ABSTRACT

NEITHER THIS ANCIENT EARTH NOR ANCIENT RUS’ HAS PASSED ON: A MICROHISTORICAL BIOGRAPHY OF IVAN BUNIN

by Zachary Adam Hoffman

The life and writings of Russian author Ivan Alexseevich Bunin (1870-1953) provide a number of important insights into the major cultural discourses of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Russian history. This thesis uses his experiences and literature as well as those of a number of his contemporaries as a guide for examining the larger dialogues of Russian cultural life in which Bunin participated. In particular, it focuses on the question of Russian national identity, responses to the February and October Revolutions, and the role of nostalgia in Russian émigré culture in Russia Abroad. The use of Bunin’s life to explore these themes also demonstrates the ways in which many of these issues carried over from the imperial era to the Soviet era in Russian émigré communities. A microhistorical study of his life thus provides a template for examining these themes within the larger scope of Russian history during this period.
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Note on Romanization and Dating

This thesis follows the United States Library of Congress method of romanization for all Russian names and transliterations of original Russian language passages into Latin characters. The few exceptions to this rule are the names of authors well known to English audiences in different romanizations—e.g., Tolstoy and Gorky are used rather than Tolstoi and Gor’kii.

Another important consideration is that of dating, as the Russian empire operated on the Julian calendar (which was 14 days behind the standard western Gregorian calendar) until January 31, 1918, which was then followed by February 14. Dates given before the switch can be taken to be old style, and those after to be new. In a few places where this may cause confusion (mainly dates in 1918) I have provided both separated by a slash, with the old style appearing first and the new second. Following this format, the two major events of 1917, the February Revolution and the October Revolution, are referred to by these names despite the fact that by the new dating system they actually occurred in March and November of this year respectively.
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Introduction

Bozhe moi—kakoe velikoe iavlenie
russkaia literatura i kakuiu
muchitel ’nuui liubov ’ budit ona.

[My God, what a great thing Russian
literature is, and what agonizing love
it inspires.]

Maxim Gorky, from a letter to Ivan Bunin, December 1910.

With the prospect of a Bolshevik defeat in the Russian Civil War fading with each passing day, Ivan Bunin and his wife Vera Muromtseva-Bunina departed the port of Odessa on the Black Sea, leaving their homeland never to return. On February 9, 1920, Vera spoke for both of them when she related in her diary: “I saw the Russian shore for the last time, and I burst out crying. An oppressive feeling overwhelms me… There is terror and darkness ahead [Poslednii raz uvidela russkii bereg. Zaplakala. Tiazheloe chuvstvo okhvatilo menia... Vpered temnota i zhut].”¹ Many Russians emigrated during this period, and by the early 1920s the number of Russian émigrés living in areas outside of the new Bolshevik state totaled approximately one and a half million, with the majority settling in various cities across Europe, the United States, and China.² Of these emigrants, Ivan Alekseevich Bunin (1870-1953) is particularly notable. Before 1917, Bunin was already hailed as heir to the literary legacies of Russian authors such as Lev Tolstoy and Anton Chekhov. Departing Odessa just prior to its fall to the Bolsheviks in 1920, he soon settled in France, where he would spend a large part of his life while abroad. In 1933, he became the first Russian author to receive the Nobel Prize in literature. Bunin’s life and writings encapsulate a number of important elements of the Russian émigré experience, providing

insights into both the creation of pre-revolutionary memories among Russian émigrés and the contested nature of “Russian” identity.

The fall of the Imperial regime and the failure of a woefully ill equipped Provisional Government thrust Russia into a period of protracted turmoil in the years following the Revolution of February 1917. When the Bolsheviks had seized power in many of the major cities following October 1917, including Moscow and St. Petersburg, a number of high-ranking officers of the tsarist regime waged a civil war against them. The anti-Bolshevik forces, known collectively as the “Whites” because of their support for the tsar, scored a number of victories early on in the war. As time went on, however, faced with internal divisions, ineffectual foreign military assistance, and the strength of Bolshevik opposition, the main White force eventually succumbed by late 1920. The remaining contingents under the command of General Petr Vrangel departed the Crimea in December 1920 with the Bolsheviks closing in behind them.\(^3\)

Many Russian intellectuals, military personnel, and average citizens left with Vrangel at this time, but the mass exodus began in earnest with the Bolshevik seizure of power itself in 1917. As these populations settled into their new host societies, a sense of despair at the perceived loss of their homeland often formed a fundamental aspect of life abroad for many Russians. In the case of Ivan Bunin and other émigré authors, this detachment and longing formed a central motif in their writings, and in retrospect, colored memories of pre-Revolutionary Russia. Bunin was no stranger to contemplating the nature of his homeland. He had written extensively about the innately “Russian” character of its people and culture. Now detached from his muse, his image of Russia, the “true Russia” now (as he and his compatriots hoped, temporarily) lost to the falsehoods of Bolshevism, became ever more dear and eulogized in his own writings and those of many of his fellow émigré authors. Nostalgia became a potent influence on Bunin’s work abroad, ultimately providing the basis for some of his greatest literary achievements, and in a sense, creating memories of pre-Revolutionary Russia for many of his fellow émigrés. Memory thus held a particularly powerful role in both Bunin’s writing and life abroad in general.

This work examines Bunin’s life and literature from a microhistorical perspective, placing these experiences within the broader framework of Russian emigrant communities during the interwar years. Bunin exemplifies the struggles many Russian émigrés and authors

\(^3\) Raeff, Russia Abroad, 18.
encountered in the period before, during and after the Russian Revolution in a number of important ways, as his life and writings provide a microcosm of much of the Russian émigré experience. As elaborated by historians such as Jill Lepore, the microhistorical approach attempts to use the biography of a single individual to draw larger conclusions about their culture and historical context. Bunin’s era was marked by fragmentation and violence that raised fundamental questions about not only the Russian state, but also the concept of Russian identity and culture itself. Bunin attempted to reconcile the disruption of the Revolution with his own internal vision of Russianness, but in the end, he and many others decided that this reconciliation could not be made. Bunin’s experiences during his decades of exile act “as an allegory for broader issues affecting the culture as a whole.”

Although this study will delve into many of the details of Bunin’s life and fiction that set him aside from other exiles, it is the exemplary nature of his experience that is of primary importance.

The question of Russian cultural and national identity is critical to Bunin’s understanding of himself, and the “true” Russianness that he and other émigré authors believed they were maintaining in exile. Two complementary ideas are important to understanding this situation. First of all, the special status of the author within Russian society greatly influenced the way that Bunin and those like him imagined themselves. The author held an important position as cultural mediator and explicator in Russian society during the nineteenth century. Writers from Aleksander Pushkin to Nikolai Gogol to Lev Tolstoy had articulated the national discourse in the era from which émigré authors such as Bunin had emerged. He and his fellow émigré writers viewed themselves as inheriting this right to comment upon, critique, and shape the imagining of Russian culture. This perceived authority is particularly important when examining Bunin’s works while abroad.

The other critical point in this discussion is the various understandings of Russian national and cultural identity at play during this period. This thesis will examine Russian identity as a shifting field of cultural discourse in a similar method to that of Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis in their work *National Identity in Russian Culture: An Introduction*. As Franklin and Widdis argue, Russian identity is to be found in the various cultural texts including literature, art, and folklore that “embody and make real the abstract ideas of Russia and ‘Russianness,’ making

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the collective identity visible for those who reckon themselves a part of it.” Therefore it is difficult to speak of a singular Russian nation or identity, as these imaginings take on multiple forms in different places and times. That these identities are imagined does not lessen their significance, because, as Franklin and Widdis explain, these “Russian identities—as they are written, discussed, pictured, or sung—are the only ones there are” and however inchoate they may be, they are “lived, and as such real [emphases original].” This situation is as evident in pre-revolutionary debates about the nature of Russian identity as in the clash between the opposing ideas of Russianness promoted by members of Russia Abroad and the Soviet Union. Using their cultural authority as Russian authors, émigrés such as Bunin attempted to maintain their own visions of Russian identity as an alternative to those of the Soviet Union through literature that romanticized their homeland with rich, detailed descriptions of its landscapes, people, and virtues.

Themes of nostalgia and memory permeate Bunin’s writings and those of other émigrés during this period and form a prominent element of much émigré literature. Two recent works, Svetlana Boym’s The Future of Nostalgia (2002) and Peter Fritzsche’s Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History (2004) have mapped out the historical terrain of nostalgia and its significance to historical analyses. Both argue that modern nostalgia emerged after the French Revolution and assumed a prominent role in modern culture in the centuries that followed. This notion of nostalgia is evident in many of the works of Bunin’s fellow émigrés as well, and in many ways constituted a defining characteristic of Russian émigré life, serving as both an intellectual preoccupation and an identifying quality of émigrés during this period. Through the works of these authors, in other words, Russian émigrés could catch glimpses of the lives they left behind, allowing them to work through the trauma of emigration.

Two of the most recent historical works to examine these communities are Russia Abroad: A Cultural History of Russian Emigration, 1919-1939 by Marc Raeff and Catherine Andreyev and Ivan Savický’s Russia Abroad: Prague and the Russian Diaspora, 1918-1938. Both explore émigré authors and literary culture, but while the former offers this perspective as part of a broader argument, the latter provides only a brief analysis. Andreyev and Savický are primarily interested with the Russian émigré community in Prague and its relationship to the

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First Czechoslovak Republic. Raeff on the other hand undertakes a wider study of the émigré community as a whole. His work, particularly important to the approach of this essay, argues that Russian émigrés were unique from many other refugees of this era in that they maintained their cohesiveness as a society while abroad. Thus, in the view of Raeff, these communities represented a society in exile—a “Russia Abroad”—that understood itself as such and remained above all “committed to carrying on a meaningful Russian life [emphasis original].” Although Bunin has been the focus of much literary criticism, little writing has specifically examined his life and works within this historical context. This study builds on Raeff’s ideas by exploring the ways Bunin’s experiences with emigration and exile document his attempts to live such a Russian life.

Moreover, a microhistorical study of Bunin’s experiences helps us further understand the significance of 1917 in the broader scope of Russian history. The events of this year caused a major disruption in the course of this history, however, much like previous events such as the French Revolution, it remains more a rupture than a definitive split into imperial and Soviet periods. Major themes of Bunin’s life and writings, for instance the debate about the nature of “Russianness” and émigré nostalgia for the pre-revolutionary past, necessarily cross the temporal boundary of 1917. In particular, Bunin’s nostalgia for the Old Russian countryside while abroad proved to be a somewhat contradictory process in light of his earlier trepidations about the backwardness and brutality he saw in the peasantry, as we shall see. Though irrational, this nostalgia for Russia before the Revolution nevertheless became a powerful trope in his émigré works and underscores the complex position of the ruptures of the Russian Revolution in the lives of figures such as Bunin. The Revolution may have lead to his departure from Russia, but it serves as more than an end to one life and the beginning of another. Bunin’s life in microhistory demonstrates the significance of the events of 1917 in Russian history, but also presents this year

6 Raeff, Russia Abroad, 5.
7 There are, for example, three extensive literary biographies of Bunin available in English: Serge Kryzytski, The Works of Ivan Bunin (The Hague: Mouton, 1972); James B. Woodward, Ivan Bunin: A Study of His Fiction (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980); and Julian W. Connolly, Ivan Bunin (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), as well as more specialized studies in literary criticism such as Thomas Gaiton Marullo, If You See the Buddha: Studies in the Fiction of Ivan Bunin (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1998), which examines the influence of Buddhist religious philosophy in many of Bunin’s works, and Alexander F. Zweers, The Narratology of the Autobiography: An Analysis of the Literary Devices Employed in Bunin’s the Life of Arseniev (New York: Peter Lang), which examines the narrative voice in Bunin’s The Life of Arseniev.
as a permeable boundary between eras, one open to broad interpretations and traversable in the larger discourses of nineteenth and twentieth-century Russia.

My argument is presented in three chronological chapters, each focusing on a particular theme associated with Bunin’s life as a Russian author and émigré. Chapter one explores his early career and participation in the debate over the nature of Russian national identity in the years leading up to the revolution. During this period, many Russian authors were preoccupied with examining the narod (“the people,” usually implied to mean the peasantry) in order to draw conclusions about the national character. Bunin’s gentry upbringing, as well as his contributions to this discussion secured his position as a leading voice in the literary community and lent him the cultural authority to explain and even judge the state of his homeland. The events of 1917 made this need ever more dire as Chapter two asserts. Bunin and many of those that chose to emigrate following the Bolshevik seizure of power responded in a number of different ways to the February Revolution, but displayed almost universal derision toward the Bolsheviks and their leaders. As the ultimate cause of their emigration, the depiction of these events is thus particularly important. Finally, Chapter three looks at the role of nostalgia among émigré communities in fostering an image of the Russia that had been lost. These images provided a bittersweet escape for many émigrés struggling in exile from their homeland and played a part in creating the sense of a Russia Abroad. Each of these three experiences played a major role in both Bunin’s biography and writings. It is their exemplary nature, however, that enables this study to paint a larger picture of the experience of civil strife, displacement, and longing characteristic of the lives of many Russian émigrés during this period.
Chapter 1
The Village
Russian Authors and the Debate of National Identity

On the night of January 3, 1894, a 23-year-old Ivan Bunin could hardly contain himself as he nervously strode toward the Moscow residence of Count Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy. Bunin had joined a group of Tolstoyans not long before “mainly out of [his] adoration for Tolstoy as an artist” and a desire to follow his teachings, but as he would later concede his intentions were “not without the secret hope… that it would at last give [him] a legitimate reason to meet him and perhaps even become a part of his circle.” He was greeted by a servant at the door and shown to an upstairs ballroom where he immediately spotted the venerable old man himself entering from the opposite side. Before he was able to respond, Tolstoy had already traversed the full length of the room and after resolutely shaking his hand began bombarding him with questions: “Bunin? Was it your father I knew in the Crimea? Have you come to Moscow for long? What for? To see me? A young writer, are you?” The interrogation continued as they sat down at a small table in the dimly lit room. Bunin timidly struggled to mete out answers to this continuous flow of inquiries, but after only a few minutes Tolstoy’s wife quietly entered to remind her husband that other guests still awaited him. At this, he quickly stood, firmly shook Bunin’s hand a second time, and after inviting him to visit again soon he departed, exhorting the young author with a few final words of advice. “There is no happiness in life,” he explained, “there are only occasional flares of it. You must learn to appreciate them, to live on them…” Bunin returned home in a euphoric daze, scarcely able to sleep that night. Both this brief meeting and Tolstoy’s parting words would remain with him through the following decades, shaping his perception of himself and his responsibility as a Russian author as well as his outlook on life during his time as an émigré barely twenty-five years later.

Youthful hero-worship aside, Bunin was linked with Tolstoy by not only their shared career but also his lineage as a gentry writer. In a brief family history found in the first chapter of

the English edition of his memoir, *Vospominaniia [Memoirs]* (translated as *Memories and Portraits*) (1950), and repeated in autobiographical notes to a few of his publications throughout the later half of his career, he specifically evokes this heritage and its connection to both his homeland and the Russian language.\(^{10}\) As Bunin explains, he descended from “ancient and noble” kin, who “spent their lives in close harmony with the peasants and the soil.” All his ancestors, he relates, “were country gentlemen,” in the central region of Russia where the “Muscovite tsars [had] erected a bulwark of colonies drawn from every province of the land” to protect against Tatar incursions. “As a result,” he explains, “it was here that the richest of all dialects was formed [*obrazovalsia bogateishii russkii iazyk*], and it was from this same district that almost all our great writers came, beginning with Turgenev and Lev Tolstoy.” Of his own notable forbears Bunin is quick to mention the poet Anna Bunina as well as Vasily Zhukovsky, one of the most illustrious figures of early nineteenth-century Russian literature.\(^{11}\)

Bunin’s position as arguably the last in this line of great authors of noble birth lent unique qualities and perspectives to his work, as he had grown up on a family estate in the very same south Russian countryside. His evocation of this connection to “the richest dialect” of Russian used by Turgenev and Tolstoy thus served as a form of self-fashioning. By drawing attention to this link he emphasized his authority to speak about distinctly “Russian” topics with the insight and grace afforded a “Russian” author of his stock. Using what others have referred to as a “common store of cultural intelligibility”—in this case the Russian language—he was able to signal to both himself and others who he believed himself to be and the impact this had on his literary perspective.\(^{12}\) Yet, Bunin’s years spent writing and travelling throughout the empire and abroad prior to his emigration also mirror the lives and writings of other Russian authors of this period. Two of his most prominent non-noble contemporaries, Anton Pavlovich Chekhov (1860-
1904) and Maxim Gorky (pseudonym of Aleksei Maksimovich Peshkov, 1869-1936), moved in the same literary circles and explored many of these topics in their writings.

When Bunin began his career in the late 1880s, he was entering into a cultural discourse on fundamental questions regarding the nature of Russian identity and the role of the Russian writer as its arbitrator. The importance of literature is difficult to underestimate in Russian history, especially in the literary traditions of the nineteenth century. In lieu of an effective representative political body and under the eye of strict imperial censorship, literature acted as a primary venue for the discussion of politics, philosophy, and most importantly, the intricacies and enigmas of “Russianness.” The author thus came to acquire major significance in Russia regarding such matters. For these reasons, prominent writers of previous generations such as Mikhail Lermontov (1814-1841), Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852), Feodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881), and Tolstoy (1828-1910) had used this medium to present commentaries on the social and moral condition of their homeland and its people. Following in this tradition, a number of Bunin’s earlier works and those of his contemporaries examined one of the more prominent themes of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Russian literature: the Russian peasantry. By this time, many members of the intelligentsia had come to view the narod—the great masses of peasants forming the vast majority of the Russian population—as the embodiment of the nebulous concept of Russianness. Many believed the village was the true site of Russian culture.

Bunin’s literary output, as well as his friendship with prominent figures of this time highlights the usefulness of using his life as a microhistorical case. This chapter places Bunin in the broader historical framework of Russian literary culture before the outbreak of the Russian Revolution by examining his life and early works concerning the peasantry with those of Gorky and Chekhov. In addition to their fame among the literary community at this time, Bunin maintained close friendships with both writers. Though the upbringing of these two men differed markedly from Bunin’s (Chekhov’s parents were petty shop-owners, while Gorky was raised by his grandparents, formerly well-off members of the lower-middle class on a steady spiral to

abject poverty), the works of these three authors all examined similar themes of lower class, peasant, and village life, albeit with decidedly different interpretations.

