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GILLY MROZ

‘SHOULDN’T HE PUT A MARTEN ON THE COLLAR?’

DISTRACTION IN GOGOL’S PETERSBURG TALES

Just before arriving in Lübeck for the first time, Nikolai Gogol wrote a letter to his mother on 24 June 1829, citing a girl he was madly in love with as the primary reason for his sudden departure from St Petersburg. In this letter, after explaining that his initial relocation from Ukraine to the capital was to fulfil his divine literary mission, he describes how God had then directed him towards Germany so that he could overcome his unrequited love for a certain lofty individual:

I saw that I had to flee from myself if I wanted to preserve my life, to establish even a semblance of peace in my tortured soul. With tenderness, I recognised the invisible Right Hand protecting me, and blessed the path it so wondrously pointed me towards.¹

In reality there was no such figure, divine or otherwise. This is the only letter in which Gogol talks about her; had she really been so exquisite, and had she really caused him so much anguish, she surely would have featured more prominently in his correspondence. A few weeks later on 13 August 1829 he wrote another letter to his mother in which he cited a different reason for his departure for Germany: a rash which he hoped the milder European climate would alleviate.² Having read both let-

¹ Given the closure of libraries during the pandemic, online editions of Gogol', Nikolai Vasil'evich, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v chetyrnadtsati tomakh*, Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1937-1952, have been used for his texts and letters. This letter can be found in volume 10: http://az.lib.ru/g/gogolx_n_w/text_1835_pisma.shtml. All translations, unless otherwise stated, are my own.

² Ibid.

ters, Gogol's mother assumed her son had contracted a venereal disease.³ Although he was horrified by her assumption, the exchange would probably have served as a distraction from the real primary cause of his flight to Germany. This was largely his anxiety caused by the failure of his first attempt at turning literature into a vocation – *Hanz Küchelgarten* (1829), a Romantic poem inspired by German idyll life. Furthermore, it is probable that this anxiety was exacerbated by his general antipathy towards the capital, which no doubt made a flight for the warmer climes of Germany far more appealing.⁴

However, Gogol soon returned to St Petersburg. Sweeping aside the failure of *Hanz Küchelgarten*, the success of his subsequent short story collection, *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka* (*Vechera na khutore bliz Dikan'ki*, 1831-1832), returned him to the path of fulfilling what he perceived to be his God-given task to become a successful author. Although this ideal was most likely driven, at least initially, by Romantic aspirations, it would soon become his primary purpose and shape his identity. He frequently wrote on the topic; examples are numerous, and include one assertion to his friend, the poet Vasilii Zhukovsky, in a letter from the beginning of another trip to Germany dated 28 June 1836: 'I swear I shall achieve something that an ordinary man cannot. I feel the strength of a lion in my soul [...].'⁵ Writing about him in this paper some two centuries later suggests that, despite his doubts and anxieties, he succeeded in his mission.

But what would have happened had Gogol succumbed completely to distraction from his *Hanz Küchelgarten*- and St Petersburg-induced woes, escaping perma-

³ Troyat, Henri, *Gogol: The Biography of a Divided Soul*, translated by Nancy Amphoux, London: Allen and Unwin, 1974, p. 56.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-47.

⁵ This letter can be found in volume 11: http://az.lib.ru/g/gogolx_n_w/text_1841_pisma.shtml.

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nently to Lübeck and perhaps never allowing himself to return to the Russian capital (even only for relatively short periods, as became his norm)? Or, worse (and, indeed, more unlikely), what would have happened had the girl in his letter, and his feelings towards her, been real? The answers to these questions can to some extent be ascertained by examining the role that distraction plays in the lives of the protagonists in four of Gogol's St Petersburg texts: Piskarev in 'Nevsky Prospect' ('Nevskii Prospekt', 1835), Akakii Akakievich in 'The Overcoat' ('Shinel', 1842), Poprishchin in 'Diary of a Madman' ('Zapiski sumasshedshego', 1835), and Chartkov in 'The Portrait' ('Portret', 1835). Although the theme of distraction is not unique to Gogol – consider, for example, Emma Woodhouse's various attempts at matchmaking in Jane Austen's *Emma*, or, at the more extreme end of the spectrum, Don Quixote's madness, travels and adventures – it appears in his Petersburg texts largely without mirth and usually with tragic consequences, with few exceptions. In this paper I explore the two main definitions of distraction – diverted attention and mental agitation – and the impact they have on the lives of Gogol's two painters (Piskarev and Chartkov) and two civil servants (Akakii Akakievich and Poprishchin). Rather than looking at the stories in order of the protagonists' professions, this paper instead flows according to the discussion of several themes, namely sexuality, status and success. In this way it examines the relationship between both forms of distraction – such as which external stimuli trigger the initial diversion of attention, and how this might influence the mental agitation consequently experienced by each protagonist – with particular attention paid to the role of women in the stories' denouement.

'Nevsky Prospect' is a story about two acquaintances who become distracted by attractive young women on the eponymous St Petersburg thoroughfare. Piskarev, a painter, is clearly taken with a brunette, and his acquaintance, Lieutenant Pirogov, encourages him to pursue her. He does so with nothing but the purest admiration for her

celestial beauty: ‘he was not kindled by the flame of earthly passion, no, in that moment he was pure and chaste, like a virginal youth still breathing that vague spiritual need for love’ (III: 19).⁶ He follows her along the boulevard, distractedly bumping into passers-by, and into a building and up a staircase, her ascent in many ways symbolic of the divine aura with which he perceives her to be imbued. She stops on the fourth floor, however, and beckons Piskarev towards her. Having realised that this heavenly creature is in fact a prostitute who has lured him to a brothel, he flees back down to the street.

Despite Piskarev’s horror at the reality of the situation, a clear antithesis to his expectations, he nevertheless becomes obsessed with the young woman – or, rather, with his perception of her. He focuses all his time, energy and attention on his imaginings and, naturally prone to distraction and absent-mindedness, forgets his painting and any other pursuits. He completely submits to his new purpose in life – living to dream and dreaming to live:

In the end dreams became his life, and from that point on his whole life took a strange turn: one might say that he was asleep in reality and awake in his dreams. If anyone saw him sitting silently before an empty table or walking along the street, he would surely have taken him for a sleepwalker or someone ruined by hard drinking; his gaze was completely devoid of meaning, his natural absent-mindedness (‘рассеянность’) had finally developed and imperiously driven out all

⁶ Quotations from the Petersburg tales are also taken from Gogol’, Nikolai Vasil’evich, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v chetyrnadtsati tomakh*, Moskva: Izdatel’stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1937-1952, found at: https://rvb.ru/gogol/toc_vol_03.htm. Volume and page number, reflecting the print edition, are provided in parentheses in the body of this paper.

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feeling, all movement, from his face. He came to life only as night approached. (III: 28)

Craving the visions he sees in his sleep, but suffering from insomnia, he turns to opium. As his dependency on dreams and drugs increases, his mental state also becomes increasingly agitated. Indeed, 'if there were ever anyone in love to the utmost degree of madness, impetuously, terribly, destructively, rebelliously, then he was that unfortunate man' (III: 30). In one blissful dream he sees her as his wife, and the joy he experiences leads him to visit her to ask her to make it their reality. He arrives in hopeful spirits, but these are extinguished when she laughs at his proposal and her friend mocks him. After wandering the streets as though in a trance, unaware of where he is going or what he is doing, he finally returns home the following day 'with signs of madness on his face' (III: 33). Soon thereafter he takes his life.

Instead of nurturing his art and putting his visions on to canvas, Piskarev lets his visions develop in his mind with no artistic release. Because he allows himself to be so completely distracted from his artistic path, so utterly engulfed by thoughts of a girl and so willing to neglect and even reject that 'spark of talent within him which, over time, might have flashed up widely and brightly' (III: 33), he becomes caught in a vicious circle of dreams and (chaste) desire with no way of ever being able to return to even a semblance of his former life. The only fate available to him – the only punishment, in Gogol's world, befitting his crime of neglecting his talent and submitting his mind to female temptation – is death, and a painful one at that. If Piskarev slitting his throat with a razor were not sufficiently tragic or horrific, the narrator adds that 'from his convulsively outstretched arms and from his terribly contorted appearance, it could be concluded that his hand had been unsteady and that he had suffered for a long time before his sinful soul left his body' (III: 33). To add a further layer to the

whole tragedy, no one attends his funeral, not even his ‘friend’ (‘приятель’, III: 16) Pirogov.

While Piskarev’s death can be considered a punishment for his lack of dedication to his art and lack of willpower towards the temptations of feminine beauty, it can also be considered more positively as a release from suffering. As Donald Fanger suggests, Piskarev’s demise – although undeniably gruesome – may in fact be better than the alternative outcome: continuing life as a struggling artist in St Petersburg. Indeed, ‘were it not for this mad passion, Piskaryov would most likely have lived out the life of an artist manqué, doomed by the allied antagonism of Petersburg nature and Petersburg society to his calling’.⁷ In this light Gogol can perhaps be considered to have been kind to his character by providing him with distraction (in the form of a celestial beauty, even if imagination and reality were conflated) and, later, death (an exit from the hardships of life as a young artist trying to make his way in the capital).

It is also worth drawing attention to Lieutenant Pirogov, Piskarev’s foil. Unlike the young artist, the lieutenant has a steady job, possesses no artistic calling, and is *пошлый*, concerned with appearances, triviality and vulgarity. Having encouraged his companion to pursue the brunette, Pirogov follows a German blonde, albeit with less innocent motives. Unfortunately for Pirogov, she is married and, although somewhat naïve, remains loyal to her husband. A later encounter in which Pirogov takes too much liberty and covers her in kisses causes her inebriated husband and two friends to beat him to a pulp. As with Piskarev, Pirogov is punished for allowing himself to be tempted and distracted by a woman. However, because Pirogov has no higher, artistic calling from which a woman can divert his attention, his punishment is nothing more than a tragicomic beating at the hands of some German tradesmen – de-

⁷ Fanger, Donald, *The Creation of Nikolai Gogol*, London: Belknap Press, 1979, p. 112.

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spite easily having the more morally questionable intentions of Gogol's two protagonists.

Just as Piskarev is naturally prone to absent-mindedness, so, too, is Pirogov prone to distraction. This is seen not only in the initial ease with which he decides to pursue the blonde, but also in the swiftness with which his romantic intentions turn into a desire for vengeance. Following his beating, his thoughts are swiftly directed to the idea that even Siberia or the whip (III: 40) would be insufficient punishment for the German tradesmen, an idea which, in turn, he quickly forgets upon eating two pastries.

There is also some similarity between Pirogov and Kovalev, the protagonist of Gogol's other St Petersburg story 'The Nose' ('Nos', 1836). Both characters have a strong interest in the fairer sex. They appear to have little motivation in their actions other than leisure and pleasure and, consequently, possess no inclination towards nurturing any talent or fulfilling any higher purpose. It is perhaps because of these characteristics that Gogol punishes both, having one beaten and the other frantically attempt to find his missing nose, apparently going about its daily business in St Petersburg. The nature of the punishments is also significant, as both characters suffer emasculation, with Pirogov beaten by the husband of the woman he was attempting to seduce and Kovalev missing a protruding organ whose phallic symbolism, according to Simon Karlinsky, renders 'The Nose' 'an obvious sitting duck for Freudian and Marxist interpretations'.⁸ Nevertheless, both characters survive their ordeals and are quick to return to their normal lives. They both do so in the same way: by entering a pastry shop, a symbol of the indulgent and hedonistic lives they lead.

Both 'Nevsky Prospect' and 'The Nose' introduce an idea which reappears throughout Gogol's works and is particularly prominent in his Petersburg tales: that

⁸ Karlinsky, Simon, *The Sexual Labyrinth of Nikolai Gogol*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 130.

interest in women comes at a serious price.⁹ However, the fates of Pirogov and Kovalev, in contrast to that of Piskarev, suggest that woman-induced distraction is particularly dangerous when it comes at the expense of artistic calling. If there is no higher purpose, then there is no path from which to be diverted, and in such cases caprice and flirtation, although still reprehensible by Gogolian standards, do not merit quite the same punishment as when the nurturing of one's talent is at stake.

Akakii Akakievich, the protagonist of 'The Overcoat', is like Piskarev in his timidity and lack of companionship, but in all other respects he is a grotesque reworking of Gogol's young artist. He is not a young man, but already in his fifties, described unappealingly by the narrator as 'short in height, somewhat pockmarked, somewhat red-haired, somewhat even half-blind in appearance, with a small bald patch around his forehead, wrinkles on both cheeks and a complexion that one might call hemorrhoidal...' (III: 141). Nor is he an artist with a romantic view of the world, but rather an unremarkable clerk (III: 141). Despite the mundane nature of his primary activity – copying documents – he nevertheless undertakes his task with such zeal often found wanting even in individuals whose profession might more appropriately demand it, such as writers, musicians, or indeed painters. As the narrator explains, 'it would hardly be possible to find a person who lived so much in his work. It is not enough to say that he served zealously, no, he served with love [...] Delight was visible on his face' (III: 144). The grotesque arises from the mismatch in feelings the reader experiences towards Akakii Akakievich: pity and disgust, but also an odd sense of admiration, directed towards an individual who finds so much enjoyment in, and possesses so much unswerving commitment to, such a mundane task. Devoted to his work, he allows nothing to distract him from it. Even when his colleagues torment him, he makes no response. Only if the jokes go too far, for example, if they nudge his hand and hin-

⁹ This is a common topic of discussion throughout Karlinsky, *The Sexual Labyrinth of Nikolai Gogol*.

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der him from his task, would he finally look away from his work and say to them: 'Leave me alone, why do you torment me?' (III: 143). This comment serves as the foundation for one of the most humane scenes in Gogol's works,¹⁰ and imbues Akakii Akakievich's undertaking of his task with a certain seriousness and loftiness. These traits are at odds with the real nature of his work, however, and the grotesque shines through upon the reader's realisation of this mismatch.

Eventually an event occurs in Akakii Akakievich's life which succeeds in distracting him entirely from his work. It is not a woman that causes an upheaval in the clerk's life, as it is in Piskarev's, but something, like his profession, more commonplace and, upon first appearances at least, innocuous: an overcoat. When Akakii Akakievich's overcoat becomes so threadbare that repair is no longer possible, he has no choice but to have a new one tailored for him. His realisation that a new coat is his only option causes him so much distress that, for the first time in the story (and, one can assume, his life), he becomes so distracted that 'instead of going home, he went completely in the opposite direction without even realising' (III: 152). In time, however, he not only accepts the concept of the new coat, but even finds pleasure in it, to the point where it begins to provide him with a new zest for life and distracts him from his previous love of copying:

From that point on it was as if his very existence had become somehow more complete, as if he'd got married, as if some other person were there with him, as if he were not alone but some pleasant life companion ('подруга') had agreed to walk down the path of life together – and this companion was none other than that same overcoat [...] He

¹⁰ Driessen, F. C., *Gogol as a Short-Story Writer: A Study of his Technique of Composition*, translated by Ian F. Finlay, The Hague: Mouton, 1965, p. 186.

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became somehow more alive, firmer even in character, like a man who has already defined and set a goal for himself. Doubt, indecision, in a word all his wavering and vague traits, disappeared of their own accord from his face and actions. Fire sometimes shone in his eyes, and the most impudent and daring thoughts even flashed through his mind: shouldn't he put a marten on the collar? Thinking about it almost drove him to distraction ('чуть не навели на него рассеянности'). Once when he was copying a sheet, he almost even made a mistake, causing him nearly to cry out 'Oh!', and crossed himself. (III: 154-155)

The grotesque is once more apparent in the nature of the reflections that 'almost drove him to distraction': they are not about a real woman (as would be more natural in reality, although no less welcome in Gogol's world), but an item of clothing. The word for 'overcoat' in Russian, 'шинель', is a feminine noun, and therefore referred to as 'she' in the original text;¹¹ the new garment thus becomes symbolic of a new woman in Akakii Akakievich's life. The above passage supports this symbolism in its discussion of marriage, sharing life with a companion, and even gift giving: like a woman with items such as jewellery, a marten collar is not an essential addition to an overcoat, but makes for a nice adornment.

Initially the overcoat can be considered a positive distraction for Akakii Akakievich. The narrator explains that before the arrival of the new overcoat (or even the idea of it), the clerk did not partake in any form of diversion (III: 146). Originally an introverted loner, the new coat makes him more animated, spirited and sociable, and he even attends a party thrown (to some extent) in honour of the garment. But that is where any positive association ends. Although the new overcoat facilitates social interaction, it is disconcerting that his grotesque passion for copying has been re-

¹¹ Karlinsky, *The Sexual Labyrinth of Nikolai Gogol*, p. 135.

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placed by an equally grotesque affection towards a garment. Furthermore, the overcoat, like the prostitute with Piskarev, has opened Akakii Akakievich's eyes to a world in which women, and therefore sexuality, exist. In addition to viewing his new overcoat as a lifelong companion, almost as if they were in the bonds of marriage, possession of the garment also causes him to be distractible while walking along Nevsky Prospect. He is less distracted by the general hustle and bustle of the thoroughfare than he is by the opposite sex, all of which had hitherto remained unnoticed. On the first occasion, on the way to the party, he stops before a shop window to look at a painting of a woman taking off her shoe and baring her leg, with a man peeking at her from another room (III: 159). There is a clear parallel between the protagonist of the story and the man in this painting, with both finding enjoyment in their voyeurism. On the second occasion, Akakii Akakievich transforms from a passive admirer of inanimate beauty and into an active pursuer of the animate kind when he suddenly runs after a woman who had walked passed him on the street (III: 160).

On his way home from the party, Akakii Akakievich is robbed of his precious overcoat. Following a series of further trials, including being shouted at by a 'certain important person' to whom he had turned for succour, Gogol's protagonist, coat-less, eventually catches a chill. Falling into fever and delirium, he blasphemes, talks gibberish and hallucinates about his overcoat, and soon passes away. As with Piskarev, and even Pirogov and Kovalev, Akakii Akakievich's death can be considered a punishment for permitting himself to be interested in women (albeit largely symbolically) at the expense of his work. His devotion to the overcoat is the main culprit in his demise: had he not given it so much thought, care and attention, had he not allowed it to distract him from his work, he might never have attended the party, never been robbed, never visited the 'important person', and, consequently, might not have succumbed to delirium and died when he did. But some of the blame must also be attributed more

generally to life in St Petersburg. For example, had the winters not been so blisteringly cold, he might not have worn through his old overcoat and needed a new one so urgently; had he earned slightly more, the purchase of a new overcoat might not have been such an extraordinary event; had the ‘important person’ not taken it into his head to bully Akakii Akakievich simply because his rank permitted him to, the latter might not have wandered around in shock and caught a chill; and finally, had the capital permitted him to develop warm and caring social connections, he might not have suffered such fatal distraction by an object whose physical warmth he too easily mistook for the emotional kind.

