Research Article

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Domestication of Russian Cuisine in the United States: Wanda L Frolov's *Katish: Our Russian Cook* (1947)

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Abstract: This article examines Wanda L Frolov's cookbook, *Katish: Our Russian Cook* (1947) as a transitional text that navigates the food diplomacy of World War II and the Cold War "Red Scare." The book narrates the story of two women from different parts of the world and walks of life – an American widow and a refugee widow from Russia – who lived together in Southern California during Prohibition. The plot is presented through the point-of-view of one of the characters, Sis, as she recounts her childhood memories, while recipes come in clusters triggered by specific vignettes. Using irony, exoticisms, and literary and cultural allusions, the cookbook embodies the journey of the Russian character from her home country to the United States through American recipes. In *Katish: Our Russian Cook*, Frolov created an original character who asserts herself in the female space of the kitchen while adjusting to a new country. This adjustment is reflected in the hybrid Russian–American menu, which represents a radical departure from the three decades worth of auto-ethnographic cookbooks produced by the white émigrés in the United States. Frolov's mode of representation of the Russian identity is fused with consumer potential as a positive force, while the child's eye view of the story obfuscates the refugee trauma narrative. Released before the advent of television cooking shows and food editor conferences, *Katish: Our Russian Cook* mapped the local Los Angeles culinary scene in the 1920s and contributed to the development of the culinary memoir writing genre. Published first during the Cold War and republished by Ruth Reichl in 2001, it serves as a pertinent example of American integration and domestication of Russianness.

Keywords: Russian, American cookbooks, hybrid memoir cookbooks, Hollywood Russian colony in the 1920s, Wanda L Frolov

What makes *Katish: Our Russian Cook* (1947) by Wanda L Frolov so fascinating is the fact that it became a transitional Russian–American cookbook[1] from the food diplomacy of the Second World War (WWII) to the ensuing "Red Scare" of the Cold War. This circumstance alone explains why the book is now largely forgotten. In 1945, the black-eyed Russian chef Katish (a nickname for Ekaterina Pavlovna Belaev) first appeared in the series of *Gourmet* magazine under the by-line Wanda E Ivanoff.[2] During the war years, the role of women in

1 From this point, we will alternately refer to this book as Katish. All citations refer to the 2001 reprint: Frolov, Katish: Our Russian Cook (New York: Modern Library, 2001). The term "Russian–American cookbooks" refers to the corpus of texts focused on Russian cuisine and published in the United States by the authors of both Russian and American origin.

2 *Gourmet* magazine originally published Frolov's Katish as a serial between January and September 1945. The stories appeared under a Russian-ish pseudonym. Wanda V. Ivanoff, "Katish," *Gourmet*, January 1945, 10–11, 32, 34, 36–38; "Katish, Part II," *Gourmet*,

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journalism underwent rapid transformations. It was the time of the iconic Rosie the Riveter, when new jobs and opportunities flourished and women's participation in the American economy skyrocketed. In food journalism, in particular, the role of women journalists was salient, for cooking and serving food during WWII, the years of rations and food shortages, was often framed as a service to their country (Voss, *The Food Section...*, 94). Writing about Russian cuisine during this period, however, rested on the two separate predicaments: the plight of the white émigrés in the United States and the war alliance with the Soviet Union. Despite their general war-time support for the USSR, refugees from the former Russian Empire massively opposed the Soviet government. In 1947, Frolov's articles were assembled and reprinted in a book format. By this time, the Cold War mechanism was already set in motion, and Katish was met with lukewarm interest from critics. It would be over 50 years before it was republished. Reprinted in 2001 as a part of Ruth Reichl's Modern Library Food Series, *Katish: Our Russian Cook* did not cause any critical ripples. The goal of this article is to uncover the forgotten name of Mrs. Wanda L. Frolov and solve the mysteries of her single bibliographic entry. In particular, we will carry out a historical investigation into the identity of the author, the position Katish holds among other Russian–American cookbooks of that period, analyze the formation of Russian identity in the United States, and look at how these recipes were adapted to American kitchens. Our ultimate task is to introduce this material into academic circulation and, thus, contribute to the discussion of Russian cuisine in the broader context of global migrations of the twentieth century.

The narrative nature of *Katish: Our Russian Cook* adds to its captivating allure. In the realm of literary gastronomy, narrative cookbooks serve as memory aids that blend the familiar with storytelling, weaving their storylines from a blend of elements related to economy, politics, religion, and culture. The story of Katish spans from pre-revolutionary Russia and China's Harbin to Southern California in the 1920s. The plot follows the peripeteia of the Thurston family, who lived during the Prohibition era in West Los Angeles. Mary is a widow who resides with her teenage children, nicknamed Sis and Bub, in an idyllic, white clapboard house with a large rose garden. Aunt Martha, the meddling sister-in-law and "a woman of firm character and an itching sense of responsibility," (Frolov 3) is actively engaged in a charity organization that aids the large number of Russian refugees arriving in Los Angeles.[3] She insists that Mary hire Katish, a fresh-off-the-boat émigré from Harbin. The new cook quickly wins over the Thurstons' hearts by filling their house with the smells of delicious food. Living with a local family eases Katish's integration into American society, while they, too, learn about Russian culture through the dishes she crafts and the stories she tells.