From the broader perspective, Bunin’s activities prior to the Revolution provide important insights into the role of the Russian author as mediator of Russian identity by displaying the various interpretations of peasant life prevalent during the late-nineteenth and earlier twentieth-centuries. These interpretations had implications for the wider understandings of distinctly “Russian” identities within the literary community and beyond. Much recent scholarship has grappled with the question of Russian national identity in the imperial period. While some historians contend that Russia did not possess a national identity at this time, others such as Franklin and Widdis maintain that this identity was an on-going debate that affirmed its existence through its continual reinterpretation and analysis in cultural discourse.\(^{15}\) The variety of opinions expressed by Bunin and his contemporaries demonstrate the discursive nature of this process of self-identification and provide an excellent example of the use of cultural texts to negotiate national sentiments. As has been argued, the contested concept of “Russianness” found one of its main manifestations in literature, and thus the myriad of images, behaviors, and colloquialisms found in these works provide insights into how visions of Russian national identity found expression in the debate over the narod. Bunin’s participation in this debate, in addition to his noble lineage and personal connections to some of the most prominent literary figures of this period, provided both notoriety and weight to his writings. It was during this time that Bunin arose as a significant voice among the Russian authorial community and gained the literary, and thus cultural, authority to comment on the state of “Russianness” in specific terms, as we shall see.

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Ivan Alexseevich Bunin was born in the provincial city of Voronezh in 1870 to a noble family in dire economic straits. The finances of his parents Aleksei Nikolaevich and Liudmila Aleksandrovna, much like that of the rest of landed gentry, had become increasingly meager following the emancipation of the serfs in 1861. Soon after Ivan Alekseevich’s birth the family moved out of the city to one of his father’s remaining estates in Butyrki, Orel province. On this rural estate Bunin would pass the majority of his youth immersed in the scenic grandeur of rural Russia so romanticized in his later writings. His family’s difficulty at scraping together the funds to maintain their aristocratic lifestyle continued to influence his upbringing however, as his study at the local gimnaziia ended by the time he was sixteen as a result of these financial troubles and his own increasing ambivalence toward formal education. Soon after, his family sold Butyki and moved to their sole remaining estate of Ozyorki in the same province. Here Bunin received private tutoring from his brother Iulii, a kandidat at Moscow University now relegated to his parent’s care and placed under police supervision at Ozyorki for taking part in radical political activities.

Ivan proved a better student under these conditions and excelled at the humanities, most notably in literature, and almost immediately began to compose poems and short pieces. Realizing his talent, Iulii encouraged his brother’s literary endeavors and he soon submitted a few of these works to be published. Ivan’s poem “Nad Mogiloi S. Ya Nadson [At the Grave of S. Ya. Nadson]” (memorializing the recently deceased poet Semyon Nadson) appeared in February 1887 in the auspiciously titled “thin” literary journal Rodina [Motherland]. Bunin’s works, which consisted mostly of brief stories about poor peasants in the countryside, continued to appear in Rodina into the following year. At the same time he began to publish poems in another magazine, Knizhki nedeli [Books of the Week], where works by Tolstoy, Gleb Uspenskii, and

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17 Iulii had been arrested for distributing revolutionary literature in 1884 and after a brief time in exile, he was placed under police supervision at his family’s estate. Woodward, Ivan Bunin, 5.
18 During the nineteenth century, the Russian literary journal appeared in two primary forms. The “thick” journal offered collections of fiction and criticism, as well as cultural and intellectual debate usually aimed at intelligentsia and upper-class readers. “Thin” journals, on the other hand, were marketed to a wider and more “common” audience outside of the intelligentsia by mixing the “high” literary content of the “thick” journal with news articles, and lighter entertainment more intelligible to the middle class. Deborah A. Martinsen ed., Literary Journals in Nineteenth-Century Russia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1, 241. Some “thin” journals used this less sophisticated tone in an attempt to educate their readers through entertainment, as was the case with Rodina, which was marketed to members of the lower-classes “seeking self-improvement.” Encyclopedia of Russian History, ed. James R. Millar, s.v. “Thin Journals,” (New York: MacMillan Reference USA, 2004), 4:1542.
Mikhail Salytkov-Shchedrin occasionally appeared. Thus, at the age of seventeen Ivan Bunin established his literary career. It would continue until his death more than sixty years later.

The euphoria Bunin felt upon finally meeting Tolstoy a few years later is understandable considering the deep connection he perceived between the author’s legendary personage and his own desires to express himself in the written word. Even before his formal (and later informal) education, Bunin had been taken with the larger-than-life aura that had seemed to surround Tolstoy from what that he heard in his father’s recollections of briefly serving with him during the Crimean War. In Memories and Portraits, Bunin explains that he became enamored with the idea of Tolstoy in his youth prior to even having read any of his works. Simply his status as a writer was enough for young Ivan, as authors “seemed a special kind of being to” him and “aroused… a strange inexpressible feeling which [he] cannot define to this day.”

The link between this feeling for Tolstoy and his own desire to write reached a climax in the years following his first publications and Bunin began to yearn for a meeting with him. After sending a letter meekly requesting an audience and an abortive attempt to journey to Tolstoy’s manor at Yasnaya Polyana, Bunin eventually found his way into a group of Tolstoyans (those who followed his teachings about the value of simple living and manual labor), which led to the meeting of January 1893.

Disillusioned with the gruff and hypocritical Tolstoyans he encountered, however, and at Tolstoy’s own advice, Bunin eventually left the group not long after their first acquaintance and began to travel throughout western Russia and abroad. During this period he continued to write and published his first collection of stories Na krai sveta [To the Edge of the World] in 1897, an anthology that contained more tales of the hardships of rural life and the decline of the gentry, expressed in pieces often more concerned with mood than plot. It received favorable reviews from major “thick” journals at the time, including Russkoe bogatstvo [Russian Wealth], Russkaia mysl’ [Russian Thought], and Mir bozhii [God’s World]. One critic praised Bunin’s “soft

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19 Kryzytski, The Works of Ivan Bunin, 19; Connolly, Ivan Bunin, 4.
20 Bunin, Memories and Portraits, 18.
21 A translation of the letter can be found in Thomas Gaiton Marullo ed., Ivan Bunin, Russian Requiem, 1885-1920: A Portrait from Letters Diaries and Fiction (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993), 41; Bunin’s account of his unfulfilled horseback journey to Yasnaya Polyana appears in Bunin, Memories and Portraits, 19.
22 From their first meeting, Tolstoy had insinuated that Tolstoyan life was not for everyone and in their following correspondences “intimated… that it was not really worth [Bunin’s] while trying so hard to be a Tolstoyan.” It was only slowly and after a failed attempt to run a bookstore peddling Tolstoyan literature that he let go of his aspirations toward living such a life. Bunin, Memories and Portraits, 27.
23 Ivan Bunin, Sobranie sochinenii, 2:485.
lyricism and strict symmetry of form,” noting that his almost poetic prose conveyed a “mood of undefined and sweet longing.” Another review stated he “undoubtedly knows the village [and] sympathizes with its townsfolk [obyvateli],” but most importantly, he also “correctly understands them and can truthfully convey their mood without pretentiousness and unnecessary sentimentality.” Thus, from early on, his contemporaries acknowledged his talent as a prose writer, but also his special connection to the countryside and ability to articulate peasant themes considered so close to the Russian soul. The “thick” journal played a central role in the literary world of nineteenth and twentieth-century Russia, serving as the main venue through which major authors engaged in intellectual and cultural debates on a variety of themes ranging from pertinent social issues to the nuances of Russian national identity. Bunin’s recognition by these institutions brought him to the attention of his peers in the intelligentsia, and allowed him to enter the cultural discourses of fin-de-siècle Russian literature.

Bunin kindled friendships with a number of prominent writers in the 1890s, meeting Chekhov in 1895 and Gorky (through his friendship with Chekhov) in 1899. By the release of his first novella, Derevnia [The Village] in 1910, Bunin had published four more collections of verse and stories in addition a five volume set of collected works released by Gorky’s publishing house Znanie [Knowledge] between 1902 and 1909. For his 1901 collection of verse Listopad [Falling Leaves] and his 1899 translation of Longfellow’s “The Song of Hiawatha” he received the highest honor of the Russian Academy, the Pushkin Prize, in 1903. Thus, by 1910, he was relatively well known in the Russian literary world. Bunin would later note with some sarcasm that it was, however, The Village that truly brought him “fame.” His perhaps feigned ambivalence aside, the publication of his first longer work did in fact bring him considerable renown and even controversy in the Russian literary community.

The Village marked Bunin’s first major foray into the debate regarding the nature of the Russian people, and with them the Russian identity. The peasant had long figured as an important symbol in the on-going debate about Russianness. Famous writers such as Gogol, Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky had portrayed peasant life in their works, and Tolstoy’s connection to his own peasants figured prominently in the Tolstoyan philosophy. By the later

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24 Review of Na krai sveta i drugie rasskazy, by Ivan Bunin, Russkoe bogatstvo 2 (1897): 37, 38.
26 Connolly, Ivan Bunin, 9.
27 Bunin, Memories and Portraits, 15.
half of the century, writers such as Gleb Uspenskii (1843-1902) and Nikolai Zlatovratskii (1845-1911) had tempered the previous somewhat idealized visions of peasant life with analyses of its darker side, yet in comparison, Bunin’s depiction of the *narod* in *The Village* appears particularly bleak.\(^\text{28}\) His vision of the countryside highlights the ignorance and violence prevalent in peasant life. Conceived in part as a reaction to the peasant uprisings of the Revolution of 1905 (and in some ways, an explanation of their causes), this work offers his interpretation of the most depraved elements of the *narod*.\(^\text{29}\) Given his youth spent interacting with the peasantry on his father’s estate, Bunin felt especially qualified to comment on this condition and in a letter to a friend in 1911 he even remarked that he knew the village, “perhaps like no one else writing now.”\(^\text{30}\) Possibly the most famous line from this piece, delivered by an eccentric local mentor to one of the main characters, exclaims: “*All Russia is nothing but a village: get that firmly fixed in your noodle!* [Da [Rossia] vsia—derevenia, na nosu zarubi sebe eto!]”\(^\text{31}\) His analysis of the *narod* carried even greater implications for the larger imagining of the concept of Russian identity.

Bunin’s vision of the village fit more closely with recent works such as Anton Chekhov’s “*Muzhiki* [Peasants]” (1897), which had presented the countryside in stark terms, but had left them not without a certain degree of hope. From modest beginnings in the southern coastal town of Taganrog, Chekhov originally trained to be a doctor before shifting his primary focus (though he would continue to practice medicine throughout his life) to fiction by the mid 1880s. By the time he meet Bunin in 1895, he was already a considered a major author and playwright, having received the Pushkin Prize in 1887 and regularly contributing pieces to major journals such as *Russkaia mysl*.\(^\text{32}\) Bunin’s friendship with Chekhov was apparently quite sincere, and during his frequent trips to Yalta, where Chekhov spent much of his time because of an increasingly severely cast of tuberculosis (which would prematurely end his life in 1904), he spent nearly all of his time at Chekhov’s home.\(^\text{33}\) Gorky became acquainted with both of them around this time

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\(^\text{28}\) For an examination of the origins of this view of the peasantry see Frierson, *Peasant Icons*, chapter 1. For information on Uspenskii and Zlatovskii’s writings on this subject see Connolly, “The Nineteenth Century: Between Realism and Modernism, 1880-1895,” in *The Cambridge History of Russian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 354-355.


\(^\text{30}\) Marullo, *Ivan Bunin Russian Requiem*, 118.


\(^\text{33}\) Bunin, *Memories and Portraits*, 71, 47. Bunin’s closeness with Chekhov also is evident from his continued correspondence with the Chekhov family following Anton’s death in 1904. His sister Maria even later named Bunin
as well, and therefore he and Bunin were both close to Chekhov during the height of his literary career and witnessed him publish some of his most well-known works including the play *Uncle Vanya* (1897) and short story “The Lady With the Pet Dog” (1899).

Most of his work falls into the category of realism and highlights the human condition, as well as pertinent social issues at the time. A good example of the former theme appears in his work “Ward No. 6,” a story set in a mental institution where a warden succumbs to paranoia and soon becomes a patient. His short story “Peasants,” on the other hand, tackles the hardship of rural life by following the story of the family of Nikolai Chikildeev, who, with his wife Olga and young daughter Sasha, move from Moscow to the village of Zhukovo after Nikolai becomes ill and can no longer work. His warm memories of his hometown are soon dispelled, however, as the family experiences the harshness of peasant life living with his destitute parents. For its time, Chekhov’s depiction was considered so severe that it had to endure heavy censorship by the imperial government before it received publication. This move on behalf of government censors only serves to underscore the influence of literature, and more importantly, the Russian author on the molding of ideas of Russian social and cultural identity.

Chekhov describes peasant life as violence, drunkenness, and most prevalently, poverty. Physical abuse becomes clear from the Chikildeev’s very first day at Nikolai’s parents home, as they encounter a small cat upon entering that has gone deaf from repeated beatings. Later on that evening his brother Kiryak mercilessly abuses his wife Marya in the squalid hut, “dragg[ing] her to the door and howling like a wild animal.” It soon becomes clear that the grandmother regularly takes out her frustrations by beating the many children that live in the hut as well, in one instance grabbing Sasha by the neck and striking her repeatedly with a small whip. Alcohol appears as an immediate cause to many of these problems, as it fuels Kiryak’s temper and prevails even on religious holidays. The Feast of the Intercession, for example, is described as a “three-day binge” where the village men drank using communal funds and Kiryak reached such a point that “he drank everything away, even his cap and boots” before thrashing Marya so

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severely “they had to douse her with cold water.” Religion itself is revered, but not understood by the majority of the people of Zhukovo. Marya and her sister-in-law Fyokla for example “hadn’t taught their children to pray, had told them nothing about God and never taught them moral principles: all they did” the narrator explains, “was tell them not to eat forbidden food during fast days.” Many go through the motions without the slightest belief, despite their staunch adherence to religious custom. Thus, the characters exist in a brutal cycle of ignorance, anger, and drunkenness, all accentuated by a “terrible, never-ending poverty, from which there is no escape.”

Poverty may be ubiquitous, but in “Peasants” the people themselves deserve much of the blame as well. In a diatribe toward the end of the story they are described as “always quarrelling and arguing amongst themselves, with no respect for one another and living in mutual fear and suspicion.” A few lines later the narrator asks: “Who maintains the pubs and makes the peasants drink?” The answer:

The peasant. Who embezzles the village, school and parish funds and spends it all on drink? The peasant. Who robs his neighbor, sets fire to his house and perjures himself in court for a bottle of vodka? Who is first to revile the peasant at district council and similar meetings? The peasant.

For Chekhov these people still deserve some sympathy, however, as they are aware of their depravity and often feel intense shame and embarrassment at their actions. This is evident early on in the character of Kiryak, who spends the day following his beating of Marya at the beginning of the story ashamedly apologizing to the family for his actions. As well, some, such as Nikolai’s wife Olga, have a moral compass and true reverence for religion beyond just ceremonial considerations. Though she only half comprehends the words of the Bible, she truly “believed in God” and more importantly, “she believed that it was wrong to harm anyone in the wide world.” Ultimately, these people are still human beings that perhaps contain the ability to overcome their baser qualities, even in the depths of misery and poverty they experience.

Chekhov therefore uses the stark images in “Peasants” to present the narod in all its gruesome excesses to highlight the fact that these are “pathetic and downtrodden” people
oppressed by poverty and “killing work.” This does not fully excuse their behavior, but it does cause Chekhov’s depiction of the narod to take a less harsh approach than Bunin would take in *The Village*. The characters in this work might can be construed to contain all of the best and worst characteristics of a Russian national identity in the late nineteenth-century. As Cathy A. Frierson explains, the images Chekhov presents are a consummate expression of the popular image of the seryi muzhik [gray peasant], a common trope in previous literature regarding the peasantry, being neither “pure and untainted white nor wholly evil and… black.” Chekhov’s image of narod follows this pattern but also points to the fact that these people deserve sympathy and help. Chekhov was a strong proponent of rural reform, and had operated a rural clinic during a cholera epidemic in the early 1890s. This work therefore appears as a call for further attention to the plight of the peasants in the countryside.

Neither Bunin nor Gorky held this short story in particularly high regard. Bunin referred to it as “by no means the best he had written,” and in a letter to Bunin from 1910, Gorky explained it as a “mere episode… from the life of a hypochondriac.” Gorky himself had a different view of the narod in his works due in large part to his own upbringing and political orientation. With his father dying soon after his birth, he lived a gradually more impoverished life with his maternal grandparents until the death of his mother in 1879 when he was 11. For the next decade and a half he supported himself with a number of low paying jobs before publishing his first successful story “Makar Chudra” in 1892. This piece focused on a gypsy bandit and reflected much of Gorky’s early work, which centered on similar themes of the distinction between haves and have-nots in Russian society, likely because of his destitute youth and increasingly left-wing revolutionary politics. By the time he meet Bunin in 1899 he had already been arrested twice for links to radical activity and by 1905 he had joined the Bolshevik Party. These connections would lead him to have a complex relationship with Bunin. Their correspondences from the two decades leading up to the Revolution indicate great closeness, and

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39 Ibid, 55.
40 Frierson, *Peasant Icons*, 117.
Bunin and his wife visited him during his self-imposed exile in Capri, Italy during the late 1900s and early 1910s “five years in a row and spent three whole winters there,” during which they met every day and developed an intimate friendship. Owing mostly to Gorky’s political positions, however, these feelings significantly cooled in subsequent years. Embittered toward the Bolsheviks by his experience during the Revolution and Civil War (covered at length in Chapter two), Bunin developed a deep derision for them and even more so for their sympathizers. He would later state that in hindsight this earlier period was merely “the time he found [Gorky] most pleasant,” in a harsh chapter devoted to him in Memories and Portraits. In any case, class struggle and the destitute lot of the narod figure significantly in many of his works from this period, particularly his propagandistic novel Mat’ [Mother] (1907). This work shares a number of similarities with Chekhov’s presentation of life for the lower classes, but offers a considerably different analysis when examining the basis for the people’s behavior and condition.

Mother presents the story of Pelagueya Nilovna Vlasova, the eponymous heroine, and her increased association with the friends and socialist political ideology of her revolutionary son Pavel. Later considered the first piece of socialist realism, the novel follows the awakening of Vlasova to the “true condition of the world”—in this instance, a Marxist vision of the masses of the narod under the iron heel of the bourgeoisie and upper class—after being indoctrinated by her son and his compatriots. After Pavel’s arrest Vlasova becomes gradually more involved in disseminating revolutionary literature in both their slum-like workmen’s suburb [rabochaia slobodka] and nearby villages. The narod of both locations display characteristics much like those of the muzhiki portrayed in “Peasants.” In the first chapter the narrator explains that after a day of labor that “sucked the vigor out of men’s muscles,” beleaguered workers swiftly drowned their miseries at local taverns. Here they would drink themselves into oblivion and “fall on one another over mere trifles, with the spiteful ferocity of beasts,” savagely beating each other in brawls before returning to their homes to abuse their wives and children with similar brutality.