‘Diary of a Madman’ is another work in which, as the title reveals, a protagonist is driven to distraction. Although Poprishchin is a copy-clerk like Akakii Akakievich, he was originally intended to be a musician, and he is, therefore, in some ways more akin to Piskarev and, as we shall see, Chartkov, to continue the theme in Gogol’s *Arabesques* of the struggling St Petersburg artist.¹² Despite sharing the same profession, Poprishchin and Akakii Akakievich differ in that the former is apparently indifferent to his work, while for the latter it is (or was) his life’s vocation. Poprishchin also differs to some extent from Akakii Akakievich, Piskarev and Chartkov in that he does not produce work that could be considered, whether by himself and/or others, a response to a divine calling; instead, he consciously detests the lowly nature of his work. He also differs from the two protagonists already discussed in this paper in the nature of his distraction: while for the others distraction is largely caused by an external, female or feminine stimulus, it is difficult to know whether Poprishchin’s change in character – his clear descent into madness – is organic or triggered by any

¹² The work was originally intended to be titled ‘Diary of a Mad Musician’ (‘Zapiski sumasshedshego muzykanta’). See Trott, Liz, ‘Diary of a Madman: The Hidden Absurd’, in Grayson, Jane and Faith Wigzell (eds.), *Nikolay Gogol: Text and Context*, Palgrave Macmillan, 1989, pp. 50-63 (p. 50).

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particular form of (female or other) stimulus in his life. It is likely a combination of the two. That his illness is at least partially present from the beginning of the story is suggested in the department head's question: 'How is it, brother, that there's always such a mess in your head?' (III: 193). But this mental 'mess' appears to be exacerbated by Sophie, the director's daughter.

The reader – and perhaps even Poprishchin – first beholds Sophie on Nevsky Prospect when the protagonist is on his way to work. He is clearly taken with her: 'Good Lord, oh God! I am lost, completely lost!' (III: 195), he exclaims upon seeing her leave her carriage and enter a shop. However, although throughout the story it appears that Poprishchin is in love with Sophie, it is difficult to know whether he is in love with *her*, or rather with the *idea of being with* a girl significantly his superior in terms of youth, appearance and status. Whatever his true feelings, they serve as a distraction from the ennui of his life working as a lowly civil servant whose duties involve little more than sharpening the director's (Sophie's father's) quills. His initial distraction on Nevsky Prospect swiftly develops into hallucinations, as he passively 'overhears' a conversation between Madgie, Sophie's dog, and Fidèle, her canine friend, before actively 'reading' the letters he believes were written by the former to the latter. In these opening two diary entries we learn not only that Poprishchin is easily distractible, but also even perhaps that he *wants* to be distracted: already late for work, he stops on the thoroughfare to watch Sophie enter a shop, before deciding to follow Fidèle 'to find out who she is and what she thinks' (III: 195). There is no indication that he ever makes it to work that day.

Poprishchin's amorous interest in Sophie is clearly misplaced. As the department head explains to him:

You're already over forty, it's time you had some sense. Who do you think you are? You think I don't know all your antics? You're drag-

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ging yourself after the director's daughter! Come on, take a look at yourself, and just think: what are you? You're a zero, nothing more. You don't even have a kopeck to your name. Just look at your face in the mirror, how could you even think about it! (III: 197-198)

Poprishchin may consider himself to be of noble birth and, therefore, worthy of Sophie, but the head of department's rant, in highlighting his employee's lowliness, poverty and unattractiveness, draws attention to the mismatch between his fancies and the reality of his situation. Despite Poprishchin's anger towards the department head, explaining his comments away by suggesting he is 'jealous' of him (III: 198), he nevertheless seems to be subconsciously aware of the truth of the gulf in status between himself and Sophie. This can be seen in the content of Madgie's letters to Fidèle, in which she 'writes', first, about the director being awarded a medal that Poprishchin could never receive but which she, a dog, has the privilege to lick and patronisingly describe as 'salty' (III: 203), and second, that Sophie is due to be married to the young and attractive court chamberlain, Teplov. Whether true or imaginary, these ideas serve to remind Poprishchin that Sophie and her family are a world apart from him in terms of their social standing.

The realisation that he could never be with Sophie, never be a part of such a family, no doubt plays a role in his interest in the news regarding the vacancy of the Spanish throne. He writes that the vacancy (coupled with the notion that it might be filled by a *woman*) '[...] destroyed and shook me so much that I positively couldn't do anything all day. Mavra [the housekeeper] observed that I was extremely distracted ('чрезвычайно развлечен') at the table. True, it seems I absent-mindedly ('в рассеянности') threw two plates onto the floor [...]' (III: 207). Just as his interest in Sophie can be considered a distraction from the ennui of his working situation, so too can his new interest in the vacant Spanish throne be considered a distraction from the

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reality of his social situation, in particular the gulf between him and those with whom he dreams of being closely acquainted. But this interest soon becomes more than a distraction: it swiftly develops into a delusional disorder, with Poprishchin proclaiming himself to be the new king of Spain.¹³ It is now no longer thoughts about Sophie, her family or the Spanish monarchy that partially distract him from his lowly situation, but rather his belief that he is the figurehead of a royal family.

Like Akakii Akakievich and his overcoat, Poprishchin's belief gives him a new lease of life. As their self-esteem and confidence rise, so too does their unusual behaviour. In a similar fashion to Akakii Akakievich chasing after a woman down the street, Poprishchin also acts out of character when he takes the liberty of entering Sophie's chamber, much to her surprise (and, most likely, horror). But despite this new confidence, neither character has any success: Akakii Akakievich is robbed of his coat and dies soon thereafter, while Poprishchin's delusions and continued descent into madness lead to his admission into a mental asylum, which he believes to be the Spanish court.

Poprishchin's arrival into the 'Spanish court' can be considered a case of 'out of the frying pan and into the fire'. His head is shaven, cold water is poured over it, and he is beaten. He appreciates that this is strange treatment for a king, but rationalises it by suggesting he must have fallen into the hands of the Inquisition (III: 213). It is also during this time that his diary entries show more explicit examples of madness, for example in the notion that the earth will soon sit on the moon (III: 212). The more he suffers at the asylum, the further he descends into madness. A brief glimmer of lucidity is seen in his final diary entry, in which he beseeches his mother to 'save your

¹³ Poprishchin is not the first literary figure whose descent into madness can be considered a response to his social situation. Consider also Cervantes's Don Quixote who, in believing himself to be a knight errant, also succumbs to self-aggrandising delusion. See Mroz, Gilly, *Cervantes and the Rise of the Russian Novel*, PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 2019, pp. 91-96.

poor son!’ and ‘see how they torment him!’ (III: 214), echoing the humanity of Akakii Akakievich’s appeal to his tormentors. But this fleeting, pathos-fuelled acknowledgement of his situation only plunges him further into his madness, with the extract ending with the question: ‘And did you know that the King of France has a bump under his very nose?’ (III: 214).¹⁴ Until this moment there is perhaps some hope that Poprishchin might not suffer the same fate as Piskarev or Akakii Akakievich, that he might recover from his distraction rather than allow it to precipitate his death. But, as Richard Gustafson observes, this comment serves to bring our feelings ‘back into focus, as we are reminded that this tear-jerking plea to mother is in fact part of the insane babblings of the madman’.¹⁵ Consequently it causes the reader to speculate whether Poprishchin might instead suffer a *worse* fate than Gogol’s two other protagonists: rather than being put out of his misery through death, he appears to be made instead to endure, at least for some time, a living death, locked eternally in a vicious circle of increasing distraction, madness, punishment and suffering. The lack of subsequent diary entries suggests that he either becomes so distanced from reality that he is no longer able, or allowed, to write, or perhaps, more mercifully, that his suffering is soon alleviated by death.

Although a female character augments Poprishchin’s distractibility, and can, therefore, be blamed at least partially for his demise, it is difficult to dispute that he was already on a downwards mental trajectory thanks to the pressures of rank and status so keenly felt in the capital. I have noted that Gogol had originally intended his work to be about a mad musician and, therefore, be more in line with the themes of

¹⁴ Other editions refer to the Dey of Algiers instead of the King of France. See for example: http://az.lib.ru/g/gogolx_n_w/text_0130.shtml. Both serve to highlight the grotesque element of this diary entry and, indeed, the whole work.

¹⁵ Gustafson, Richard F., ‘The Suffering Usurper: Gogol’s “Diary of a Madman”’, *Slavic and East European Journal*, 9 (1965), 268-280 (p. 279).

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Arabesques. However, he probably chose to make his protagonist a lowly civil servant because of 'the flood of newspaper stories about insane asylums and their inmates' from which he 'might have learned that the majority of patients in at least one Petersburg asylum were civil servants, the most common pathological symptoms being pride and ambition, followed by fear and timidity'.¹⁶ This made a quill-sharpening clerk a prime candidate for a story shaped around a status-induced descent into madness, and allowed Gogol both to explore and exploit the themes of 'pride and ambition [...], fear and timidity' in a protagonist with a deep-rooted and dangerous obsession with rank and status.

Gogol returns to the idea of the troubled artist in 'The Portrait', a story which shares various qualities with those discussed above. Like Piskarev, Chartkov is an impoverished painter trying to make a career for himself in St Petersburg. Like Akakii Akakievich, he is devoted to his work, sometimes becoming so immersed in it that he would forget not only about eating and drinking, but even about 'the whole world' (III: 86). And, like Poprishchin, he is cognisant of social inequalities in the capital; however, in Chartkov's case this is more in relation to fame and renown specifically, rather than to status and rank more generally (although they are in many ways connected).

Of Gogol's protagonists, Chartkov is the only one who explicitly possesses true artistic talent. However, he is also the only one imbued with an innate sense of impatience and fickleness, characteristics about which his professor repeatedly warns him:

Look out, brother [...] you have talent; it would be a sin if you ruined it. But you're impatient. Something draws you in, something takes

¹⁶ Fanger, *The Creation of Nikolai Gogol*, p. 115.

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your fancy – you busy yourself with it, and everything else becomes rubbish, you don't care about anything else, you don't even want to look at it. Watch out you don't become one of those fashionable painters [...] Take care, you're already feeling drawn to the world; I've already seen a stylish scarf around your neck, a glossy hat... It's enticing, you can start painting fashionable little pictures, little portraits for money. But talent is ruined by this, not developed. Be patient. (III: 85)

Although the professor reveals in his counsel that Chartkov is naturally prone to dandyism and distraction, the painter initially heeds his advice, immersing himself in his work and enduring privation to nurture his talent. The negative tendencies remain present, however, and the reader first observes a glimpse of them when Chartkov, passing by an art shop in Shchukin market, involuntarily stops in front of it. Gogol does not reveal what the protagonist's destination was, but he explains that he impulsively enters the shop and spends his final twenty kopecks on a portrait that he does not particularly want and definitely does not need. The portrait, the reader learns later, is of a demonic moneylender. Given the supernatural nature of the painting and the dangerous power it wields, the reader might forgive Chartkov somewhat for his apparent oblivion and frivolity at this moment; however, given his professor's warning about his tendency to succumb to temptation, the reader also cannot help but wonder how much of this episode was, at least in part, his own doing.

This momentary lapse of concentration and judgement begin the process of his steady downfall. That night he is haunted by his new purchase. He dreams of the moneylender climbing out of the picture frame and, when Chartkov sees him in possession of a bag of gold coins, it causes greed and envy to join fear in the painter's range of emotions. The following day, just as he is being evicted from his apartment and forced to pay the rent he owes, he finds a roll of gold coins, hitherto believed to

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have been imaginary, inside the portrait's frame. Having agreed to pay what he owes, Chartkov wonders what to do with the rest of the money. His initial thoughts are relatively commendable:

Now I'm set up for at least three years, I can lock myself away in my room and work. I now have enough for paint, for lunch, tea and expenses, for an apartment; now no one will interfere or bother me [...] if I work three years for myself, without rushing and without thinking about sales, I'll surpass them all, and perhaps become a famous artist.
(III: 96-97)

Even though he aims to nurture his talent with only a basic level of comfort, there is nevertheless something disconcerting about his desire, not to create an elevated work of art, but to 'become a famous artist', which hints at his inner greed and conceit. These traits quickly quell his initial, more praiseworthy thoughts: looking at his new wealth, '[n]ow everything that he had looked at until then with envious eyes, which he had admired from afar, his mouth watering, was in his power' (III: 97). Several ideas cross his mind, such as wearing a fashionable tailcoat, renting a fine apartment, attending the theatre and, like Pirogov and Kovalev, going to a pastry shop. Within moments of having this new train of thought, he is on the street, ready to put this plan into action. Having satisfied these material desires, his next aim is to 'seize fame by the tail and show himself to the world' (III: 98). The appearance of the portrait in Chartkov's life thus serves to bring his inner greed to the fore, and, in so doing, distracts him once and for all from the true path of art.

While it is difficult to dispute that the portrait exacerbates Chartkov's distractibility, it is the nature of his first clients that appears to seal his fate. The aristocratic mother and her teenage daughter care for little other than appearances, to the extent

that the former refuses to allow Chartkov to paint the latter as she really is; instead, she must be painted wearing a different dress and sitting not in his apartment, but outside in a garden. This first session causes the painter to struggle to concentrate on his usual work, having become entirely distracted by the tasteless novelty of the experience and by the impending return of his clients. In the next session the mother insists on him removing all the features, nuances, tones and hues he had imparted on his portrait. In his frustration he spends the next few days imparting them instead on an unfinished sketch of Psyche, which mother and daughter, upon their return, assume to be their commission. Thanks to their misguided delight, he is beset with new commissions, with each new client asking him to paint them not in their true guise, but as Mars, Byron or others. The more quickly he seeks success, the more quickly his talent degenerates, a vicious cycle that continues until, perhaps most tragically, he grows tired of painting altogether, preferring instead his life in high society, ‘a distracted life (‘*рассеянная жизнь*’) and society in which he tried to play the role of a man of the world – all this took him far from his work and thoughts’ (III: 109). Painting soon fails to serve as a source of enjoyment for Chartkov, to the extent that he even has his students finish his paintings; now, the sole purpose of art is to enable him to retain the fame he had so greedily sought.

Having reached this state – intoxicated by fame, entirely distracted from any lofty artistic path, and having wasted his talents – he is asked to consider the painting of an acquaintance. This fellow painter had just returned from Rome, where he had ‘immersed himself like a hermit in his work and undistracted study (‘*неразвлекаемые ничем занятия*’)’ and where ‘he ignored everything and gave everything to art’; thanks to this persistence he acquired ‘a majestic idea of creation, a powerful beauty of thought, and the lofty charm of a heavenly brush’ (III: 111). This commitment to his artistic goals, this dedication to his task, enabled the painter to create a work of art

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so elevated that it nearly brings its beholders to tears. When asked his opinion, Chartkov is unable to respond; he bursts into tears and rushes out of the hall 'like a madman' (III: 113).

For the first time in many years, Chartkov becomes inspired to pick up his paintbrush and endeavour to create a divine piece of work. His choice of subject is a fallen angel. To his despair, he has no success: everything comes out forced, akin to the works he has painted for his clients. Vexed by his inability, he catches sight of the portrait of the moneylender, which had been concealed since the fateful morning he found the roll of gold coins, and a raging envy fills his soul. However, instead of working even harder in an attempt to re-find and re-ignite the talent he had spurned in favour of quick fame, he purchases as many great works of art as possible only to tear them apart. If he cannot possess the talent required to create a masterpiece, then his only other option is to destroy the works of those who do possess it. Overflowing with envy, spite and rage, his behaviour venomous and uncontrollable, he passes away from a combination of fever, consumption and hopeless insanity, seeing in the faces of those at his deathbed none other than that of the moneylender.

Chartkov's fate has some parallels with that of Petro in Gogol's 'St John's Eve' ('Vecher nakanune Ivana Kupala', 1830), who also turns to demonic powers to attain quick wealth. In this text he makes a pact with the demonic Basavriuk and the *Baba-Yaga* to possess sufficient gold to gain his beloved Pidorka's father's consent to their marriage. Once married, Petro becomes unseeing and unfeeling to everyone and everything around him, including his young wife, and begins his descent into distraction. When he finally recalls that in exchange for wealth he had to shed the blood of Pidorka's young brother by brutally decapitating him, he is swept off by the devil, leaving behind nothing more than a pile of ash. As one of Gogol's *Dikan'ka* texts, the theme of distraction, particularly with regards to divine talent, is absent from this

story. However, it nevertheless serves as a cautionary tale regarding the destructive nature of unearned, and particularly unholy, wealth.

Returning to Gogol's *Arabesque*, Part Two of 'The Portrait' shows what might have been Chartkov's fate, had he possessed more willpower and less greed, and thus not allowed himself to be tempted by wealth and fame and distracted from his artistic path. In this part the reader learns how the portrait of the demonic moneylender came into being and the despair it unleashes on all those who possess it. A young painter at an auction where the portrait is being sold explains that it was created by his father, having been commissioned by the moneylender himself. However, it brought so much anguish and oppressive feeling to his father that only life in a monastery, including several years as a hermit, were enough to restore the tranquillity of his soul and, therefore, the divinity of his painting. The sermon he provided to his painter son following this experience serves as a didactic message to all of Gogol's protagonists: 'You have talent, and talent is the most precious gift from God – don't ruin it [...]. For man, a hint of the divine, heavenly paradise is found in art [...]. Sacrifice everything to it and love it with all your passion [...]' (III: 135). As this speech suggests, creative talent is closely interwoven with divine power, and it largely reflects Gogol's own belief in his divine mission to become a great writer. For the author, deviation away from nurturing one's God-given talent can be considered akin to deviation from God Himself. In this light it is difficult to dispute that one of the main reasons why Gogol's protagonists suffer either death or near-death in the Petersburg tales is their need for punishment for their lack of steadfast commitment to their work – exchanging it instead for status, wealth and/or women – and, therefore, to God.

As this paper shows, all four protagonists allow themselves to be distracted in some way from their lives in St Petersburg, just as Gogol had been briefly by his first trip to Lübeck. Because of this, tragedy befalls Piskarev, Akakii Akakievich, Poprish-

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chin and Chartkov, while Pirogov and Kovalev also do not escape entirely unscathed. But while attraction to women, anxieties around status and wealth, and lack of will-power to stick to one's divine artistic (or pseudo-artistic) path are common shortcomings among these protagonists, leading to their distractibility and, therefore, their downfall, they share one other trait: a lack of a social network. As Karlinsky points out, '[w]hatever devilry, tragedy, or mischief may have stalked Gogolian characters in the Ukrainian settings of Dikanka or Mirgorod, they all lived in warmly integrated communities and had their families and loved ones to turn to in times of crisis.'¹⁷ Conversely, the Petersburg protagonists have no one to turn to. Although the narrator of 'Nevsky Prospect' tries to convince the reader at the beginning that Piskarev and Pirogov are friends, the latter's absence from the former's funeral points to a distant acquaintanceship at best. The only people who show some interest in Akakii Akakievich and Poprishchin's welfare are their housekeepers; however, they generally have little association with the protagonists, in comparison, for example, to Osip with Khlestakov in *The Government Inspector (Revizor)*, 1836). As for Chartkov, although he is described as having friends, they are seldom mentioned, and the reader can, therefore, assume that he is as loyal to them as he to his art. Because of the protagonists' lack of companionship, when they suffer, go mad and eventually die, they do so largely alone. Based on this, one cannot help but wonder whether, had these characters had a supportive social network – or at least someone to whom they could mention their meagre financial situation, their longing for recognition for their work, or even their attraction to a young woman on Nevsky Prospect – their fates might have been quite different. But it also draws attention to Gogol himself as an aspiring St Petersburg writer: did he, too, struggle with loneliness, particularly in the early stages of his career? It is true that his correspondence and biographical evidence sug-

¹⁷ Karlinsky, *The Sexual Labyrinth of Nikolai Gogol*, p. 111.

gest that his years in the capital were replete with social activity. However, given the isolation and alienation of his protagonists, it is difficult not to share Karlinsky's speculation as to whether 'the self-discipline [Gogol] had to exercise to suppress his need for warm human contact [...] was already taking its psychological toll in inner loneliness, frustration, and alienation, as it clearly was in the last decade of his life.'¹⁸

In the early years, travel abroad served to distract Gogol from his biggest fears and anxieties, primarily of not succeeding in creating great literature. But in later years, following his success with *Evenings* and around the time he wrote the majority of the texts discussed in this paper, Gogol underwent a shift in attitude. Although, as with his first trip, his departure from Russia in 1836 was in part induced by anxiety, this time caused by the furore around *The Government Inspector* (it seems that failure and success sparked a similar response in him),¹⁹ he was also embarking on a quasi-spiritual journey. While his divine mission had played a small role in his original relocation to St Petersburg and his first flight to Lübeck, the panoply of reasons he provided for this initial departure abroad (including, most surprisingly, his alleged interest in a girl) suggests that it was not his main focus at this early stage. Now, however, having relocated abroad once more, his divine mission was front and centre. As he wrote to Zhukovsky in a letter from 28 June 1836:

I can say that I never sacrificed my talent for fame. No diversion ('развлечение'), no passion was able to take possession of my soul for even a minute and distract me from my duty ('отвлечь меня от моей обязанности'). [...] And my current removal from my homeland was sent from above by the same great Providence which sent everything down for my learning. This is a great turning point, a great period in

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 111-112.