Like many of refugee biographies, the fabula of our protagonist's life is fragmented. Born into a priest's family, Katish lived the first part of her life in the countryside, which included time in a remote village in Siberia where her father had been sent to work (23). One of her grandmothers was a Crimean Tatar woman whom her grandfather married while stationed on military duty in the Crimea (49). Upon turning 17, Katish met her future husband Alex, an officer in the Imperial Army, at a ball in the capital city of their gubernia (57). If the narrator is reliable, then the ability to attend the ball suggests that Katish belonged to the noble class but was impoverished, as her choice of a husband without a fortune provoked the ire of the family. The couple married a year after they first met. However, Alex was drafted to fight in World War I, where he ultimately lost his life in battle, leaving his newlywed wife to grieve his loss. After the Revolution, Katish made her way through Russian Turkestan to Harbin, and, from there, to the United States (3). Like many refugees in the 1920s, she came to California via New York (32). In its intricate tapestry of characters and cultural exchanges, *Katish: Our Russian Cook* is more than just a cookbook; it is a poignant narrative of migration, resilience, and the power of food to forge connections, illuminate histories, and transcend borders. It subtly reminds us that our culinary experiences are imbued with personal and collective histories, often narrating stories of cultures colliding, adapting, and enriching each other – and Katish's story is a testament to this enduring truth.

February 1945, 14–15, 35–38, 40–42; "Katish, Part III," *Gourmet*, March 1945, 14–15, 32, 34, 38–41; "Katish, Part IV," *Gourmet*, April 1945, 14–15, 51–52, 54–55, 57; "Katish, Part V," *Gourmet*, May 1945, 14–15, 38, 40, 41–42, 44, 46, 48–50; "Katish, Part VI," *Gourmet*, June 1945, 14–15, 30, 32–34; "Katish, Part VII," *Gourmet*, July 1945, 14–15, 52, 54–57; "Katish, Part VIII," *Gourmet*, August 1945, 14–15, 46, 48, 50–52; "Katish, Part IX," *Gourmet*, September 1945, 16–17, 70–75, 78–79. (This footnote has been cited from Jacobs 220).

3 Based on different estimates, the white émigré colony in Hollywood consisted of 1,500–1,800 members by the end of the 1920s.

By its composition and narrative technique, *Katish* is all but conventional. The book examines migration through a child's eye view of everyday life in Southern California's mixed cultural environment. In doing so, the book pays homage to the émigrés of the Russian Hollywood colony as much as to the author's childhood by taking frequent alterations between the third person (Sis' point of view) and the omni-present narrator. A variation of the handmaid's tale, the book de-centers the traditional master–servant power dynamic with formal sophistication. The recipes tend to come in clusters, which are triggered by memories of specific childhood vignettes. *Katish* ends with a separate recipe notebook written by the cook herself. The fact that the narrator positions herself as a child recreating the cook's presence and voice suggests that Frolov, an American author, does not cross the fine line between describing cross-cultural contact and cultural identity appropriation. Two cookbooks united within one story, Frolov's account represents a positive cohabitation experience between two women from different parts of the world and walks of life: an American widow and a refugee widow from Russia. The figure of the cook occupies a special place in the microcosm of the children and, through her engaging stories, colors their childhood memories with warmth and humor.

The book's author, Wanda L. Frolov, is nothing short of a mystery. A genealogical search on ancestry.com revealed the identity of this curious one-entry writer, whose pen-name "Ivanoff" proved to be a translation of her maiden name Johnson. The United States Census from 1920 indicates that Wanda Lee Johnson was born on August 6, 1911, in Holtville, California, a small town near the US–Mexican border. Her father, Wylie E. Johnson, was a contractor from Kentucky and her mother, Lilian Withers, was from Missouri. Wanda was 4 years old when her father died. The family moved to Long Beach, California, in the early 1920s. In 1928, Wanda graduated from Polytech High School. The 1930 United States Census lists Wanda as a stenographer working in the oil industry while living with her mother and older brother, Waldo, in a rented house in Long Beach. Wanda's mother would die 2 years later. Sometime before 1933, Wanda married a chemical engineer named Boris A Frolov. He was a Russian émigré who came to the United States in 1923 via Shanghai and settled in Los Angeles. The couple moved to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1933. In 1945, Boris Frolov relocated to New York where he worked as a technical representative for the Shell Development Company. Wanda's brother, Waldo Johnson, served in WWII and died in 1946. Wanda divorced Boris Frolov in 1953 and remarried James W Ramsay in Eastchester, New York. She died in 1969 and was buried in Colma, a cemetery in San Mateo County, California.[4] As we can see from the author's biography, the years 1945–1947 were conducive to the nostalgia of restorative type, which, in Boym's words "attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home" (Boym XVIII). With her mother and brother gone and the looming separation from her husband, it would be the smell and taste of Katish's recipes that connected Wanda to her past. Back in 1945, *Gourmet* magazine was only 4 years old and willingly accepted the story written by the novice author.