45 Bunin, Memories and Portraits, 80.
46 In this segment, Bunin cynically looks back on Gorky as overbearing and pompous, being at least somewhat sincere in private life but always one to put on a show in public. Gorky’s later association with the Soviet government Bunin so reviled likely played a role in their estrangement as well. Ibid, 71-72.
47 Maxim Gorky, Mother (New York: D. Appleton Century-Company Inc., 1936), 4-5; Gorky, Sobranie sochinenii, (Moscow: Gosudarstvenoe izdatel’stvo, 1924), 7:5. Gorky illustrated similar instances of abuse in the first part of his trilogy of autobiographical novels Detstvo [Childhood] (1913).
These people experienced the same “killing work” and fell into drunkenness and violence with similar ubiquity to the peasants Chekhov had described a decade earlier. In a segment of the novel that follows the mother’s visit to a local village to spread propaganda, the peasants appear in the same state. During a stay with a small family sympathetic to her cause, one peasant women exclaims that they “work and tremble over a piece of bread for their homes, and… have nothing,” which leads them to a cycle of working, drinking and fighting.  

Rather than placing blame on the people themselves, however, Mother takes the stance that their condition is the direct result of the class oppression they face. The vision of the narod in this work is thus closely related to its revolutionary message. For Gorky, the root cause of the violence, ignorance, and alcoholism in the countryside and the workers slums is their oppression at the hands of the upper classes. Throughout the novel Pavel, his comrades, and eventually the mother appear as martyrs to this revolutionary cause. Gorky’s image of the narod differs from Chekhov’s in that it provides a definitive solution to their toil—to learn “the truth” about it and to unite and openly challenge their oppressors. This depiction provides a somewhat simplified vision of the narod, compared to the “gray peasants” portrayed in “Peasants.” Seemingly for Gorky, the depravity displayed by the people is almost solely the responsibility of their oppressors, and the extremes of their behavior are therefore parallel to the extremes of their oppression.

Bunin did not see such a basic solution to the harsh realities of the life of the narod. His depiction of the countryside in The Village offered a bleak and almost hopeless image that caused a stir amongst the literary community even in light of conditions shown in “Peasants” and Mother. In his analysis, the condition of the countryside was both the cause and result of a distinctly “Russian” element of the narod’s character that left them still very much tied to their pre-modern roots even at the beginning of the twentieth century. The plot of the novella follows the lives of two peasants, a greedy and boorish shop owner named Tikhon Ilich Krasov and his romantic wandering brother Kuzma, through their lives in the Russian countryside in the first decades of the 1900s. The grandchildren of a former serf, Tikhon Ilich and Kuzma began their adulthhood as traveling merchants, but after a quarrel set off in opposite directions in life. Tikhon Ilich gradually gathered enough wealth to buy the estate to which his ancestors were previously bound but lives an unhappy and violent life running his general store and administering his

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48 Ibid, 384.
various properties. Kuzma on the other hand, set off on the road, and though publishing a small collection of prose, moved between a number of short-term occupations only to become greatly depressed at the state of his life and the countryside. In the third and final part of the novella, a defeated Kuzma returns to his native town to assist his brother in managing his properties but finds little relief from his anguish in the harsh environment of the titular village of Durnovka.

The theme of physical violence figures strongly in Bunin’s illustration of rural life, even more so than in Chekhov’s or Gorky’s work. Tikhon Ilich regularly indulges in petty cruelty, often striking passersby with his whip while traveling on his runabout. One of his employees mercilessly beats his new wife, in one instance until “everything turned black before her eyes.”49 This woman, known throughout the novella as “the Bride” for her beauty is the receipt of several acts of sexual abuse and rape by both Tikhon Ilich and the local men of the village. In a number of instances peasant men even boast about their violent actions in crude language. In the third part of the work, a grizzled old scoundrel nicknamed Seryi (a clear satire of the trope of the gray peasant) drunkenly brags of a beating he once gave a woman: “Then I began to tan her hide—I had a fine suitable little whip on hand. Well, to say it simply, I cut up her whole body to such a degree that she slid down at my feet and kissed my felt boots.”50 In Bunin’s interpretation, these qualities underscore a deep ignorance in the narod that echoes the backwardness of Russians as a people. In the final pages of the novella he intimates that a thin veneer separates them from their primitive ancestors, noting that the erratic movements of the elderly peasant while butchering a pig for a wedding ceremony cast “a huge dancing shadow on the snow—the shadow of a pagan [na neg bolshuyu pliashushchuiu ten’,—ten iazychnika.]”51 There is widespread poverty and regular famine in the countryside, but ultimately these outside forces only serve to accentuate base qualities. Bunin’s commentary on the drunken lust and brutality of the peasants thus reflects deeper ruminations on the nature of Russian national identity by hinting at the inherently “Russian” elements of his characters. These people appear almost beast-like in appearance and action, but in Bunin’s interpretation this depravity is an outward manifestation of innate qualities in the Russian people. At its core, the narod appears selfish and uncouth, and when aggravated by dire material circumstances, which are in most instances of their own making, they react in a manner much like their primal ancestors.

49 Bunin, The Village, 57.
51 Ibid, 282; Bunin, Sobranie sochinenii, 3:128.
According to Bunin, the real blame for this behavior therefore lies in the Russian soul itself. Kuzma Krasov, an anxious character given to bouts of personal reflection, often serves as the mouthpiece for these sentiments. When witnessing the coarseness of the village firsthand, he frequently contemplates the Russian case in comparison with others. For example, when reuniting with his brother after their prolonged separation, Tikhon Ilich’s crude speech and poor manners spark an inner monologue:

“Can it be the same in other lands?”
No, it could not be the same… Take the Germans of the towns, or the Jews: all conduct themselves reasonably, are punctual, all know one another, all are friends… they teach their children, love them, walk with them, talk with them as with equals so that the child has something to remember. But with us, all are enemies of one another, every one envies and slanders everyone else, goes to see acquaintances once a year, sits apart, each in his kennel.52

The baseness of the Russian character, in his opinion, motivates their violence and avarice, preventing them from living like civilized peoples. For these reasons Kuzma remains pessimistic about the outlook for the narod. When considering the recent arson of a local manor house he reaches a similar conclusion: “Tis’ only forty-five years since serfdom was abolished—so what can be expected of the people [narod]? Yes, but who is to blame for it? The people [narod] themselves.”53 The nature of the narod contains dark potentialities for Bunin, which manifest especially in times of disruption such as the Revolution of 1905, and he would see these traits again in the years ahead. While far from attempting to offer a totalized image of a definitive Russian national identity, at this point in his writings, Bunin strongly implies a belief in the existence of distinctly “Russian” national traits and tendencies, unflattering and perhaps undesirable as they may be. Ultimately, his characterization of the narod in The Village, like those of Chekhov and Gorky in their works during the years preceding, functioned as an important voice in the debate regarding the ever-evolving notions of Russian national identity.

Bunin’s first major entry into this discourse garnered a significant response. As before, most reviews praised his prose and style, but his subject matter received scrutiny from a number of angles. Many were shocked at the harsh landscapes of violence and greed Bunin envisioned. A review for the journal Zaprosy zhizni [Demands of Life] saw his image of the village as completely black, stating that “This is not Earth, but something more like Hell [Eto ne zemlia, a

52 Bunin, The Village, 105-106.
53 Ibid, 162; Bunin, Sobranie sochinenii, 3:78.
Others pointed out that although he obviously knew the countryside, some of his statements about the Russian character contained broad generalizations stemming from his own position as a member of the aristocracy. A review in Vestnik Evropy [Messenger of Europe], for example, said that The Village was written with “classical brilliance” and would stand as one of the most important works produced in its time, but wondered whether it provided more material for understanding “the psychology of the contemporary intelligentsia” as it seemed to portray the narod in somewhat derogatory terms typical of the conservative standpoint. Thus, though few questioned his credentials, many took issue with his assertion of the dark possibilities inherent to Russian nature. Though he may have feigned indifference to these reviews, he clearly paid attention to them. He remarked to Gorky that he viewed much of what was being said about The Village as “foolish to obscenity,” however, the controversy it caused, as well as the fact that it received three separate publications between 1910 and 1915, underscores the impact it had on the Russian literary community and beyond.

Gorky himself was greatly affected by the piece and considered it a masterwork. In a letter he told Bunin “Moscow and Petersburg types… will not appreciate The Village, nor will they understand its essence or form.” He believed that no one had written about Russia this way before, in such a “lament for our native land, so modestly clothed and muted,” yet expressing such “noble sorrow and agonizing fear.” Unlike those who questioned the effect of Bunin’s noble upbringing on the novella, Gorky underlined its importance, stating that it was a key to his understanding of the situation, but that no nobleman would have explained the countryside in such terms. His work had raised fundamental questions about the nature of Russianness by examining the figure of the peasant in its bare essence, and what he saw held had strong implications for his homeland in not only the present, but the future as well. Like Bunin, he had seen similarly dark results when the baser qualities of the narod were exaggerated in harsh material conditions, though he may have disagreed on their ultimate source. Gorky in fact believed a day would come when Russians would look back to The Village as the catalyst for serious contemplation of “not just… the peasant and the people[,] but also the most serious question of all—is Russia to be, or not to be? [ne o muzhike, ne o narode, a nad strogim

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55 E. Koltopovskaya, review of The Village, by Ivan Bunin, Vestnik Evropy 2 (1911): 396.
56 Bunin to Maxim Gorky, 12 January 1911 in I. A. Bunin: Pis’ma, 164.
The Village represented a move toward the conceptualization of Russia as a nation and a people in its analysis of the life of the great mass of its population. Bunin clearly felt that a distinct “Russianness” existed, and that many of its salient qualities could be found in the narod. What this held for Russia’s future remained to be seen.

Bunin’s renown continued to grow in the years following the release of The Village as eight collections of his poetry and prose were published by 1915 including a six-volume edition of his collected works. 1915 also saw the publication of one of his best-known pieces, the short story “Gospodin iz San-Frantsisko [The Gentleman From San Francisco].” In this story he offered a critique of the emptiness caused by the excesses of modern living. It presents the luxurious life and unceremonious death of a wealthy American businessman on a lavish cruise in the Mediterranean. After weeks of fine dining and fancy parties the unnamed gentleman suddenly dies of a heart attack, and, lacking a coffin, is placed in one of the wooden crates that had stored expensive seltzer water he insisted upon bringing onboard. The cruise proceeds undeterred, and wealthy men and women continue their expensive holiday unaware of the corpse traveling with them below deck. This work in many ways echoes the themes of Tolstoy’s “Smert’ Ivana Ilich [The Death of Ivan Ilich]” (1886), which presented a similar condemnation of superfluous living in the story of a bureaucrat’s deathbed realization that he has lived a shallow and petty life of comfort and selfishness. Twenty-five years into his literary career, Bunin’s original idol still influenced his thoughts and writings.

Bunin had last seen Tolstoy along the Arbat in Moscow a few years before the author’s death in 1910. It had been a brief meeting but the old man had again showered the now middle-aged Bunin with questions. “How do you do?... How and where do you live? What are you doing?” he asked spryly. After a few more words Tolstoy firmly shook Bunin’s hand for the last time and departed.

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58 For a further discussion of the similarities between these two works see: Connolly, Ivan Bunin, 87-88.
59 Bunin, Memories and Portraits, 30.
impact of these meetings and their conversations about literature and life remained with him for the rest of his life, reinforcing his tendency to focus inward and away from political concerns.

Bunin’s life before the Revolutions of 1917 follows a course traversed by many Russian authors during this period, a way charted out by his first hero, Tolstoy. In the decades preceding 1917 Bunin was an itinerant writer engaged in extensive contemplation of the Russian national question in his works and correspondences with his friends and peers among the Russian literary community. Though he may have disagreed with them in his interpretations of these issues, he represented a prominent, though conventional, voice amongst the range of authors debating similar national questions in their literature. In other words, throughout the first half of his life, Bunin fit the mold of a distinctly “Russian” author and all that this title entailed. Bunin’s voice had its own particular tone, however, as he remained conservative in both his views regarding radical and revolutionary activity and his desire to keep his art outside the worldly realm of politics. This was in contrast to many of his peers who made explicit political statements in their work, a distinction of which they were well aware. Gorky commented on this as early as 1901, when in a letter to friend he exclaimed that his talent was “as beautiful as matt silver,” and yet he would not “fashion it into a knife and stick it where it’s needed.” Nevertheless, in the years leading up to the Revolution Bunin instead focused inward, examining human nature and attempting to appreciate the “brief flares of happiness” in life Tolstoy had alerted him to many years prior. This would eventually change, however, with the coming of the Revolution of 1917 and the ensuing Civil War. In an atmosphere where he saw *The Village* coming to life around him, Bunin found that he could not remain silent.

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Bunin visited St. Petersburg (then Petrograd) in April of 1917, two short months after the fall of the Russian Empire in the February Revolution and the creation of a Provisional Government. During his stay (which would be his last in the Russian capital), he attended a banquet to inaugurate the opening of an exhibit of Finnish artwork. “The ‘flower of the Russian intelligentsia’ was there to a man,” he recalled in his memoirs, including many prominent authors and artists, as well as ministers from the Provisional Government and abroad. One rude and obnoxious “so-called poet,” however, particularly stood out for Bunin at the occasion.

While he was dining with Gorky and a Finnish painter this young buffoon approached their table uninvited and brusquely pushed up a chair. He then began eating off of their plates and drinking from their glasses. Though Gorky “roared with laughter,” the Finnish painter “stared at him spellbound, just as he would probably have stared if a horse had been led into the banquet hall.” Bunin was also not amused and quickly pulled his chair away. When the jester asked if he hated him so much that he could not even sit by his side, Bunin replied curtly “no,” feeling that to show such strong negative feelings toward this miscreant would have done him too great an honor.61

His smug disdain for this “hooligan”—the Futurist poet, Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893-1930)—was further exacerbated when he interrupted the toast of Foreign Minister P. N. Miliukov (1859-1943) by jumping on a chair and yelling profanities “so obscene that Miliukov was completely flabbergasted” and stopped mid-sentence.62 After being interrupted a second time, Miliukov abandoned his speech and a French ambassador—incorrectly assuming that Mayakovsky would not be so brash as to accost a foreign dignitary—attempted to finish the toast, but met with even greater interference. In his diary of the period, Bunin noted that after this altercation “the entire hall suddenly erupted into a savage and senseless frenzy. Infected by Mayakovsky, everyone began to shout for no reason at all. They began to stamp their shoes on the floor and to beat their fists on the table. They laughed, howled, yelped, and grunted; they

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61 Bunin, Memories and Portraits, 202.
62 Ibid, 203.
even turned off the electricity.”

For Bunin, the chaos brought on by Mayakovsky’s posturing mirrored the forces unleashed by the events of 1917.

Bunin had greeted the fall of the imperial government in the Revolution of February 1917 with trepidation, but found the Bolshevik seizure of power in October and the ensuing civil conflict wholly disgusting. The Bunins spent that summer in the countryside, where Ivan lived in constant fear of peasant uprisings, but moved to Moscow in early fall. In his reminiscences a few decades later in *Memories and Portraits*, he refers to Mayakovsky as “a blasé fop and [a] snob,” and overall expresses a less than favorable opinion of his poetry. Besides his personal and professional opinion of him (or for that matter, Bunin’s own inflated view of himself), his later depiction of Mayakovsky as a tasteless and tactless buffoon was also clearly colored by his opinion of the Revolution and the Bolsheviks in general. Mayakovsky was among a group of intelligentsia who embraced the Revolution and sung its praises in their verse and artwork.

Bunin, on the other hand, detested it and its supporters as the manifestation of all of the worst qualities of the Russian character he had illustrated so harshly in earlier works such as *The Village* and “The Gentleman From San Francisco”.

For Bunin and many other future émigrés, the violence, disruption, and political opportunism of 1917, which they saw in the Bolshevik coup in October, sparked outrage and despair at not only the descent of their country into civil war, but also what they perceived as an overall decline in the moral and cultural strength of Russia as a nation. Bunin’s common-law wife, Vera Muromtseva (1888-1961), recalled his feelings in a diary entry from late December of 1919: “I will never reconcile with this, that Russia has been destroyed [Nikogda ia ne primiryus’ s tem, chto razrushena Rossia],” he exclaimed one night a month before their emigration, “that from a strong state it has become the weakest [chtol iz sil’nogo gosudarstva ona prevratilas’ v slabeishee].” These sentiments form the foundation of his diary of the period, later published under the title *Okaianny dni [Cursed Days]* in 1936. Bunin’s account, though unique in its

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65 Bunin, *Memories and Portraits*, 205
68 Bunin, *Okaianny dni* (London, Ontario: Zaria, 1936). The work appeared the same year in *Sobranie sochinenii*, 12 vols. (Berlin: Petropolis), see note 63 for information on its publication in English.
personal narrative, fits squarely within a larger body of literature published in the émigré community the Bunins entered after their departure from Odessa in February of 1920. A wealth of diaries, memoirs, and firsthand accounts of the Revolutionary and Civil War era from a variety of political orientations were published in émigré presses throughout the existence of Russia Abroad. Many echoed Bunin’s apprehension and aversion to both the Bolsheviks and the disorder of the Revolution. These works therefore form an important element of the overall justification for Russia Abroad as they document not only the events that led to the decision of many to leave their homeland, but also the negative vision of Russianness their authors saw in the Bolsheviks.

This chapter will examine the Revolutionary era through the lens of Bunin’s *Cursed Days* and other émigré accounts. The response of the intellectual community was incredibly diverse, but two broad targets appear. In Bunin’s opinion, and those of conservative figures such as the émigré historian S. S. Oldenburg, the revolutionary masses largely represented the dregs of society—unkempt, ignorant, and drunken armed peasants and soldiers who were “now masters of everything, the heirs of [the] colossal heritage [*Teper’ khoziaeva vsego etogo, nasledniki etogo kolossal’nogo nasledstvo*]” of Russia. In other words, the narod he had described in *The Village* were now in charge. Though many in fact praised the early stages of the Revolution and its popular support (particularly those later involved with the Provisional Government), the machinations of Bolshevik power and its leadership received almost universal ire amongst the émigré community. To Bunin, these men were the ominous puppet masters of ignorant masses, and to former ministers of the Provisional Government such as V. D. Nabokov (1870-1922) or Alexander Kerensky (1881-1970), they were Jacobins and opportunists who had usurped government power on false pretenses, sending Russia down a dark and troubled path. By examining Bunin’s account of the Revolution in conjunction with the other works presented here, the catalyst for emigration and more importantly its émigré interpretations becomes clearer. In emigration, questions of how and why what they saw as the “true” Russia had been replaced by an unacceptable Bolshevik parody were continual points of return for émigré authors.