¹⁹ Troyat, *Gogol: The Biography of a Divided Soul*, p. 153.

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my life. I know that I will encounter many unpleasant things, that I will endure both want and poverty, but there's no way I will return to society soon.²⁰

His goal of creating a great, didactic work, ordained by God, which he believed would be his epic *poema*, *Dead Souls* (*Mertvye dushi*, 1842), was now his focus, and he planned to endure significant hardship (with the exception, it seems, of St Petersburg's harsh climate) to achieve this aim. In contrast to his first flight to Lübeck, his new flight appears to have served less as a distraction from his situation and more as the means through which – together with hard work, perseverance and willpower, traits lacking in his St Petersburg heroes – he would finally succeed in creating the masterpiece he believed was his destiny. However, although he successfully completed the first part of *Dead Souls*, by the time he came to write the sequel, he was already immersed in an obsessive religiosity that would only continue to increase. This would not only see him burn his manuscript (mirroring his earlier incineration of all the copies of *Hanz Küchelgarten* he had purchased), but would also, in tragic irony, lead him further away from achieving his goal than it would inspire him towards it, and drive him towards compulsiveness, distraction, and a tragic fate that would not be misplaced among his Petersburg protagonists.

²⁰ This letter can be found in volume 11: http://az.lib.ru/g/gogolx_n_w/text_1841_pisma.shtml

ZOJA KUCA

WAR THROUGH THE EYES OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN: SVETLANA ALEXIEVICH'S
CONFESSION BOOKS *THE UNWOMANLY FACE OF WAR* AND *THE LAST WITNESSES*

I am writing not about war, but about human beings at war.

I am writing not a history of a war, but a history of feelings.

(Алексиевич 2019, 15)

Introduction

Svetlana Alexievich is not just a modern writer, but also an active public figure. She expresses her life position on the pages of her books and through the media.¹ She has devoted her prose in particular to debunking myths and established opinions in the Soviet conceptual sphere. Her books cover various historical events of the twentieth century, but at their centre is a constant archetype – the ‘little person’, who speaks for him- or herself about what is happening in the country and beyond. The heroes of these best-selling novels are the simplest and most ordinary people, who appear as mere pawns in a historical maze of events. They are a kind of polyphonic novel-confession: dozens of little stories in each book, representing different milestone events, social and political peripeteias, forming a new perspective on the history of the USSR, which until recently seemed to the *Soviet person* so unremarkably simple and straightforward.

¹ During the unprecedented protests in Minsk on 12 August 2020, Alexievich made an open statement to President Lukashenko via Radio Svoboda: ‘... I would like to say what journalist Svetlana Kalinkina said beautifully: “Go away beautifully...!” But it won’t work, there’s already blood [spilled]. Go away before it is too late, before you plunge the nation into a terrible abyss, into the abyss of civil war! Go away! Nobody wants a Maidan, nobody wants blood. Only you want power. And this desire of yours for power demands blood.’ (Алексиевич 2020) [All translations are mine unless otherwise stated. (Z. K.)]

In this article I will engage in an analysis of two books whose narrators are women and children. The rather stereotypical views that women are incapable of doing traditional men's jobs and that children's visions of war are not worthy of attention are wonderfully dispelled by the writer in *The Unwomanly Face of War* and *The Last Witnesses*. The former was first published in a limited edition in October 1984. A number of memoirs were simply stricken out by the censors, and the author herself was accused of debunking the heroic image of *Soviet woman*. It was only the second edition, published after the collapse of the Soviet Union, that lived up to the writer's original intention.

In the case of *The Last Witnesses*, there are also fundamental differences between the first and second editions of the book. The number of stories in the second edition has not only increased, but some of them have been supplemented. It is the post-Soviet edition, without a preface or afterword, and without photographs of eyewitnesses, which truly reflects the universal tragedy (Ушакин 2008, 236-237). Instead of a foreword, Alexievich quotes the well-known words of Fyodor Dostoyevsky: 'Would there be justification for peace, our happiness and even eternal harmony, if even one tear of an innocent child were to be shed for the sake of this, for the strength of the foundation? And he answered himself – this tear will not justify any process, any revolution. No war. It will always outweigh it. Just one tear...' (Алексиевич 2019, 5).

A woman's voice about war

The subject of women in war is not a new one, either in fiction or as research material. The presence and participation of women in the First World War in front-line action radically changed the stereotypical attitude to women. Zhanna Abasheva draws attention to the dramatic changes in the position of women after the First World War

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(Абашева 2015, 137). In 1917 the first female death battalion was formed in Russia, whose representatives took an oath to fight on the front line. The main purpose of this battalion was to encourage male soldiers to continue fighting at the front (ibid., 138, 140). During the Second World War, based on the experience of the Women's Battalion, a series of decrees was passed to encourage women to serve in the Soviet army. As part of the initiation, schools were opened to train women in purely military occupations. Women accounted for the vast majority of medical personnel, some became pilots and snipers, and others went to the front line.

In modern times, the topic of women's experiences of war, women's memories of war, women's military psychology and behaviour patterns have gained particular relevance in relation to gender studies. Magdalena Baran states that since antiquity, famous female warriors have always been present in our history, and their extraordinary courage and bravery have been emphasised by historians. However, she draws attention to one key point, that in the case of the present narrative, the main component – autobiography and auto-reflexivity – was missing. 'We learn their stories only through the mediation of other, mainly historical documents, thus not gaining their own point of view, their own history, their perception of the war' (Baran 2017, 257).

Alexievich's book, notably, was not the first in a series of narratives about women involved in front-line action. The Soviet censorship allowed a number of books devoted to women's war themes to be published: Vitaly Zakrutkin's *Матерь человеческая* (1969), Natalia Kravtsova's documentary-fiction tale about airmen *От заката до рассвета* (1969), the book *Доктор Вера* (1966) about a young surgeon, Vera Treshnikova, by Boris Polevoy, and Boris Vasilyev's *А зори здесь тихие...* (1969) about five anti-aircraft female soldiers who gave their lives in a deadly battle with the enemy. The above works belong to prose fiction, which heroises women, glorifying their military exploits, rather than presenting a more factual picture of events.

The first version of Alexievich's book, published as a separate edition in 1985, did not contain all the memoirs prepared by the writer, as many were not allowed by the censors. Her own goal was quite the opposite of the existing arrangement: to show the war through the eyes of a woman, to present it as it really is, without embellishment and heroic pathos. The emotional and sensitive side of the events plays a key role. The writer looks for and finds in the female character a 'little person' with her weaknesses and strengths, bravery and fear, courage and cowardice. The war changed not only a person's moral world and the scale of values constructed long before – at the front, teenage girls forgot about their youth and immaturity. They were prepared to sacrifice themselves for their homeland, for the sake of their loved ones, for those who had already died or those who were waiting for them at home. 'When I was nineteen I had the award 'For Courage'. At nineteen I turned grey. At nineteen both lungs were shot in my last battle, the second bullet went between two vertebrae. My legs were paralysed... I was considered dead...' (Алексиевич 2019, 66).

Svetlana Alexievich wrote her novel in the genre of documentary-fiction prose 'from the voices of life itself' after reading Ales Adamovich's book *I am from a fiery village* (ibid., 9), co-authored with Janka Bryl and Volodymyr Kolesnik. Alexievich's book focuses on factual authenticity.² The writer felt a desire to write about the phenomenon of women at war in the genre of eyewitness memories, choosing women rather than men as narrators, as was common in wartime literature. One of the heroines of Alexievich's book recollected in an interview: 'We, the heroines of this book, were so exposed to her, as if we were living through the war all over again. Perhaps this is why it is not a book, but a real confession of women's souls. Sveta very subtly felt the right vein... She listened so attentively, let everything through to her soul: about how people loved during that war, how they perished and were buried in

² See Kuča 2018, 20-34.

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anonymous graves, in their coats. And she listened and wiped away her tears' (Шахнович 2015). Alexievich's heroes are more than two hundred women war veterans, medical workers, underground fighters, snipers, partisans; short stories are the basis of the narrative. The writer appeals to the reader's consciousness and creates a new gender reality: 'during the Second World War the world witnessed the female phenomenon' (Алексиевич 2015, 5).

The genre of documentary fiction prose was also borrowed by Alexievich from her teacher, Ales Adamovich.³ The journalistic practice of tape-recording a text, then taking it down from the tape, has never found its application in literature. Interestingly, it was Adamovich who first gave the future writer the addresses of some women front-line workers, as well as the money to visit them. Work then began on the book-confession *The Unwomanly Face of War*. A number of plays based on the book were created which were performed to great acclaim not only at the Taganka Theatre in Moscow, but also at other theatres throughout the Soviet Union. The Belarusian filmmaker Viktor Dashuk made seven documentaries called 'War Has No Woman's Face', which won a number of prizes, including the prestigious Silver Pigeon in Leipzig (Басова 2009, 95).

The book-confession *The Unwomanly Face of War*, like the writer's other books, does not have a single storyline, but the voices are united by common themes, plots and details that add to the story's dynamics. The internal links between the stories – notes Karolina Górska – are loose, so that the integrity of the book is maintained, even if the stories are rearranged, added to or removed altogether (Гурска 2018, 198). 'What interested me most in my archives was the notebook where I wrote

³ The writer recalls (Алексиевич 2015, 5): 'My teacher Ales Adamovich, whose name I would like to mention with gratitude today, also believed that it was blasphemous to write prose about the nightmares of the twentieth century. You can't make these things up. The truth has to be told as it is. What is required is "superliterature".'

down the episodes that were crossed out by the censors. And also – my conversations with the censor. There I also found pages I had thrown out myself. My self-censorship is my own prohibition’ (Алексиевич 2019, 25).

Defining the genre in which the writer’s books are written makes it difficult for many researchers. These include documentary-fiction prose, as we have noted, ‘epic-choir prose’, ‘oratorio novel’ and simply ‘cathedral novel’ (Десюкевич 2017, 31). Olga Desiukevich defines the genre of the book as a polyphonic novel which fulfils the function of collective memory. The aim of its creation is to understand, realise and make sense of a tragic event, to reveal a repressed truth (ibid., 32). Daniela Lugarich, for her part, believes that the book is written in the genre of a testimony, in which the appellate function plays a key role (Лугарич 2014, 21). A similar claim is made by Anna Mareeva, who argues that in our time ‘the impact of contemporary documentary prose on society, on the reader’s and the world’s interest in literary criticism, in fact, cannot be overestimated’ (Мареева 2019, 136-139). Irina Murzak, following other researchers, sees Alexievich’s work as a special space ‘in which there is a dialogue between the writer and the reader’ (Мурзак 2016, 133). In the books, she continues (ibid.), the historical fact presented is enriched by an emotional assessment, and this assessment is presented on behalf of women, which in turn introduces a moment of deeper psychology. The tragedy of society, the drama of families, the psychological trauma of individuals, all of this resounds with emotion in the pages of Alexievich. Alexievich writes that when a person who has been through the war tries to convey these events in words, ‘he has a sense of disaster. A person becomes numb. He wants to tell, others would like to understand, but they are all powerless’ (Алексиевич 2019, 14). The polyphony in Alexievich’s books, as Romanova notes, ensures the development of an intersubjective dialogisation, in which not only the echoing of voices plays a key role, but also the polyfunctionality of their perception and reading by both the

writer and reader (Романова 2019, 269). All the voices in the confessions form a kind of text with a single guiding theme consisting of several peripeteias and collisions, complicated by the characters' sensual sphere: their mental anxieties and experiences (ibid.). It is not without reason that Belarusian researchers of Alexievich's work refer her books to the problems of 'catastrophic Soviet society', which is the aggravation of a number of material and spiritual problems 'whose sources were war and disasters, and the consequences – socio-cultural changes in the lives of both individuals and many families, villages, cities, regions and countries as a whole' (Томашевская 2016, 100). Both during and after the war, those fortunate enough to have survived had physical and mental health problems, impenetrable fears and an inability to live in 'peacetime'.

Fragmentariness, which is a structural feature of Alexievich's books, contributes to the division of the text into two groups: 1) the characters' statements, and 2) the author's descriptions and remarks (Сивакова 2014, 134). The confessions of the narrators are structured according to the principle 'the world around me'. All statements have an autonomous character, devoid of any confrontations and clashes of position. The main task and aim of the author is to bring order to the sound of many different voices, both taken together as a group and for each one separately (ibid., 135). The author's role is not only to present the material as a montage, but, most importantly, to select the information correctly. The author, combining dozens or even hundreds of narrative voices, forms a unified whole. Despite the fact that the book is based on documents, the author's processing of it into a single story has a powerful artistic effect on the reader's emotions (Гурьска 2017, 295).

It is also worth noting that the chapters of *The Unwomanly Face of War* are not uniform. The first chapter, 'A Man More Than War', is devoted to the writer's own recollections and observations. In this chapter Alexievich included those frag-

ments of memories which had previously been taken out by the censor, as well as her conversations with the censor. The second chapter, 'I Don't Want to Remember', consists of just two lengthy stories. The next chapter with the title 'Grow Up, Girls, You're Still Green' consists of 45 stories whose heroines are cooks, hairdressers, signallers etc. In this part of the book, the contrast between women and men at war is perhaps most telling. In spite of the fact that a woman at war ceases to be a 'Turgenev lady' and becomes a soldier, she retains her femininity to a large extent. Even at this difficult time, according to the memoirs, women were trying to look after themselves – they painted their lips, did their hair, and those who had not had their high-heeled shoes taken away, sometimes put them on, even for a moment, just to feel like a woman again. The war did not kill a woman's desire to love and be loved: she falls in love, dreams of dating, of family (future or present). The series of portraits presented in the book allowed Alexievich to summarise the experience of many people, notes Desiukevich (Десяюкевич 2017, 32). Such a multidimensional approach allowed the writer to present the women's view of the war holistically (ibid.). The key to the selection of characters and their confessions plays an important role here: Alexievich was interested in the views of women of different military professions on the war. As the writer herself points out: 'each of us sees life through her own work, through her own place in life, or in an event in which she takes part. [...] A nurse has seen one war, a baker another, a paratrooper a third, a pilot a fourth, an assault rifle platoon leader a fifth ...' (Алексиевич 2019, 99). From this quotation it follows that Alexievich seeks to present the war in a broader scope: far-sighted, multidimensional.

Throughout the book the opposition is not only expressed as a binary feminine/masculine formula. The author often resorts to the use of narrative opposition: motifs, archetypes, even stereotypes; war/peace; inability to live at war/inability to live in peace time; going to war as teenage girls/returning as disabled women; serene

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life in peace/life in the face of death at war. These oppositions are also expressed in the titles of chapters and subchapters: 'A soldier was needed ... but I still wanted to be beautiful', 'About men's boots and women's hats', 'About a girlish descant and sailors' superstitions', 'About the silence of terror and the beauty of fiction', 'About a basket with a mine and a teddy bear', 'About mums and dads', 'About small life and a big idea'.

As noted above, the novel's entire focus is on women. If there is any mention of a man, he is merely a background to reveal the female image, to reinforce it. The male image is in opposition to that of the female. The writer tries to show that women's memory of war is different from that of men: Alexievich believes that in the representation of war 'men hide behind history, behind facts, war captivates them as action and an opposition of ideas, various interests, while women are captured by feelings' (ibid., 17). Alexievich represents women's memory of war because they are the most 'high-aperture' in their tension of feeling, in their pain (ibid.). She persistently proves the point that women are capable of seeing what men are closed to, that it is harder for a woman to kill because she gives life, carries it within her and nurtures it (ibid., 18). Women's military memory differs from men's in that there is no room for memories of victories, titles, incredible feats; there is a lot of suffering in this memory, and it is not only people who suffer, but also the earth, birds and trees (ibid., 10). One of the narrators, who went through the war with his wife, testifies: 'I have memorised many of her stories and have as they say now, 'got them straight' for my grandchildren. Often I tell them not my war, but hers. It is more interesting for them. [...] I have more concrete military knowledge, but she has feelings' (ibid., 121). Men – Alexievich writes – 'are reluctant to let women into their world, into their territory' (ibid., 18). Of course, there is heroism in this book too, but the focus is not so much on it as on the feelings and experiences associated with it. The writer points out that

the authenticity of feelings is the most essential aspect of memoirs. 'Crying and screaming cannot be subjected to processing, otherwise the main thing would not be crying and screaming, but processing. Instead of life, literature will remain. Such is the material, the temperature of this material' (ibid., 19).

Magdalena Baran points out that women see war without any political nuances, strategic goals or ethical dilemmas. For her, war is about destroyed homes, the tragedy of people whose names we will never know, it is about fear and death, everything else is just a supplement (Baran 2017, 255). Even the spatial coordinates, the places where battles took place, are seen differently by women's eyes than by men's. Whereas the male soldier concentrates his attention on specific geographical names, very precise distances, the woman notices nature, assesses events through the prism of natural phenomena (Кęпа 2015, 44).

Feminine/non-feminine, feminine/masculine are the two main binary oppositions on which Alexievich bases her narrative. All the voices in the narrative speak of the female phenomenon, reinforcing it with the masculine, and this opposition concerns both actions and feelings. 'It is not a woman's business to hate and kill' (Алексиевич 2019, 44). Or: 'We shot well, even better than the male snipers who were recalled from the front line for a two-day course, and who were very surprised that we were doing their job' (ibid., 42). And another: 'Everyone had a medal, and they were afraid of mice' (ibid., 48). A woman who remained a woman in her being, became a man for a time, but after the war she learned to be a woman again (ibid., 49). Yet, in view of army discipline and the harsh conditions of war, a woman (as a soldier) was, in theory, expected to renounce her sexual identity. In practice, however, she was expected to function androgynously, displaying both her feminine and her masculine characteristics, depending on the situation (Zywert 2015, 147-148). Thus, a female soldier exclaims at the sight of another wounded soldier: 'Ah, I think you're a bloody

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Turgenev lady! A person is dying, but she (we are talking about her herself), a delicate creature, you see, has puked' (Алексиевич 2019, 88). Here it is possible to talk about a moment of initiation, a kind of turning point, radically changing a given personality through trials. The turning point can be traced, for example, to the first time a man is shot by one of the narrators, when she is confronted by the shocking sight of a wounded soldier, and, in some cases, after a change from the traditional female haircut to a short male haircut.