When it comes to the historical veracity of Frolov's memoir, the dust jacket of the 1947 edition offers an explanatory note: "The characters are all based on real people, and the various episodes did occur, but to different people of my acquaintance. I suppose Katish was more or less suggested to me by a Russian cook who once worked for friends of mine" (Frolov dust cover). The documentary details of the book include an exact rendition of the author's brother's name (Waldo Devere for Waldo Elbert Devere Johnson, 1908–1946), her father's death, as well as an autobiographical mention of the author's own marriage to a Russian: "I took Katish's excellent advice many years ago and married a Russian" (Frolov 27). The account of the Easter Church service at Holy Virgin Mary Orthodox Cathedral on Micheltorena Street (located in the present-day Silverlake neighborhood of Los Angeles) suggests that the author was describing her own experience. Frolov's altered details include changing the home neighborhood from her family home in a working-class area of Long Beach to the affluent West Los Angeles, "dabbed as Spanish colonial style": "Los Angeles was indulging in an orgy of pale pink, dull orange, and even lavender stucco bungalows that looked more edible than livable" (Frolov 4). Another altered detail is the cook's name. The author's inclusion of quirky stories about Ekaterina Pavlovna

4 The chronology of Wanda Lee Johnson's life was reconstructed by using a wealth of American genealogical databases from ancestry.com and includes the results of both the 1920 and 1930 U.S. Censuses, Wanda Lee Johnson's high school yearbook records, *California Voter Registration Information*, *U.S. Find-A-Grave* indexes, marriage and divorce certificates, as well as *New York Passenger and Crew Lists*, 1917–1967.

Belaev in the text suggests that she may have existed, even though no record of her can be found in Los Angeles city directories or Census Bureau documents from the time period. If we were to determine the genre of this text, then we would have to insist on its hybrid nature: a semi-documentary memoir cookbook at best.

While the indeterminacy of this text's genre poses a quandary for modern readers, the question of Katish's authenticity did not bother reviewers back in the 1940s. As Faulkner ("New Books on the Shelves) at the Evening Star wrote, "Whether Katish is a real or imaginary character is of little importance, the recipes are very real, each one is tested, completed, and easy to follow" (A18). Morrison Wood ("Story of Katish…") of the Chicago Daily Tribune, who was one of the very few men who wrote food journalism at the time, also viewed the book from a purely practical angle and praised it for "having a strong nostalgic fascination for those of us who kept house back in the 1920s, when cooks were honest craftsmen who took pride in their work, and not grumbling ex-war workers accustomed to making anywhere from $40 to $60 a week" (Wood C4). Reviewers tended toward a utilitarian reception, which was particularly apparent in one New York Times review. Helen Lee Maison ("Culinary Roundup…") criticized the book's novelistic structure, and she would go on to use the most culturally inaccurate illustration from Katish to adorn her article. The illustration in Maison's work, featuring the cook holding two dessert dishes – one adorned with an American flag and the other topped with the flag of the Soviet Union – poses questions regarding its significance. Given the historical context of WWII and the alliance between the United States and the Soviet Union during that period, it may be argued that the inclusion of the Soviet flag could be attributed to the widespread American support for the Soviet Union (Figure 1). However, it is highly improbable that a white émigré would have willingly embraced the idea of posing with the Soviet flag, let alone parade it for the press. Another reviewer, Corlin ("This Collection is About Food") of the Los Angeles Times, called the book "amusing, unusual, and appetizing" but dedicated less than ten lines to this literary reflection on the history of immigration to Los Angeles (C1). After all, the book was published decades before American cuisine underwent a substantial diversification of its menu, and the aforementioned reception in the press was the extent to which an ethnic cookbook would be noticed in the pre-television era.

How familiar was the American audience with Russian cuisine in the 1940s? Before the Russian Revolution, American attention oscillated between fascination with the tsar's lavish kitchen, the disheartening news of bread shortages among the peasants, and squeamish interest in the Polish and Jewish cuisines of the American ghettos. After the Revolution, however, the plight of the Russian aristocracy sprinkled American tabloids like the dill decorating Russian dishes. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, American newspapers frequently published Russian recipes and articles about Russian cookery. In major cities, the public could also taste these dishes. In Los Angeles, for example, the list of Russian restaurants and cabarets included the Double-Headed Eagle, Moscow Inn, Volga Boat Cafe, Russian–American Art Club, Katinka, and Romanoff's.

Figure 1: Katish holding up two desserts adorned with American and Soviet flags. Illustration by Henry Stahlhut (Frolov 83).

Thus, by the 1940s, Americans had a budding familiarity with Russian cuisine, driven by media coverage and the presence of Russian eateries in major cities. This laid the groundwork for a warm reception of books such as *Katish: Our Russian Cook*, which introduced them to more diverse flavors and stories from Russia.

