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Alternative Émigré Places: Berberova, Makine, and the Russian Escape from Paris

Abstract: In their novels *Poslednie i pervye* and *La Vie d'un homme inconnu*, Nina Berberova and Andrei Makine, respective representatives of the first and third waves of Russian emigration in Paris, carve out hybrid spaces based on a similar premise: the materialistic life of the French capital threatens the Russian exile with spiritual disintegration. However, their particular fictional constructs differ in the temporal dimension, and the goal of this essay is to show that spatial solutions to an émigré population's position are inseparable from the community's view of itself in time. Berberova describes with historical fidelity an émigré effort at farming in the French Midi in the 1920s, and, borrowing from the Slavophile agrarian ideal, views the experiment as a cultural "fix" appropriate for the short-term survival of the emigration. Makine's hero develops a nostalgia for the difficult years Russians experienced in the 1930s and 1940s, only to realize that by entering this world he has become doubly exiled from the Paris of today: not just in space but in time. Berberova sees cultural identity marginally surviving through its very self-forgetfulness, and Makine's hero lives on to write the obituary for a culture that was never his.

Keywords: Berberova, exilic literature, Makine, Proust, Russian Paris

For Russians who left their country after the Revolution, the lapse of a decade brought the realization that the Bolshevik takeover was permanent and that their native country was being altered beyond recognition. Several artists returned – Marina Tsvetaeva, Aleksandr Kuprin, and Sergei Prokofiev, to name a few – but most chose permanent exile. Surrounded by a world of seeming (though illusory) durability and by indifference toward their native culture, the Russian emigrants struggled to invest their newly discovered Europe with a significance peculiar to their condition, all the while anticipating that any meaning they found would be invisible to, or at least misunderstood by, the local community. Dmitri Merezhkovski took refuge in politics and religion and became a writer of tracts, while Ivan Bunin, a decade later, would resort to nostalgia in his semi-autobiographical story collection *Temnyi allei* [Dark Avenues]. Bunin tacitly conceded that Russians could not construct a relation to a place where they had no history, and, conversely, that the émigrés' own past could not have much allure for Parisians, who saw the Russian community as a destitute and likely transient minority.

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The spatial dimension of the exilic experience was thus inseparable from that of time, and émigré literature dramatizes both. By "émigré literature" I mean works composed by authors who left their native country and assumed they would not return, whether perforce or as a matter of choice.[1] The language of composition chosen by émigré writers affects the audience but not the status of the author as an émigré. Nabokov wrote in Russian, English, and French after emigrating. Although both were residents of Paris, Berberova wrote in Russian and Makine in French. Their choices of idiom shed light on their understanding of cultural bilingualism, to which both allude, and, as in his earlier, nuanced exploration of a diglossic imagination in *Le Testament français* [Dreams of My Russian Summers], Makine uses bilingualism in *La Vie d'un homme inconnu* [The Life of an Unknown Man] as a thematic marker of superimposed cultures and layered historical timelines. But Berberova's and Makine's choice of language per se is less relevant to this essay than their use of bilingualism as a way of recreating, only to dismiss, a contemporary Paris that neither novel is ultimately about.

How should an émigré population define itself in a world that tolerates it only in a temporally provisional space? Most Russian émigré literature consistently addresses, or at least poses, the conundrum of temporal and spatial displacement. Some émigré texts, like Mikhail Osorgin's novel *Vol'nyi kamenshchik* [The Freemason] or the stories collected in Nina Berberova's *Biiankurskie prazdniki* [Billancourt Tales], stage a drama of assimilation, and others foreground various failures to assimilate, but a small number of émigré narratives propose alternative spaces for the exiled culture to inhabit. This essay first inspects the imagined alternative space-time world of one of them, Berberova's *Poslednie i pervye* [The Last and the First], published in Paris in 1930. I introduce as a point of comparison *La Vie d'un homme inconnu*, published in Paris in 2009 by Andrei Makine, a member of the "third wave" of Russian emigration and best known as the Goncourt Prize laureate for *Le Testament français* (1995). Both authors address the plight of Russian émigrés in Paris. Since most exilic theory today grounds its idea of hybrid identity in the existence of a *sui generis* mental territory, an extraordinary personal space created by the émigré, the fact that these two novels offer an alternative exilic locale that is concrete and precise, neither conjectural nor theoretical, gives them a notable place in current conceptualizations of the émigré text. But they differ from each other in one significant way. Berberova assumes that a permanent return to Russia is not an option, while Makine, having begun his ca-