On the one hand, a woman consciously assumes the role of a man, often transforming herself from a young girl into a soldier. On the other hand, on a subconscious level, she necessarily longs to remain herself, a woman literally wearing all the attributes of femininity. 'Whatever women talked about, even about death, they always remembered (yes!) about beauty, it was an indestructible part of their existence' (ibid., 206). Despite all their efforts of will, even during the war, a woman still wanted to remain a woman. One woman recounts how, instead of eating two eggs, she used them to polish her worn boots, recalling with pride: 'Of course she wanted to eat, but the feminine thing won out – to be beautiful' (ibid., 211). Another recalls: 'In an abandoned hat shop we picked out a hat each and, in order to stay in them for a while, slept sitting up all night. In the morning we got up... We looked in the mirror again... And we took off everything and put on our soldier's blouses and trousers again' (ibid., 213).

Such gender autonomy went against the imposed reality. A soldier, regardless of gender, was not supposed to be burdened by gender identity, notes Baran. In war, gender does not matter (Baran 2017, 259). 'It seems to me,' recalls one narrator, 'that I have lived two lives – a male life and a female life' (Алексиевич 2019, 88). Or the frequently repeated words of the commander: 'I need soldiers, not ladies. Ladies do not survive war' (ibid., 210). Interesting in this regard is the clash of points of view,

which shows the same opposition. There are male voices in Alexievich's narrative, which also testify to an internal confusion regarding the perception of the woman issue. One interlocutor, who had fought at the front, put it this way: 'But we men had a sense of guilt that girls were fighting, and I still have it. [...] I might have gone on a reconnaissance party with one, but I wouldn't have married her. [...] We got used to thinking of a woman as a mother and a bride. A beautiful lady, after all' (ibid., 101). Another man says: 'I met many beautiful girls among front-line girls, but we did not see them as women. But they were our girlfriends who carried us out of the battlefield. Rescued us, nursed us back to health. [...] But could you marry your brother? We called them our little sisters' (ibid., 103). One man has a starkly different view: 'Was there love in the war? There was! And those women we met there, beautiful wives. Faithful girlfriends. Those who married in the war were the happiest people, the happiest couples. [...] It's a lasting bond' (ibid., 122). Another states: 'You cannot imagine how good a woman's laughter is in war! A woman's voice' (ibid., 121).

In one 'confession' a narrator informs us that when women soldiers returned home they were too embarrassed to wear their awards (men did so without any problem). Soviet society preferred to remain silent about women's exploits in the war. 'Men', recalls the narrator sadly, 'are victors, heroes, grooms, they had the war, but we were looked at with very different eyes. Very different... I can tell you, they took our victory away from us. Quietly exchanged it for a woman's happiness. Victory was not shared with us. And that was hurtful' (ibid., 136-137). In the Soviet Union, Baran states, women's lives during the war were silenced, moreover there was an order to leave the truth about the war behind the doors of one's own home. It was not only a question of presenting the war exclusively through men's eyes, but also of preserving the 'untainted' view of women, of preserving 'the image of a woman giving life, not taking it away' (Baran 2017, 258). Under pressure from society, they were prepared to

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deny and keep silent about a fragment of historical events in which they had taken an active part. It was only in the 'home narratives' that the seemingly forgotten past came alive and was relived once more. Judith Herman, a psychologist, notes that the suppression of war memory is due to the pressure of a society that has not experienced violence (Herman 1992, 70). A display of military decorations awarded to Soviet women soldiers would have been at odds with public consciousness, for which the established image of a Russian woman as the protector of the hearth was still relevant.

Alexievich's documentary prose is built on the principle of confession. The confessions of the narrators are genuine, as the writer herself attests. In these meetings a conversation about war did not always come at once. Sometimes it was necessary to spend the night at the writer's house or simply wait for a moment of spiritual well-being, when the interviewee would not only be able to remember war-time events, but would be able to assess his or her actions and observations with hindsight. Often it was the dozens of years lived after the war that allowed frontline women to look inside themselves. 'Pain melts, destroys any falsehood. The temperature is too high! Ordinary people, I became convinced, behave more sincerely – nurses, cooks, laundresses... They, [...] get the words out of themselves, not out of newspapers and books they have read – not out of someone else' (Алексиевич 2019, 11).

Alexievich's books being discussed here can be treated as types of confession – not, of course, of the religious kind, but as sincere stories, deep and touching, sometimes even with intimate women's themes. Confession as a genre in theological literature is seen as the reconciliation of the confessor with God through the confession itself and the consequent absolution of sins. This type of sacred dialogue represents one of the religious sacraments. An essential factor of confession is the presence of a super-participant in the communion – God, while the priest mediates in the dialogue between God and man (Пригарина 2011, 11-12). In Alexievich's book, memory plays

the role of this mediator. That is, unlike sacred dialogue, the communicants of this process are the narrator-hero, the listener-reader and *memory*. Here we can speak not so much of a canonical confession, but rather of a confessional intention, i.e. a desire to speak out, to find support and understanding in the interlocutor, who may be the first person in all the years since the war to have heard the details of the narrator's life at the front (*ibid.*, 13).

The confession-tellings in Alexievich's book are not a public repentance, but rather a form of self-expression. Their main purpose is to share painful memories and evoke an appropriate reaction, either condemnatory or sympathetic. It is worth noting that even the most sincere monologue-confession can be devoid of repentance. It is precisely this trait that can be seen in the majority of stories in *The Unwomanly Face of War*. Confession in this work is presented in the form of various mental agonies associated with painful, unresolved memories. The confession-tales of female soldiers are a kind of test of truth, connected with their experiences of war events and actions.

Romanova points out that the main function of voice-witnesses is to transmit their inner state. These witness accounts, filled with emotionality, the confessional and drama, form a kind of 'living document of the era' (Гурька 2019, 6). 'The conceptual spiritual experience of the "voices" forms the "soul" history of the people' (Романова 2019, 268), creating the most objective image of tragic events. The documentary evidence, presented through hundreds of narrative voices, provides a panorama of the war, a comprehension of its drama and tragedy for the whole of society and for each individual. The clash of times – war and post-Soviet, the change of attitudes, the exposure of taboo themes are presented by Alexievich with the help of living witnesses of events which happened during the war. In order to enhance the significance of the events and to expose certain moments, places, feelings, events and details, the fictional documentary world is built on the opposition of feelings:

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love/hate, joy/disappointment, elation/depression, life/death, fear/courage and many others. Thus, the main purpose of the confessions is not to realise one's sinfulness, but rather to explicate the sincerity of what is being stated. In turn, the genre of confession is inextricably linked to memory. Memory is always linked to an emotional return to the past, whether positive or negative, to its time and space.

The memory mechanism is triggered at the outset, as Alexievich herself recounts her memories of the victory. 'We were children of Victory. Children of the victors. The first thing I remember about the war? My childhood longing amidst incomprehensible and frightening words. The war was always remembered: at school and at home, at weddings and christenings, on holidays and at funerals. Even in children's conversations' (Алексиевич 2019, 7). She continues (*ibid.*), 'The village of my childhood after the war was a woman's village. An old wives' village. I do not remember men's voices. That's how it has remained for me too: old wives talk about the war.' This is why Alexievich decided to tell the history of the war with the help of women's voices, their memories hidden away for decades. It was women's feelings that formed the foundation of this war (see Pavlenko 2020, 119).

The retrospective view allows storytellers to realise, understand and objectively evaluate what was not previously filled with meaning, observations and conclusions. Thanks to memory, an inner human need, there is a moment of confession in which a penitential element slips in. The confessional stories have the form of a monologue-remembrance, although they have an inner dialogue. This dialogue is conducted by the narrator with herself, with her memory and with her conscience. In many of these stories Alexievich (Алексиевич 2019, 11) sees a certain selectivity in what is said. This selectivity is caused by various factors: 1) the desire or unwillingness to look inside oneself at the time of the war events; 2) the ability or inability to assess events objectively decades later; 3) the fact that 'the feelings and language of

educated people, oddly enough, are often more subject to processing by time. Its general encryption. Infected with secondary knowledge. With myths.’ Confessional stories, of course, are nothing more than a dialogue between the same person: a younger person (during the war years) and an older person (at the time of the confessional story). It is a dialogue, firstly with oneself, and then with others. Seventeen- and eighteen-year-old girls went to war, and their memoirs and confessions are told at a more advanced age. They are different people, with a different life experience and a different perspective on past events from the war.

Alexievich often asks questions about truth: what truth do war veterans live by; is there only one truth? As it turns out, their truth is inextricably linked to the past and the present. ‘More than once I have encountered these two truths living in one person: their own truth, driven underground, and the common truth, imbued with the spirit of the times. The smell of newspapers. The former could rarely resist the total onslaught of the latter. If, for example, there were other relatives or acquaintances, or neighbours (especially men), in the flat apart from the narrator, she was less sincere and trustworthy than if it were just the two of us’ (ibid., 116). Alexievich writes about the unconscious bifurcation of people. Whether women want to live with that truth of the past in the present time of peace. One of the narrators, after reading her own confession sent by Alexievich, responded to the writer as follows (ibid.): ‘I am a heroine for my son. A deity! What will he think of me after this?’ Cases in which narrators rejected what they had previously said about the war are not isolated. Some of them ‘were in a hurry to forget, to erase the traces, because the evidence they had saved could become evidence, often costing their lives’ (ibid., 117).

The war with its trauma, a space of fear and death for veterans, does not end with its historical date. For them, the *locus horribilis* continues in peacetime, in their memory, in their minds, in the past, inextricably linked to the present. These fears fill

the oneiric space from which the women storytellers cannot free themselves. The retrospective look back allows them to look at the past with different eyes, to evaluate it in a different way. Living simultaneously in two dimensions – thinking about the past and drawing conclusions in the present – pushes the narrators into the depths of a life lived. The more often the characters turn to the past, the better they understand the present. Together with her characters Alexievich analyses her own inner world. She is trying to look deep into herself, into her soul. She notes (ibid., 23): 'I am trying to remember the person I was when I wrote the book. That person no longer exists, and even the country we lived in then doesn't exist. It was defended and in its name people died from '41 to '45. Everything outside is different: a new millennium, new wars, [...] a Russian (or rather, Russian-Soviet) man who has changed in a completely unexpected way.'

War is death, pain and fear, and this is totally incompatible with the female creative force – writes Zharkova (Жаркова 2015, 39). It is for this reason that Alexievich's book is a newness, as it raises the question of understanding the role of women in warfare. A woman – giving life, and a woman – taking it away. Hundreds of stories, hundreds of living voices testify to the terrible history of war, in which gender roles change, the moral and ethical side of life is on the wane, in which the question of life as an unconditional value is keenly raised.

Children's memory of war

The Last Witnesses is a sequel to 'Voices of Utopia', a documentary-fiction series by Svetlana Alexievich. The book consists of children's memoirs united by a common theme of war, reproduced from the shards of youthful memory, for which any violence is always more horrifying than for adults. The most innocent eyewitnesses to the

events of the Second World War, at that time aged between four and twelve, recount the experiences of Soviet children during wartime.

In *The Last Witnesses*, produced almost in parallel with *The Unwomanly Face of War*, there are exclusively children's voices, the voices of the children of war. Here the author is silent and does not interrupt the confessions, does not dare to comment on children's memories of their experiences (Ничипоров 2020, 37-38). The silence and numbness of the youngest eyewitnesses to the war becomes a running motif in most of the stories.

The composition of the work consists of one hundred stories united by a common thematic focus, shared emotions, similar desires and dreams. At the beginning of each confession there is information about the narrator: name, surname, age (during the war) and occupation performed during peacetime. The stories are set not only during the time of war, but also prior to it. In their recollections, the young witnesses try to grasp everything connected with the time of peace: this includes smells, objects and plant life. The children's perception of the present world carries over to their experience of war events: 'I'll tell you about smell... How war smells... [...] And so the beginning of the war for me is always associated with the smell of lilac. The smell of bird cherry. These trees always smell of war to me' (Алексиевич 2016, 13). Or another story: 'We like to watch a fire, a bonfire, but it's scary when a house is on fire. [...] A few days ago there was greenery here, there were flowers, but now everything is burnt out. [...] The black earth where everything was growing has disappeared somewhere, there is only very yellow sand. Only sand. It's as if you're standing next to a freshly dug grave...' (ibid., 14-15). With the moment of realisation, the colour scheme associated with the time of peace thickens, darkness displaces light. 'Then all shades of colour disappeared. All colours. The word "death" appeared for the first

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time, everyone began to say this incomprehensible word. And Mama and Papa aren't around' (ibid., 16).

Children's first encounters with death, their attempts to understand and define it eventually acquire a generalised form: death is everywhere, there is no hiding from it. Death is war, destroying everything that appears in its path – human beings, nature, the material and objective world. Death in the memories of children is, on the one hand, associated with the elements, mainly fire, and on the other hand, with eschatological phenomena. War and death are destructive forces which, in children's minds, become identical. Katya Korotayeva (ibid., 15) recalls her first encounter with the atmosphere of war: 'Fire didn't spare anyone. When you walk – there is a black corpse, meaning that an old man has been burnt. If you see something small and pink in the distance, it means a child. They were lying on coals, pink... Mother took off her scarf and blindfolded me... Thus we reached our house, the place where our house stood a few days ago. The house was gone. We were met by a cat which had miraculously saved itself. [...] No one could speak... Even the cat didn't meow. It was silent for days. Everyone was numb.' Lida Pogorzelskaya (ibid., 38) testifies: 'We didn't have time to remember. The adults barely spoke, they walked in silence, rode on the horses in silence. And it was getting scary. People were coming and coming, lots of people, and everyone was silent.' The memoirs are beyond ideology and politics. What is striking in them is not only the detail of what they see, but also the perceptiveness of a child's memory stretching back decades. This is why Alexievich, who engages in dialogue with the narrators of *The Unwomanly Face of War*, is silent in *The Last Witnesses*. These confessions need no further commentary.

In all of Alexievich's books the category of memory is a layout wrapped around war events. Confessions by both adult and child eyewitnesses touch on the theme of memory, or rather the dilemma: to forget the past or to remember it? Many

narrators say that they wish they could live at least one day without remembering the war. The war took the lives of millions of Soviet children: Russians, Ukrainians, Belarussians, Jews, Tatars, Latvians, Roma; it crippled the lives of millions, robbed them of their childhood. It is also worth noting that in the USSR, even before the Second World War, during the brutal times of Stalin's repressions, children of 'enemies of the people' could end up in orphanages, concentration camps and even slavery.⁴

Sergey Ushakin draws attention to a significant difference between *The Last Witnesses* and other narratives of this kind. Women, mostly uninvolved in institutional violence and, even more so, children, with their fragile psyche, experience tragic events deeply. 'In fact, the awareness of this tendency has largely contributed to the fact that, over the past two decades, domestic and foreign studies of war memory have witnessed a certain break with the traditional tendency to identify memories of the war with those of the military itself, be they commanding officers or ordinary soldiers' (УШАКИН 2008, 235).

In *The Last Witnesses* there are six main types of memory, discussed below, based on psychological categories, namely: 1) psychogenic amnesia caused by the loss of loved ones, especially parents; 2) rejection of one's own identity, the desire to 'zero out' one's own life history; 3) conscious withdrawal from reality through immersion in a prolonged sleep or an involuntary fall into a pathological clinical state (coma); 4) loss of consciousness and further amnesia caused by external factors; 5) imbalanced perception of reality, inability to associate past events with oneself; 6) memory loss in regard to close relatives and a dissociative perception of parents.

Psychogenic amnesia, caused by the loss of loved ones, is quite common in *The Last Witnesses*. The shock experienced by children from the loss of their loved ones can cause memory lapses for the rest of their lives. From the memories of

⁴ See, for example, Frierson 2011.

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Tamara Parkhimovich (Алексиевич 2016, 56): 'On the way, many children were met by their parents, but my mother was not there. Suddenly they say: "The Germans are in town..." [...] Someone told me that he saw my mother killed... And then I had a memory lapse... How we got to Penza – I don't remember. I don't remember being brought to the orphanage. Blank pages in my memory...' Another witness recalls (ibid., 100-101): 'She calls me "Anechka"... But I think I have a different name... As if I remember that I have a different name, but I forget what it is. Out of fear... Out of fear that my mother has been taken away from me... [...] Twenty-five years after the war I have only ever found our aunt. She used my real name with me and it took me a long time to get used to it...'

The rejection of one's own identity or the desire to nullify one's life history is another category of psychological trauma associated with memory. A good example of this category is the story of Anna Gurevich. Her rejection of memories from her war-time childhood is due, not so much to the loss of her parents (her mother survived and found her after the war), as to the experience of living in an orphanage. Her memories of it have been completely wiped from her mind. As an adult, after a chance encounter with an educator from the orphanage, shattered memories were restored. 'To this day, when I hear the word "grout", I immediately want to cry. I get the urge to vomit. When I became an adult, I couldn't understand: why, why does this word cause such disgust? I had forgotten about the orphanage... [...] I had even forgotten the orphanage, because I was already living with my mother. At home. [...] She went, but I couldn't move. Of course, I should have run after her, asked her about it. I didn't run and didn't catch her up' (ibid., 159-160). What is revealing in this story is not only the loss of memories, but also the reluctance to reconstruct them. Anna Gurevich was not just in a Soviet orphanage, but in an institution in occupied territory under German administration. The scale of the tragedy of this experience was partly revealed in her

memories, which came to light later, in particular the fact that blood was taken from children, including her (ibid., 162).

Conscious escape from reality through immersion into prolonged sleep can be caused by trauma. The following excerpt from *The Last Witnesses* may indicate that this child has not simply drifted off to sleep, but has experienced a state of coma (ibid., 12): ‘They said: it’s war, I – and this is understandable – at the age of five was not imagining any pictures. No fears. But out of fear, precisely out of fear, I fell asleep. And I slept for two days. For two days I lay there like a doll. Everyone thought I was dead. My mother cried and my grandmother prayed. She prayed for two days and two nights. [...] “Grandma,” I asked later, “how did you pray when I was dying?” “I asked for your soul to come back.”’

Loss of consciousness and further memory impairment caused by external factors is depicted in the case of children who were subjected to forced blood transfusions. These episodes can be characterised as a mild form of violence involving not only military personnel, but also doctors. From eyewitness accounts it becomes clear that the German command decided to make extensive use of donated blood from minors in the treatment of wounded soldiers in the Reichstag. From the recollections of Sasha Suetin (the events unfolded when he was four years old) we know how the blood donation procedure took place and what nervous shock it caused for the helpless participants. After an episodic blood transfusion the boy’s memories are not simply erased, but the psychological disorders associated with forgetting reality become apparent. He states: ‘I remember nothing else: who rescued us at the camp and how, how my brother and I ended up in an orphanage, how we found out that our parents had been killed... Something happened to my memory. I went into first grade. Children would read a poem two or three times – and they had memorised it. But I would

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read it ten times and couldn't memorise it. But I did remember that for some reason I didn't get "F's" from the teachers. Others did, but I didn't...' (ibid., 68).