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By late 1917, Bunin was living in Moscow and experiencing the Revolutionary era with Vera Muromtsveta, whom he had met in 1906 and eventually married in 1927. After the abdication of the tsar following the February Revolution, a government initially under the prime-ministership of Prince Georgii Lvov, and later Kerensky, attempted to re-establish order. The political and social situation quickly deteriorated however, as the new Provisional Government fought a losing battle to maintain the Russian position on the Eastern front of the Great War as well as simply to keep the national government functioning. In the face of both outside aggression by the German Army and the inner turmoil aggravated by Bolshevik agitation, the Russian political landscape became increasingly unstable as the national army steadily disintegrated throughout 1917.71

Though they tried to maintain some semblance of a normal life, the Bolshevik coup in October of 1917 brought the Bunins troubles to a head. Eventually they remained in their home attempting to escape the violence he describes so vehemently in Cursed Days. By December 28, Bunin ruminated on a terrible year in a letter to a friend, stating that he had not written anything since the spring. In a statement almost certainly aimed at the liberties the Bolsheviks promised to bring the struggling Russian state, he explained that his whole head had “gone grey from freedom, equality, and brotherhood.”72 No longer able to bare the turmoil and uncertainty, Ivan and Vera soon left Bolshevik-occupied Moscow for Odessa on the coast of the Black Sea in Ukraine.

Though the situation in Odessa presented only a slight improvement over Moscow (the city changed hands between the German, Bolshevik, Ukrainian, and White Russian forces frequently during their stay), Bunin made the best of his surroundings and held out hope, as did many other Russians in Odessa, that the Bolshevik cause would ultimately be defeated.73 The Bunins again attempted to maintain a normal life during their time there, and in addition to

73 Connolly, Ivan Bunin, 13.
continuing his aristocratic style of dress and living arrangements, Bunin regularly welcomed fellow exiles from the northern cities to their home for tea and conversation. This pleasant exterior did not always hold however, as his anxieties regarding the course of events often boiled to the surface. The diatribes and digressions in his diary give vent to this disgust and frustration at the revolutionary masses and their Bolsheviks leaders.

*Cursed Days* described the masses in a series of small vignettes about life on the streets of Moscow and Odessa, displaying the petty squabbles and vulgar language of a people in step with Bunin’s vision of “revolutionary spirit.” Drunkenness and confrontation seem ever-present, just as they had appeared in village life. Though the diary covered primarily his time in Moscow and later Odessa in 1918 and 1919, he often referred back to the events that took place during the 1917 Revolutions. In an entry from April/May of 1919, he recalled his impression of Petersburg during his visit there in April of 1917. For Bunin the depravation began after the fall of the imperial government, and nowhere was this clearer for him than in Petersburg, where an “orgy” was now occurring after the February Revolution. “Nevsky was being trampled underfoot by a grey mob” he recalled, bustling with “soldiers, …unemployed workers, strolling servants, and drunkards of all kinds [soldatnei, …nerabotaiaushchimi rabochimi, guliashchei prislugoii i vsiakimi iarygami].” He saw this same situation throughout the period of 1917 to 1919.

On one evening in February of 1918 a young soldier, “in rags, scraggly, filthy, and dead drunk” accosted him on a Moscow street, spitting in his direction and yelling “Despot, son of a bitch!” To Bunin, the masses of soldiers and peasants swept up in the Revolution were acting upon their most base and dark instincts, indulging in alcohol, theft, and violence. Even non-combatants had been affected. A few days later at a train station he observed “two old ladies savagely curs[ing] out the ‘government,’” while a peasant seemingly transported directly from the pages of *The Village* drunkenly stands listening to them “in a strange, dull, dead way… with an idiotic smile on his lips.” Nearby, a tall soldier stands in a pristine uniform, carrying a Bible. He is so unlike everyone else at the station, Bunin whimsically refers to him as “the last of the Mohicans” as he sums up for him the morality and tradition that has been disregarded in the name of the Revolution. For Bunin, this “revolutionary spirit” had clear antecedents in Russian history, and as elaborated in *The Village*, remained a basic undercurrent within Russianness that

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74 Bunin, *Cursed Days*, 114; Okaiannye dni, 84.
75 Ibid, 46.
76 Ibid, 52.
existed hand in hand with the more positive cultural characteristics of pre-Revolutionary Russia he would later romanticize in exile. At this time in his life, however, Russia remained a disturbing and violent place.

For Bunin, the atavistic and unruly qualities that, according to legend, led proto-Russian tribes to summon Viking princes to serve as their sovereigns at the dawn of Russian history had fully risen to the surface, in stark contrast to the idealized view of the narod put forth by recent Russian literature. The excesses of the Revolution embodied the will of these people, not modern Russians he asserts, but “Rusichi,” their pre-Kievan ancestors, “who from time immemorial were known for their antisocialness and who gave us so many ‘daring pirates,’ so many vagabonds, escapees, scoundrels, and tramps [izdrevle slavnykh svoei antisotsial’nost’iu, davshykh stol’ko ‘chudalykh razboinikov, stol’ko brodiat, begunov, a potom khitrovtsev, bosiakov].” Having recruited them “for the glory, pride, and hope of the Russian social revolution” he wondered, “why should we feign surprise at the results?” The chaos he saw in revolutionary Russia was thus the direct result of letting these qualities reign unchecked.

Bunin intentionally presents these endemic characteristics to show that the blame for the excesses of the Revolution rested not only in the narod, but also the intelligentsia and upper classes, which never took the time to truly understand them. As he attempted to demonstrate in The Village, and his response to those who criticized its dark depiction of the narod, the intelligentsia’s vision of them was usually far from reality. In a lecture entitled “Velikii durman [The Great Narcotic],” which Bunin gave in Odessa on September 21 and October 3, 1919, he expounded upon many of the themes later found in Cursed Days and placed particular blame on these intellectuals for writing “highly polished puff pieces” containing “liberal lying” about the condition and character of the people so as “not to appear reactionary.” As they conformed to left-wing paradigms of the basically pure but downtrodden muzhik and the greedy and tyrannical landowner, they produced visions of the narod that were “false, ignorant, crude, and illiterate,” he exclaimed, and merely showed that they knew nothing about the masses. This lack of comprehension thus added to the tragedy of the Revolution and the decision of émigrés such as Bunin to leave their homeland, as they had lost something he felt they never took the time to fully appreciate. Ivan and Vera had visited Odessa twelve years prior to their arrival there from

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77 Ibid, 198-199; Bunin, Okaianye dni, 172.
Moscow in 1919, and in an entry from *Cursed Days* dated in April of that year he noted the immense changes that had occurred to the city since their last time there, and how this reflected the nature of the Russia they had lost to the Revolution and would lose in exile. “Our children and grandchildren will not be able even to imagine the Russia in which we once lived… and which we ourselves did not value or understand [Nashi deti, vnuki ne budut v sostoianii dazhe predstavit’ sebe tu Rossiu… i my ne tsenili, ne ponimali]” he mused, “all its might, complexity, richness, and happiness [vsiu etu moshch’, slozhnos’t, bogatstvo, schast’e].”*79 For conservatives like Bunin, the Revolution had unleashed the masses to drink and plunder at will, and not surprisingly, havoc ensued.

Bunin was not alone in his opinion of the events of 1917. The historian S. S. Ol’denburg (18??-1940) in many ways shared this view of the revolutionary masses, albeit with a considerably stronger passion for the Empire and its sovereign in his work *Tsarstvovanie Imperatora Nikolaia II* [*The Reign of Emperor Nikolai II*] (1939).*80 Elaborating on a shorter biography of the tsar entitled *Gosudar’ Imperator Nikolaia II Aleksandrovich* [*The Sovereign Emperor Nikolai II Aleksandrovich*] he had published in Berlin in 1922, his 600-page historical account chronicles the tsar’s life and 23-year reign.*81 In this work, Nicholas II and the autocratic system he represented are depicted as viable political forces engaged in a noble struggle with extenuating factors such as the war and his own ministers. Ol’denburg was the son of a well-to-do family of the intelligentsia (his father was a world-renowned Indologist and briefly a minister in the Provisional Government) and as such, received an extensive education both at home and abroad, spending long periods in Western Europe. Despite this exposure to western models, however, he retained a staunchly pro-tsar and pro-autocratic perspective in his works.*82 After his arrival in Paris in 1925, he published pieces in a number of conservative and monarchist émigré periodicals, including the major daily newspaper *Vozrozhdenie* [*Renaissance*] and more specialized and smaller outfits such as *Russkaia letopis’* [*Russian Chronicle*].*83 Though works...
published in the right-leaning *Vozrozhdenie* ranged from politics to literature, those of *Russkaia letopis’* focused almost entirely on the ghosts of Imperial Russia, putting out materials relating to the tsar and his family, including letters, personal documents, and biographies. The section labeled “to readers” in the first edition of the journal, which ran nine issues in its lifespan from 1921-1925, even stated its goals in terms evocative of the tsarist past, presenting the journal as “a chronicle of the new Time of Troubles in Russia [*letopis’ novogo smutnogo vremeni Rossii*].” Ol’denburg’s resolutely positive image of the last tsar was thus at home in such right wing and often nostalgic publications, which allowed him to venerate the sovereign and lament what might have been.

Unlike the almost universal derision he received for his governing capabilities during the War and both Russian Revolutions, Nicholas is described in *Tsarstvovanie Imperatora Nikolaia II* as an able and even effective ruler. Ol’denburg goes to great lengths to highlight Nicholas’s positive qualities, though in the end, many seem superficial defenses of his shortcomings. About his competence as an administrator he notes, for example, that the tsar “had a lively mind [and]… quickly grasped the essence of report[s]” and possessed “an extraordinary memory, especially for recalling faces.” In regards to the well-known passive-aggressiveness displayed in his frequent dismissal of high-ranking government ministers, Nicholas was in fact attempting to soften the blow so as not to appear domineering in his exercise of power. Despite complaints about the tsar’s “undependability” by departing officials, he argued that many in fact “admitted that even under unfavorable conditions Nicholas displayed cool resolve in carrying out projects that …[they] recommended.” To Ol’denburg, the tsar was exercising a sacred duty as autocrat of the Empire and engaging with matters that superseded the authority of advisors. Ultimately, his explanation of Nicholas’s behavior rested on the fact that it was this short-sightedness on their part that caused problems as “the ministers, in truth could not depend on the sovereign to further their political careers.”

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86 Understandably, certain ministers did not see their removal in such terms. For example, the tsar had held a private audience with Count Sergei Witte on the day of his dismissal as President of the Council of Ministers during which he had been incredibly friendly and personable. Witte returned home to find an order for his removal and began to feel that the tsar was not only incompetent, but somewhat of a sadist as well. Figes, *A People’s Tragedy*, 21.
inaction taken of the sovereign tsar, but of outside variables including the Duma and the revolution that engulfed the capital.

Though not quite the degenerate rabble depicted in Cured Days, the rebellious masses nonetheless appear fierce and unruly in Ol’denburg’s account of the February Revolution. In addition to decrying Bolshevik “philistines [obyvateli]” for agitating the masses of workers to strike, Ol’denburg explains the violence of the revolutionary mob as deplorable. Following the tsar’s departure from Petrograd to Central Military Command on February 22, elements he describes as “the enemies of order [vragov poriadka]” saw their chance to act and massive street demonstrations took place.88 Much like Bunin’s depiction of the revolutionary era as tempered with drunkenness and violence, Ol’denburg describes the fall of the Kronstadt garrison on February 28 as “a bloodbath.” “Mutinous sailors murdered Admiral R. N. Wiren, slaughtered several dozen officers, and locked the rest in subterranean casemates” he explains, adding that the riotous troops then “ransacked every storehouse in search of liquor.” As well, the Petrograd garrison had become “an armed mob, vicious and cowardly, equally prepared to tear apart an ‘enemy’ as to scatter in all directions after the first volley.”89 These mobs were thus a coalescence of the drunken, selfish and craven elements within the city and the garrisons that were holding Petrograd, and therefore the imperial government, hostage.

Given the Duma’s proximity to these armed mobs, Ol’denburg expressed little faith in the efficacy of any government these politicians could construct. Unsurprisingly, he saw possible salvation from only one source. “Only the emperor at the head of loyal troops could have overcome the anarchy,” he states, as “Any government formed in turbulent Petrograd… would have become a prisoner of a disaffected garrison.”90 The revolutionaries thus appear not as a general rising of the “people’s will,” but as angry, self-interested thugs whose success was assured only by political maneuvering that prevented the tsar from personally intervening in the Petrograd revolt. The royal train had been detained at Pskov, where after hours of negotiations with his generals and top advisors, Nicholas was persuaded to abdicate on March 2, 1917. Here the tsar relinquished the authority Ol’denburg explains he never felt comfortable sharing as he viewed it as his “sacred obligation” to rule.91

88 Ibid, 4:132, 130; Ol’denburg, Tsarstvovanie Imperatora Nikolaia II (Moscow: Terra, 1992), 620, 618.
89 Ibid, 4:141.
90 Ibid, 4:143.
91 Ibid, 154.
Obviously not all witnesses to the Revolution of 1917 took such a starkly negative view of its popular support. Many members of what would become the Provisional Government initially welcomed the popular uprising as a moral struggle against an oppressive regime, as in the case of Vladimir Dmitrievich Nabokov in his account, *Vremennoe pravitel’stvo* [*The Provisional Government*], written soon after the events and published in 1921. Born in 1870 to a noble family near Tsarskoe Selo, Nabokov had reason to welcome the fall of the empire. As a prominent member of the Constitutional Democratic Party (also known as the Kadets), he had been elected to the First Duma (an representative body in the imperial government) during the hasty reforms that took place in the wake of the Revolution of 1905. He was quickly barred from political activity, however, after taking part in a protest against the tsarist government, which had dissolved the Duma and called for re-elections after only a few months for its resistance to imperial influence. He soon became a well-known and respected journalist. As a founding editor of the official Kadet daily newspaper, *Rech’* [*Speech*], Nabokov worked closely with other prominent Kadets such as future Foreign Minister Miliukov covering important political events, most notably the infamous Beilis trial.\(^92\) Having served as an officer in the imperial army during the Great War, he found himself in Petrograd at the time of the February Revolution. Given his close connections to important figures such as Miliukov, his presence at some of the very first meetings of the Provisional Government, and his career as a minister in the new government, this account of its first few months offers important insights into the negotiations and political infighting that occurred in its early stages.

Interestingly, Nabokov considered both the February and October overthrows as *pereveroty* [revolts, or coups] rather than *revoliutsii* [revolutions], but his initial enthusiasm for the seeming end of the imperial regime shines through in *Vremennoe pravitel’stvo*. On March 2, 1917, he made a trip to the State Duma to inspect the happenings of the newly established Provisional Government, and after encountering a large group of officials headed there to declare their allegiance to the new government, decided to follow them on their walk through the main streets of Petrograd. Nabokov recalled an ecstatic feeling as they passed through the revolutionary masses crowding the avenues. During their long walk to the State Duma he felt “a

\(^92\) Robert Paul Browder, Introduction to *Nabokov and the Provisional Government*, trans. and eds. Virgil D. Medlin and Steven L. Parsons (New Haven and London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 4. The Beilis trial involved a Jewish brickmaker who was accused of the ritual murder of a Christian boy. Beilis was eventually acquitted, but the trial was a major news story and sparked national debate about anti-Semitism and the place of Jews in Russian society.
sense of spiritual elation such as [he] ha[d] not since known,” as it appeared that “something
great and sacred had occurred, that the people had cast off their chains, that despotism had
collapsed [v samom dele proizoshlo nechto velikoe i sviashchennoe, chto narod sbrosil tsepi,
chtotukhnul despotizm.]”93 His enthusiasm was soon checked, as his position within the circle of
the Provisional Government gave him a firsthand look at the logistical and political problems the
new system faced. Early on in this memoir, Nabokov states that he was somewhat blinded by his
initial eagerness, and failed to see that in reality the revolution was a “military revolt which had
spontaneously broken out” due to circumstances created by the war. He thus welcomed the fall
of the autocracy, but felt in hindsight “that in this soil lay the seeds of future anarchy and
catastrophe.”94 For Nabokov, the common revolutionaries might have broken their ties with the
autocracy, but where they would go from there was still undetermined.

By mid-April of 1917, Nabokov’s vision of the situation had become exceedingly
bleaker. In an entry from Cursed Days less than a year later, Bunin had wondered whether the
two Bolshevik soldiers he saw prowling the street of Moscow in early 1918 were “patrolmen or
robbers.” Given the chaos he had witnessed in the Bolshevik takeover of the city, he was inclined
to believe that they were “probably both.”95 Nabokov saw a similar decline in the military
discipline, brought about in part by a decree of the Petrograd Soviet (a body made up of workers
and soldiers deputies that had formed during the revolution to which a large amount of soldiers
declared allegiance) that created soldiers’ councils to debate the orders of their commanders and
greatly relaxed formalities between the two groups. In this “revolutionary” situation, he believed
that the officer corps commanding these increasingly unwieldy soldiers was left with the choice
of pandering and “demeaning themselves” before their troops, or openly resisting the new
paradigm, and necessitating their removal from the post to prevent mutiny. “In this way,”
Nabokov explained, “the best, strongest, and most conscientious elements gradually disappeared,
and only pathetic dregs or particularly adroit persons… remained.”96 The revolution and its
popular support thus appears both necessary, and problematic in Nabokov’s account. In bringing
down the tsarist government it had in many ways laid the groundwork for the Bolshevik coup
later in 1917.

93 Nabokov, “The Provisional Government,” in Nabokov and the Provisional Government, 43; Nabokov, Vremennoe
Pravitel’stvo (Moscow: Moscow University Press, 1991), 14.
95 Bunin, Cursed Days, 55.
As the primary catalyst for emigration among the majority of the community, many émigrés viewed the Bolsheviks and their seizure of power in the October Revolution with contempt. Though many in fact blamed him for allowing the coup to occur, much of the émigré community would have agreed with Aleksander Kerensky’s characterization of Bolsheviks in his account of the period, *The Catastrophe* (1927). With his usual dramatic flair (Kerensky was a flamboyant figure known for temperamental outbursts), he argued that although the Empire had its problems, Russia stood to have a more positive future “in which there was no room for the zoologic [sic] experiments of Lenin.”\(^97\) Bunin, Ol’denburg, and Nabokov in many ways agreed with this depiction of Bolshevism. All four may have eventually joined the emigration for a number of different reasons, but they and Russia Abroad were at least united in their derision for the Lenin and the Bolshevik government. Numerous voices within the community expressed anger and reservation at the qualities displayed by its leaders and adherents, feeling that they had either ruined or irrevocably damaged Russia. For Nabokov they had overthrown an ostensibly democratic government in a military coup rather than a popular revolution, while Ol’denburg felt the Bolsheviks had interfered with the grand development of a legitimate and perhaps even sacred monarchy. Kerensky may have claimed the Bolshevik coup “threw Russia back a century,” but as we have seen, Bunin felt the moral degeneration had brought them even farther backward in time.\(^98\) Overwhelmingly negative images of the Bolsheviks and their supporters thus dominate the memoirs and works examined here, and form an important component of the émigré psyche by codifying a vision of the enemy that they sought to escape in emigration, where they awaited what they all assumed would be the quick disintegration of the fragile Bolshevik regime.