The advent of Russian–American auto-ethnographic cookbooks was part and parcel of this process. The first English language Russian cookbook came out in 1923 under the title *The Borzoi Cook Book*, with an image of the Borzoi dog printed on its bookplate. It was compiled and translated by Princess Alexandre Gagarine who, as the book dust cover states, based her menu on the house of Madame Dragomirov, the wife of the Governor General of Kiev. The book envisioned its intended readership as "American housewives in search of novel culinary experiences" (as stated on the Gagarine dust cover), with the French spelling of the Russian name Alexandra lending an air of European sophistication. Ten years later, Selivanova's (*Dining & Wining…*) *Dining and Wining in Old Russia* framed its primary goal as "to give an account of Russian food customs and the recipes of some of the Russian national dishes" (Foreword). According to Selivanova, the book filled out the lacunae in memoir literature flourishing at the time, recording the world of pre-revolutionary Russia through "the most salient feature of the Russian character – the love of good food" (Foreword). As we see from the aforementioned examples, the Russian–American cookbooks of the 1920s and 1930s aimed at recording the experiences of a bygone era and offering them in an adapted form to the housewives of a new country. Markevich's cookbook titled *The Epicure in Imperial Russia* marks the very end of this tradition. In the preface, the author deliberated on the change of status of Russian cuisine abroad: "In former times, Russian cooking was very little known outside of the country …. During recent years, however, one rarely meets an epicure or food enthusiast who has not tasted caviar or Vodka" (Markevich 1). The book positioned itself as "a guide to the mysteries of the Russian table" in Imperial Russia. It also acknowledged that it replaced commodities, such as "a fish of the Volga" or "a bird of the steppes" with American regional varieties (Markevich 1).

With the exception of the aforementioned *The Epicure in Imperial Russia*, during and after WWII, the teleology of Russian cookbooks shifted from the past to the present and future tenses. Already two decades after the Revolution, even the most persistent refugees knew that there was no return, while the tribulations of the war years proposed a new set of survival problems. The cookbooks that came out during the 1940s were seen as a part of the war-time effort to show solidarity. They furnished the narrative of adaptability which could educate American audience. For example, the two issues of *Russian Cook Book for American Homes* (edited by Maddox, who often co-authored with his wife) crowdsourced inexpensive recipes par excellence from émigré families all over the United States. The book was republished in 1942 by Russian War Relief Inc, and in 1943, it was republished under the subheading of the War-time Edition.

Another curious example is *Samovar, A Russian Cookbook: Popular and Famous Russian Dishes* (1946) by Elizavetta Dmitrovna. The author's identity was informed by her experiences cooking traditional Russian cuisine in the makeshift Shanghainese Russian colony, which, in the 1930s, counted about 35,000 members. The samovar on the book's cover represented a symbolic receptacle of a refugee home, traveling with the author's family first from Russia to China and then to America. It underscored the ability of Russian refugees to adapt and survive in new lands. Written by a Russian woman who had lived in Shanghai and dedicated to her American husband, this book was a product of the mass migrations in the new global situation.

Additional micro shift was taking place at the beginning of the Cold War when Princess Kropotkin, the daughter of the famous anarchist, published her collection titled *How to Cook and Eat in Russian*. It expressed the author's hope to win "American friends for Makar and Marfa" (the Russian way of saying Mr. and Mrs. Russia) (Kropotkin vi). Educated in England and working as a journalist, Kropotkin wrote this cookbook as a goodwill effort of cultural diplomacy aimed at overcoming the barriers between the nations reacting to the worsening political climate. At the same time, regardless of their intentions, the auto-ethnographic cookbooks that came out during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s treated Russian cuisine as a stable ontological entity. The recipe indexes may have included some variations, such as the percentage of the French entries of the menu, the complexity of recipes, or a few Georgian or Central Asian recipes, but the food itself was auto-identified as unquestionably Russian. None of these cookbooks attempted to "fuse" cuisine with that of other places and cultures beyond the historic confines of the Russian Empire.

Katish represents a radical departure from all of her forerunners. Written by an American author, the book seeks to construct a hybrid, literary Russian cook who, in turn, is trying to serve her Russianness to the

Figure 2: Branch of Owl Drug Company Store at the intersection of Hollywood Blvd. and Vine St. in the 1930s.

American household. Katish's culinary experiences acquire regional specificity and a high degree of detail. It was no longer about "how we used to cook in Old Russia" or recreating the glorious atmosphere of the old days, but about a modern chef in 1920s West Los Angeles cooking with products found in the local markets. The shopping descriptions occupy a substantial section of the narrative. It is precisely the consumer drive that informs the main character, be it a fascination with chocolate soda in Owl Drug Store, gorgeous displays of fruit and vegetables, the novelty of drive-in markets, or the thrill of second-hand shopping.

Characteristically, Russian ethnic shops, which existed in Los Angeles in the 1920s both in the Russian Hollywood colony and in "Beard's Town" (the Molokan settlement in downtown Los Angeles), are hardly mentioned. Katish purchases, cooks, and serves her food as if outside of the broader context of Russian cuisine in America. We see her going to Los Angeles' oldest Orthodox church, but she does not mention other Russian cooks, groceries, or restaurants (Figures 2 and 3).