An imbalance in the perception of reality and one of its clinical manifestations, an inability to associate past events with oneself, also occurred in some children as a result of trauma. For example, Lily Melnikova's grandmother was killed in a bomb attack in front of her when she was only seven years old. The girl was so shocked by this event that for a long time she could not remember her name. She held on to these memories as a kind of film which she herself did not perceive as her own. 'When they met, they remembered riding on a cart [...], how Grandma was killed in a bomb attack... How her old neighbour, Grandma's friend, called out to her when she was already dead: "Maria Ivanovna, come upstairs, you have two grandsons left... How could you die, Maria Ivanovna? Why did you die, Maria Ivanovna?" The girl, it turns out, remembered it all, but was not sure it was she who remembered it, and this is what was wrong with her. She only had two words left in her ears: Maria Ivanovna' (ibid., 80).

A final manifestation of memory-related psychogenic disorders is the obliteration of the faces of close relatives or the dissociative perception of one's parents. In the case of Gena Zavoyner (trauma at age seven), the arrest of her father by the Gestapo triggered in the girl a complete loss of memory of his face. 'When my father was taken away... He was wearing a trench coat, but I don't remember his face, it has completely disappeared from my memory. I remember his hands... They twisted ropes around his hands. Daddy's hands...' (ibid., 105). The war and the traumatic reality it caused often led to a very close psychological relationship between strangers who were brought together by fate, akin to a family bond. In one scene we read of a boy calling a Soviet soldier who had come to meet him 'father' and who in turn calls him 'son'. Vasya Chorevsky recalls: 'I saw our first soldier... I think it was a tank man, I

can't say for sure... And I ran towards him: "Daddy!!!" And he lifted me up in his arms to the sky: "Sonny!" (ibid., 33). This situation can also be characterised by generalisation: in the war all women were 'mothers' and the men 'fathers'. 'We called all military men "dads"', recalls Zina Kosiak (ibid., 16).

When it comes to the kinship relationship evoked by the reality of war, the archetypal image of the Mother in *The Last Witnesses* is a central one. In the mind of a child, this image represents a meaningful model on which his or her very existence depends. This archetype is manifold and has many forms of manifestation. It is inextricably linked to the theme of family and the child's life space. Interestingly, *The Last Witnesses* lacks the principal dichotomy of this archetype (mother vs. stepmother), and the binary nature of the image of the Mother postulated by Jung (Юнг 1996, 37-45) is negated in conditions of war. Although in Russian tradition the binary nature of the archetypal image of the Mother is generally represented in the form of an opposition of mother and stepmother (Гусева 2019, 125), in *The Last Witnesses* it is not simply absent, but the image of the stepmother takes on a positive connotation, indistinct from that of the mother. As has been shown above in the example of constructive dissociation, every woman for an orphaned child potentially becomes a mother, at least temporarily. Hence, in this work, the image of the Mother embodies kindness and affection, love and beauty, protection and security. 'A strange woman strokes my head. In those moments I realised: she looks like my mother...' (Алексиевич 2016, 7).

In the recollections of war witnesses this image is elevated to the rank of the sacred, becoming the centre of the universe. The mother as a person, all her actions and habits, the verbal and non-verbal sides of her existence, are *a priori* perceived in the minds of children as the only right thing, not subject to doubt, much less discussion. In the image of the Mother, Jung emphasised 'the magical power of women, the

wisdom and spiritual elevation that surpasses the limits of reason' (Вейт 2010, 63). It is precisely this archetype that we observe in *The Last Witnesses*. Taisa Nasvetnikova recalls bitterly (Алексиевич 2016, 22): 'Mother was my world. My planet.' In another memory she states: 'Mum kept us safe, we sat under Mum's "wings". Somewhere in our consciousness we were aware that something bad had happened, but Mum was with us and at the place where we were going to, everything would be fine' (ibid., 124). The lack of a mother was associated with a number of restrictions and shortages. 'I wanted to eat all the time. But even more, I wanted someone to hold me, to caress me' (ibid., 69). The loss of affection from a mother's death or absence often exceeded the body's physiological needs and hunger was not as bad as the lack of a mother. It was all possible to endure and bear as long as a mother was around: 'We ate pea soup for a month. The soup ran out. [...] We might have broth one day, one egg for everyone on another day... Often there was nothing at all. Mother would just hug and caress us...' (ibid., 74). The image of the mother is associated with happiness and the chronic fear of losing her. Tatyana Parkhimovich recalls: 'I dreamt about my mother every night. My real mother. And suddenly – she was there in reality, but it seemed to me that it was a dream. I can see – my mother! But I don't believe it. [...] I was afraid... I was afraid to believe in my own happiness...' (ibid., 56-57). At the sight of their mothers after the war, children's emotions were so strong that they lost consciousness, confused dreams and fairy tales with reality: 'One day... At dawn... this only happens in fairy tales, and also in war. There was a knock on the window... I got up: there's my mother standing there. And I lose consciousness...' (ibid., 198).

As can be seen, the image of the mother in *The Last Witnesses* is often endowed with features of holiness and the fabulous. The tale of the goldfish, told to Zhenya Belkevich (ibid., 6) by her mother in peacetime, is the one she remembers best. It is well known that fairy tale plots and images are easily retained in memory

and become cultural markers (Гусева 2019, 78). Children's consciousness, which is characterised by subjective interpretation, often tries to see the fairy tale in reality, to erase the boundaries between the visible and invisible world. In the case of Zhenya's memories, it is not so much the fact of remembering the fairy tale that is remarkable, but the fact of the fable itself – the fish grants wishes. Perhaps in wartime, children, more than ever before, expect to meet the same goldfish that would grant at least one of their wishes. 'No one asked us for any documents. They brought a piece of bread and tinned food right away. We don't eat, we're afraid – this happiness is about to end. It's an impossible happiness...' – recalls Lilia Melnikova (Алексиевич 2016, 78).

During the war people were in a state of limbo between life and death, and this raised many unanswered questions in the minds of children. Rimma Poznyakova recalls: 'What is it – war? What does it mean – I'm going to be killed? How is it that Daddy will be killed?' (ibid., 150).

Another analogy, that of the nursing mother, also applies to adolescent girls, eleven-year-old girls who had to play the role of a mother during the war and breast-feed their younger brothers and sisters so that they would not starve to death. 'The baby climbs up to me... Seeks my breast... Some milk... I remembered how my sister used to feed him... I pull out a nipple for him, he clicks away and falls asleep. I have no milk, but he will get tired, work away and fall asleep.' Valya Zmitrovich recounts how she had to save her little sister: 'We went to the village, picked up the baby girl, she was alive, only blue from screaming. My brother Ivan said: "Feed her." How am I going to feed her? I don't even have breasts. And he's scared she'll die, so he says: "Try..."' (ibid., 245). In this context there is not only a premature change of roles, but also a moment of initiation, seen also in scenes of hair cutting (ibid., 198). or the finding of a mother's first grey hair (ibid., 217), a first encounter with death (ibid., 23, 154, 240). War – notes Vitaly Darensky – is 'one of the symbols of initiation, i.e. a

symbolic passage through death, a test of death, after which one acquires a special experience which allows one to look at life and assess it as if from the outside, “from the perspective of eternity” (Даренский 2014, 93).

Spiritual initiation radically transforms a person as an individual (ibid., 98). This transformation is as much about adults as it is about children. It is difficult to speak of catharsis here: war experience tends to have destructive consequences, burdening and complicating subsequent life in peacetime. As Vera Zhdan states (Алексиевич 2016, 240-241): ‘I’m afraid of men... I got it from the war. [...] I didn’t get married. I didn’t learn what love is. I was afraid: what if I give birth to a boy...’

Conclusion

The Unwomanly Face of War and *The Last Witnesses* are initiation texts. Their reading generates initiation in the reader ‘through the extremely concentrated transmission of the tragic experience of war’ (Даренский 2014, 99). War, presented through the eyes of women and children, is more confronting than in the memories of men. Alexievich’s books do not have a single storyline, rather they are united by common themes and details which help the reader to understand these tragic events. The confessions of the characters in both books are structured along the lines of ‘the world around me’. Whereas in *The Unwomanly Face of War* Alexievich’s voice is clearly heard in her comments and her reflections on the war, in *The Last Witnesses* the author is silent. The horrific picture of war, seen through the eyes of its most impartial and innocuous participants, apparently needed no further commentary. The key function of the series known as ‘Voices of Utopia’ is that of appeal. Not only does Alexievich manage to bring taboo subjects to the surface, she breaks down the existing stereotype of the female soldier, as well as showing a new dimension to war through the eyes of children.

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OXANA ONILOV

**BRIDGING OR BONDING? EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF ONLINE SOCIAL CAPITAL ON
PROTEST PARTICIPATION IN POST-SOVIET MOLDOVA**

Introduction

Previous studies have suggested that social media may generate social capital (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe 2007, 2011), that is, the compound of interpersonal relationships and the resources acquired from them that scholars identify as central to cooperation (Coleman 1988; Putnam 2000). The inherent social structure of social media allows the construction and maintenance of online weak and strong social ties that consequently lead to the creation of online bridging and bonding social capital (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe 2007, 2011; Williams 2006). The strength of bridging social capital lies in the increased ability to get access to innovative information and knowledge, and to build consensus among different groups of people. The strength of bonding social capital is the social and emotional support and trust that exist among tightly knit relationships. The resources acquired from the two types of relationships have different potentials to promote cooperation. Of interest to this study is an examination of which type of online social capital can act as a mediating mechanism between Facebook use and offline protest participation. Although a large number of studies have focused on the relationship between social capital and participation in general, only a few have looked at the types of social capital developed online (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe 2007, 2011; Ellison et al. 2014; Vitak, Ellison & Steinfield 2011; Wellman et al. 2001; Williams 2006), and even fewer at the types of online social capital that can impact offline protest participation (Gibson & McAllister 2013; Hwang & Kim 2015; Skoric, Ying & Ng 2009).

The findings resulted in mixed and inconclusive findings because of the different socio-political contexts where these studies were conducted. The purpose of this paper is thus to expand our understanding of how Facebook can promote various types of social capital, which types can be conducive to offline protest participation, and how the socio-political and media contexts affect this relationship. The context in this paper is post-Soviet Moldova, a hybrid state with a politically monopolised media, and specifically the Moldovan anti-government protests of 2015. A significant contribution of this paper is that it is the first to touch upon the development of social capital in the post-Soviet online space, one of the least researched non-Western contexts.

Social capital and protest participation

The main idea behind the concept of social capital is that individuals who interact routinely create a sense of trust and responsibility, and this, in turn, leads to social cohesion and cooperation (Coleman 1990; Putnam 1993). Different types of relationships and network characteristics produce different kinds of social capital. This leads to what Putnam (2000, 22) calls the most important distinction between the different dimensions of social capital, namely bonding and bridging social capital. Bridging social capital is outward-oriented and is built among weak ties. It bridges cross-cutting networks and allows unconnected groups to share and exchange more information, and broaden and innovate knowledge (Williams 2006). Weak ties operate as bridges and facilitate access to resources that would be overlapping if found among strong ties. Bonding social capital is created between people with similar interests, as those among family members or friends. Bonding ties are characterised by multiple interactions and offer higher levels of trust, reciprocity and solidarity. However, the tighter one's social network, the less information will reach one, because the information will move in a circuit of overlapping relationships.

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Scholars have sought to adapt and apply the concept of social capital to political and civic participation (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988; Lin 2001). They argue that the more social capital people possess, the more likely they are to participate in civic and political activities (Putnam 1995; Uslaner 1998). Bridging social ties will facilitate the diffusion of politically relevant information, connect people to wider networks where they can meet new people (Granovetter 1973), and, hence, increase the probability that they will be asked to engage in civic or political activities. Bonding ties will bring in shared values and trust, and, thus, increase the possibility of someone accepting an invitation to become politically involved if asked by an acquaintance, friend or family member (Campbell 2013). This will influence the perception about the protest invitation, and the recruited person will be more likely to find it worthwhile (Passy 2001). Hence, both bridging and bonding, although through different mechanisms, may play their roles in engaging people in political participation. As Kitts (2000, 249) summarises:

If transmission of novel information is a key mechanism of disseminating activism, then weak ties should be more effective than strong ties. However, if persuasion or social approval is the underlying mechanism of network mobilisation, then effects should be greater for strong ties than for weak ties.

The paper will analyse the various types of social ties and the resources acquired from them that may have an impact on protest participation, with a special focus on their development in the online context.

Social media, online social capital and protest participation

Scholars refer to the forms of social interaction and the resources obtained from these interactions through information and technology networks in various ways: digital social capital (Mandarano, Meenar & Steins 2010), online social capital (Kobayashi, Ikeda & Miyata 2006; Skoric, Ying & Ng 2009; Williams 2006, 2007) and social media social capital (Gil de Zúñiga, Barnidge & Scherman 2017). Facebook, the platform analysed in this study, has been found to be a favourable environment to develop and maintain both types of online social capital – bridging and bonding (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe 2007; Williams 2007). Online bridging social capital is built around online weak ties and larger networks (Haythornthwaite 2002), while bonding ties maintain and solidify pre-existing ties (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe 2007).

Studies that examine the relationship between social media use and participation through the prism of online social capital show that social capital built on social media is not only a predictor of online political participation (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung & Valenzuela 2012; Valenzuela 2013) but is also related to offline political participation (Gil de Zúñiga, Barnidge & Scherman 2017). This means that relationships facilitated and built on social networks extend to the real world and facilitate direct political coordination and action (Bakker & Vreese 2011; Bennett & Segerberg 2011; Eltantawy & Wiest 2011).

While there is promising evidence that bridging and bonding social capital can be built online, and there is potential in these types of online social capital to impact political involvement, only a few studies (Gibson & McAllister 2013; Hwang & Kim 2015; Skoric, Ying & Ng 2009) have examined this relationship (although other studies have used the concept of social capital to explain civic engagement). Skoric, Ying & Ng (2009), in their case study of Singaporean society, found out that in order to elucidate the fear of participation in the offline context, the reliance on online bonding

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social capital was crucial (Skoric, Ying & Ng 2009). Gibson & McAllister (2013) performed a similar study in the Australian context and demonstrated that it was the online interactions between networks of family and friends that led to offline participation and that bridging social capital did not have any impact on political engagement. This was explained by the fact that in Australia, '[the] internet is less well used to mix with people of diverse backgrounds' (Gibson & McAllister 2013, 29), and online interaction occurs mainly between bonding ties. However, another study (Skoric, Ying & Ng 2009) based on South Korean youth revealed different results, in particular, that a well-constructed heterogeneous network (bridging social capital) increased the likelihood of participation, since this implied more resources to use, which would otherwise be harder to obtain from interaction with existing strong relationships (Hwang & Kim 2015). The explanation for these inconclusive findings can be attributed to the different contexts and the various ways social media were used in them. Hence, adopting the concept of social capital in this study means to consider the circumstances under which it was developed, specifically in the post-Soviet space.

Social capital in the post-Soviet space

Because of the omnipresent Soviet rule, the public life of Soviet citizens was politicised, monitored and controlled through different trade unions, mass membership organisations and the secret police (Howard 2003). Forceful integration into the communist political and social system, the formality and obligation towards the public sphere resulted in a failure to build trust and exchange civic skills, nurtured apathy towards civic and political engagement and built very low levels of bridging social capital. However, the control under which the Soviet citizens lived produced in return genuine and meaningful relationships among small, tightly knit family and friend groups and, therefore, strong bonding social capital. 'The privatisation of life'

(Sztompka 2004, 491) supplied the safety, mutual support, reciprocity and feelings of solidarity that were difficult or impossible to achieve from engagement in the communist public sphere (Howard 2003).

Although the Soviet system collapsed and institutional changes took place, ‘patterns internalised through communist socialisation are difficult to eradicate’ (Lasinska 2013, 25), and individuals’ current behaviour patterns are shaped by past experiences and the ways they interpret those experiences (Howard 2003). Therefore, many post-Soviet countries are still characterised by high levels of bonding and low levels of bridging social capital (Howard 2003; Lasinska 2013). These findings have important implications for the understanding and conceptualisation of social capital and citizen participation in transition societies and their development in the online post-Soviet space. In the case of Moldova, will online mirror offline? This inquiry is introduced in concordance with the following research question: Which type of online social capital led to offline protest participation in the case of the Moldovan anti-government protests?

Research case

The analysis of the impact of online social capital on protest participation was based on the case of the Moldovan anti-government protests of 2015. Moldova, a landlocked Eastern European country sandwiched between Ukraine and Romania, had never existed as an independent state within its current borders. Initially part of an independent principality for almost five centuries, Moldova has been, at different times, a territory of Imperial Russia, part of a reunited Romania, a Soviet republic, and in 1991 with the collapse of the USSR it emerged as an independent and sovereign state. The ideological heritage of the Romanian and a more recent Soviet past is a polarising issue at social, economic, geographical and political levels. The political narratives usually re-

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volve around a pro-Moldovan, pro-Romanian, pro-Russian or pro-European policy, and the reforms and prosperity of the country are often associated with its geopolitical orientation. However, no policy has turned out to be democratic so far. The first ten years of independence were characterised by a weak and fragmented party and state, tensions over national identity, a weak civil society and a ‘traumatic economic down-fall’ (Tudoroiu 2011). The chaos and disillusionment associated with the first independent rulers and Soviet nostalgia gave way to the installation of a communist government in 2001. For the next eight years Moldova was governed by a ‘neo-communist’ regime ‘representing an effort to mirror the totalitarian past with the limited instruments of authoritarianism’, as Tudoroiu (2011, 240) argues. After two terms and violent protests, the Communist party was removed from power in 2009 and replaced by loose coalitions of anti-communists calling themselves pro-Europeans. The pro-European politicians (2009-2015) brought Moldova into the gravest political and economic instability. Oligarchs and businessmen-turned-politicians engaged in fierce competition over control of state institutions, and the country faced a continuing increase in corruption and abuse of power, with all signs of state capture (Tudoroiu 2015).

In 2014 it was discovered that three Moldovan banks were involved in a banking scam: one billion US dollars had disappeared. The bankrupted banks were covertly bailed out by the government with loans taken from state reserves. These emergency loans created a hole in public finances equivalent to an eighth of Moldova’s GDP. The financial scandal resulted in the depreciation of the national currency, a rise in prices and tariffs, and a growing discontent and frustration with the governing parties. The escalation of anti-government feelings led a group of activists to organise long-lasting protests demanding the punishment of those involved in the banking theft and the resignation of government officials responsible for it.

A group of lawyers, journalists, analysts and public figures created a grass-roots campaign titled the Dignity and Truth Platform and organised protests amid the corruption scandal. Various protests, flash mobs and sit-ins were organised during the year, attracting protesters of all ages, occupations and political orientations from all over the country. The protests gained momentum in September when organisers estimated that 100,000 people took to the streets and became part of the largest protest since Moldova's independence. Although the Platform became the main organiser of the protests during 2015, it is important to note that there were other political parties and actors that joined the protests in the common fight against corruption.

After the protests ended, the country witnessed significant changes that brought the organisers and activists of the protests into politics and parliament. After the parliamentary elections of February 2019 and a political blockage, in June 2019 the oligarchic regime was removed from power. Since December 2020, the country has been headed by Maia Sandu, one of the main participants and organisers of the 2015 protests, and the pro-reform political party launched by her has a parliamentary majority as of July 2021.

These protests provide an interesting case study of how social media may reveal its potential in the mobilisation of a protest, especially when most of the Moldovan mainstream media was owned by the politicians involved in the theft and targeted by the protesters. When the protests started, 70% of Moldova's TV market was owned by just one politician, and the remaining 30% was spread among other politicians (Gogu 2016). Moreover, almost 70% of the Moldovan population used television daily as their primary source of socio-political news (Cărauş & Godarsky 2015), thus being exposed to a heavily politicised message.