1 This definition would exclude Andrei Bely, despite his extended stays in Switzerland and Germany both before and after the Revolution. Ivan Turgenev and Maksim Gorky are not normally considered émigré authors, but the reasons for their prolonged sojourns in Europe are so complex that any account of them must consider their perspectives as voluntary émigrés.

reer as a novelist in the early 1990s, shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, asks, "Why not cross back?", "Can one *not* be an exile?", and "Can one be an exile in one's homeland?" Taken together, though written nearly eighty years apart, the two novels are startlingly similar in anchoring their imagined universes in real historical conditions, but Makine explicitly takes up a question foreclosed to Berberova by precisely those circumstances: whether one can end one's exile without surrendering anything.

The first half of Makine's novel introduces the protagonist Ivan Choutov, a Russian émigré writer living in Paris, who ironically defines himself as an almost cartoon-like caricature of a self-absorbed, insecure, and depressive artist, living out a life of borrowed literary clichés. Even when imagining his own future, Choutov does so in terms of similes drawn from novels and stories. Choutov symptomatically quotes from the Russian literary canon, particularly Anton Chekhov, the master of ironic stories of impotence and existential entrapment. But Choutov also *behaves* like one of Chekhov's characters, caught up in a vexed relationship with a woman and mired in the minor tragedy of a trivial, constrained existence. He obsessively repeats a line from Chekhov's short story "A Joke," the Russian title of which is "Shutochka," close to his surname and symbolically binding him, as he acknowledges, to Chekhov's universe.

Visiting St Petersburg in 2009, Choutov discovers a world which does not differ markedly from contemporary Paris. He stays in an apartment with the "new Russians," one of whom markets mass-trade books and proudly oversees a popular series written by several authors publishing under one name. In this post-Soviet world where authors have become interchangeable and words issue from untraceable sources, contemporary culture appears sated with an excess of information and thrives in an environment devoid of chronological and topographical markings: the Hermitage Museum remains open all night, people are where their cell phones are, and as Choutov remarks: "Every opinion is present" (Makine 2009, 102).[2]

A modernity emptied of the past deprives it even of the "near future." Gheorghe Derbac has written that in *La Vie d'un homme inconnu* one finds "a civilization that has lost all its landmarks, where its so-called 'meta-narratives' are no longer relevant [...] a society where people prefer living in a kind of *eternal present* instead of remembering the past" (Derbac 2012, 292; emphasis in original). It is only when Choutov stumbles on Guéorgui Volski, a taciturn old man living in his friends' apartment, that he finds a temporally distinct Russia, a Russia of memory, disclosed as a privileged space for "remembering the past." Volski's reminiscences to Choutov

2 All translations in this article are my own.

about his earlier life in the Soviet Union produce the novel's most extended and significant anachronism.

Like Choutov the émigré writer, Guéorgui Volski has a text-like persona, constructed out of both the stories he tells and his calculated mute resistance to contemporary Paris, embodied by his silent response to the noise of the television flooding his apartment. In the Soviet Union, Volski worked as a singing instructor and often used song as a political response. He recounts a time after World War II when Communist Party henchmen, seeing that documents in the Museum of the Leningrad Siege passed over the role of the Communist government during the Blockade, ordered that the museum archives be burned. Volski responded to this coercive moment when free speech was suppressed with a career as a teacher of singing. At the novel's end, he works in an orphanage training mentally and physically disabled students to stage operas. In his past and present life, Volski has stood on the side of words and language, and the weighty resonance of his own cognomen – *volia* derives from the Slavic root for "liberty," or "the free exercise of will" – contrasts sharply with the clownish-sounding "Choutov."

The contested place which language occupies in *La Vie d'un homme inconnu* cries out for a Bakhtinian gloss, which Edward Welch has provided. In addressing the "linguistic conscience" in Makine's novels, Welch notes, "we are dealing with narrators who have become sensitive to the speech surrounding them and managed to grasp its contours" (Welch 2005, 120). Within Volski's narration, the liberating discourse represented by song struggles with the stifling, collective political cant on all sides, while in the world of contemporary St Petersburg, a parallel polarity in the novel sets Volski's uncommunicative presence in the bedroom against the pleonastic verbiage of television, advertising, and cheap mass-trade fiction that fills the world outside the apartment.