When it comes to Russian identity representation, the narrator is aware of the hackneyed representational clichés (a by-product of the commercialization of Russian identity by Hollywood) and uses them with irony. The very first statement of this kind comes with the early portrait of the protagonist:

> We had to admit that Katish did look jolly. She was a little one side or the other of thirty. Her short, sturdy figure, wide mouth and snub nose in a round face gave her a look of cheerful reliability. But it was her dancing black eyes that fascinated us. They were large and perfectly round and resembled the luscious black cherries that the grocer had polished to put in the very front window. You could not resist them. (Frolov 6)

Figure 3: Ye Marketplace, one of the first drive-in Los Angeles markets, on Los Feliz Road in Glendale, California, in 1924.

Here, Frolov cleverly combines a famous Russian romance song with cherries at the market. The eyes, a proverbial mirror of the mysterious Russian soul, are compared to a market commodity. The trade metaphors persist throughout the book, and "the Russian soul" in Frolov's rendition comes across as market-oriented. The author disposes of the stereotype of the "mysterious Russian soul" in favor of "a curious Russian soul":

> Russians are full of curiosity – all kinds of curiosity. The purely personal sort, an endless amount of intellectual curiosity, and a great deal of the humanitarian variety. They wonder what makes things go, and they try to find out. They want to know how other people live, how they feel about things. And they inquire. They wonder about their immortal souls and yours. And they discuss things unceasingly. They want to know the answers to countless abstract questions. And they argue spiritedly. They would like to know how much money you earn and how much rent you pay, and often as not, they ask you! (Frolov 95)

Frolov not only blurs the boundaries of the traditional Russian matrix, the divide between *byt* and *bytie*, the Quotidien and the Being, but also makes the refugees' interest in the mundane a positive force. No matter how naive the representational rendition is, from the white American middle-class female perspective whose consumer power had just been recognized by mainstream society, acknowledging the consumer desire in others is a liberating intersectional gesture of support. In other words, the narrator believes that it is acceptable for Russian refugees to seek knowledge about the American economy and to desire betterment for themselves. This group's existence does not threaten the host community but, rather, puzzles and bemuses it.

Another characteristic feature of Katish is that irony is directed not only at others but also at the self. It is remarkable how Frolov portrays her as she comes to terms with the American newspaper stereotypes about Russian aristocracy and reconciles them with her own experience:

> [...] in those days, often stories dealt with the fantastic going-ons of the Russian upper classes before they had been thrown to the four winds by the upheavals of the Revolution.
>
> Their breathtaking loves and licentious lives, as seen through the eyes of imaginative reporter who had probably never left his home city, made fascinating reading. ... You can imagine how interestedly I watched the behavior of the Russian nobility who came my way. When I tried to question Katish, with what I considered wonderful tact and subtlety, about their mores and morals, she only looked at me in blank astonishment. (Frolov 108–109)

Everything is beautiful in this fragment: the estranged description of the narrator's child self, the ironic discursive framing of the story, as well as the cook's silence which, of course, speaks volumes. Just as the child narrator fails to color the newspaper dolls properly (and this occupation constitutes her primary reason for even reading the newspapers), she also fails to grasp the nature of the people she meets, yet the silences, omissions, and cracks in the narrative convey just enough information for the grown-up reader.

On the level of language and style, the identity construction in Katish occurs through the introduction of exoticisms, as well as a sparse amount of literary and cultural allusions. For example, Katish's speech characteristics are transmitted through the use of Russian words and are given by Frolov (*Katish, our Russian Cook*) in italics *Bozhe moi!* (My God!) (8) or broken, ungrammatical "unreasonful" (19) English: "Ai, is nice! I like!" (Oh, it is nice! I like it!) (6), "Da, yes, I take" (Yes, yes, I take it) (64), or "Ai, paradise has been given to Amerikanzi" (Oh, paradise has been given to Americans) (12). Sometimes, the Russian words and phrases are used alongside with a translation. "Nichevo. It is nothing." (*Nichego* is a Russian word for nothing) (13). The misunderstandings predictably emerge from a lack of language mastery. For example, Katish develops a dislike of the iceman because she does not understand the name that he gives her. Instead of "buttercup," she thinks that he calls her "the butter dish" (16). At the same time, the extended Russian vocabulary, which the book included with no footnotes or dictionary, has the potential to confuse monolingual readers.

Katish's basic vocabulary in Russian includes the following words: *ai* (oh), *Ahhhhhh* (wow), *Slava Bogu!* (Thanks God!), *amerikanzi* (Americans), *blini* (Russian pancakes), *blinchiki* (a diminutive form for Russian pancakes), *borshch* (traditional East European soup made with beets), *Bozhe moi!* (My God!), *chai* (tea), *chaipit* (ungrammatical form of to drink tea), *da* (yes), *golubka* (dove), *golubtsy* (cabbage rolls), *molosolni agurchiki* (pickled cucumbers), *nichevo* (nothing), *pelmeni* (traditional Russian dumplings), *pirogue* or *piroshkee* (the word for traditional Russian baked or fried stuffed buns), *rassolnik* (soup with picked cucumbers), *samovar* (tea urn), *shashlyk* (skewered meat kebabs), *smetana* (sour cream), and *vareniki* (a type of dumpling). The

peculiarities of the authorial spellings indicate that the author is transcribing them based on how they sound. The use of these loan words, however, does not yield the double signification characteristic of other hybrid literary traditions. In other words, the author does not engage in the nodding or winking at the readers fluent in both languages. Devoid of the language play, her Russian language use is correct but sterile.