Research design

In order to understand whether the role of Facebook for offline participation was mediated by online bridging or bonding social capital, this study relied on qualitative semi-structured interviews with protesters. The collection of data consisted of two stages. First, data were collected through an online survey in order to gain a picture of the typical protester and to select suitable participants for the interviews.

The study relied exclusively on data collected from Facebook users who attended at least one protest in 2015. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalised to those who did not use Facebook and could be different from and only partially representative of the general population. A search of Facebook protest events that took place in Moldova during 2015 was performed, and nine protest events were found. The Facebook accounts of those who indicated that they attended those events were extracted to form a list-based sample frame. After checking for duplicates, the events generated a total of 6573 attendees. Applying the Cochran (1977) formula, the required sample size was set at 363. Expecting a response rate of about 20%, a common response rate for web surveys (Lee 2010), the number of participants required to achieve the sample size was 1815. Hence, 1815 participants were contacted through Facebook and asked to complete the survey.

The survey comprised 21 questions and gathered data on protesters' socio-demographics, their general and protest-related media use, the protest-related activities which they engaged in online and offline, and the types of social connections they relied on primarily for their protest participation.

The purpose of the first data collection was to guide the sampling and identify participants for the follow-up qualitative phase. At the end of the survey, participants were given the option to participate in an interview with the researcher. Applying a purposeful sampling to the list of those who agreed to be interviewed, a total of 20

semi-structured interviews were conducted, 16 interviews with protesters and 4 with activists and organisers of the protest events. Out of these 20 participants, 14 were men and 6 were women. Their average age was 29 with a range from 20 to 50. All of the interviewees had at least a Bachelor's degree. The confidentiality of participants was protected by de-identification.

The interviews were conducted by the present author between January and June 2017. Depending on participants' availability and preferences, interviews were performed face-to-face, both offline and online, and several were conducted over the telephone. The average duration of the interview was one hour. While this study is presented in English, the surveys and interviews were collected in Romanian and, in a few cases, in Russian. The translation of selected quotations in English was done by the present author. Although every attempt was made to retain local nuances, some idiosyncrasies of Romanian and Russian could be lost in translation.

The interview questionnaire was divided into different, but interrelated thematic sections, and it revolved around participants' protest-related use of Facebook and its potential impact on offline participation. A special focus was put on participants' social media communities, their interaction with their online strong and weak ties, the resources they acquired from each type of tie and which ties and resources had a stronger impact on their offline protesting. The textual data of interviews were analysed using a top-down thematic analysis (Boyatzis 1998). This means that themes came from the characteristics of the topic, the present author's theoretical orientation and the established definitions of the main concepts mentioned in the literature review.

Familiarisation with the data started with the transcription of interviews and consequent repeated reading of them. The second step was the generation of initial codes that were sorted into potential themes. These comprised 35 broad categories that included the types of online activities in which participants engaged; the ways

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and reasons for using Facebook; interaction within the bridging and bonding groups of ties, online and offline; protest participation and protesters' use of television and the quality of its news; offline bonding relationships, etc. After the themes had been identified, they were refined, defined and named. This helped to delineate each theme and what aspect of the data each theme captured. It is important to note that the analysis implied a constant shift throughout the phases, and so it was first coded manually; then, to facilitate organisation, the qualitative data analysis software NVivo was used. This allowed for a smoother process of looking for patterns of codes and links between codes across the data.

Who were the protesters?

The survey response rate was only 10.25%. However, many studies that use web surveys report response rates below 20% (Lee 2010), and many others demonstrate that response rates below 10% are not uncommon (Fricker 2008; Porter & Whitcomb 2003). In any event, the survey's main objective was to provide a pool of potential contacts for qualitative interviews with protesters.

The survey results showed that Facebook was a significant tool for a key demographic group:

- young – 45% of Facebook users who attended the protests were in the age group of 25-34 and 34% in the age group of 18-24;
- relatively well educated – almost 80% of protest participants hold a higher education degree;
- employed – 57% of participants were full-time employees;
- slightly more men than women, 58% vs 41%, who protested at least three times.

Facebook was considered a very important source of protest-related information by 55% of the surveyed participants. Almost 80% of them used it more than once per day as a source of news, and 30% claimed to have learned about the protests from a Facebook post, video, shared news, message, protest event invitation, etc. In regard to online protest-related activities, 60–80% of the respondents claimed to have used Facebook to share protest-related information, express opinions about protests, discuss them with friends and keep in touch with other protesters, and almost 40% of them did so at least once a day during the protest period.

Online news portals followed, with 31% of participants considering it a very important source of protest-related information; more than half of the respondents used it with the same frequency as Facebook. However, only 13% of respondents learned about the protests from online news portals. It is important to emphasise that when interviewed, the majority of respondents claimed that they followed different news portals through Facebook.

Nearly 20% of respondents learned about the protests from discussions with their social connections and 30% by watching television. Other traditional media, such as newspapers and radio, as well as two social media pages used in Moldova (Twitter and Odnoklassniki), were never used as news sources by the respondents.

As these results indicate, protesters made extensive use of Facebook and considered it a significant news source. How and why exactly it had an impact on participants' offline participation is discussed more thoroughly in the interviews, and the results are presented below.

Online social capital: bridging or bonding?

Facebook is centred on people's connections, interactions and the resources they produce together, be it through managing existing relationships or building new ones

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(Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe 2007; Steinfield, Ellison & Lampe 2008; Vitak, Ellison & Steinfield 2011; Williams 2006). The qualitative interviews with protesters reflected on the type of online social capital that led to protest participation. Was it online bridging or bonding social capital that influenced the formation of a participatory attitude and behaviour? Did the information received online from close social contacts exert a stronger effect on political behaviour than information coming from weaker social contacts? To what extent did information and messages of social support and trust coming from online strong ties influence potential protesters to decide whether or not to protest? Could alternative and new information coming from online weak ties help overcome the inhibition of protest participation?

Based on the analysis of the interview data, it was discovered that participants attached more importance to their online bridging ties rather than bonding ties when referring to their offline protest participation. The main principle of bridging social capital is that it allows an innovative, off-centre, dynamic flow of information between two or more otherwise unconnected groups, and this is what participants confirmed to have been looking for online. A recurrent theme that emerged from interviews revolved around the theme of ‘online new people’ and ‘online new information’, resources that were more difficult to get in a context with either a politically controlled mainstream media (see 1 below) or tightly knit offline ties (see 2 below).

1. Facebook as an alternative to a politically controlled media

A significant number of interviewees described the Moldovan media as ‘captured’ and openly or indirectly named different politicians who stood behind it. Since the protests were against some politicians with media interests, participants claimed that their TV channels tried to discredit the protests and influence public opinion through a negative

portrayal of the events. A 34-year-old political analyst compared the denigration on television with ‘media lynching’. He claimed:

They were throwing dirt on participants and their demands. Every authoritarian regime tries to denigrate the opposition, and this happened with us too. If before regimes were trying to silence the opposition through terror, now they are doing it through manipulation in the media; it is all about media lynching.

Another participant, a 38-year-old entrepreneur and an activist, asserted that the negative representation was meant to protect vested interests, but also to bring discord between participants and thus discourage the participation of those not yet involved. She concisely summarised the derogatory representation of protests as follows:

[T]he media holding group that owns a great number of stations started to talk about [...] the disintegration of the Republic of Moldova, [...] these manipulations were done on purpose to make people question who we are and send the message that we are promoting violence and could endanger people’s lives.

Other participants claimed that the protests were described in the mainstream media as leading to a ‘frozen conflict’ (ID1) or ‘a coup, chaos, anarchy’ (ID12).¹ Interviewees’ insights are consistent with research studies which demonstrate that social movements which challenge the status quo are identified as deviant, and their legitimacy is undermined (Gitlin 1980; McLeod & Hertog 1992; Shoemaker 1984).

¹ Respondents are given anonymously with a number and the prefix ‘ID’.

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Therefore, in this context of a ‘bought, politically affiliated’ (ID13) and ‘controlled’ (ID4, ID16) media, according to some of the interviewees, the most important role Facebook played during the Moldovan protests of 2015 was providing access to alternative information. The affordability of live streaming, direct information from participants, alternatives to mainstream media framing and access to multiple and diverse sources of information was regarded as compelling by the respondents. A 32-year-old singer claimed:

In our country, the media is not free or independent; it is actually non-existent. Facebook is theoretically the only free space we have so far. Those who are on Facebook are the most informed and, therefore, least manipulated.

A recurring theme in all responses that described the information acquired from Facebook as being ‘impartial’ was related to its live-streaming function and its power to bypass the conventional gatekeepers. Facebook users trusted that their online connections would supply them with ‘depoliticised’ (ID4), ‘objective’ (ID7), ‘alternative’ (ID11), and ‘new’ (ID17) information. A 21-year-old student stressed the importance of following protests in real-time through Facebook and receiving direct, non-stop and unaltered protest-related information. He stated:

The information circulating on Facebook didn’t have to pass through the filter of the media ownership. It was unaltered. There was no TV presenter, no script. It was much more convenient to watch the protests or read opinions on Facebook and then make your own conclusions.

If the politically owned media would often ignore protests in their daily news, there was an information avalanche on Facebook which created the feeling that everyone was involved. Respondents claimed that when connecting to Facebook, information and news about the protests were everywhere, and the overwhelming flow of information was increasing. It created the impression that everyone shared, posted and talked about the protests, and these became the centre of all Facebook debates for a long period of time. Research demonstrates that information presented by multiple sources is more ‘worthy of diligent consideration than information from only one perspective’ (Harkins & Petty 1987, 267), and exposure to repeated information and messages of protest over a small time frame help to activate users by creating a ‘collective effervescence’ (González-Bailón et al. 2011, 5). The following statements from a 32-year-old singer and then a 33-year-old programmer underline the exposure to repeated information on Facebook:

It was not hard to find out about protests. Social networks made it easy; probably, there was not even a single person who did not know about it. There were thousands of shares on Facebook.

It was Facebook, yes. I do not remember whether it was a group post exactly, an event or just a piece of news, but I knew because everyone on Facebook knew.

Nevertheless, the dissemination of mobilising and encouraging information was just as efficient as rumours and fake news. A significant number of interviewees talked about an increasing number of trolls that were trying to compromise and suppress protest activities. They made use of terms such as ‘a great deal of’ (ID3), ‘an empire’ (ID11), ‘a factory’ (ID5) to describe trolls’ online presence. A 23-year-old

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student claimed that with the start of the protests and the growing enthusiasm on Facebook, politicians created hundreds of bloggers and trolls to monopolise the flow of information online as they did in mainstream media:

Misinformation and discrediting invaded the online environment too. They [the politicians] saw that if they were winning in mainstream media by controlling many TV and radio channels, they were losing the fight online, because it is not that easy to influence opinion here. [...] Trolls were working on behalf of the governing parties.

Although a great number of respondents acknowledged the presence of online trolls, they still preferred Facebook for its diversity of news. They argued that despite the misleading information spread on Facebook, the platform offered them more choices than watching ‘a captured’ (ID4, ID9) and ‘politically affiliated’ (ID13) television network. The ability of new media to bypass conventional gatekeepers is considered a significant change in protest activities (Mercea 2012). Facebook users trusted that the online connections, people and pages they followed would supply them with reliable and relevant information and fill in the gaps that the mainstream media avoided or disparaged.

Access and exposure to alternative information were achieved as a result of participants’ interaction with online bridging ties. A 50-year-old accountant described her Facebook bridging ties as ‘people I have in my friends’ list, but I rarely talk to’ and ‘people unknown to me, I don’t know them personally, but I like to follow their opinions and protest activities’ (ID17). Another interviewee, a 28-year-old resident doctor, confirmed that access to diverse information and opinions in his daily news stream was because of ‘all those people online and acquaintances’ (ID12). According

to other interviewed participants, the diffuse and large networks of bridging ties helped Facebook users to:

- broaden their knowledge and increase their understanding of what was happening (ID17, 50-year-old accountant)
- keep up to date and gain awareness of other people's views through the lens of the citizens themselves (ID3, a 33-year-old entrepreneur)
- make their own conclusions about a protest and its participants (ID6, a 33-year-old IT programmer).

Moreover, for a 38-year-old entrepreneur and one of the movements' organisers, Facebook played an important role in helping to meet other like-minded people and build the organising team of the upcoming protest events. She stated:

One evening I received a notification, an invitation to a flashmob. It was after we all learned about the stolen billion. Witnessing the increasing discontent on social media, a young man decided to challenge people and organise a flashmob. I didn't know him personally, but I clicked on the event, I wrote to him, and this is how everything started. The event happened on the 24th of February. [...] You should know that we met each other, namely on Facebook. I met determined people there, and we decided to go through with it; since then, there have been a great number of protests, flashmobs, actions against the government.

These arguments are consistent with several research works that emphasise the pronounced effect of social media in relatively closed or authoritarian regimes, where

the online public sphere creates opportunities otherwise lacking for dissenting voices to be heard (Diamond 2010; Shirky 2011). If social media is important in Western democracies, in countries without free and independent media it might be even more important, as argued by Boulianne (2018). For instance, in such post-Soviet countries as Russia and Ukraine, internet and online media are considered alternatives to controlled and co-opted media systems (Oates 2013).

(2) Facebook as a space to accrue bridging ties lacking offline

The second reason why participants resorted to Facebook and online bridging connections is that access to resources that they provide was hindered by the tightly knit offline bonding ties. As the literature on social capital in the post-Soviet context indicates, Moldova is still characterised by a strong bonding social capital. Interviewed participants spoke about the importance of trust, reciprocity, feelings of solidarity, mutual help and support, shared values and views on the protest, cooperation and being there for each other when referring to their offline bonding ties.

Several participants highlighted family gatherings organised on weekends as a way to engage in debate about the protests and use these occasions to motivate and convince others to join the movement. A 22-year-old student (ID4) claimed:

You know, Moldovans gather together on Saturdays, and they discuss what is happening in the country and say, 'Tomorrow is Sunday, and there is a new protest, why not go? We care, let's go' and this is what I saw in many families.

Others said they had seen many groups of families and friends come together by motivating each other, and the feeling of solidarity (ID18) within those groups

helped, for instance, ‘2000 [protesters] become 5000’, as a 23-year-engineer stated (ID7).

Respondents also mentioned that having friends already involved in the protests had influenced their decision to participate, since they could trust them, and this served as a sign of approval and incentive. This finding is supported by the claim suggested by Passy (2001, 181), who emphasises that ‘when recruiters are close friends, potential participants tend to trust them’, and trust is considered a significant antecedent of protest participation (Crepaz, Jazayeri & Polk 2017). A 23-year-old engineer (ID7) described it as a ‘contagion’. He stated:

Some of my university friends were not interested in getting involved initially, but then I suggested to them, ‘Let’s do it,’ [...] and they did it because I was doing it. Afterwards, they became more active [...] my friends from the village, I talked to them too. [...] if people feel that they do something for their community, they want to share it with their friends. And in this way, from one to another, you have more and more people protesting.

Although offline bonding ties turned out to be very important for participation, their very importance and abundance did not create the need to maintain them online, and, as a 28-year-old doctor (ID12) claimed, ‘their digital presence [became] redundant.’ These dense and homogeneous offline ties created a closed space where the knowledge that was circulating became overlapping and repetitive, and, hence, there was a need to find alternative spaces for new protest-related information. For instance, a 50-year-old accountant argued that she relied on many people and resources to learn about protests, and Facebook was used in particular for its novel information:

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I attended almost all the protests. But when I couldn't go [...], in the morning at work I would discuss the protests with my colleagues, and each would share what they had read, heard or learned about the protests. Later, in the evening at home, I would talk to my husband and children. And then I would check Facebook for news from my close circle of friends. You know, these online acquaintances helped me broaden my knowledge about the protests, and I received information that I couldn't get otherwise from friends or colleagues.

Another 28-year-old doctor (ID12) claimed similar things. For him, the main reason for using Facebook was to interact with people from whom he could learn new and engaging facts about the protests. He stated:

I used Facebook to meet new people, people with whom I share many interests, fascinating people. I met them later at the protests, and we continue to meet even now to get to know each other better; we like to engage in debates. [...] By interacting with new people online, I have access to new and interesting information. As for the people I already know, there is not much to learn; we know each other very well already, we know about each other's political ideologies.

The information from 'new people' came from an increased number of diverse sources, which the respondents began following during the protest period. They argued that they started to 'like' or 'follow' Facebook pages that resonated with their interests and values. The new sources included protest organisers, activists, journalists, opinion leaders, actively involved protesters, public figures, news portals and different Facebook groups. The ubiquitous and widely shared information among online bridg-

ing ties was perceived as ‘more than enough to decide whether to join the protest movements or not’, as a 33-year-old IT programmer (ID6) claimed.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that online bridging social capital became the link between Facebook use and offline protest participation. In this Moldovan case study, the monopolised media system and the low level of bridging social capital contributed to the need to look for a space that could provide people with alternative, non-redundant and diverse information that is considered significant in stimulating political knowledge (Bakshy, Messing & Adamic 2015; Bekmagambetov et al. 2018) and increasing the opportunities for mobilisation (Valenzuela 2013). This space was Facebook, which allowed for the creation of bridging social capital online and could compensate for its lack offline. According to Kitts (2000, 249), ‘If transmission of novel information is a key mechanism of disseminating activism, then weak ties should be more effective than strong ties’, and this seems to have been the case for the Moldovan Facebook community.

Therefore, contrary to Gibson & McAllister (2013) and Skoric, Ying & Ng (2009), but supporting Hwang & Kim (2015), this study showed that those who adhered to social media to connect with bridging ties and capitalise on the resources these bring were more likely to engage in offline protests. In addition, this study contrasted with the results of Gibson & McAllister (2013). They claim that online bridging networks do not make an impact on political engagement, because these ties represent connections that are too weak to influence ‘real world’ activism. In the case of the Moldovan anti-government protests, Facebook was well suited to accruing bridging social capital, compensate for its lack offline, and there was ‘strength’ in these ties (Granovetter 1973). This strength consisted in access to mobilising and alternative

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resources that would be overlapping if found among bonding ties, not provided by the politically monopolised media, or ‘difficult to access offline because of barriers created by the authorities’ (Ryabinska 2013).

The fact that the respondents built bridging social capital on Facebook does not mean that social support and trust originating from strong ties were not important for participation. Bonding social capital definitely played a significant role in facilitating collaborative action, but not online. These findings contrast with previous research studies which demonstrated that social media could also lead to online bonding social capital (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe 2007; Steinfield, Ellison & Lampe 2008; Vitak, Ellison & Steinfield 2011; Williams 2006). These studies explain that social media strengthen pre-existing offline ties, and the familiarity and feeling of togetherness that these bring online are predictive of offline participation. However, this paper demonstrates that the participants did not feel the need to build bonding social capital online, since its role for participation resided in the offline context.

This discrepancy in the results is a confirmation of the fact that there is no single type of online social capital that can predict offline participation in any context, but rather the context informs which type of social capital is built online. Social media usage is endogenous to community characteristics and contextual factors (Fuchs 2017; Kidd & McIntosh 2016). As this study demonstrates, although there is a need for discerning between different types of social capital and the contexts where these are developed, they are mutually constitutive, and social capital existing online is defined by social capital present offline (Kobayashi, Ikeda & Miyata 2006, 604). The fact that Moldovans build bridging social capital online is not solely the result of online interactions; this is embedded and moulded by the offline context and the scarcity of bridging social capital offline. Moreover, this indicates that the quantity and quality of social capital created online are not identical to those existing offline. Facebook was

used to compensate for deficits in offline bridging social capital, but it did not lead to bonding social capital, which was in abundance offline.