By the time the two chronologies of Makine's novel merge – Volski dies shortly after finishing the story he tells Choutov – Volski's autobiography-within-the novel has converted Choutov, denizen of an ultramodern Paris, to the world of Volski's Soviet past. The dull Choutov comprehends that Volski has made something of his life by acting for the collective whole, despite the fact that the impact of his perseverance was severely restricted by dehumanization, tyranny, war, and a culture of suspicion. On the surface, therefore, *La Vie d'un homme inconnu* counter-intuitively evokes nostalgia for a world in which individual effort counted for practically nothing. Choutov ends by seeing present-day Paris and St Petersburg as two indistinguishable allomorphs of European urban culture. But though Makine offers Volski's defunct Soviet Russia as an oppositional culture, it does not present a viable alternative to modernity. Choutov's newfound, substitutive "place" can only be entered virtually. It is specific but unreal. In this manner, Makine opens up and enlarges the

space of exile, inviting readers to join him in an alienated and unattainable historical dimension.

In *Poslednie i pervye*, Nina Berberova makes perhaps the first attempt by a Russian émigré realist novelist to extricate herself from formulaic descriptions of a ghettoized émigré community. In describing the disorder of émigré life – hybrid values, unconventional careers, the dissolution of cultural and political boundaries – she portrays a world that would seem to offer no anchor to the Russian diaspora, and she explicitly rejects the solution discovered by Vladimir Nabokov almost at the same time in émigré Berlin: a private mental space occupied by the obsessive, anxious, super-talented artist.

Poslednie i pervye begins with the premise that Russian culture cannot survive in cities, and Berberova's novel attempts from the outset to solve the Russian emigration question outside the French capital. Her settlers enter the brave new world of the French economy as asparagus farmers in Provence, and by situating the narrative in the context of interwar émigré politics, Berberova prevents the novel from lapsing immediately into utopian rhetoric.[3] The heroine Vera Gorbatova identifies herself as a Russian woman "off the farm" (Berberova 1930, 15). She proclaims to her fellow countrymen, including an old admirer who has arrived from Africa, that "as long as we're not in Russia, our place is on the land" (27). Her stepson Ilia Stepanovich, the "first man" (13) of the Russian agrarian future and the referent of Berberova's title, is positioned to interpret culture outside of normative conventions like native language or religion. As he announces to a vagrant who comes to the door: "Our time doesn't flow like yours" (18). Return to the land resets the émigré clock.

Berberova's displaced community faces geographic choices: Paris, the French Midi, French Africa, and even Communist Russia. Vera's husband Stepan Gorbatov has remained in the Soviet Union; flourishing under the USSR's capitalism-friendly New Economic Policy, or NEP, of the years 1921–1928, he has made himself a fortune from beaver furs. The Gorbatov couple, a figurally rich Franco-Soviet dyad, sets in motion a series of ironic reversals within the novel. Berberova invokes a cliché of Russian émigré fiction, the topos of the "return trip," only to parody it with the creation of a wealthy émigré businessman who enriches himself travelling

3 Indeed, *Poslednie i pervye* is historically accurate. The French Midi played an important role in the lives of Russian émigrés in the 1920s and 1930s. Boris Poplavsky spent several summers on the Côte d'Azur at Le Lavandou, scene of much of the action of his novel *Domoi s nebes* [Homeward from Heaven]. During the summer of 1923, Nabokov worked as a fruit-picker on the Domaine de Beaulieu, the Bezpalovs' estate near Toulon (Boyd 1990, 205–211). In "Argentina" [The Argentine], a story in Berberova's *Biiankurskie prazdniki*, there is talk of Russian workers being sent to the south of France to do agricultural work (Berberova 1997, 14).

back and forth to the Soviet Union. This plot device undercuts the Soviets' claim of Marxist economic equality but leaves Western, specifically Parisian capitalism equally suspect. Like Makine, then, Berberova explodes the easy dichotomy of capitalist Paris and Communist Soviet Russia, collapsing them both into a repugnant materialism to be rejected by the novel's "first man." The counter-worlds for the Russians' rural life in the Midi are the Soviet Union *and* Paris. Indeed, the quasi-capitalist Russia of the NEP mirrors the Russians' nineteenth-century image of Paris as a bourgeois hell of corrupt urban business types, the despised *deiateli*.[4] An early reviewer of *Poslednie i pervye*, Ekaterina Bakunina, claimed that Berberova's novel fosters a spiritual liberation in the face of European rationality, and that this "celebration of the spirit" is "a specifically Russian characteristic" (Bakunina 1932, 258). But while the latter part of this assertion may be true, the principal contaminant in Berberova's world is clearly not Western rationality at all but materialism, exemplified by both Paris and Moscow. Furthermore, any rhetoric of nationality centred on Bakunina's essentializing concept of a Russian "spirit" can only be adopted by the "last," or older émigré generation. The younger cohort of exiles is fast losing its native Russian, has forgotten its culture, and is internationalist to such a degree that it is now uniquely resistant to the nationalist, stereotyping agendas of its forebears.