In *Cursed Days* Bunin portrays the Bolsheviks as charlatans parading on principles of freedom and liberty in a thinly veiled play for power. In an entry dated April 25, 1919, Bunin clearly states his opinion on the situation. “One of the most distinguishing features of a revolution,” he explained, “is the ravenous hunger for historionics, dissembling, posturing, and puppet show,” and by early 1919, the Bolsheviks had taken a position analogous to the Jacobins following the French Revolution. In short, he concluded, “the ape has awakened in man [v


\(^{98}\) Ibid, 4.
chelovek prosypaetsia obez'iana].” To him, the Bolsheviks were a “terrible gallery of convicts,” in essence, a group of sadistic and power-hungry opportunists, preying on the masses by offering false promises of equality and peace.

Bunin often uses the metaphor of a puppet show to illustrate the relationship between the Bolshevik government and the masses. On April 30, 1919, he passed by a number of spectacles in Odessa set up to celebrate May Day, and paused to take in the festivities at Cathedral Square. Here, he witnessed a display of revolutionary propaganda that filled him with resentment and indignation:

There were, of course, the processions with red and black banners… [but also] Actors and actresses dressed in opera-like folk costumes… [and] “living tableux” depicting the “might and beauty of the workers world,” of “brother” Communists with arms embraced… and of “grim-faced” workers in leather aprons. In a word, everything was the way it was supposed to be, all staged by order of Moscow, courtesy of that reptile Lunacharsky. When will the Bolsheviks end this most base mockery of the mob, this repulsive buying and selling of their souls and bellies?

In Bunin’s interpretation, the Bolshevik leadership itself in fact orchestrated much of the public displays of enthusiasm for its policies, with figures such as Lenin’s ally and now Commissar of “Enlightenment” Anatolii Lunacharsky (1875-1933) pulling the strings. Lenin and his cohorts appear to manipulate the populace into believing their lies, while they pursue their opportunistic designs on power.

The Bolsheviks popular support fares little better, as Bunin depicts their foot soldiers as similar to the peasants of The Village, only now “united” and more frighteningly, armed. Recalling the Bolshevik seizure of Moscow in the early days of November 1917, Cursed Days paints a picture of the Bunins holed up inside their apartment and boarding up their windows in an attempt to escape the violence outside. On November 3, Ivan noticed a silence in the streets after the fighting they had heard for the past few days, and decided to venture outside. “No sooner had I flung open the door,” he writes, “when a gang of ‘warriors for a bright future’ [bortsov za svetloe budushchee] rushed in… looking for enemies and weapons.” These figures “were completely crazed by victory, booze, and the most animal-like hatred,” as they gazed on he and Vera with “parched lips and savage looks.”

To Bunin, these soldiers represented a

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99 Bunin, Cursed Days, 81; Okaiannye dni, 49.
100 Bunin, Cursed Days, 74.
101 Ibid, 88.
102 Ibid, 201.
militarized version of the *narod* of Durnovka. Unlike the peasant characters from his novella, however, they now held the power. His statement earlier in the work about the tenuous difference between the new military presence in the city and a group of bandits is especially pertinent in this situation. Whereas before he had believed that the baser qualities of the *narod* had been given free reign by the February Revolution, many of these elements were now being controlled by a group of individuals who possessed not only these same qualities, but also the reins of political power. This is Bunin’s vision of Bolshevik power in *Cursed Days*, and though others may not have viewed the communists in such savage and break terms, many soon to be émigrés expressed comparable concerns.

V. D. Nabokov presents the Bolsheviks in less demonic, though still unfavorable language. In much the same way in which Bunin’s interpretations stem from his cultural position as a Russian author, Nabokov’s political loyalties to the Provisional Government no doubt influence his take on Lenin and his compatriots in *Vremennoe pravitel’stvo*. Here they appear as political opportunists whose ultimate interests rested in power, which they sought at almost any cost. Nabokov thus describes the Bolsheviks as possessing “Jacobin fearlessness [and]… unscrupulousness.” He asserts, for example, that while the Provisional Government was forced to make tough decisions regarding personnel, they kept in mind that many at risk of losing their jobs had been little more than petty bureaucrats, indifferent to politics, but honest workers with families to feed. The Bolsheviks on the other hand, he asserts, were “completely indifferent to the fate of individuals,” and lacked a “fair and humane attitude.” As he explains, the Bolsheviks callously threw out the Senate and the imperial bureaucracy, leaving “people who, after working all their lives, now found themselves old and… without a crust of bread.”

Though clearly sympathetic to his former employers, Nabokov nonetheless makes strong statements regarding the ruthlessness with which the Bolsheviks exercised power and its implications for the Russian government. In his account, they are to be reviled for their immoral and unprincipled seizure of power, which derailed Russia’s first, at least theoretically, democratic government.

Another émigré who took aim at the Bolsheviks, and specifically their leader, was the author and literary critic Mark Aldanov (born Landau, 1886-1957). Aldanov was the son of wealthy parents, and grew up in Ukraine, where he received an education in law and science at the University of Kiev. As with the others discussed here, he exhibited aversion to the

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103 Nabokov, “The Provisional Government,” 64.
Bolsheviks and, like Bunin, fled south to Odessa before emigrating to Paris in 1919, becoming an important author in the Parisian émigré community. Though he shared his profession and was personally acquainted with Bunin, his dislike for the Bolsheviks in some ways owes more to his political ideology. In his scathing biography of Lenin, originally published in French as *Lenine* (1919), he openly acknowledges his political bias, stating that he is a socialist of the labor party, and is therefore sympathetic to left-wing movements, but is against violence and revolution. This work sets out to systematically discredit Lenin and the Bolsheviks. Though it at times it lapses into hyperbole—Aldanov even goes so far as to criticize Lenin’s literary ability—his diatribe against what many émigrés viewed as their primary enemies provides a pertinent supplement to memoirs and accounts discussed thus far. Émigré literati expressed their distaste for the Bolsheviks in a number of ways besides these accounts of the Revolutionary era, and thus polemical works such as Aldanov’s *Lenine* help to map the critical émigré response to the events of 1917.

Though a political biography equally concerned with discrediting Lenin’s brand of communism, much of Aldanov’s denunciation of Lenin and his party appear similar in language and sentiment to those expressed by others among the émigré community, including Bunin, Nabokov, and Ol’denburg. From the first sentences of his argument, he states that Lenin has wielded more power over Russia and caused it more harm than Nicholas II. In addition to presenting his political biases—from this statement it can be inferred that unlike Bunin or Ol’denburg, he likely welcomed the end of the imperial regime in the February Revolution—a, the first few chapters present a vision of Bolshevik Russia in terms very much akin to the apocalyptic sentiments of *Cursed Days*. When examining Lenin’s accomplishments, all of which he cynically claims were “crowned with universal glory,” he sees little more than deceit and destruction. After his seizure of power in October 1917, he was responsible for “an unprecedented reign of terror; the Third International; the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat;’ chaos; civil war; and,” in no uncertain terms, “the complete collapse of Russia.” He goes on to assert that Lenin’s political talents rested, not in “prophesy, but in… turning the greatest amount of hatreds that the war built up to the benefit of his own ideas.”

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107 Ibid, 70.
and the Bolsheviks are therefore not only usurping authority in a Jacobin play for power but also locking Russia in a terminal decline. Much like Bunin, Aldanov sees Bolshevik Russia as a dark and dubious place. Though his exact reading of the situation contains unique biases, Aldanov chose to flee the Bolsheviks for many of the same reasons as the émigrés examined here. Ultimately they sought refuge abroad, where they could articulate their ideas about both the dangers and hypocrisies they saw in Bolshevik Russia, and the “true” Russia that was lost to war and revolution.

For this reason, Aldanov is an important figure as well, as he held a prominent position in the community of Russian émigré literati that congregated in various cities across Europe following 1917. As a well-respected and influential writer he was a regular contributor to a number of important émigré literary journals, and maintained an especially prominent presence as contributor and reviewer in the major journal Sovremennye zapiski [Contemporary Annals]. A thick journal in the tradition of those discussed in chapter one, Sovremennye zapiski ran continuously from 1920 until 1940 and published seventy issues in addition to a running a publishing company that released works by nearly every major émigré author. As the most prestigious and respected journal in Russia Abroad, this journal played a major role in circulating Russian émigré literature, a role it took quite seriously while the fatherland was under Bolshevik occupation. Although its founding editors belonged to the Socialist Revolutionary Party, the journal opened its pages to authors of all political orientations, and regularly published works by liberals such as Aldanov as well as conservatives such as Bunin. The editor’s note from the first edition laid out its purpose as to provide a forum “for everything in the areas of artistic creation, scientific research, or the search for the social ideal that has objective value for Russian culture [ob ’ektivnuiu tsennost’ s tochki zreniia russkoi literatury]” as “the free and independent word [svobodnomu, nezavisimomu slovo]” had no place in Bolshevik Russia.\(^{108}\) Sentiments such as these codified the purpose of Russia Abroad as to not only explain the problems with the new Soviet regime, but to carry Russian culture abroad to protect it from the Bolsheviks clutches. In the face of Civil War and Bolshevik victory, many therefore found themselves abroad either by choice or necessity.

Though *Cursed Days* was published over fifteen years after his emigration, Bunin’s account of his hardships during the Revolution and Civil War, as well as his pain and resentment toward the Bolsheviks still found a sympathetic audience among this émigré literary community. A review for the newspaper *Segodnia* [*Today*] highlighted the complexity of Bunin’s account, noting that, in the end, it seemed to be a farewell to a former life, expressed with “sorrow, anger, and tears [skorb’, gnev i slez].”\footnote{Review of *Okaianne dni*, by Ivan Bunin, *Segodniia* 293 (1935): 4.} Although he made a point of avoiding the political connotations of Bunin’s account, in a review in *Sovremennye zapiski* of the ninth and tenth volume of his recently published collected works, which contained *Cursed Days*, Aldanov commented on this vitriol as well. Despite this dark imagery, however, he believed that “treasures of fine art” could be found in even the most “malicious and pointed” chapters.\footnote{Aldanov, review of *Sobranie Sochinenii Tom IX i X*, by Ivan Bunin, *Sovremennye zapiski* 59 (1935): 472.} Bunin’s account of the Revolutionary era received praise for both its deeper ruminations about the impact of these events on Russian life, but also its high aesthetic value as a well-crafted piece of Russian literature, imbued with the cultural weight and significance. In this way, he left his own particular impression on a larger corpus of literature regarding the Revolution and Bolshevik ascendency to political power. In the end, Bunin’s place as an émigré who reflected upon the events that led to life abroad is that of one of many who rejected the Bolsheviks. Thus, Bunin’s experience during this period, and his account in *Cursed Days* provide an effective tool for examining the ways he and his fellow émigrés sought to understand the great rupture in their lives and the life of their homeland.

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Of course not all Russian authors fled after the Revolution. Mayakovsky, the young poet Bunin viewed with such disdain at the Finnish art exhibition in 1917 went on to have a highly successful career as an author in the Soviet Union. In addition to writing propaganda for the Bolshevik cause during the Revolution and Civil War he composed numerous pro-Soviet works during the 1920s. His poem “My Soviet Passport” (1929), for example, told of the great dignity one felt when presenting proof of Soviet citizenship upon visiting a foreign land. “Read it [and] envy” it exclaims after comparing the merits of other foreign travelling papers to that of his
crimson passport, “I am a citizen of the USSR!” Though he would eventually become disillusioned with Soviet society at the end of his life, after his suicide in 1930 his image became even more trumpeted in Soviet literary culture, and numerous monuments were erected in his honor. Others, such as Gorky, or the novelist Aleksei Tolstoy (1883-1945), departed in disgust at the violence and turmoil of the Civil War but later returned to the Soviet Union and became a part of the Soviet literary establishment. Gorky came back to Russia in 1928 and assumed a leading role in Soviet literature and helped to establish the official genre of Socialist Realism—a move that likely solidified the negative image of him in Bunin’s memoirs. Aleskei Tolstoy also receives a highly critical review in Memories and Portraits. Here, he is shown to have a great literary talent but also an “exceptional lack of moral sense,” which Bunin believed made him “an equal of his immoral colleagues who, like himself, had taken up the profitable career of service to the Kremlin.” Many of these figures eventually came to terms with the Soviet regime and even prospered, but as Bunin’s sentiments make clear, this could potentially have consequences for their reputation outside the Soviet Union, with many who shared Bunin’s opinion of the Bolsheviks likely also sharing his view of their sympathizers.

Another issue that arises in a discussion of Russian reactions and accounts of the Revolution and Civil War period is that of anti-Semitism. A prominent strain in Russian political and social thought before this era, anti-Semitism led to numerous pogroms during the Civil War (in many, though not all, cases carried out by those of or sympathetic to the White movement), and White propaganda commonly portrayed Bolshevism as a Jewish conspiracy. Given this history, these sentiments played a role in the articulation of the émigré narrative of the Revolution and appear in a nuanced form in Cursed Days. The ugly mobs Bunin presents here are belligerently anti-Semitic, often using racial slurs and coarse language to describe Jewish individuals, such as Lev Trotsky for example, and the Jews as a whole. For Bunin, this is yet another indicator of the backwardness and ignorance of the narod, and he writes with great disdain about pogroms occurring during the Revolutionary and Civil War era. Though Bunin spoke out about these incidents, he continually praised White Army generals such as Anton

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112 See, for example, his play “The Bedbug” (1930), where he offers a satire of a stagnating Soviet society in a humorous tale about a Soviet citizen from the 1920s who is transported to a bland future socialist society.
113 Bunin, Memories and Portraits, 158.
114 Figes, A People’s Tragedy, 676-679.
115 See for example the entry from May 2/15, 1919 in Cursed Days, 141.
Denikin, however, despite his anti-Semitism and the fact that he and many of his officers often remained complacent about pogroms carried out by their troops.\textsuperscript{116} Thus, Bunin’s position in regards to anti-Semitism appears complex. He was mostly an opponent of anti-Jewish violence in \textit{Cursed Days}, but also seemed willing to look the other way when it came to supporting a force that he believed would defeat the Bolsheviks.

Overall, Bunin’s experiences and accounts of the Revolutionary era allow us to map the response of many Russians who chose to emigrate during and after the events of 1917 and the Civil War. Many versions of this story exist. Though Bunin’s narration is particularly harsh and contains many of his own interpretations, it provides a useful starting point from which to examine anti-Bolshevik sentiments and illustrates some of the key ways in which émigrés defined the meaning of 1917. As a member of the landed gentry, he believed he had seen the frightening possibilities that lay in the \textit{narod}, and had written about them with caution in works such as \textit{The Village}. For him, the Revolution brought all of these terrible qualities to the forefront, and placed the rabble in charge of Russian society. Though not all agreed with Bunin in these specifics, the anti-Bolshevik thrust of his account is replicated by numerous other figures in the range of the political spectrum: from liberals such as Aldanov, to moderates such as Nabokov, to conservatives along the lines of Ol’denburg. In Bunin’s 1919 speech “The Great Narcotic” he remarked that he did not think a peasant he had seen beat a swan with his shoe at the Moscow zoo would make a good socialist, and that “neither this ancient earth, nor ancient Rus’ has passed on.”\textsuperscript{117} In addition to emphasizing the medieval nature he found in the \textit{narod}, his sentiments about the peasant at the Moscow zoo also mirrored those of many émigrés who saw imminent defeat ahead of the Bolsheviks. This may not have been the case, but in life abroad they would remain firm that their own “true” Russia, now carried with them outside its borders, would certainly not “pass on.”

\textsuperscript{116} Marullo, \textit{Cursed Days}, 217fn; Figes, \textit{A People’s Tragedy}, 677.
\textsuperscript{117} Bunin, excerpt from “The Great Narcotic,” in \textit{Cursed Days}, 256.
Bunin sat at his desk in his villa in provincial France most of the day on November 9, 1933, but did not feel motivated to write. It was a dreary day and after noticing heavy rain clouds in the sky in early afternoon he decided to take in a movie at the local cinema. The film was quite trivial in subject matter, but it was just the kind of distraction he was looking for. Not long into it, however, he was interrupted by a hand on his shoulder and brief whispered message: there was a phone call for him from Stockholm. Bunin walked home briskly, but avoided becoming overly excited. He had already been passed over for the Nobel Prize a few times in recent years, and had no reason to believe that this time the phone call from the Swedish Academy would be any different. Upon returning home, however, he found that he had finally been awarded the prize, and for the remainder of the night he took calls from all across Europe, overwhelmed by the flood of congratulations, and ceaseless questions from reporters. Many had to do with his homeland and status as an émigré. “When did you leave Russia?... Are you thinking of going back?...Is it true that you are the first Russian who has ever received the Nobel Prize?”” they asked. To the second question he replied, “My God, how could I think of going back?”

In his recollection of the event in *Memories and Portraits*, he recalled that he was “swept away as if by an impetuous torrent” in the whirlwind of fame and adulation he received in the month between when he heard that he had been awarded the prize and when he accepted it in Stockholm on December 10. Despite his excitement at earning such an honor, he felt it held a special significance for himself and the entire émigré community as well. “I belonged to old Russia,” he wrote, “which was now scattered all over the world.” His award thus “became for all that exiled, humiliated, downtrodden Russia an event of truly national importance [sobytiem istinno natsional’nym].”

Though large Russian émigré communities thrived across Europe following the Revolution, as the prospect of Bolshevik collapse (so certain to most émigrés in its early years) began to fade, many despaired the seeming loss of their homeland. Bunin’s works in

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emigration, and in particular his semi-autobiographical novel *The Life of Arseniev* [*Zhizn’ Arsen’eva*] (1930), captured this longing for “Old Russia” in thick, evocative language that occurred often in émigré literature. In this way, Bunin and his fellow émigré authors took part in the creation of a nostalgic landscape that presented Russians living abroad with a welcome vision of Russia before 1917. These images allowed them both to escape (however briefly) from their émigré lives into warm memories, and to maintain a pre-revolutionary vision of Russianness, which remained in many cases their central object of longing.