Conclusion

This study has focused on the impact of social media and online social capital on offline protest participation. It finds that Facebook became a means to capitalise on such resources as an access to novel, varied, mobilising and alternative information. This was achieved through Facebook users' interaction with their online bridging ties – a type of ties that are difficult to obtain offline. Therefore, in contexts where the media system impedes the circulation of unconventional information and offline social interactions are so tightly knit that they do not allow the entrance of novelty and civic skills, social media can be helpful in bypassing these hindrances. They can facilitate protest participation by accumulating resources that are difficult to obtain through other means.

This study does not ascribe the mobilisation of protests exclusively to social media, as this would mean succumbing to technological determinism. Although not the main focus of this article, this study also revealed that offline bonding ties played a significant role in people's decision to protest. This conclusion impedes the drawing of clear boundaries between technology and society, online and offline, viewing their interrelationship as dynamic, multifaceted, fluid and constantly evolving.

While this study contributes to our understanding of the relationship between social media and protest participation, as with any research, it has some limitations. The first main limitation of this study is that it focuses on the impact of one specific social media platform on participation in protests in one country, and, therefore, it is difficult to make its findings universal. It might be worthwhile to replicate this study in other similar post-Soviet contexts or hybrid regimes to see how or whether the ad-

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vent of social media can break the monopoly exercised by institutions and how it can promote political participation in those contexts. It might also be useful to consider the impact of other social networking sites on social capital and participation. Although most social networking sites share common elements, they differ in terms of ‘structural variations around visibility and access’ (Boyd & Ellison 2007, 213), and previous research has demonstrated that the platform itself matters in terms of affecting and changing political attitudes (Gainous, Wagner & Abbott 2015).

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DAMIAN HERDA

ON THE PRODUCTIVITY OF THE ATTENUATIVE ADJECTIVAL SUFFIX *-aw(y)* IN
CONTEMPORARY POLISH: A CORPUS-BASED STUDY

1. Introduction

In his comprehensive study of degree expressions, Bolinger (1972, 4) defines gradation as a linguistic operation which consists in comparing degrees on an abstractly construed scale. Kallas (1999, 503) further distinguishes between two types of gradation, namely relative and absolute. In the former case, a comparison is typically drawn between two or more entities with respect to the degree of a specific property by means of comparative and superlative morphology,¹ whereas in the latter, the gradational assessment is conveyed based on a standard implied by the modified predicate.

In Polish, absolute gradation is typically expressed by free degree modifiers, more specifically, attenuators (also known as downtoners), e.g. *trochę* ‘a bit’, and intensifiers (also known as boosters), e.g. *bardzo* ‘very’, yet, to a lesser extent, the discussed operation can likewise be performed by bound elements (see Kallas 1999, 505-506), such as the intensifying prefixes *prze-* (as in *przebogaty* ‘very rich’ < *bogaty* ‘rich’) and *super-* (as in *supermocny* ‘very strong’ < *mocny* ‘strong’), or the downtoning prefix *przy-* (as in *przyciasny* ‘a bit tight’ < *ciasny* ‘tight’). This paper is concerned with yet another formative of the latter kind, namely the Polish attenuating adjectival suffix *-aw(y)*, which is commonly interpreted as indicating that the referent of the adjective’s argument either slightly exceeds the standard implied by the adjectival base or just barely fails to reach the relevant property, and whose semantic con-

¹ Relative gradation may also involve a single entity, in which case the scalar assessment pertains to the entity’s degree of a given property at different points of time.

tribution is, therefore, similar to that of the English element *-ish* (e.g. *grubawy* ‘plumpish’ < *gruby* ‘plump’, *niebieskawy* ‘blueish’ < *niebieski* ‘blue’, *okrągławy* ‘roundish’ < *okrągły* ‘round’, etc.). What makes this suffix particularly interesting is the fact that it is recognised to be the only bound, moderately productive element in Polish which, while deriving new adjectives from adjectival bases, serves the function of attenuation (see, among others, Grochowska 1975, Jadacka 1978, Szymanek 2010, Jaros 2016).² However, all of the previous investigations devoted to the current status of *-aw(y)* are based primarily on lexicographic material. Thus, drawing on a random sample of adjectival formations involving the attenuative suffix *-aw(y)* derived from the National Corpus of Polish (N = 1000), the present study aims to provide a more accurate, quantitative account of the productivity of the analysed formative in contemporary Polish.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 offers an overview of the literature pertaining to the Polish suffix *-aw(y)*. Section 3 describes the method used in the corpus investigation. Section 4 presents the results of an analysis of the empirical Polish data. Finally, Section 5 summarises the main conclusions arrived at in the study and outlines prospects for future research on the topic.

2. The suffix *-aw(y)*

As noted by Kreja (1957, 351-357) and Kleszczowa (2003, 64), in the history of Polish the suffix *-aw(y)* attached not only to adjectives, but, albeit less frequently, it also combined with nouns (e.g. *dziurawy* ‘hollow’ < *dziura* ‘hole’, *krwawy* ‘bloody’ < *krw* ‘blood’, *rdzawy* ‘rusty’ < *rdza* ‘rust’) and verbs (e.g. *ciekawy* ‘curious’ < *ciekać* ‘lit.: to leak, to run’), even though the genetically deverbal forms suffixed by *-aw(y)*

² By contrast, the aforementioned attenuative prefix *przy-* is considered to be no longer productive in present-day Polish (see Szymanek 2010).

are currently non-derivative (Grochowska 1975, 335). As can be inferred from the above-listed examples, in the latter cases the formative does not carry the notion of attenuation. In fact, in none of the Old Polish *-aw(y)* formations identified by Kleszczowa (2003, 64-65) can the suffix be said to imply a low degree of a property. Indeed, the formative had not acquired the function of attenuator until the sixteenth century (see Kreja 1957). In contemporary Polish, however, it is only with adjectival bases that *-aw(y)* still exhibits some level of productivity (see, among others, Grochowska 1975, Jadacka 1978, Szymanek 2010, Jaros 2016).

Following Grochowska (1975, 334-335), the suffix *-aw(y)* applied to adjectives modifies the property denoted by the derivational base by attenuating the degree to which the feature holds of the referent of the adjective's argument, which is why the formative's meaning is equivalent to that of free downtoners such as *nieco* 'slightly' or *trochę* 'a bit'.³ According to Jadacka (1978, 153-155), however, adjectives suffixed by *-aw(y)* may also have an approximative meaning, i.e. they may point to a property which only approximates that denoted by the base, in which case the referent of the adjective's argument is in fact not regarded by the speaker as possessing the exact quality. As Jadacka (1978, 158) further explains, the approximative function of *-aw(y)* may likewise be conditioned by the speaker's uncertainty as to whether a given individual or entity can be truthfully described by means of the base adjective or not. Interestingly, the availability of different interpretations of the semantics of the suffix at issue sometimes finds reflection in dictionary definitions, a fact which can be exemplified by how the two most popular Polish online dictionaries, namely *Słownik*

³ For this reason, adjectives suffixed by *-aw(y)* are sometimes misleadingly referred to as 'adjectival diminutives' (Kallas 1999, 505-506). However, it is essential to distinguish *-aw(y)* formations from adjectives to which genuine diminutive morphology has been applied (e.g. *szybcutki* 'very fast; lit.: fast.DIM' < *szybki* 'fast', *malutki* 'very little; lit.: little.DIM' < *mały* 'little'), since in the latter situation, the meaning of the base item is, curiously enough, intensified rather than attenuated (see Herda 2020).

języka polskiego PWN (SJP PWN) and *Wielki słownik języka polskiego* (WSJP), define the formation *żółtawy* ‘yellowish’ (< *żółty* ‘yellow’): in the former case, the adjective is defined as denoting a colour ‘close to yellow’, while in the latter, it is taken to encode a ‘non-saturated’ yellow. Additionally, Jaros (2016, 22) observes that in some situations, *-aw(y)* may even be interpreted as pointing to an excess of the property denoted by the adjectival base, as in *dlugawy* ‘longish’ (< *dlugi* ‘long’).

Given the above facts, it stands to reason that the suffix *-aw(y)* is only compatible with gradable adjectives (Grochowska 1975, 336-340), i.e. predicates invoking qualities whose degree varies within a specific dimension of measurement (see Paradis 2001; Kennedy & McNally 2005), and does not combine with classifying adjectives (e.g. **klasycznawy* ‘slightly classical’ < *klasyczny* ‘classical’), binary adjectives (e.g. **żywawy* ‘slightly alive’ < *żywy* ‘alive’, **martwawy* ‘slightly dead’ < *martwy* ‘dead’), or so-called extreme adjectives, which can be thought of as implicit superlatives (e.g. **ogromnawy* ‘slightly huge’ < *ogromny* ‘huge’).⁴ Moreover, based on the examples available in the literature, it seems safe to conclude that *-aw(y)* is not sensitive to the nature of the scale lexicalised by a particular predicate. In other words, the interpretational ambiguity inherent in the suffix is mirrored in its compatibility with different types of gradable predicates, namely with both closed-scale and open-scale adjectives. In the former case, *-aw(y)* may further be seen to combine with lower-closed-scale adjectives, as in *brudnawy* ‘a bit dirty’ (< *brudny* ‘dirty’), as well as upper-closed-scale adjectives, as in *pustawy* ‘a bit empty’ (< *pusty* ‘empty’).⁵

⁴ Even so, it is sometimes possible to assign a gradable reading to an otherwise non-gradable adjective (see Paradis 2001), as exemplified by *okrągławy* ‘roundish’ (< *okrągły* ‘round’) and *bardziej okrągły* ‘more round’.

⁵ As for lower-closed-scale adjectives, a minimal degree of a given property is sufficient for a felicitous employment of the predicate. For instance, if a piece of clothing is labelled as *dirty*, it means that it contains at least one discernible trace of dirt. Such adjectives are standardly compatible with attenuators, which indicate a slight positive departure from the lower boundary. In the case of upper-closed-scale adjectives, on the other hand,

The distribution of the suffix *-aw(y)* has additionally been demonstrated to be restricted by a number of formal criteria. Firstly, as noted by Szymanek (2010, 126), the formative is at present compatible with underived and denominal adjectives, with the exception of those ending in *-ist(y)*, *-ast(y)*, *-at(y)*, *-sk(i)*, *-owat(y)*,⁶ and *-liw(y)*. In particular, the bound attenuator *-aw(y)* does not combine with adjectives derived from nouns by means of *-aw(y)* itself (Grochowska 1975, 338; Szymanek 2010, 127), e.g. **dziurawawy* ‘slightly hollow’. Furthermore, Grochowska (1975, 337) points out that the suffix under discussion cannot be applied to adjectivised participles (e.g. **cierpiącawawy* ‘slightly suffering’ < *cierpiący* ‘suffering’, **zmęczonawawy* ‘slightly tired’ < *zmęczony* ‘tired’). In addition, Szymanek (2010, 125) asserts that *-aw(y)* displays a propensity to attach to native adjectives rather than items of foreign origin, and especially to those with one-syllable stems (Szymanek 2010, 127).

It has likewise been observed in the literature that *-aw(y)* exhibits a tendency to combine with adjectives belonging to specific semantic classes. In this way, *-aw(y)* formations can be divided into the following groups (see Grochowska 1975, 338-341; Jaros 2016, 23-24):

- a) adjectives denoting basic colours, e.g. *białawawy* ‘whiteish’ (< *biały* ‘white’) or *czerwonawawy* ‘reddish’ (< *czerwony* ‘red’);
- b) adjectives encoding taste sensations, e.g. *słodkawawy* ‘sweetish’ (< *słodki* ‘sweet’) or *słonawawy* ‘a bit salty’ (< *słony* ‘salty’);
- c) adjectives denoting physical qualities of humans, e.g. *krępowawy* ‘a bit stout’ (< *krępy* ‘stout’) or *łysawawy* ‘baldish’ (< *łysy* ‘bald’);

the property must reach a certain degree to be present whatsoever, as is the case with *pełny* ‘full’ and *pusty* ‘empty’. Adjectives representative of the latter category are therefore compatible with totality modifiers, such as *completely* (see Paradis 2001; Kennedy & McNally 2005).

⁶ Interestingly, the Russian cognate of the Polish suffix *-owat(y)*, namely *-ovat(yj)*, has acquired an attenuative function analogous to that of *-aw(y)*, e.g. Polish *słodkawawy* ‘sweetish’ and Russian *sladkovatyy* ‘sweetish’.

- d) adjectives denoting physical qualities of objects, e.g. *ciasnawy* ‘a bit tight’ (< *ciasny* ‘tight’) or *ciężkawy* ‘a bit heavy’ (< *ciężki* ‘heavy’);
- e) evaluative adjectives, e.g. *głupawy* ‘a bit stupid’ (< *głupi* ‘stupid’) or *nudnawy* ‘a bit boring’ (< *nudny* ‘boring’).

Grochowska (1975, 337) further states that as far as items belonging to the last category are concerned, *-aw(y)* normally attaches to items encoding properties considered undesirable. In fact, attenuators, whether bound or free, seem to cross-linguistically combine with neutrally or negatively loaded predicates, at the same time rejecting positively coloured items, e.g. *głupawy*, *trochę głupi* ‘a bit stupid’ vs. **mądrawy*, **trochę mądry* ‘a bit wise’ (see Paradis 1997, 89-90). Jadacka (1978, 147) nevertheless notes that when attached to negatively charged adjectives, *-aw(y)* does not actually always imply a low degree of a property, and instead sometimes plays a purely euphemistic role, i.e. it lessens the potentially negative effect that the adjectival base might have. According to Jadacka (1978) herself, such euphemistic uses display a subjective character. However, rather than being merely subjective, attestations of this kind seem to be intersubjective in nature, as they suggest the speaker’s attention to the hearer (see Traugott 2010). Besides, it should be underlined that euphemisation can in fact be conveyed by all attenuators (see Bolinger 1972). By way of illustration, both *grubawy* ‘plumpish’ and *nieco gruby* ‘slightly plump’ may actually be employed to refer to an individual viewed by the speaker as moderately plump or even very plump, in which case the use of attenuating elements simply stems from the speaker’s politeness (or irony).

As mentioned before, the adjectival suffix *-aw(y)* is noteworthy not only because of its puzzling semantics, but also due to the fact that in contemporary Polish, it constitutes the sole morphological means of degree attenuation which, in contrast to

the now unproductive attenuative prefix *przy-*, is still regarded as exhibiting a certain level of productivity in language use. The claims made in the literature pertaining to the current status of the former Polish formative are, nonetheless, mainly based on lexicographic material, and, as such, do not lend themselves to the determination of the suffix's actual degree of productivity. In particular, Szymanek (2010, 128) recognises the existence of non-entrenched *-aw(y)* formations, which are not included in official wordlists. The following parts of this text, therefore, present a corpus-based analysis of the discussed Polish suffix, whose results will be juxtaposed with those of the previous studies devoted to the formative's specificity.

3. Method

In order to establish the productivity level of the suffix *-aw(y)* in contemporary Polish, a random sample composed of 1000 relevant adjectival formations was extracted from the balanced, 300-million-token National Corpus of Polish with the help of the Poliqarp search engine. Since the words in the corpus are not tagged with respect to derivational morphology, I had to employ the orthographic query *base=".*awy"*, additionally specifying that the hits must involve adjectival forms. Moreover, it was necessary to add a large number of exceptions, including adjectives in which *-aw(y)* is now fossilised and/or does not perform the function of attenuation, such as *ciekawy* 'curious', *jaskrawy* 'vivid', *kędzierzawy* 'curly', *koślawy* 'lopsided', *krwawy* 'bloody', *łzawy* 'tearful, soppy', *żwawy* 'lively', etc. Since neither case nor gender was specified in the command, the obtained results involve all possible inflected forms of adjectives suffixed by *-aw(y)*. Having compiled a dataset consisting of relevant attestations, I calculated two common measures of productivity, namely type-token ratio (TTR) and hapax-token ratio (HTR),⁷ which refer to the number of, respectively, types of adjec-

⁷ The HTR measure sometimes comes under the name of 'potential productivity' (PP).

tival bases and hapax adjectives divided by the number of all tokens in the sample, i.e. 1000. For a wider context, the values were then compared with those pertaining to the current productivity of the well-established prefixal degree modifier *super-*, as determined by Pakuła-Borowiec (2013). Next, I prepared a list in which the adjectival bases are ranked with regard to type-frequency, and made qualitative comments pertaining to the semantic classes represented by the detected adjectives.

4. Results

The random sample consisting of 1000 attestations of the Polish suffix *-aw(y)* turned out to contain 58 adjective types, of which only nine are hapax legomena. Thus, the TTR is 0.058, while the HTR stands at 0.009, which means that the probability of encountering novel *-aw(y)* types is conspicuously low (slightly below 1%). By contrast, according to Pakuła-Borowiec's (2013, 28) calculations, the TTR for *super-* is ~ 0.125 , whereas the corresponding HTR value stands at ~ 0.073 . Thus, a Polish language user is approximately eight times more likely to come across novel expressions involving the Latinate prefix *super-* than new adjectival formations with the native suffix *-aw(y)*, a finding which bears additional witness to the latter element's highly restricted productivity.

The following is a list of the 58 adjectival bases identified in the investigated data together with their respective token frequencies. The forms are arranged in descending order:

1. *zielony* 'green' (146)
2. *żółty* 'yellow' (96)
3. *niebieski* 'blue' (68)
4. *czerwony* 'red' (55)

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5. *biały* 'white' (53)
6. *glupi* 'stupid' (48)
7. *szary* 'grey' (42)
8. *złoty* 'golden yellow' (40)
9. *słodki* 'sweet' (37)
10. *rudy* 'ginger' (36)
11. *czarny* 'black' (32)
12. *siny* 'livid/blue-gray' (28)
13. *gruby* 'plump' (24)
14. *łysy* 'bald' (23)
15. *tęgi* 'stout' (21)
16. *błękitny* 'sky-blue' (19)
17. *pusty* 'empty' (17)
18. *starszy* 'older' (17)
19. *ciężki* 'heavy' (16)
20. *gorzki* 'bitter' (16)
21. *różowy* 'pink' (16)
22. *ciemny* 'dark' (14)
23. *siwy* 'grey' (14)
24. *brudny* 'dirty' (11)
25. *blady* 'pale' (10)
26. *chłodny* 'cold' (9)
27. *stary* 'old' (7)
28. *brązowy* 'brown' (6)
29. *ciepły* 'warm' (6)
30. *głuchy* 'deaf' (6)

31. *mdły* 'bland' (6)
32. *mroczny* 'gloomy' (5)
33. *okrągły* 'round' (5)
34. *słony* 'salty' (4)
35. *tlusty* 'fat' (4)
36. *twardy* 'hard' (4)
37. *bury* 'dark grey' (3)
38. *miękki* 'soft' (3)
39. *ryży* 'ginger' (3)
40. *wilgotny* 'wet' (3)
41. *chudy* 'skinny' (2)
42. *ciasny* 'tight' (2)
43. *długi* 'long' (2)
44. *fioletowy* 'violet' (2)
45. *nudny* 'boring' (2)
46. *smutny* 'sad' (2)
47. *spory* 'large' (2)
48. *srebrny* 'silver' (2)
49. *tępy* 'blunt; dumb' (2)
50. *brunatny* 'russet' (1)
51. *cierpki* 'tart' (1)
52. *duszny* 'stuffy' (1)
53. *krępy* 'stocky' (1)
54. *kwaśny* 'sour' (1)
55. *mętny* 'murky' (1)
56. *modry* 'cerulean blue' (1)

57. *smętny* ‘dull’ (1)
 58. *suchy* ‘dry’ (1)

As can easily be noted, a significant proportion of the sample is made up of colour adjectives. More precisely, there are as many as twenty relevant types, namely *zielon(k)awy* ‘greenish’, *żółtawy* ‘yellowish’, *niebieskawy* ‘blueish’, *czerwonawy* ‘reddish’, *białawy* ‘whiteish’, *szarawy* ‘grayish’, *złotawy* ‘goldish’, *rudawy* ‘gingerish’, *czarn(i)awy/czerniawy* ‘blackish’, *sinawy* ‘a bit livid/blue-grayish’, *błękitnawy* ‘sky-blueish’, *różowawy* ‘pinkish’, *siwawy* ‘grayish’, *brązowawy* ‘brownish’, *burawy* ‘dark grayish’, *ryżawy* ‘gingerish’, *fioletowawy* ‘violetish’, *srebrnawy* ‘silverish’, *brunatnawy* ‘russetish’, and *modrawy* ‘cerulean blueish’, together with four adjectives encoding visual sensations, namely *ciemnawy* ‘darkish’, *bladawy* ‘a bit pale’, *mrocznawy* ‘a bit gloomy’, and *mętnawy* ‘a bit murky’. In sum, there are 24 adjective types related to colours (and shades thereof), their token frequency value standing at 693, which amounts to as much as 69.30% of all the *-aw(y)* tokens in the sample.