The chief suspense of *Poslednie i pervye* turns on the characteristic émigré ambivalence about returning. As Judith Kalb notes of Berberova, her "complicated relationship with the past involves holding on and letting go simultaneously" (Kalb 2001, 151). To the Russians in Provence, Stepan Gorbatov appears fat and coarse. But Gorbatov, vexed that his son Ilia is obstinately tied to a future on the land, simultaneously attempts to lure his other son back to Moscow to join him in business. In a mordant anachronism, Berberova pits this Soviet world of NEP capitalism against a pre-revolutionary, populist agrarian ideal – Russian by derivation, but now renascent in rural France. The brittle generation of Russians remaining in Paris amusingly assumes that to live outside the city means to be ill or at one's dacha (Berberova 1930, 114), but Berberova views her hybrid Provençal village as the only place where Russians can create a cohesive identity. Returning to the homeland, remarks Ilia, is the worst of all choices, and assimilation the next

4 In a review of Makine's novels, Katherine Knorr addresses this history of inconsistent Gallomania: "Makine's mixed feelings about France […] fall into another tradition, one he knows well, that of Russian writers and travelers who were both attracted and repulsed by France" (1996, 33). Berberova's vacillating attitude toward France above all reflects Alexander Herzen, the nineteenth-century social philosopher and harsh critic of the Revolution of 1848. In principle, Berberova would support Herzen's view that the individual can only be redeemed in small communities, placed far from the influence of government institutions.

worst (50), but Berberova goes further, showing that both of Ilia's options are untenable. Assimilation may possess many salutary benefits, including material ones, but the émigré's native culture then becomes nothing more than a vanishing import. As for the alternative of holding on to the notion of a Russia that has been destroyed, the position of *Poslednie i pervye* is bleakly clear. The Russians that have remained in Paris live in slums by the Champs de Mars, and their small children rifle through garbage near the acerbically named "City of Kiev" pub.

As in much fiction produced in Russian Paris between the wars, including the novels of Mikhail Osorgin and Boris Poplavsky, Berberova poses the question of cultural destruction with her depiction of the younger generation. Vera Gorbatova's daughter Marianna loves a local French boy, to whom she speaks in Provençal, and the vagrant deems it unimportant whether she marries a Russian or a Frenchman, as long as he is "of the soil." This reshuffling of Russian cultural priorities uncouples language from ethnic identity, while the prosperous stability of the colony in the Midi suggests that its defining Russian feature is actually the rural economy, functioning in a capitalist market but spiritually segregated from capitalist values. Berberova's stance reflects the notion of what Petr Lavrov called "conscious historical solidarity" in nineteenth-century Russian socialism,[5] as well as embodying Nikolai Mikhailovskii's ideal of self-sufficiency, but her position departs from the populist platforms of the 1870s and 1880s in her refusal to renounce the capitalist economy. Indeed, the degree of labour specialization required by asparagus farming as described in *Poslednie i pervye* would make its world an anathema to Russian populism, not to speak of turn-of-the-century Russian Marxism.

At the same time, the novel implies that freedom requires a complete disengagement from the past. In *Poslednie i pervye* one can "become" a new species of exilic personality, choosing to live entirely for the future. Michael Seidel has written of Henry James's expatriate Americans in *The Ambassadors* that "exiles become, in a sense, voluntary; they cross to a zone of opportunity that readily serves as a metaphoric space for the state of their altered consciousness" (Seidel 1986, 137). In Berberova's universe, that "zone of opportunity" is very real, where her youthful characters are licensed to adopt a new understanding of their exilic positioning. The phrase from the Gospel of Matthew invoked by the novel's title reminds the reader that the leading figures of emigration, "first" in generational terms, are now the "last" people, encumbered by too much cultural baggage to develop a postexilic consciousness. And the reverse is also true. The young are truly the last Russians to have been born in a nation dissolved by the Revolution, but they will be the first to create an exilic identity dissociated from that catastrophe.