In his autobiography *Speak, Memory*, Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov (1899-1977)—the son of the journalist and Provisional Government politician—describes the recollection of his Russian childhood as a “robust reality [that] makes a ghost of the present.”120 Much like Bunin, Nabokov chose to leave his homeland following the Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917 for a life abroad where he would struggle with the loss wrought by the disruption of the Revolution in much of his literature in the 1920s and 1930s. Unlike Bunin, however, after his early works in emigration, which focused mostly on émigré life and reflected upon Old Russia, this theme appeared less and less in his later career and he eventually left Russia Abroad to settle in America in 1940. Here he largely abandoned writing in Russian, establishing himself as a major writer in English and published his work best known to western audiences, *Lolita* (1955).121 Nonetheless, Nabokov’s early émigré works fit well within the larger paradigm of longing and nostalgia articulated in the works of fellow writers such as Bunin, forming a signature trope of Russian émigré literature. Viewed as second in importance among émigré communities only to the re-publication of Russian classics by Tolstoy, Gogol, Pushkin, and Dostoevsky, the literature produced by Russian emigrants between 1919 and 1940 contains strong overtones of grief and longing that found deep resonation within the Russian émigré communities that constituted their primary readership.122 These writers, following the lineage of their nineteenth-century forebears,

122 Raeff, *Russia Abroad*, 79. A common practice in much scholarship regarding Russian emigration during the Soviet period has been to break these movements down into “waves,” with the first departing during the Civil War, the second following World War Two, and the third during the 1970s and early 1980s. As Raeff has pointed out in a recent article, this timeframe of waves tends to over-simplify the emigration, particularly in the case of those who went abroad during the interwar years. Émigrés departing in the 1920s and 1930s, for example, thus are able to fall through the cracks when this paradigm is employed. To avoid venturing into further “atemporal abstraction,” Raeff suggests abandoning this somewhat arbitrary system, in favor of the study of Russia Abroad within the timeframe of 1919-1940. Such a reorganization allows for a more historicized depiction of Russia Abroad by tying it to a specific
took their roles as critics and creators of Russian culture very seriously, as reflected in the debate over the *narod* seen in chapter one. Given the fragmented nature of the community both geographically and politically, Marc Raeff has described “political life in exile” as “nothing but shadow-boxing.” Through the expression of distinct visions of their homeland and the fundamentally “Russian” ideals expressed by émigré authors in their literature—the realm of nostalgia, memory, and counter narratives—, however, émigré cultural life held a far greater significance to Russia Abroad.\(^\text{123}\)

Many cities—including Prague, Berlin, Harbin, and Shanghai—hosted large Russian émigré populations in addition to populations found Great Britain, Latvia, and Estonia. Yet, when Vera and Ivan arrived in France in 1924 Paris was virtually the center of Russia Abroad.\(^\text{124}\) Sporting a sophisticated community engaged in various social functions and the publication of numerous periodicals, the Paris enclave included many prominent Russian authors and literati at one time or another, including Aldanov, the symbolist poet Zinaida Gippius (1869-1945), and Boris Zaitsev (1881-1972), as well as political figures such as General Denikin (1872-1947), Prince Lvov, Kerensky, and Miliukov. Émigré magazines and journals such as *Sovremennye zapiski* provided these authors a medium through which to keep Russian literary and cultural traditions alive, lament the loss of their homeland, and present an alternative vision of Russian culture to those propagated by the Soviet Union. Memory pieces such as Bunin’s *The Life of Arseniev* and some of Nabokov’s early short stories and novels touch upon the key role of nostalgia and remembrance in expressing and perpetuating these themes in émigré literature and articulate a shared, though by no means uniform, sense of loss among the community.

Nostalgia has been defined in a number of ways pertinent to the discussion of Russian emigration in the early twentieth century in recent scholarship. In her work *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym defines it as “a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed,” and “a sentiment of loss and displacement, but… also a romance with one’s own

\(^\text{123}\) Raeff, *Russia Abroad*, 9.

fantasy.” She posits that nostalgia often takes a reflective form that concentrates on the perpetuation of longing, with the subject fully aware that the homeland is gone and will never return. This state is fixated on a yearning that constitutes “a form of deep mourning that performs a labor of grief.” Peter Fritzsche examines nostalgia similarly by contextualizing its rise as a mass sentiment following the Napoleonic era, and proposes that nostalgic longing is predicated on a distinctly modern conception of time. He sees this as brought about by the comprehension of the present as fundamentally disconnected and separated from the past by a “deep rupture in remembered experience,” and in this sense past events, places, and ideas are understood as bound to “non-repeatable, irretrievable time,” a state that he refers to as “the melancholy of history.” This understanding of time leaves all modern individuals “stranded in the present” but specifically accentuates the despair of nostalgics such as Bunin as their longing “calls for a return home, but it does so in conditions of homelessness.” As seen in chapter two, for Bunin and other émigrés 1917 acted as this “moment of rupture.” Furthermore, as the sense of loss is based on a shared notion of non-retrievable time, nostalgics both create and consume texts that document or romanticize these losses as a “way to connect their personal ordeals with larger social narratives.”

Each of these approaches provide methods through which to understand not only the experience and emotions of emigration, but the underlying mentalities that helped articulate both Bunin’s and Nabokov’s own understanding of themselves as émigrés, as well as the common sentiments that allowed the themes of their works to reverberate among Russia Abroad.

In this chapter I will explore four works that express these nostalgic ideas and offer a view of both life in emigration and the role of memory and longing in this life: Bunin’s *The Life of Arseniev* and “V Parizhe” [“In Paris”] (1940), and Nabokov’s *Masheńka* [Mary] (1926) and his short story “Vozvrashchenie Chorba” [“The Return of Chorb”] (1925). Here again, Bunin’s experiences abroad and émigré writings are situated within the larger frame of the experiences of

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126 Boym draws a distinction between this type of nostalgia and a “restorative” type, which seeks to actively reconstruct lost places and times, ibid.
127 Ibid, xviii, 55.
129 Ibid, 216.
130 Ibid, 8.
emigration, exile, and longing so many of his fellow émigrés felt for their old homeland after the events of 1917. The specific character and appearance of memories of pre-Revolutionary Russia in the minds of the characters of these pieces form an important trend. The reminiscences of Russian childhood and adolescence in *The Life of Arseniev* and *Mary* provide excellent examples of a type of rich and colorful reality these memories harbored for émigrés. Another aspect of these works concerns the ways in which memories play out in the specific longings and activities of their characters, and provide the “robust reality” through which they are able to “make a ghost of the present.” Émigré authors expressed important elements of émigré life such as these through the contemplative interactions their characters had with a lost homeland in their everyday life—a sentiment often closely familiar to the readers of these works in émigré periodicals and publications. Overall, these pieces of literature provide insights into the Russian émigré experience of authors such as Bunin and his contemporaries and offer a glimpse of the powerful force of nostalgia in émigré communities as an active force that offered meaning and escape from everyday life in exile. In these writings, he carried his role as Russian author abroad, continuing his vocation as mediator of Russian culture for the unique situation of Russia Abroad.

In the weeks before their departure from Odessa in February of 1920, Vera wrote in her diary that Bunin “suffered greatly.” “He wakes up at night; he does not sleep from six in the morning on,” she wrote; “he cannot understand how it all fell apart so quickly, or the reasons why.”131 Having been unable to flee to Istanbul with Aleksei Tolstoy and his family after the fall of the city to the Bolsheviks in April of 1919, the Bunins remained in Odessa to witness its capture by Denikin’s White Army a few months later before finally escaping on a small Greek ship as the Bolsheviks were in the process of retaking the city. After weathering a crowded voyage in frigid weather they arrived in Istanbul only to narrowly escape a “disinfection” shower that a French doctor (because of the Ottoman Empire’s defeat in the First World War, the city was under allied occupation) had ordered be administered to all entering Russian refugees by

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using his literary prestige.\textsuperscript{132} From here they began a long journey through Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and finally to France, where after remaining for a time in Paris, they settled in the southern provincial city of Grasse in 1924. In the years following his emigration he would split his time between a Parisian apartment and relaxation in his country villa.

During this period Bunin experienced a professional and personal rejuvenation after the relentless blows he had been dealt by the Revolution and Russian Civil War. In his memoirs, Bunin’s friend, the author Nikolai Roshchin (1896-1956), explained that Bunin looked much better than he had when they had last met in Odessa, stating, “gone were… the indifferent, tired face, and the hoarse voice…his smile was first youthfully derisive, then affectionate and kind.”\textsuperscript{133} The image of himself as a distinctly “Russian” author he had maintained since his early career enabled him to weather the experience of Civil War and exile and even thrive. After somewhat of a decline in his productivity, his literary output bounced back with the publication of at least ten collections of short stories and verse between the years 1921 and 1930. In these years Bunin created some of his most famous works, such as the novella \textit{Mitya’s Love} (1924) and \textit{The Life of Arseniev}, which was originally serialized in \textit{Sovremennye zapiski} and then released by its publishing company as a separate volume in 1930.\textsuperscript{134}

Bunin’s prestige among the émigré literary community is underscored by the fact that the journal considered him one of the most important living Russian writers, placing his name at the top of their list of works available through their publishing company and often warmly receiving his works in their reviews.\textsuperscript{135} For example, about his collection of short stories and poems \textit{Roza Ierikona} \textit{[The Rose of Jericho]} (1924), a reviewer noted that he wrote “masterfully” about heavy topics such as life and death, and emphatically stated that “he [was] a continuator of the classical tradition in Russian literature [on—pro dolzhatel’ klassicheskoi traditsii v russkoii literature.]”\textsuperscript{136} In another review, this time of his anthology of works from the period of 1911 through 1913 \textit{Poslednee svidanie} \textit{[The Last Meeting]} (1927), fellow émigré author Georgii Adamovich (1894-1972) noted that Bunin had shown much growth in recent writing even in comparison to his

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{132} Bunin had avoided this humiliation by loudly shouting that he was an \textit{Immortel} (a French Academic designation equivalent to the Russian Imperial Academy, of which he was a member) and the doctor allowed Bunin and his companions to pass, Bunin, \textit{Memories and Portraits}, 177-178.
\item \textsuperscript{133} Nikolai Roshchin, excerpt from \textit{Moi Bunin}, in Ivan Bunin, \textit{From the Other Shore}, 117.
\item \textsuperscript{134} Bunin, \textit{Zhizn’ Arsen’eva. Istoki dnei}. (Paris: Sovremmenye zapiski, 1930).
\item \textsuperscript{135} See, for example, the ad in the front page of \textit{Sovremennye zapiski} 30 (1927), where his works appear first in a list of publications including other prominent writers such as Aldanov, Zaitsev, and Gippius.
\item \textsuperscript{136} Mikhail Tselin, review of \textit{Roza Ierikona}, by Ivan Bunin, \textit{Sovremennye zapiski} 22 (1924): 449.
\end{itemize}
highly praised works of over a decade earlier. His works abroad were, to Adamovich, “cleaner, stronger, and more free” than any of his pieces before.” In emigration, Bunin would use the ability to capture mood and atmosphere identified in even the earliest reviews of his writing to their fullest potential. In many of these works, he would capture a longing for lost places and times using evocative language that conveyed these emotions to a sympathetic audience.

These sentiments are perhaps best expressed in The Life of Arseniev, his final novel, often considered to be his masterwork. The main plot of the novel presents the memoir of an aristocratic Russian author who, much like Bunin, is now in his later life and living in exile in southern France. The novel begins with Arseniev’s earliest recollections of life in the Russian countryside and proceeds through his early youth on his family’s estate, before moving to cover his adolescence and early adulthood. The first of its five parts thus deals more with the aura of pre-Revolutionary Russia in Arseniev’s memory, while the later sections turn more toward issues of love and loss. Many characters and events, as well as the overall course of Arseniev’s life closely mirror that of Bunin’s. As Andrew Wachtel has argued, such autobiographical fictional accounts, or “pseudo-autobiographies” as he refers to them, of childhood appear in numerous instances throughout Russian literature since Lev Tolstoy began the trend with his novella Childhood [Detstvo] (1852). Bunin (perhaps rightly) saw himself as last in the line of gentry authors in Tolstoy’s tradition, and his incorporation of both personal and general reflections of the past allow The Life of Arseniev to tell a biographical narrative, but also capture the experience of a generation—elements wholly characteristic of this style of writing. When asked, Bunin admitted that the novel contained many autobiographical elements, but vehemently rejected the idea of interpreting the piece as such, intimating that its artistic value lay in its depiction of its subject matter, rather than its connection to his own life. This work therefore serves as an important historical source for understanding the almost mystical aura that surrounded “Old Russia” for émigrés in the decades following the Revolution.

The Life of Arseniev engages densely in descriptive and yet abstract visions of this image. Arseniev’s first memories are of “a large room lit by the sun of a late summer’s day, spreading its parched glow over the sloping hill-side seen through the window facing south [bol’shuiu,

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139 Ibid, 189.
osveshchennuu predoseennim solntsem komnatu, ego sukhoi blesk nad kosogorom, vidnym v okno, na iug].”

In this work, the importance of distinct yet malleable memories of former days becomes clear in the ways these images are used by the novel. Here even simple settings such as Arseniev’s “large room” take on a greater significance when viewed through the lens of nostalgia, as they are able to provide both a vague sense of familiarity as well as pointed images with specific, personal meanings. As demonstrated by Arseniev’s childhood wanderings on his family’s country estate, such vivid descriptions of people and places provide images crucial to the ability of these characters to transcend their temporal location in exile and reexamine and even re-inhabit—however briefly—their past. These childhood and adolescent descriptions of an ideal “Russia” give emotional visions of a semi-mythical homeland present in Arseniev and other émigré works such as Nabokov’s Mary. From an émigré standpoint, these images play a critical role in the continuation, and even creation, of nostalgic longing, as they provide idealized versions of the early memories of Russian expatriates now blurred by time and physical separation.

The Life of Arseniev begins with the earliest recollections of its middle-aged narrator. At a stage of life governed by visceral and ephemeral emotions, the young protagonist sees an overblown and dynamic picture of what are for him the halcyon days of the Russian past. Arseniev witnesses a plethora of vibrant landscapes and memorable events that develop the nostalgic overtones of the first sections of this novel and provide the prevailing atmosphere for the majority of the ensuing plot. In many cases during these early chapters, the physical presence of the protagonist is dwarfed by the description of his surroundings. As he describes one distinct recollection, “the large deserted courtyard lies in shadow, and I… am lying on its green cool grass, looking up at the bottomless blue sky… there, high up, floats a white cloud; growing

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141 Fritzsche posits this as a distinctly modern method of remembrance in “How Nostalgia Narrates Memory.” Using his primary example, the French Revolution, he argues that in the new grand narrative centered around the major political, social, and cultural disruptions wrought by the Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, the pre-Revolutionary past was now foreign and lost, and individuals began to understand themselves in relation to this history on both collective and personal terms. He further notes, “the availability of a general narrative about the movement of history made socially sensible the most individual experiences and invited counternarratives based on those particulars.” In other words, broader notions of history, or in this case the blurry ideas of “childhood” and “Russia” in this passage from Arseniev, worked in tandem with the more particular, personal elements of these memories to make them significant to both the author and reader. Fritzsche, “Nostalgia,” 72.
rounder, it slowly changes shape and melts away into that concave blue expanse.”¹⁴² This sense of awe can be tied to the young age of Arseniev at this time, but also to the narrator’s own contemporary understanding of this landscape as an ideal and romantic recollection of his former country.

Another childhood recollection concerning a carriage ride down an old dirt highway illustrates this sentiment as well. In this scene, the narrator describes his first experience with “the romance of forsaken highways,” and of “the soul of old Russia that was becoming a thing of the past [otkhodiashchuiu v predan’ e russkuiu starinu]” as “the old ruts were grown over with grass,” and tall lonely willows line “the deserted track.” While traveling down this road, Arseniev spots a jet black raven on an old sign post and his father tells him of the life span of these birds—that they could live for hundreds of years—and that this one may have been around during the reign of the Tatars. The memory of his father’s story and ancient and fading history of this road prompts the narrator to ask, “Wherein lay the fascination of what” his father “had said and what… [he] now felt? In the sense of Russia and of it being my homeland [V oshchushchen’ e Rossii i togo, chto ona moia rodina]”?¹⁴³ As with his earlier childhood musings, this memory is filled with flexible imagery that is of value as specific memory, yet in this instance the narrator uses this mechanism to explore these themes from an expressly émigré perspective. Unlike childhood remembrances that evoke vague sensations of youth in addition to the particular memory of a summer afternoon, the recollection of narratives tied directly to his earliest understandings of his homeland allow for a continual reinterpretation of Russian identity through nostalgic contemplation. In this sense, Bunin is empowered to use these images to create his own ideas of “Russianness” and provide his own meanings to their shared memories of the pre-revolutionary past. Such an active process of self-identification played an important role in émigré communities struggling to maintain their vision of Russian culture and identity while living abroad.

Its nature as a “pseudo-autobiography” in the style of his forbears was also not lost on his audience, as it connected with the sense of nostalgia of those of Russia Abroad, the unique generation for which, following the pattern of classic authors such as Tolstoy, it was intended to speak. In a review for Sovremennye zapiski, for example, Aldanov explained that The Life of

¹⁴² Bunin, Arseniev, 19.
¹⁴³ Bunin, Arseniev, 55; Bunin, Sobranie sochinenii, 7:56.
Arseniev was not an autobiography, but a memoir that attempted to encapsulate an era. This work thus fell into a category of Russian literature such as Lermontov’s *Geroi nashego vremeni* [A Hero of Our Time] (1840) or Gorky’s trilogy of memoirs *Detstvo* [Childhood] (1913), *Vliudiakh* [Into the World] (1916), and *Moi universitety* [My Universities] (1920), a genre of works so well-known, Aldanov argued, that he saw no need to expand on them in his review—they had, “of course, already been read by every educated Russian [vsiakii obrazovanyi russkii].”\(^{144}\) He also noted what he viewed as a resolutely positive message in *The Life of Arseniev*, considering the pessimism so evident in *The Village* and “The Gentleman From San Francisco.” Aldanov believed it was his greatest work so far, calling the novel a work of “strength and beauty,” and asserting that it occupied “the highest place in Russian literature.”\(^{145}\) Bunin was thus not only using his long-praised skill at capturing atmosphere and mood to distill the nostalgia of the émigré experience, but also taking part in a style of writing closely linked to the old traditions of Russian literature he brought with him abroad.

For reflective nostalgics, in Boym’s argument, it is important to note that these memories are understood as inherently malleable and romanticized. In this sense, many of the émigré characters in the works of Bunin or Nabokov are, for the most part, able to accept the fact that they hold a view of their homeland that is constructed in hindsight for specific purposes within their own cultural and social milieu. That *Arseniev* is conceived as an autobiographical novel rather than an outright autobiography also concedes this point. As Julian Connolly argues in his literary biography of Bunin, “the invention of Arseniev… stems from Bunin’s perception that his own past becomes, in memory and in art a ‘fictitious’ reality.”\(^{146}\) For Bunin, the attempt to reconstitute the past as it actually existed is not the purpose of his writing *The Life of Arseniev*, nor does it even necessarily appeal to him or the narrator—the world about which he writes is irrevocably gone, the pre-revolutionary past of his childhood will not and cannot return. The same was true for Bunin. As early as 1918 he had sensed the loss of his old homeland. In an entry from *Cursed Days* dated March 24/April 6 mused that he and Vera “went to visit N. V. [Orlov]-Davydov on Bol’shoy Levinsky Prospekt. He lives in a small, yellowish home… with a black roof in the front and a yellow fence with black iron chalices on the gates. A turquoise sky

\(^{144}\) Aldanov, review of Zhizn Arsen’eva, Sovremennye zapiski 42 (1930): 525.
\(^{145}\) Ibid, 523
\(^{146}\) Connolly, *Ivan Bunin*, 114.
shone from behind lattice-like trees. Old Moscow, gone forever.\footnote{Bunin, \textit{Cursed Days}, 74.} Not only would the material elements of his friend’s home not survive the conflict, neither would the Russia he had known before the revolution. Thus, the images of the narrator’s homeland presented in the early chapters of \textit{Arseniev} offer the reader a view of Russia as it exists in the mind of the narrator in a purely nostalgic sense—but for émigrés like Bunin, these recollections constituted tangible realities in their everyday life, as we shall see.