The cultural and historical allusions of Katish represent the least saturated aspect of the Russian identity construction and are primarily limited to a discussion of Russian music. Besides the aforementioned "Ochi chernye" (Dark Eyes), a popular in the nineteenth-century romance, with lyrics expressing admiration for a person with captivating and enchanting dark eyes, Frolov also fixates her attention on the phonograph records by Feodor Chaliapin (whose performances she might have attended), as well as the liturgical music of the Orthodox Easter service recorded by the choir of the Russian church in Paris. Another set of references is present in the description of General Krasnoperov, one of the book's minor characters. For example, Frolov includes an episode of him narrating the story of Patziuk, a minor literary character from Nikolai Gogol's novella *Night Before Christmas* (1830–1832), who effortlessly consumes dumplings without the use of his hands, as they mysteriously dip themselves in sour cream and leap into his mouth. This episode foreshadows the vareniki recipe in her text. In conclusion, through the exploration of cultural and historical allusions, including references to Russian and Ukrainian music and literary characters, Frolov intricately weaves together elements of what was thought of at the time as Russian identity and tradition in her text, further enriching the narrative of Katish and highlighting the significance of cultural heritage in shaping individual and collective identities.

One of the most curious descriptions of this general emerges toward the end when we see him caroling the "Bublichki" song while playing his balalaika. A popular new economic policy-era song, a period of economic reform in the Soviet Union that lasted from 1921 to 1928, written by Odessan poet Iakov Yadov, it came to the United States with the records of Leonid Utesov. Its Yiddish translation was later popularized by the famous Barry Sisters, Klezmer, and jazz entertainers. If we assume the documentary nature of this fragment, then the inclusion of this Jewish song from the Bolshevik lands in the white army general repertoire, not to mention its inconceivable balalaika arrangement, would attest to the song's genuine popularity in exile. After all, Los Angeles even got its own Bublichki restaurant, opened in the 1940s on Sunset Boulevard.

Notwithstanding, Frolov's cultural repertoire is, by far, narrower than her linguistic and culinary menu and can be attributed to the narrative prevalence of the child's perspective (Figures 4 and 5).

It is precisely the perspective of the child narrator in *Katish* that acts as a filter and attests to many of the book's omissions. Its silences can be viewed as significant, especially in the context of narratives of trauma, nostalgia, and food deprivation informing émigré prose of the period. Yet, the author includes one highly metaphorical story that makes up for many of the book's silences:

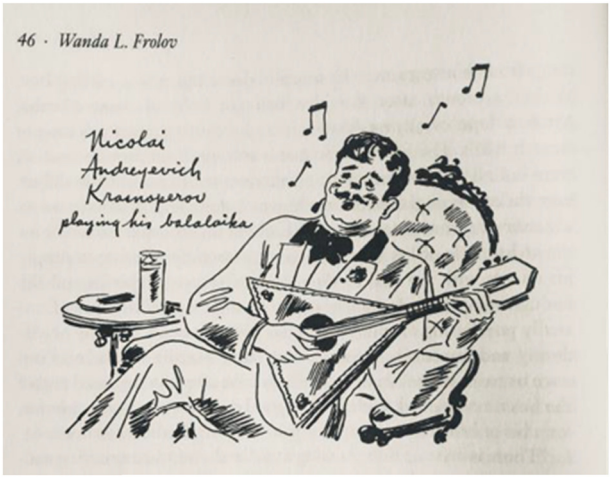

Figure 4: General Krasnoperov playing a balalaika and caroling Bublichki. Illustration by Henry Stahlhut (Frolov 46).

Figure 5: Bublichki Russian Cafe in the 1940s at 8846 Sunset Boulevard.

> When we laughed over the scene in The Gold Rush where Charlie Chaplin boils his shoe for nourishment, Katish laughed too. But she told us, "In Russia, after the Revolution, you would have made the shoe before you could boil it." (Frolov 32)

This snide remark is followed by a story of a young émigré couple living in New York and "earning their way by hard work though the university" (Frolov 32) who had unknowingly bought burial shoes and played tennis in them, to the amusement of their American acquaintances. The story of refugees playing tennis in burial shoes (*belyie tapki*, as the Russian saying goes) exposes traumatic memories lurking in the dark, but just barely visible for the teenager's mind to record and process. The *Katish* episode of watching Charlie Chaplin's film provides a comic relief, and the dark twist at the end would have, perhaps, been appreciated by the great comic himself.

Figure 6: Charlie Chaplin in the shoe-eating scene from "The Gold Rush," 1925. Movie still.

Being a patron of one of Hollywood's Russian cabarets, Chaplin was nothing short of familiar with the difficulties of Russian exilic life first-hand (Figure 6).