5 For Lavrov's phrase, cf. Walicki (1979, 242).

Berberova's imaginative pastoral sacrifices virtually every aspect of the Russian experience in order to save what the writer believed to be the moral core of her culture. To do so, Berberova redoubles the loss, for in the rush to escape the erasure of their present culture, her Russians return to a historical moment – a pre-industrial Russia – that itself has already been erased by Soviet Communism. Berberova begins with the premise that exile itself constituted a story which could not be read in reverse, and how to work "back" to Russia, the object which was taken away, remains for her a question that cannot be answered. In this regard, Berberova's literary achievement exemplifies the evolving debate among Russian émigré artists in Paris after the Revolution. As Maria Rubins writes, "Russian Montparnasse presents an early case of implicit contestation of the idea that 'proper' Russian culture can only arise on Russian territory" (2015, 235).

Today's conceptualizations of nomadism are usually expressed in a vocabulary of liberation. The migration narratives they parse might in turn be said to mimic the equally liberating normative premise of the nineteenth-century novel: incomplete, partially severed relationships which are discarded and replaced with whole, healthy ones. Plots of nomadism often imply an inherent *Bildung*, propelling a character into an alien environment where possibility, and the forking narratives allowed by choice, serve to both condition and free the subject. In stark contrast, Berberova saw exile as a foreclosure of possibility for the individual *as Russian*. By putting community *Bildung* on a par in the narrative with the evolution of the individual, she finds a realistic way of imagining exile. Berberova is pessimistic about the individual émigré's ability to survive as a reservoir of Russian cultural knowledge, but sanguine that a Russian way of life may be reprised unconsciously by Russian émigrés on the land. This transposed land loyalty, modelled on the literary cult of the land nourished by Leo Tolstoy, anchors Berberova's Russian community in Provence. And while the microsociety in the Midi succeeds for very few of its characters, it is not dystopian. It portrays an experiment, rather than completed and ossified worlds. Nor is it utopian in the fashion of Socialist Realism, where progress toward perfection requires a state of exceptional circumstances and vigilance against enemies, both of which constrain the behaviour of characters. In the Gospel of Matthew, the "last shall be first" is followed by the words "few will be chosen"; in the context of *Poslednie i pervye*, this implies a winnowing of the older generation, a Darwinian struggle to survive. But the destination to which Jesus refers, the "kingdom of heaven," is suggestively dropped by Berberova, leaving the reader to ponder whether the Russians' flight from Paris has led them to any sort of paradise at all.

The social experiments offered, qualified, and occasionally exalted in the narratives of Berberova respond to a central concern, the survival of a lost Russia abroad. Community emerges as the distillation of Russianness, an attenuated no-

tion of peasant society which serves to embody Russian culture. Unlike the Slavophiles, who invented the concept, exiled artists in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s speculated about whether this notion of community was portable. The pre-Bolshevik Russian world that lay behind them was not, but the underlying idea remained, and it drove Berberova far from the Romantic "ur-narrative" that both preceded and followed her in the history of European fiction: the glorification of a sometimes momentary, sometimes permanent disengagement of the individual from society, and the triumph of a subjecthood rooted in that individuality. Her narrative looks on exile as a social prison, compelling its inmates to examine themselves as social creatures pure and simple, and in doing so, forcing them to decide for themselves what émigré society means. In *Poslednie i pervye*, Berberova proposes that the Russian emigration can preserve traces of its Russianness only through an emphasis on community. And because it ran against the émigré experience in France, her idea was itself counter-cultural in its time.

Berberova does not describe a completely self-sufficient society, nor does she envision the survival of the Russian language in emigration, but she does discover in Russia's "near past" a cultural template for émigrés' "near future". Makine does the same, pessimistically and conservatively diagnosing modernity as a decentred machine of materialism, an instance where the West has infected Russia and the two have fused. Without changing his outward life, the protagonist Choutov migrates into history, and he does so by learning at the feet of the book's only true émigré, Volski, who is trapped in an uncomfortable exilic present. Makine's plot, then, undermines the reader's conventional expectations about the two principal characters: Choutov, the Parisian Russian who travels back and forth to Russia, is stripped of his role as émigré, while Volski, who has never left Russia, becomes the expatriate.