Bunin was not the only Russian writer to invoke visions of the past in his émigré writings. In Nabokov’s \textit{Mary}, these themes appear in a similar, though perhaps more personal, dimension in the interactions between the émigré Ganin and his memories of his former love over the course of the novella. Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov was born to V. D. Nabokov and his wife Elena Ivanovna Nabokova in 1899. Given his own lineage (the Nabokovs were also an “ancient” and “noble” family) as well as his father’s stature as a politician and journalist, Nabokov received an extensive education, learning English and French, in addition to his native Russian. By his teen years he was writing poetry in all three languages. His family was forced to flee Russia after the Bolshevik coup and ensuing Civil War, and eventually ended up in London, where he studied at Cambridge. Leaving him to his studies, the family soon moved again to the émigré community in Berlin, and following his father’s death in an attempt on P. N. Miliukov’s life, Vladimir Vladimirovich settled there himself in 1922. Having taken the pseudonym Vladimir Sirin in 1920 (which he would continue to use until the late 1930s), he published his first anthologies, two collections of verse entitled \textit{Grozd [Cluster]} and \textit{Gornii put’ [Mountain Path]}, in 1923 to favorable reviews.\footnote{Julian Connolly, “Vladimir Nabokov,” \textit{Dictionary of Literary Biography}, 251-253. Vladimir Sirin, \textit{Grozd: Stikhi} (Berlin: Gamaïum, 1923); Sirin, \textit{Gornii put’} (Berlin: Grani, 1923); Sirin, \textit{Mashen’ka} (Berlin: Slovo, 1926).} By 1926, he released his first novella, \textit{Mary}, and soon garnered a considerable amount of renown, regularly publishing works in \textit{Sovremennye zapiski}.\footnote{Bunin, \textit{Cursed Days}, 74.}

\textit{Mary} tells the story of a Berlin émigré and his nostalgic affair with the memory of his first love. The protagonist, Lev Ganin, lives a depressing life in a dingy hotel on a floor populated with fellow sullen émigrés. After learning that the forgotten love of his life is in fact now the wife of one of his neighbors and will soon be arriving to stay in Berlin he spends the next few days re-living their love affair in all its minor details. Though the piece is not a pseudo-autobiography in the style of \textit{The Life of Arseniev}, its relationship to Nabokov’s own experiences makes it an apt comparison to Bunin’s work. In the introduction to the 1970 publication of the
English translation of *Mary*, Nabokov admitted that “had [he] thought of it… several scenes,” from the novel “should have been transported virtually intact,” into *Speak, Memory*, as they closely mirror events of his life.\(^{149}\) This novella thus provides addition insight into the power of nostalgia in everyday life for émigrés such as Bunin and Nabokov.

In *Mary*, Ganin’s memories of his youth in Russia display a similar grandiose quality to those in *Arsenieiev*. While riding down an old country road in hopes of encountering a girl with whom he is infatuated, he pauses “to lean on his bicycle, looking across one of those forest fringes only found in Russia [gliadel cherez polia na odnu iz tekh lesnykh opushek, chto byvaiut tol’ko v Rossii], remote, serrated, black, while above it the golden west was broken only by a single long lilac cloud from under which the rays spread out like a burning fan.”\(^ {150}\) It is against this broader Russian backdrop that an adult Ganin residing in Berlin in the 1920s remembers his first contact with his long lost love, an image that now occupies the days of his present reality in exile. In much the same way as the warm childhood memories in Arseniev’s narrative provide an escape from contemporary life, Ganin’s renewed love affair with Mary in his memory transforms his surroundings. The broader atmosphere of pre-Revolutionary Russia serves as the larger setting for intensely personal remembrances that have a specific sentimental value for the protagonist in addition to providing larger connections recognizable to émigré readers. *Mary* presents a different storyline than *The Life of Arseniev*, however, as its principal plot takes place in exile rather than solely in the memory of the narrator as in the case of *Arsenieiev*. This provides a critical element to the appearance of nostalgia in *Mary* as it presents the reader with a picture of how its characters construct their memories in relation to their position in exile.

In this novella, the ideal vision Ganin retains of Mary is closely related to his image of Russia itself.\(^ {151}\) For example, while in St. Petersburg during what he refers to as “the snowbound era of their love,” he associates their meetings closely with the cityscape, noting that after her arrival they first “met under the same arch where Liza dies in Tchaikovsky’s *The Queen of Spades*.” Even the layout of the city has a particular significance, as the distance between their residences “made it difficult to meet” and ultimately caused them to begin to write “frequent piercingly tender letters” to each other, a connection they continued throughout much of their subsequent time together, leaving him with a small bundle of letters that he maintains in his


\(^{151}\) Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 267-68.
apartment while in exile, many years later.  

For Ganin, the sense of a lost love and a lost homeland are intimately connected. As the date of Mary’s arrival in his dingy hotel approaches, he closely associates the last letters that he received from her with the distinctly “Russian” locales where they had reached him: Petersburg, the Crimea, and Yalta. Pondering this, he thinks to himself “all his youth, his Russia, [is] coming back to him again [priezzhaet vsia ego iunost, ego Rossiia]” in his memory, and would soon be made corporeal when she arrived. In this way, by longing for his youth with Mary, Ganin is able to re-envision and reconnect with not only his now mythical lost love, but also the warm atmosphere of his lost homeland.

Similar sentiments linked to specific locales appear elsewhere in émigré literature. In his study of the city of St. Petersburg in the psyche and writings of émigré poets, “Petersburg in the Poetry of Emigration,” Vladimir Khazan asserts that it held a critical place in the overall idea of Russian culture for many émigrés. The city represented not only the capitol of Old Russia, but the setting for many of the lives and works of nineteenth-century greats such as Pushkin and Dostoevsky. As Khazan explains, it was therefore central to émigré visions of the Russia that they had lost, maintaining a “dense, mystical, literary… aura… that was perceived in emigration as the most genuine and real life.” Allusions to Petersburg in the poetry of émigré authors thus underline the fact that the city was “inseparable” from Russian literature and what they saw as the essence of Russian culture. To evoke its name and image in their work was to reconnect themselves with “the mother lode of [their] native culture” in a way that lessened the burden of life abroad. Much like the poets Khazan examines in this article, some of which provided evocative descriptions of a city in which they had never actually set foot, the Russia envisioned by the protagonists of The Life of Arseniev and Mary contains deep emotional as well as cultural resonance.

These poignant yet pliable images of the past permit many of the characters in the works of émigré authors to live in mental worlds that overshadow their actual surroundings and segue into another important aspect of these pieces. Émigrés were able to work through their feelings of isolation and loss—performing Boym’s notion of the “labor of grief”—in exile through the

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152 Nabokov, Mary, 70.
153 Ibid, 102; Nabokov, Sobranie sochinenii, 1:104.
155 Ibid, 120.
expression of these sentiments, utilizing them as a kind of fodder for the perpetuation of nostalgic longing for their homeland. In *Mary* and “The Return of Chorb,” these mental actions play an active role in the ways their protagonists interact with their surroundings in exile. *The Life of Arseniev* and “In Paris” cover these themes as well, but in a slightly different manner. Overall, these reminiscences offer an escape into untarnished worlds in which the dreamer holds the power to shape and reexamine their own temporal realities. These lived memories provide both the characters of these works and émigré readers a method of dealing with their status of exile.

The final section of *The Life of Arseniev*, originally published separately under the title *Lika* in 1939, focuses specifically on the relationship the narrator maintains with a woman who occupies a similar place in his life as that of Mary to Ganin.156 Though itself a part of the narrator’s recollection of his homeland before exile, Arseniev’s experience of longing for his love highlights many of the ways nostalgic and mournful sentiments are translated into lived experiences for the characters of émigré literature, and thus, émigré readers as well. At the end of their troubled yet passionate relationship, Lika writes Arseniev “several lines on a scrap of paper” before rushing “to pack some of her things, strewing the rest of them about” and leaving his apartment and his life forever. Arseniev remarks that “for a long time, I couldn’t bring myself to put away all those other things,” as though he felt that her presence still existed in the room and his life as long as they remained in view. In this way, however unwillingly, Arseniev perpetuates the existence of Lika through his presence in an apartment and in sight of personal belongings still tied closely to his memory of this woman. He “avoids all contact with people,” and begins to work “through recollection after recollection, day after day, night after night [vospominanie za vospominaniem, den’ za dnem, noch’ za noch’u]” in hopes of understanding and dealing with his loss. He soon finds himself so “tormented by her ubiquitous presence [vezdesushchim prisutstviem] at home and in town” that he feels the need to escape, and leaves to stay with his parents.157 In this instance, the narrator performs a labor of grief that remains closely tied to his remembrances of his physical surroundings in much the same way as Ganin.

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From the moment she leaves, Arseniev begins to construct an image of her in his memory that eclipses the details of his current setting.

Although this story is contained within the narrative of his biography, which ends shortly after her departure, Lika’s emotional and nostalgic presence still holds resonance for the narrator decades later as he compiles this story in exile. The final passages of *The Life of Arseniev* expound upon this sentiment in a way that incorporates both personal and émigré themes. At home, Arseniev finds further depression rather than peace and finally succumbs to the urge to visit Lika’s family’s house located nearby where he is turned away by Lika’s younger brother before learning anything about what has become of her. The novel ends with Arseniev’s realization that she had died not long after abandoning him and the two concluding paragraphs consist of reminiscences regarding her still lingering effect on his life. He still possesses an old notebook she had given to him as a gift, demonstrating again the effect of memories connected to specific personal effects and the bygone eras they represent.\(^{158}\)

The final lines relate that Arseniev recently saw her in his dreams and though her image was dim, he “felt such a surge of love and joy, and such a physical and spiritual closeness as I have ever felt for anyone.”\(^{159}\) As Connolly argues, for Arseniev, his memories maintain the existence of Lika as “alive in the soul of the sensitive artist” allowing him to transcend even mortal detachment from her presence.\(^{160}\) In this way, the narrator is able to perpetuate his image of his lost partner in an active manner through longing and the continued reexamination and reinterpretation of his contact with her. The blurry image of Lika itself therefore retains a central place in Arseniev’s understanding of his life without her: it outshines all other past and present relationships. In addition to the personal overtones evident in this particular passage, at the heart of this work lies the ability of recollection to provide both a connection to the past and an understanding of the present. Through his continued reimagining of Lika he is able to maintain not only her existence, but also that of his old homeland, which serves as the setting for this image in his everyday life.

The daily reality of this nostalgia also appears as a strong presence in the meditations of Ganin during his time in the Berlin émigré community in *Mary*. After discovering that Mary is

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\(^{160}\) Connolly, *Ivan Bunin*, 123.
the wife of one of the émigrés with whom he lives in a rundown Berlin hotel, Ganin resolves to spend the remaining days before her appearance in a concerted effort to relive their entire relationship in his memory. The narrative therefore splits at this point and follows both Ganin’s ordinary existence amongst a group of other émigrés dealing with their detachment from their homeland and the whole nostalgic recollection of Ganin’s affair with Mary. Much like how Arseniev’s image of Lika overshadows his temporal reality, Ganin’s recollections of Mary overwhelm him in a way that causes confusion in the daily happenings of his life.

For example, during a lunch with his fellow émigrés, he is taken aback by their conversation regarding Mary’s arrival. “It had not occurred to him,” the narrator explains, “that these people, the ghosts of his dream-life in exile [teni ego izgnannicheskogo sna], would talk about his real life—about Mary.”161 Ganin’s nostalgia allows him to invert his understanding of the difference between the reality of his physical surroundings and those within his memory. For this reason, his recollections become the most consequential actors in the novel. These memories hold such a powerful appeal to him that he understands in the final lines that his love affair with his remembrance of Mary in the past four days had made them “perhaps the happiest days of his life,” even more so than those they actually spent together.162 Rather than a passing daydream therefore, his nostalgia becomes the dominant narrative in his existence, leading events such as his neighbor’s heart attacks to serve only as interruptions in his “real life.”

Ultimately, Ganin abandons his plan of reconnecting with Mary after coming to the end of his memories of their love just hours before her actual appearance in Berlin, and chooses instead to leave Germany altogether and head for “France, Provence, and then—the sea.” At this point, he realizes that his recent reverie is far more powerful and real than any actual reunion with Mary might be. She is now entrenched in his memory, “other than that image no Mary existed, nor could exist [krome etogo obraza, drugoi Mashen’ka net, i byt’ ne mozhet].”163 This decision to avoid real contact with his lost ideal is in fact a fundamental characteristic of nostalgia. The break between the object of longing and the nostalgic, though lamented, is permanent. Although nostalgia cherishes the past as “its mournful subject,” because of this irretrievability, it must still “hold…it at arms length,” for the very same reason.164 Any attempt

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161 Nabokov, Mary, 52; Nabokov, Sobranie sochinenii, 1:71.
162 Nabokov, Mary, 114.
163 Ibid; Nabokov, Sobranie sochinenii, 1:112.
164 Fritzsche, “Nostalgia,” 65.
to retrieve this reality would thus prove futile. As well, this decision reflects a desire to avoid contact with their object of longing, as it would cause them to leave their imagined ideal or homeland for a reality that “might turn out to be false or even deadly.”\textsuperscript{165} From this standpoint, Ganin’s choice to retain his imagined love rather than reconnecting with the real Mary takes on a larger significance when examined in light of what Mary represents to him as an émigré. His memories of her are related closely to his memories of his homeland and for this reason, his past four days engrossed in their love affair also constituted an engrossment with his nostalgic vision of Russia. The decision to put off contact with the real Mary in favor of his mental image therefore entails avoiding contact with the “real” Russia as well.\textsuperscript{166}

Another of Nabokov’s works, “The Return of Chorb,” deals with this theme of conscious reconstruction of past events in a similar fashion. Published in a collection of the same name in 1929, this short story follows the anguish of a Russian émigré as he retraces the steps of his recent honeymoon after the abrupt and accidental death of his wife. Unlike Ganin, who maintains the ability to reconnect with the real-life counterpart of his nostalgic image and relives his romance so as to prepare for their reunion, Chorb lacks this capacity and thus embarks on a journey to memorialize the image of her in his mind. Seeking to “possess his grief all by himself, without tainting it by any foreign substance and without sharing it with another soul,” he does not inform anyone of her death, even his in-laws. In this way, Chorb, like Ganin, views this nostalgic reality as his “real” life and is opposed to others intruding upon it. As he passes through the places they visited during their honeymoon, he does “his best to look up all the roadside items that retained her exclamation mark: the special profile of a cliff, a hut roofed with a layer of silver gray scales, a black fir tree.” In his mind, if he can “gather all the little things they noticed together… her image would grow immortal and replace her forever [obraz stanet bessmertnym i emu zamenit ee navsegda].”\textsuperscript{167} The personal quality of his longing closely models the nostalgic labors of other émigrés described in these works that are predicated on an insurmountable gulf between the present and the past.

In the instance of Chorb, the codification of his wife in memory by ritually reenacting the events of their life together, allows him to escape the reality of her passing. While Arseniev is

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\textsuperscript{165} Boym, The Future of Nostalgia, 337.
\textsuperscript{166} For an interpretation of Ganin’s decision to leave grounded alternatively in literary criticism, see Eric Laursen, “Memory in Nabokov’s Mary,” Russian Review 55, no. 1 (Jan. 1996): 55-64.
\end{flushright}
content with a single tangible object, such as Lika’s notebook, to satiate his nostalgia and perpetuate her presence, Chorb takes this action to its ultimate end by physically revisiting the settings of their shared experiences. The culmination of this labor will be a night surrounded by his memories and a number of her personal effects in the sleazy hotel room in which they spent their first night together following their wedding, after which he believes “her image will be made perfect.” This situation presents a powerful metaphor for the experience of exile as that of a re-imagining of the present through the lens of nostalgia. Though Chorb seeks to relive his wife’s presence, her actual physical return is not what he seeks. Her death represents a rupture much like that of exile, and through the acknowledgment of her absence he is able to critically examine his memories of her and imagine what Fritzsche refers to as “different pasts and… multiple possibilities for the future,”—in this case, a future where her immortal image remains present in his life. By mourning the loss of their homeland, émigrés gained the ability to reinterpret its meaning and significance in much the same way as hindsight allowed them to create their own visions of Russia and Russianness with their significances to their everyday life.

In the end, Chorb attempts an interesting confrontation between nostalgia and reality. Realizing that in order to truly recapture their first night together he will not be able to stay in their room alone, he hires a prostitute to serve as a surrogate. Soon after falling asleep with the woman beside him, however, he wakes panicked. He initially recognizes the woman in bed as his wife—having awoken in such a familiar environment—and shrieks in terror at the notion that she has actually returned from the dead. No longer safely within the realm of nostalgia, a false manifestation of his beloved briefly shatters Chorb’s fantasy and reflective distance, confronting him with an image fundamentally different than the nostalgic representation he desires. This draws close parallels to Ganin’s decision to leave Berlin rather than deal with a physical representation of his love that could not possibly match the one maintained in his memory. In addition to these personal qualities, from an émigré perspective, this encounter serves as a metaphor for the dangers of moving beyond the act of nostalgia into what may be, in Boym’s words, a “false” or “deadly” reality. The image Chorb seeks is an ideal that defies physical

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170 Nabokov, *Stories*, 152.
embodiment and exists, like a mythical homeland, in a personal realm separated by irrevocable loss where it can be a proper object of longing.\textsuperscript{171}

Bunin would return to similar subjects repeatedly in his later career as well. In 1943, at age 73, he released his last major collection of new fiction, a three part anthology containing over thirty short stories entitled Temnyi allei [Dark Alleys]. In the short story “In Paris,” two émigrés partake in an affair that speaks to many of these themes. One of the biggest differences between the characters of this work and those of others of Bunin and Nabokov examined here is that of age. This story revolves around the chance meeting of Nikolai Platonich, a former general in the White Army in his 50s, and a Russian waitress “of about thirty” named Olga Aleksandrovna at a tiny Russian restaurant in Paris during the late 1930s.\textsuperscript{172} The age of these characters is critical to the overriding émigré themes apparent in this work as it portrays the long-term effects of emigration on the countenance and overall outlook of those in exile. The nostalgia of this story therefore takes on a slightly different tone that is more desperate and mournful, as evidenced by plot and the dismal Parisian scenery.