Another remarkable feature of Frolov's book is her refusal to employ the common trope of marriage. Out of the two parallel romance subplots, one results in marriage and the other does not. The old spinster, Aunt Marta, marries the Russian General Krasnoperov, but Katish refuses a marriage proposal by the xenophobic uncle William, who was smitten by the scope of her culinary talents. Marriage here functions as an individual choice, a fact of biography and, by that, devoid of any symbolic weight. Instead, Katish exists as a separate entity in her own right while making her life in a new country. She enters the American social order by learning its language, technology, and banking system. She not only learns to drive but musters the system as far as distributing loan money to other refugees and helping her community. Remarkably, Katish's relationship to her host country and the process of assimilation is rendered in exclusively positive terms.

This domestication of a Russian chef for American audiences also carried over to the recipes. Adriane Jacobs ("The Many Flavors…") correctly describes Katish's menu as "enjoyed by the one-time upper and merchant classes – beef Stroganoff, chicken Kiev, Pozharskii cutlets, and rum-soaked desserts – as well as timeless and classless favorites, such as borshch, kasha with mushrooms, and fruit kissel" (Jacobs 220). At the same time, we disagree with Jacobs' analysis that Katish's "cooking reflected a past way of life" (220). While it is true that "Frolov celebrated Russians and their cuisine without actually challenging her readers to travel to present-day Russia in their minds" (220), Katish did attempt to look at present-day America. Frolov goes as far as to include a recipe for short ribs and to mention a fictitious cookbook of Russian–American cooking, which, supposedly, helped Katish learn American cookery:

> We all, even Mother, had been a little afraid that with a cook so foreign we would have to dine every night on exotic dishes. But Katish proved immediately that she knew how to deal with such staples as chops, steaks, and roasts. Somewhere in the second-hand shops of Los Angeles she had unearthed a Russian-American cookbook, and armed with a dictionary, she explored the mysteries of fried chicken, waffles, and other of our favorite recipes. (Frolov 14)

In mastering both Russian and American cuisine, Katish arrives at the cusp of culinary fusion, long before it would become a salient characteristic of California's gastronomic scene. Take, for example, Katish's recipe for cheesecake. This signature dish is the first recipe of the first chapter. It is with this cheesecake that Katish gains the favor of her host family, especially the children. The choice is well-calculated. Had she made a variation of an apple pie (charlotte a la russe, for example), such an unorthodox approach would have hardly been a revelation. For there are few foods more American than American apple pie, and people like it for what it is.

When it comes to cheesecake, however, there is no invariant of American cheesecake. Its recipes exist in endless varieties, from early colonial manuscripts to modern times. They are conditioned by the diversity of contributing national cultures and their dairy products alike. Be it quark, cottage cheese, ricotta or cream cheese, sour cream or creme fraiche, baked or unbaked, mousse, torte, tart, a recipe of Northern or Southern Europe, there is simply no such thing as American cheesecake. And while Russian cuisine provides no direct analogue of cheesecake, several of its staple dishes feature similar ingredients: vatrushki, syrniki, paskha, tvorozhnaia zapekanka, cottage cheese pudding, or cottage cheese with sour cream and raisins.[5] How, then, does one go about adapting these Russian recipes to American kitchens, given that the milk cultures in the new country will inevitably differ? All in all, out of the five cookbooks previously mentioned in this article, each book has a recipe for paskha and honors the religious tradition. Princess Gagarine (*The Borzoi Cook Book*) also has two recipes using cream cheese: cream cheese pudding (196) and cakes made with fresh cream cheese, a fancy rendition of vatrushki (208). Princess Kropotkin (*How to Cook and Eat in Russian*) offers her recipes for smetannik (225) and tvorojniki (229); Gaynor Maddox (*Russian Cook Book…*) offers two variations of syrniki and tvorozhniki in *Russian Cook Book for American Homes* (78–79). Selivanova (*Dining & Wining…*) also

5 Vatrushki is a traditional Eastern European pastry. It is made with sweet dough and filled with a delicious combination of cheese, fruit, and sweet cream. Syrniki are traditional Russian pancakes made from curd cheese and egg. These pancakes are light and fluffy, with a slightly sweet flavor. Paskha is a traditional Russian Easter cake made with curd cheese, butter, and sugar. Tvorozhnaia zapekanka is a traditional Russian cake made with cottage cheese, eggs, and sugar.

features cottage cheese cream (145), while Dmitrovna (*Samovar: A Russian cook book…*) has several recipes for paskha, vatrushka (79–81), and cottage cheese cake (77). All in all, Dmitrovna's Samovar is the only cookbook out of the five (besides Katish) to come up with a cheesecake look alike, the modern day tvorozhnaia zapekanka! Its recipe requires baking and uses cottage cheese with Cream of Wheat® as its base. Katish takes her cheesecake to a new level. Following American recipes, her oven-baked recipe calls for finely crushed zwieback, German rusk, or twice-baked bread, for its crumb lining. The cake's base is a mixture of Philadelphia cream cheese and sour cream. The rest requires standard ingredients and techniques: separately beaten egg whites, a pinch of salt, and finely cut vanilla bean. What sets this recipe apart is that it is not a traditional Russian dish. It names a specific American brand of cream cheese as its key ingredient and imitates a torte composition. On top of it all, Frolov (*Katish, our Russian Cook*) shuns all euphemisms and names it a cheesecake (8). No other recipe seems to be further removed from Russian traditional cooking in the entire corpus of Russian–American cookbooks of the first half of the twentieth century. That is why Katish's cheesecake is something that the American audience can completely relate to.