If Berberova's "exit strategy" for the Russian diaspora was communal village life, a position promoted by Slavophile writings in the nineteenth century, it is not surprising that Makine, whose narrative approach in *La Vie d'un homme inconnu* persistently foregrounds textuality, appears to find his novel's cultural anchor in earlier writings as well. That programme – a paradox at first glance – is Socialist Realism. With few exceptions, Volski's tale meets the requirements of that aesthetic as it was promulgated in the 1920s by Anatoly Lunarcharsky, the Commissar of Education, and codified by his successors. The Volski plot glorifies individual sacrifice in the service of a collective endeavour and, like Socialist Realism, allows for the malfeasance, mendacity, and venality of high officials, while simultaneously holding up the efforts of the lowly worker as a paragon of conduct. In a discussion of clichés in *Le Testament français*, Adrian Wanner goes so far as to assert that "the commonplaces are mainly those of Soviet propaganda" (2011, 25). Those of *La Vie d'un homme inconnu* are not, for Volski directly indicts

the Communist regime's cruelty and misconduct; the conventions of his life narrative, however, do mirror the Socialist Realist aesthetic. The magnetism of Volski's account finally draws Choutov into the true exile with which the novel concludes. On his return trip from Russia to Paris, he notes:

> In the airplane, he feels for the first time in his life that he is travelling from nowhere to nowhere, or rather that he is on a journey without a true destination. But up till now he has never experienced such an intense sense of belonging to a native land. Except that this homeland happens to coincide with an epoch, not a territory. Volski's epoch. That dreadful Soviet epoch. The only one Choutov knew when he lived in Russia. (Makine 2009, 285)

Although Makine's hero despises the Bolshevik era, he discovers that only the Soviet generations that suffered the deprivations of perpetual war and poverty led meaningful lives. On the one hand, Volski's native land has become a time, not a place. But that time in its own way is also "nowhere" – no place at all, since the Soviet epoch now belongs solely to a dying generation. Untethered from their once lofty position as a revolutionary era in Russian history, the early decades of Communism now survive precariously in memory. Ultimately, they fail to furnish Choutov with a place of nostalgic repose. Rather, they destabilize him. On his return to Paris, Choutov now finds himself to be "nowhere," an impoverished émigré hack who lives in a world of metaliterary clichés. Stephanie Bellemar-Page has remarked that in all of Makine's work one finds "an uncertainty about one's identity, the feeling of strangeness that remains in a foreign country, and a discomfort about the role one must play to find a home in the Parisian literary scene" (2009, 111). In *La Vie d'un homme inconnu*, Makine effectively converts Choutov's reception of Volski's oral history into a metaphor for exile. Choutov's acceptance of that history makes it difficult for him to reinsert himself into Parisian life, which exists for him only as a present-day nightmare. The lot of the émigré is "discomfort about the role one must play."

Choutov's Proustian resolution – and seeming solution – at the end of the novel is fatuous and historically naive: "What he would have to write about was precisely this: the 'unknown women' and 'unknown men' who had loved each other and remained speechless" (Makine 2009, 292). Writing about the exiled subject from the place of the exile – Choutov writing about Volski – cannot be redemptive in Makine's universe, since in the world of 2009 pictured in *La Vie d'un homme inconnu*, no one will read a book like Choutov's. *Makine's* book – *La Vie d'un homme inconnu* – thus predicts in advance the failure of the virtual book that Choutov will write about Volski. In making this distinction, Makine morbidly reverses Proust's optimistic conceit about the success of Marcel's writing project.[6]

6 Makine himself has mentioned Proust's influence on his work, and Margaret Parry has acutely written: "We might say that Makine's work, like *In Search of Lost Time*, is above all the story of a

The plot engagements with the Russian homeland in *Poslednie i pervye* and *La Vie d'un homme inconnu* conclude, respectively, with the erasure of memory and with the idiosyncratic restoration of an explicitly *literary* remembering. Choutov adopts the conventions of Socialist Realism to portray the era when that movement predominated. Berberova creates an émigré universe of incredible specificity – soon to be monolingual and neglectful of the past, yet unconsciously following a Russian tradition of attachment to the land which predates the rise of the Bolsheviks. But where Berberova actually invents a unified culture that has forgotten its roots, the elegiac Makine improvises the culture of an implied readership, trained to identify exiles in unexpected temporal dimensions.

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literary calling, and its key terms are time, death, memory, childhood, beauty, poetry, and eternity" (2004, 104). Like *La Vie d'un homme inconnu*, Gaito Gazdanov's 1929 Parisian novel *Vecher u Kler* [An Evening with Clair] also employs split time frames to straddle the past and the moment of reminiscence.

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