The setting of “In Paris” frames the encounter between Nikolai Platonich and Olga Aleksandrovna against a background rich in émigré imagery. The weather on the day of their meeting—and all but the penultimate scene of the story—is cold and damp. The Paris streets are described as “dark, cold, and somehow greasy-looking” as Nikolai passes by a small restaurant in the evening. Without thinking, he pauses before the window display and examines the Russian fare visible in the window: “conical rose-colored bottles of rowanberry vodka and yellow bottles of zubrovka in the shape of cubes, …a plate containing stale pirogi, [and] another with meatballs that had taken on a grayish look.” Intrigued, he soon enters as “the shop was brightly lit, and he felt drawn toward that light and away from the dark alleyway [V magazin bylo svetlo, i ego potianulo na etot svet iz temnogo pereulka].”\textsuperscript{173} The symbolism here is obvious: for émigrés, even hints of Russian culture illuminate the otherwise dreary foreign cityscape and provide an escape from the isolation of exile. This is not the entirely the case, though, as the images he confronts do not appear very fresh or appetizing: the pirogi are stale and the meatballs have likely sat in the window for a considerable time as well. Thus, oases such as this restaurant are

\textsuperscript{171} Boym, The Future of Nostalgia, 267, \\
double-edged swords for émigrés such as Nikolai Platonich—they offer a glimpse of a homeland for which they yearn, but at the same time exhibit the effects of time and detachment on images of their homeland, reinforcing the rupture between their present in exile and past in Russia. Under these conditions a fatigue has set in from protracted longing, leaving the nostalgic images stale and less vivid.

Once inside, Nikolai is taken aback by Olga’s classic Russian beauty—dark hair, dark eyes, a voluptuous body—and after returning to dine a few evenings that week, asks her to accompany him to a movie and dinner. As the plot unfolds, their relationship develops around conversations regarding the common sufferings of exile. The reader learns that Nikolai’s wife left him in Constantinople and he has been unlucky with love and business ever since. Additionally, Olga lives alone in a little hotel as her absentee husband works in Yugoslavia. Although they do not speak at length of their former lives in Russia, their discussions unite them in their shared experiences as émigrés. Their relationship leaves Nikolai feeling “more agitated than he had been for ages [s’ davno ne ispytannym volneniem],” and provides an escape from a mundane and lonely reality. In this situation, contact with fellow émigrés serves much the same purpose as the nostalgia of Ganin or Arseniev. It allows those longing for a lost homeland the opportunity to commiserate with like-minded souls in order to deal with the hardships of expatriation. After the movie and meal they retire to his apartment and make love. Two days later Olga moves in and they begin a life together.

Their happiness is fleeting, however, and soon themes of isolation and loss appear again, as Nikolai dies of a heart attack that spring. His death is emblematic of the émigré perspective regarding life in exile. It occurs in the mundane location of a subway car, as his head simply “jerked back against the seat and his eyes rolled up,” while he “was sitting reading a newspaper.” With great suddenness the harsh reality of exile intrudes upon the reverie of these two characters in much the same way as the events of Ganin’s “dream life” in Berlin consistently interferes with the goings-on of his “real life” in his memories of Mary in Russia. In the final paragraph, Olga Aleksandrovna sits sobbing on the floor of their apartment, clutching Nikolai’s old White Army military jacket to her face. In this scene, her possession of the jacket implies

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174 Connolly, *Ivan Bunin*, 129.
more than a representation of her lost love; it serves as a symbol of the irrecoverable Russian homeland that has been pushed further away by the dreary qualities of émigré life.

The semi-autobiographical nature of *The Life of Arseniev* as well as the strong émigré overtones and subject matter of stories such as “In Paris” attest to the influence of emigration on Bunin and Nabokov’s writings. Though Nabokov departed from the émigré community to live in America and examine American themes with English prose, his earlier works display elements that also appeared in those of permanent émigrés, such as Bunin. The memories of the émigré characters found in this literature allow them to engage in an active longing that perpetuates their memories of pre-Revolutionary Russia in their present lives in exile. As Russian émigré communities constituted the primary readership for émigré authors of this period, figures such as Bunin and Nabokov were able to incorporate these personal elements into their writings and mourn (whether perpetually in the case of Bunin, or for only part of their lives, as with Nabokov) their loss to a sympathetic and nostalgic audience. The works of these authors in many ways therefore allowed Russian émigrés to catch glimpses of the lives they left behind, helping them to work through the trauma of emigration with deep nostalgic sentiments as their companions.

The act of longing itself forms an important trope of these works and appears in various forms throughout the literature studied here. In Bunin’s writings nostalgia figures prominently in the lives of characters such as Olga Aleksandrovna in her lamentations while holding Nikolai Platonich’s jacket in the final scene of “In Paris,” or Arseniev in his description of Lika’s old notebook and the joy with which he recalls the two mistakes she made in a brief inscription to him “in anxiety, haste, [and] bashfulness.”177 In other examples of émigré literature, as with Nabokov, the lived memories of the characters often constitute the main focus of the plot and provide some of the most vivid representations of the power of nostalgia in émigré life. Chorb’s single-minded devotion to the construction of an “immortal” image of his deceased wife and Ganin’s protracted fantasies, which reverse his sense of reality, making his memories a real life and his physical surroundings a dream each emphasize this point. For these characters, and vicariously both their émigré authors and émigré readers, nostalgia provides a tool with which to dull the pain of exile by reconnecting with a vision of the past that remains warm, familiar, and open to continual reinterpretation. In this situation, as with much of his prior life, Bunin performed his role as purveyor of Russian culture though his literature, in this case preserving it

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while in exile. As a member of a larger community of Russians living abroad, his life and émigré works provide a glimpse of the discourse on the meaning of Russia Abroad and nostalgia for a mythologized, yet very real image of their former Russian homes.

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In 1931, a Swedish translation of *The Life of Arseniev* was published, and two years later on December 10, 1933, Ivan Bunin accepted the Nobel Prize in literature at a ceremony in Stockholm. In the end, he had received the award for, as the Swedish Academy put it, “the strict artistry with which he has carried on the classical Russian traditions in prose writing.” This pronouncement, in addition to the fact that the first Russian to receive the prize in literature was an émigré rather than a Soviet citizen, lent a modicum of international recognition to the émigré community and its attempts to preserve “Old Russia” abroad. Bunin avoided overly direct political statements in his banquet speech (given in French), but made a point of commending Sweden as a place where “freedom of thought and conscience” held sway. In his brief statement he also acknowledged that in the past fifteen years his “sorrows [had] largely exceeded his joys,” and that “these sorrows had not all of been of a personal nature, far from it,” a clear reference to the collective sorrows of Russian émigrés in general. After months spent in anxiety while the Swedish Academy made their decision, he reveled in the recognition both he and the Russian émigré community had finally been accorded, and believed his suffering had not been in vain. He was flooded with congratulatory telegraphs from émigrés from all over Russia Abroad. One of these communiqués related that Russian émigrés were “crying from happiness,” and greeting each other in his name, saying “Congratulations to you on Bunin!” The decision to award the prize to a Russian author in exile lent legitimacy to the Russian émigré movement as a distinct cultural identity in opposition to Soviet authority. The international recognition given to Bunin and the Russian émigré community confirmed their belief that the Soviet Union was not the true Russia, and that their survival in exile had preserved the culture and history that the Bolshevik Revolution had suppressed. These peoples had been forced to flee their homeland, but after a

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180 Marullo, *Ivan Bunin, From the Other Shore*, 269, 283.
181 Raeff, *Russia Abroad*, 111.
decade in exile, many believed that they had brought with them the beauty and purity of the Russian spirit as described in Bunin’s works.

Bunin’s fame was not to last, however, as in the following decades his international renown slowly declined and he and Vera found themselves struggling to get by on an irregular income from Ivan’s various pensions and publications.\textsuperscript{182} His health also began to decline as well during the period after World War II. The war itself presented a major problem for the Russian émigré community: it had given the Soviet Union legitimacy on the world stage. On June 14, 1946, the Soviet government even declared amnesty and offered citizenship to all Russian émigrés.\textsuperscript{183} The Soviet government and its sympathizers had been critical of Bunin’s Nobel Prize for its political ramifications, though Josef Stalin’s grip on power had prevented Soviet citizens from learning much about it as it went unannounced in the Soviet press. With the passage of time and the offer of general amnesty, the situation appeared different, but many remained hesitant. During the most repressive years of Stalin’s rule in the 1930s, many Soviet citizens feared any contact with foreigners as it could lead to their arrest—in this situation contact was thus dangerous for Soviets and émigrés.\textsuperscript{184} In addition to the silence regarding Bunin’s Nobel Prize in the Soviet press, even praise for émigré writing could lead to trouble for authors. Soviet writer Varlam Shalamov (1907-1982), for example, had been arrested and sent to the Soviet gulag in 1937 on the charge of “spreading falsehoods” in an underground newspaper he was associated with in the 1920s during the height of Stalin's purges. In 1943 he received an additional ten years on his sentence at the Kolyma labor camp in Siberia in part for stating that Bunin was a “great Russian writer.”\textsuperscript{185} Praising émigré writers, and especially those as publicly anti-Bolshevik as Bunin, had consequences in the Soviet Union, and it was only in later years that Bunin’s work saw wide publication in the USSR.

Although Bunin never lost his anti-Bolshevik stance, he declared the Soviet offer a “magnanimous gesture,” and even attended meetings in the Paris émigré community to discuss the question of amnesty.\textsuperscript{186} Whether Bunin seriously considered making peace with the Soviet Union is doubtful, but the opportunity to possibly alleviate his poverty and stake a controlling

\textsuperscript{182} Connolly, Ivan Bunin, 16.
\textsuperscript{184} Raeff, Russia Abroad, 116.
\textsuperscript{186} Bethea, “Ivan Bunin and the Time of Troubles,” 13.
claim in the publication of his works in the Soviet Union would have likely aroused his interest. In the end he declined the offer, however, and remained a stateless émigré in France until his death in 1953, ironically the same year as the Soviet leader, Stalin.

As an émigré author, Bunin participated in a lively literary community that eagerly sought to preserve a vision of a distinct pre-Revolutionary Russia in literature, memory, and life. Through the work of writers such as Bunin and Nabokov the traditional role of the author continued its prominence among the distinctly “Russian” cultural life of those in Russia Abroad. By articulating these feelings of nostalgia and loss they offered a method of simultaneous memorialization and perpetuation of “Old Russia” in the life and literature of their community. Bunin and Nabokov offer an interesting comparison, however, in regards to their positions in this community. While both wrote works that greatly contributed to the corpus of writing devoted to nostalgia and the recreation and re-living of memories, Nabokov’s decision to leave Russia Abroad for a career in America as an English-language author demonstrates one possible path for those dispossessed by the events of 1917 and the Civil War. Many émigrés such as Bunin, on the other hand, chose to remain in Russia Abroad. In this limbo-like state of exile they could stall the process of integrating into a new society, and continue their deep longing for a homeland to which they will never return, maintaining its presence in their daily lives.

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
Conclusion

On November 1, 2000, then-Russian President Vladimir Putin made a public visit to the Sainte-Geneviève-des-Bois cemetery outside of Paris. At this spot lay the graves of a large number of Russian émigrés who had died abroad during the Soviet period. When asked if there was a specific site he wished to see, he replied simply, “Bunin’s”—the other graves on his tour were chosen by the local caretakers. During his visit a few wreaths were placed at the monuments to prominent émigrés including Viki Oblenskaya, a member of the French resistance during World War Two. Yet, Putin reserved the most symbolic gesture for Bunin’s burial site. Here, he personally laid flowers on Bunin’s grave. Upon leaving, the president stated that it was necessary for all “Russians to come together around their homeland [rodina],” as they were all “children of the same mother, whose name is Russia.”

Putin’s statement about the need to re-incorporate these figures into the post-Soviet cultural landscape came as part of a larger movement that began with the end of the Soviet Union in 1991. Since this time, there have been numerous discussions in Russia regarding how to integrate the cultural legacy of émigré authors into contemporary culture. As historians have noted, however, this debate still “recogniz[es] that art and literature are crucial for defining Russian national identity,” in much the same way as these writers did in their activities abroad. As part of this trend, for example, textbooks focusing on the works of émigrés intended for high school teachers and students have appeared in Russia that seek to further “assimilate and domesticate the legacy of Russia Abroad,” into the corpus of twentieth-century Russian culture and memory. The attempts of these writers to carry major aspects of their culture abroad for preservation are thus, in a sense, being rewarded by their return to the cannon of Russian culture they so revered, though the literature of Soviet writers now maintains a considerable place in this entity as well.

Bunin’s literature made a slow but steady return to his homeland following his death in 1953. No less than three sets of his collected works were published in the Soviet Union between

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190 Ibid, 527.
the 1950s and early 1980s.\footnote{Bunin,}\footnote{Bunin,} It was in the perestroika era and beyond, though, that saw the greatest revival as a six-volume edition of collected works and at least five editions of The Life of Arseniev and three of Cursed Days were published between 1985 and 1991 alone.\footnote{Bunin,} In the years following, Bunin’s works have become even more widely available in his native land, with three editions of collected works released, including a thirteen-volume complete set containing correspondences and various other supplemental materials in 2005.\footnote{Bunin,} In an era when many Russians appear eager to reclaim the cultural heritage of Russia Abroad, Bunin’s writings and his position as the first Russian Nobel laureate in literature seem to hold a significant place in this body of national culture.

As a microhistorical case, Bunin’s life and writings offer a guide through some of the most important events and themes of Russian history in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, especially in regards to the discourse of national identity and the cultural mission of the émigré movement. As well, they provide a vision of 1917 as a critical juncture in Russian history, yet not a rigid boundary between imperial and Soviet eras. The events of this year lent themselves to a plethora of differing interpretations for not only the Russian Revolutions, but also the eras immediately before and after. Numerous themes in Bunin’s life thus traverse the borders of 1917, necessitating an approach to the study of émigrés that examines their culture on both sides of the Revolution. Whether experiencing an often paradoxical nostalgia for a lost homeland or attempting to continue their ideal of Russian culture abroad, the émigré movement’s activities outside Russia had close connections to cultural dialogues both before and during 1917. A microhistorical study of Bunin thus highlights many prominent discourses of Russian life that overlap between the timeframe of the late Russian Empire and the early Soviet Union, presenting a cultural study of a Russian emigration rooted in both periods.

\footnote{Bunin, Sobranie sochinenii, 5 vols. (Moscow: Pravda, 1956); Bunin, Sobranie sochinenii, eds. A. S. Miasinikov, B. S. Riurikov, and A. T. Tvardovskii, 9 vols. (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1965-1967); Bunin, Sochineniiia v trekh tomakh, 3 vols. (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1982).}{191


\footnote{Bunin, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v XIII tomakh, ed. I. I. Zhukov (Moscow: Voskresenie, 2005).}{193
As a gentry author, Bunin occupied a specific place as successor to the great noble authors of Russian literature exemplified by his early idol, Count Lev Tolstoy. He carried this distinction with him through the rest of his life, but it was during the earlier stages of his career where he invoked this lineage most authoritatively. Having grown up on an aristocratic estate in the south-Russian countryside, Bunin believed he possessed a keen knowledge of the *narod* and rural life in general. With the conditions of the countryside and the lot of the peasantry coming ever more to the forefront of imperial politics and national literature, Russian authors used their unique position as executors and purveyors of Russian culture to address the issue in their writings. Bunin was no exception. In this discussion a number of different interpretations emerged about the nature of the *narod* and the reasons for the violent and meager circumstances of rural Russia, ranging from class oppression to poverty and neglect. Bunin’s *The Village* provided one of the darker depictions of the countryside with its images of uncivilized savagery and profound ignorance amongst the townsfolk of the titular village of Durnovka. In his reading, the *narod* contained many of these tendencies as a part of their nature as Russian peasants, and exhibited them with increasing ferocity in times of distress and social disturbance. This harsh analysis may not have been the consensus, but its impact on the literary community, not to mention Bunin’s renown, helps illustrate the complexities of national discourse within Russian literature of this era. As a “Russian” author covering distinctly “Russian” topics, he fit within a larger group of intelligentsia writers committed to the same tasks.

Bunin’s interpretation of the *narod* became particularly critical during the Revolutionary era, which he both witnessed while living in Moscow and Odessa between 1917 and 1920 and documented in his diary *Cursed Days*. The events of 1917 are arguably the most significant in Russian history, and provoked a massive response from nearly all areas of the political, social, and cultural spectrum. In the Russian literary community, Bunin’s experience during the uprisings of 1917 and the Bolshevik rise to power, as well as his literary response, give a primary example of the negative view many future émigrés had of these events. While authors such as Vladimir Mayakovsky sided with the Bolsheviks, many, such as Bunin and Mark Aldanov viewed them with unrelenting derision. Bunin saw the entire Revolutionary era as a gross manifestation of the most dubious and brutal elements of the *narod*: in essence, *The Village* brought to life on a national scale. His fellow émigrés may not have held this exact position, but many shared his distaste for the Bolsheviks and belief that their ascent to political power
(tenuous though they believed it to be) necessitated emigration. Bunin, like over a million other Russians, left his homeland, rejecting the new Soviet government and attempting to continue the traditions of Russian culture abroad.

Physically removed from Russia, but determined to carry on its heritage, Bunin assumed a role as one of the most important authors in Russia Abroad, again contributing to a broader dialogue on matters of culture and national identity. In emigration, he took part in a literary culture that eulogized and even mythologized pre-Revolutionary Russia in works rich with nostalgia for a homeland now lost to him and his fellow émigrés. Distinctly “Russian” places such as the southern countryside figured prominently, maintaining their presence in the daily lives of their authors and readers. These authors attempted to carry on their critical place in the shaping of Russian culture while abroad, and in nostalgic works such as Bunin’s *The Life of Arseniev* they provided an escape into welcome memories of a Russian past that allowed them to continually recreate and reinterpret their homeland in their minds. Bunin’s receipt of the Nobel Prize thus truly was a “national” event for Russia Abroad as it gave international recognition to their efforts to continue the traditions of this culture outside of a native land now ruled by what they viewed to be a corrupt caricature of its former glory.

The assertion that émigrés sought to sustain their heritage by leading “a meaningful Russian life,” is thus typified in the case of Ivan Bunin. Whether examining the national character from his place at the end of the line of gentry writers, commenting on the complexities of the 1917, or articulating the sense of loss and longing while abroad, Bunin lived such a “meaningful life” through his continual participation in the dominant cultural discourses of Russianness in his era. Putin’s gesture in 2000 represents a homecoming of sorts for Bunin to the shores he left with such sadness eighty years prior. Though he may have seen Russian soil for the last time that cold February day in 1920, his sense of the beauty and mystery of his homeland remained with him until the end of his life, just as it had since his earliest youth.

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194 Raeff, *Russia Abroad*, 5.
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