Following three decades of Russian–American cookbooks penned by Russian authors, the American host community finally issued its own rendition of a Russian cookbook. This endeavor emerged as a genre-bending memoir, illustrating the intertwining lives of diverse cultures spanning Russia, China, and the United States, through the tumultuous eras of World War I and II, and the seismic shifts of the Russian Revolution. The appended recipe book from Katish, the titular character, presents a unique amalgamation of American and Russian cuisine. It includes traditional Russian dishes such as Chicken Kiev, Pozharski cutlets, kasha with mushrooms, and Dragomirovsky forshmak, alongside staples of Anglo-Saxon culinary tradition such as casseroles, dinner biscuits, bread rolls, sandwiches, custards, and tarts. These hybrid culinary creations not only indicate the domestication of a Russian cook within her new multicultural surroundings of Southern California but also symbolize the convergence of diverse culinary landscapes.

Released within the context of the ensuing Cold War, before the advent of television cooking shows and food journalism, Katish mapped the local Los Angeles culinary scene and contributed to the development of the narrative food writing genre. Similar narrative style would be continued by Jeanne Voltz, a Los Angeles Times food editor, and was recognized as her signature mark (Voss, *The Food Section* 52). While the circulation numbers of the 1947 publication of Katish are unknown, the book travelled all the way to Paris and was in the possession of Alice B. Toklas, the author of one of the most famous cookbooks in the world, which she wrote in 1954.[6] Frolov's work re-emerged when Ruth Reichl republished it in 2001, illustrating a broader context of ongoing rediscovery of female food writers in the United States, such as Clementine Paddleford (1898–1967)[7] and Myra Waldo (1916–2004),[8] who have often been overlooked despite their substantial contributions. These revivals, including Kelly Alexander and Cynthia Harris's 2008 biography of Paddleford, provide a richer understanding of the evolution of food writing and emphasize these authors' role in shaping our culinary

6 For more information, see "Alice B Toklas and Her Cookbook – Part One." One Crumb at a Time Blog. Accessed January 15, 2023 at http://onecrumbatatime.blogspot.com/2011/08/alice-b-toklas-and-her-cook-book-part.html.

7 Clementine Paddleford (1898–1967) was a pioneer in food journalism who played a pivotal role in transforming food writing from mere recipe narration to insightful commentary on socio-economic, historical, and cultural aspects of food habits in America. Through her extensive travel across the United States, she meticulously documented regional cuisines, significantly contributing to the formation of American culinary identity. Notwithstanding her noteworthy contributions, her work has been often overshadowed. The biography, Alexander, Kelly, and Cynthia Harris. *Hometown Appetites: The Story of Clementine Paddleford, the Forgotten Food Writer Who Chronicled How America Ate*. Gotham Books, 2008, seeks to revive Paddleford's legacy, emphasizing her profound influence on the contemporary approach to food writing.

8 Myra Waldo (1916–2004) was a prolific author, celebrated for her contributions to travel literature and culinary arts. From the mid-1950s, Waldo penned numerous travel guides and cookbooks, including timeless pieces such as *Serve at Once: The Soufflé Cookbook* (1961) and *The Molly Goldberg Jewish Cookbook* (1955), co-authored with actress Gertrude Berg. Despite her extensive body of work and influence on these genres, Waldo remains understudied. Beyond her writing, Waldo's career included roles as a food and travel editor for WCBS radio, consultant for airlines and hotels, and manager of special projects for Macmillan Publishing Company. Among her notable works are *The International Encyclopedia of Cooking* (1967) and *The Dictionary of International Food and Cooking Terms* (1967). These extensive and diverse contributions to travel and food writing left an indelible mark on these genres, securing her legacy in the field.

narratives. In a similar vein, the influence of *Katish* on the genre of narrative food writing offers valuable insights into the evolving landscape of food writing and its correlation with the growing presence of ethnic cuisine within the United States.

And it feels good to have Katish back. At this time of growing political tension between Russia and the US caused by Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine, alongside the mass migration from war-affected regions, all set against the backdrop of the recent anti-immigration policies of the Donald Trump era, *Katish* serves as a poignant reminder of a period in US history when refugees were welcomed and their dreams could be achieved through sheer hard work. Frolov demonstrates her prowess in creating compelling characters who assert themselves in the traditionally female realm of the kitchen while adapting to a new country. Katish not only offers a hopeful model of integration and the embracing of Russian culture for American audiences, but also evokes empathy for refugees and acts as a cultural ambassador, fostering connections between Russian heritage and American households. Our diet extends beyond mere sustenance; it holds the power to express our identity and shape who we are. So, what story does your plate tell?

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