What deserves special attention in the context of the colour terms detected in the dataset is the fact that in contrast to the previous claims made in the literature concerned with *-aw(y)*, the suffix does in fact attach to a fair number of derived, i.e. non-basic, colours, such as *szary* ‘gray’, *błękitny* ‘sky-blue’, *różowy* ‘pink’, *brązowy* ‘brown’, or *fioletowy* ‘violet’. Given this observation, coupled with the considerable size of the semantic class at issue, it seems that despite generally not being productive, the analysed formative exhibits a somewhat higher degree of prolificness in relation to colour adjectives.

Almost equally large in terms of type frequency is the proportion of adjectives encoding physical qualities of humans and/or objects,⁸ most of which can be labelled as the exponents of parameters such as age, weight, consistency, temperature, length, size, etc. The relevant formations include 23 adjective types, namely *grubawy* ‘plumpish’, *łysawy* ‘baldish’, *tęgawy* ‘a bit stout’, *pustawy* ‘a bit empty’, *starszawy* ‘oldish (lit.: older-ish)’, *ciężkawy* ‘a bit heavy’, *brudnawy* ‘a bit dirty’, *chłodnawy* ‘coldish’, *starawy* ‘oldish’, *cieplawy* ‘warmish’, *głuchawy* ‘a bit deaf’, *okrągławy* ‘roundish’, *tlustawy* ‘fattish’, *twardawy* ‘a bit hard’, *miękkawy* ‘softish’, *wilgotnawy* ‘a bit moist’, *chudawy* ‘a bit skinny’, *ciasnawy* ‘a bit tight’, *długawy* ‘longish’, *sporawy* ‘largish’, *dusznawy* ‘a bit stuffy’, *krępowy* ‘a bit stocky’ and *suchawy* ‘a bit dry’. However, the token frequency of the items representative of the discussed category is markedly smaller than that of colour terms, the exact value standing at 187, which makes up for 18.70% of all the *-aw(y)* tokens under analysis.

Particularly interesting in the discussed group is the pair *starawy* ‘oldish’ and *starszawy* ‘oldish (lit.: older-ish)’, since what serves as the derivational base in the latter case is the comparative variant of the former adjective. As using the form *starszy* ‘older’ is a polite way of referring to elderly people in Polish, it should not come as a surprise that in the data under scrutiny, the euphemistic formation *starszawy* ‘oldish (lit.: older-ish)’ is invariably employed with reference to humans, as in (1)-(3), whereas *starawy* ‘oldish’ is used not only in relation to animate referents, as in (4), but also in relation to inanimate objects, as in (5)-(6).

⁸ Some of the adjectives belonging to this group may be used in relation to humans and objects alike, e.g. *starawy* ‘oldish’, while others are restricted to either animate (e.g. *głuchawy* ‘a bit deaf’) or inanimate referents (e.g. *dusznawy* ‘a bit stuffy’).

POLISH ADJECTIVAL SUFFIX *-AWY*

1. Właściciel, **starszawy jegomość** w futrze z kołnierzem z wydry, uchylił kapelusza [...]. [NKJP]
'The owner, an elderly gentleman clad in a fur coat with an otter collar, raised his hat a little bit.'
2. W końcu przybiegł ten **starszawy lekarz** [...]. [NKJP]
'Finally, the elderly doctor ran in.'
3. Był **starszawym mężczyzną** o pałakowatych nogach. [NKJP]
'He was an elderly, bow-legged man.'
4. Widział pociesznego **starawego faceta**, który, tak to bywało, przejął się rolą. [NKJP]
'He saw a funny, elderly guy who, as it usually happened, was very pre-occupied with his role.'
5. Bezwładna ręka Dębczaka zsunęła się nagle z kolana po burch, **starawych spodniach**. [NKJP]
'Dębczak's inert hand suddenly slid from the knee down his slightly old, grayish trousers.'
6. Bez wahania podeszła do **starawej fasady** [...]. [NKJP]
'Without much hesitation, she walked up to the oldish façade.'

The analysed dataset further contains six types of *-aw(y)*-formations encoding various taste sensations, namely *słodkawy* 'sweetish', *gorzkawy* 'a bit bitter', *mdlawy* 'blandish', *słonawy* 'a bit salty', *cierpkawy* 'a bit tart', and *kwaśnawy* 'a bit sour'. The token frequency of adjectives of this kind is 65, which amounts to 6.50% of all tokens in the sample.

The least frequent semantic group is composed of evaluative adjectives. Among the four types representative of this category are the formations *głupawy* 'a bit

stupid’, *nudnawy* ‘a bit boring’, *tępawy* ‘a bit dumb’,⁹ and *smętnawy* ‘dullish’, whose overall token frequency is 53, which makes up for 5.30% of all the tokens in the dataset.

Finally, there is one adjective type which cannot be easily subsumed under any of the above categories, namely *smutnawy* ‘a bit sad’, which invokes a psychological rather than a physical quality, and which, at least in some of its uses, cannot be perceived as an evaluative expression. In the sample under examination, the discussed formation is attested twice, which amounts to a mere 0.20% of all the relevant tokens.

5. Conclusion

The Polish adjectival suffix *-aw(y)* is noteworthy for two main reasons. Firstly, it belongs to the rare group of morphological degree modifiers, more specifically, attenuators. And secondly, it is claimed to be capable of deriving new adjectives from existing adjectival bases in contemporary Polish. Nevertheless, all of the previous observations made in the literature with reference to the discussed formative are grounded primarily in lexicographic data. Drawing on a random sample of adjectives suffixed by the attenuative element *-aw(y)* extracted from the National Corpus of Polish (N = 1000), this paper has therefore aimed to establish the formative’s current level of productivity by providing two pertinent measures, namely TTR and HTR, as well as by offering generalisations on the semantic classes of adjectives detected in the empirical data.

The calculations carried out suggest that the current productivity level of the suffix *-aw(y)* is conspicuously low. More precisely, among the 1000 tokens included

⁹ In truth, the adjective *tępy* ‘dumb’ originally means ‘blunt’, and as such applies to a physical quality of an inanimate referent, yet in the scrutinised dataset the formation *tępawy* ‘a bit dumb’ is invariably employed in the metaphorical sense related to intellectual (in)capacity, which is why it has been assigned here to the evaluative category.

in the dataset, there are only 58 adjective types, of which as few as nine are hapax legomena. Accordingly, the relevant TTR value stands at 0.058, while the HTR is 0.009, which means that the probability of encountering new *-aw(y)* types in language practice is slightly below 1%. As for the semantic categories represented by the adjectives suffixed by *-aw(y)* identified in the corpus material, the obtained results largely concur with those of the previously conducted, dictionary-based studies. On the whole, the formative under scrutiny attaches predominantly to adjectives encoding qualities available to the senses, particularly sight, taste and touch. First of all, *-aw(y)* turned out to exhibit a very strong predilection to combine with adjectives denoting colours (and shades thereof). This semantic category is represented by 24 types and 693 tokens. Yet, contrary to what is claimed in the literature, the analysed suffix has been shown to attach not only to the names of basic colours, but also to those of derived colours, as in *błękitnawy* ‘sky-blueish’ (< *błękitny* ‘sky-blue’), *fioletowawy* ‘violetish’ (< *fioletowy* ‘violet’), or *różowawy* ‘pinkish’ (< *różowy* ‘pink’). It seems, therefore, that, despite its generally low productivity, the suffix is somewhat more prolific within the semantic class of colour terms. Another frequent semantic group of *-aw(y)* formations, represented by 23 types and 187 tokens, involves adjectival bases encoding physical properties of humans and/or objects, such as age, temperature or size. With 6 types and 65 tokens, taste-related adjectives form the third largest semantic class in the dataset. The sample has additionally been found to contain one adjective type, instantiated by two tokens, which, denoting a psychological property, cannot be easily fitted into any of the above-listed categories, namely *smutnawy* ‘a bit sad’ (< *smutny* ‘sad’).

Since the conclusions reached in the present study all pertain to the current status of the suffix *-aw(y)* in Polish, future research on the topic should involve a diachronic corpus-based analysis aimed at establishing (changes in) its productivity from

the sixteenth century, when it began to function as a bound degree modifier. Moreover, the interpretational ambiguity intrinsic to *-aw(y)* in contemporary Polish calls for a uniform semantic analysis of the suffix, which would account for its compatibility with different types of gradable adjectives.

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Luke Harding, *Shadow State: Murder, Mayhem and Russia's Remaking of the West*. London: Guardian Faber, 2020. ISBN: 978-1-783-35205-0. ix + 324 pages. Illustrations, index.

Most readers whose business involves Russian affairs will by now have formed a clear impression of the modern Russian state under Vladimir Putin and the malign influence it has exerted on world affairs. The signal events of recent years, e.g. the US elections, Brexit, the amended Russian constitution, the poisoning of the Skripals and Alexei Navalny, will not be quickly forgotten. Luke Harding's book explores these events, among others, and the background to them, arguing that the West 'needs to understand its adversaries better, lest recent history repeat itself.' In doing so, he provides much detail which will be new to specialists and non-specialists alike.

Harding is uniquely equipped for the task, having served as the *Guardian's* Moscow correspondent for four years (2007 to 2011), until refused re-entry, and having personal experience of the operational practices of the *spetssluzhby* ('special services'). His earlier works on related matters, in particular *Mafia State*, *A Very Expensive Poison* and *Collusion*, have shone much light into the murkier corners of Putin's empire, the GRU, FSB and their operations at home and abroad. They have also provided him with a network of well-placed contacts to aid his investigation of the 'shadow actors' who 'have bent foreign policy to their advantage'.

Shadow State in some aspects picks up where *Collusion* left off, tracing the movements and operations of those actors and others. At the same time, it casts a wider net, covering British politics, the Ukrainian conflict and the Wagner group's operations in Africa, though US-Russian relations remain central. The result is a

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scathing indictment, in which Trump's White House and Putin's Kremlin are a match for each other in villainous intent, but Trump – the less successful autocrat – proves unable to make himself president for life and stops short of serial murder. Putin's superior cunning has manifested itself many times, never more so than in the crushing humiliation of Trump at the Helsinki summit. It is Harding's contention that well before the collapse of the USSR the KGB had realised that in Trump, with his vanity, 'rank amorality', limited intellect, limitless ignorance, and weakness for money and flattery, it had ready-made *kompromat* and a potential agent of influence.

Collusion examined the Kremlin's efforts to reduce the Democratic vote in 2016. From Harding's new work, we learn that a senior Russian official greeted the result with a text message, 'Putin has won!', and the shadow state proceeded to build on that success by sowing discord among its adversaries on an even grander scale than before, while doing its best to murder 'traitors' and opponents. Harding lays out the details of the GRU's attack on the Skripals, exposed by Bellingcat, and provides a blow-by-blow account of covert moves to tip the scales in the British EC referendum of 2016, overseen by the ambassador, Alexander Yakovenko, and senior GRU officers. In 2018 the GRU dispatched a team to the Netherlands to conduct a hacking operation against the OPCW, which was investigating the Salisbury poisonings, but was foiled by the Dutch authorities. GRU hackers targeted FIFA and other sporting bodies. Russian agents planted a canard, eagerly seized on by Trump, that Ukraine, not Russia, was responsible for any interference in the 2016 US election. These and other operations are meticulously explored.

Harding's sleuthing uncovers the trails of protagonists who disappear from view: Ivan Korobov, GRU director when his subordinates set out to poison the Skripals, dies at the age of 62, quite soon after an interview with Putin. Konstantin Kilimnik, an adviser to Viktor Yanukovich, faces charges with Paul Manafort of ob-

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structing US justice, but is out of reach in Moscow. Sergei Millian, a source for Christopher Steele's dossier with close business connections to Trump, claiming 'insider knowledge and direct access to the top hierarchy in Russian politics' (Millian's words), drops out of sight.

The underlying theme, stressed in the closing pages, is that the two rulers have much in common. Both have their faithful television networks through which to glorify themselves and smear critics; both habitually lie; both work energetically to boost their personal power while wrapping themselves in their respective flags. Trump surrounds himself with a demi-monde of louche characters, fixers and money-launderers, sidelining the State Department and experienced officials. Putin has an entourage of trusted oligarchs and long-term allies with criminal records. Dmitry Peskov and Michael Cohen play analogous roles and have similar backgrounds. The two presidents share a simple philosophy: *L'état, c'est moi*.

Harding has had recourse to a wide range of excellent sources: given the genre, these are less often documents or publications than well-placed informants, personal contacts and data leaks. Readers with a preference for traceable footnotes will no doubt appreciate that a journalist's sources in a work of this nature rarely lend themselves to footnoting. Attribution is carefully provided, though some sources need to be protected, as was the case with Steele's dossier (to which Harding gives much credit).

Shadow State is the kind of investigative journalism at which Harding excels, though the colloquial delivery in breezy journalese may not be to everybody's liking. The fluid and fast-changing field may account for occasional signs of haste in production. Shouldn't an editor have caught 'the officers laid low' and suggested replacing modish locutions like 'back in the day'?

Shadow State went to press in 2020, after Trump's first impeachment, but before the further tumultuous events of that year: the pandemic, the attempt on Na-

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valny's life, the exposure of his assassins, the 2020 US election and downfall of Trump and his cronies into complete disgrace. A revised edition, dated July 2021, takes full account of these. No doubt further developments in US-Russian relations, not to mention recent events in Belarus, will supply Harding with ample material for yet another revision, if not a sequel to this splendid account.

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Megan Swift, *Picturing the Page: Illustrated Children's Literature and Reading Under Lenin and Stalin*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020. ISBN: 978-1-4426-1531-1. 240 pages.

The focus of Megan Swift's *Picturing the Page* is the impact that illustrations in early Soviet books had on young readers. Swift's tour of this topic spans illustrated Soviet children's literature between the years 1917 and 1953 – thus spanning the first two Soviet leaders, Lenin and Stalin. The choice of era is significant, because, as Swift explains, across this period, illustrated children's books occupied a central position in mass political culture: they were not only book art, but they helped deliver ideological messages to 'little comrades'.

Picturing the Page begins with the author discussing the claims for the importance of this area of study. Swift offers a comprehensive literature review on the topic of Soviet children's literature, culture and book art, in which she highlights the fact that her book continues a field of scholarship started by the Soviet researchers Andrei Chegodaev and Ella Gankina between the 1950s and 1970s. Despite the book's title, it does not provide a full account of all illustrated children's literature of the period. By

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the author's own admission, *Picturing the Page* is set apart by its method of tracing single works in multiple illustrated versions, rather than making a chronological study of all the major artists or artistic schools of children's literature across the period. The study delivers close readings of selected literary texts and an analysis of the artwork in these books. Swift demonstrates a pattern in Soviet children's book illustrations, wherein the past was viewed through the achievements of Soviet power, and illustration served as an influential medium offering the reader new meanings, thus becoming 'the voice of today sounding from the pages of yesterday' (p. 13).

Picturing the Page is divided into three parts: 'Fairy-Tale Nation', 'The Afterlife of Russian Classics' and 'War-Time Picture Books'. The book's rich selection of rare colour and black and white images from the early post-revolutionary period is supported by detailed historical and cultural commentary and an analysis of a wide variety of sources, including public debates, textbooks and teacher's manuals – a reading that can be enjoyed 'by the educated non-specialist as well' (p. 5). This is a book that has good scholarly content, but which has also been designed to offer the non-expert an insight into what to many non-Russians will be a little-known and intriguing aspect of Soviet culture.

In 'Fairy-Tale Nation', Swift explores two fairy tales written in the first half of the 19th century which were reinvented subsequently by post-revolutionary illustrators: Pushkin's *Tale of the Priest and His Worker Balda* and Ershov's *Little Humpbacked Horse*. A close connection is observed between illustrations of the Stalin-era peasant Balda, the Priest, the Tsar, the Humpbacked Horse and important shifts in the existing Soviet cultural agenda, such as anti-religious and patriotic campaigns. This represents an ideologically oriented reading of the past.

'The Afterlife of Russian Classics' is dedicated to illustrations in two classical works of Russian literature, Pushkin's *The Bronze Horseman* and Tolstoy's *Anna*

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Karenina, which had both been reformatted for children. While Swift notes significant differences in the ways that the works of Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Chekhov and Dostoevsky were approached by Soviet publishers, she highlights the fact that illustrated Pushkin's works, including *The Bronze Horseman*, were used to articulate the cultural goals of the state. Swift also examines how Soviet illustrations of the powerful scene of Anna Karenina's reunion with her son Seriozha can be seen to represent a dramatic change in the role of Soviet women in society, particularly in their increased freedom.

The third part of the book, 'War-Time Picture Books', offers an exploration of children's war-time picture books during the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945. Swift analyses three illustrated books for young readers: Mayakovsky's *Let Us Take the New Rifles* and Marshak's *Mail and War-Time Mail*, which were published after the German invasion. Swift offers the reader an insight into how war-time picture books connected not only with child readers themselves, but also with their parents, who were the first generation of Soviet readers and the generation who were now defending their nation at war.

Picturing the Page is an example of thorough interdisciplinary research written in an engaging manner, well supported with wonderful images. The book will be of great value to scholars and students in the fields of Russian history, culture, literature, art and folklore, as well as to the general reader who may seek to grasp how the Soviet system helped shape the ideological views of its children and played a part within wider Soviet political education campaigns from the 1917 Revolution through to Stalin's death.

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Evgeny Boratynsky and the Russian Golden Age: Unstudied Words That Wove and Wavered, translated from the Russian, with an Introduction and Commentary by Anatoly Liberman, London and New York, Anthem Press, 2020. ISBN: 978-1-78527-136-6. 319 pages.

The name of Evgeny Baratynsky (1800–1844), or Boratynsky, as Liberman and other scholars prefer to spell it – and so did the poet himself towards the end of his life – is not a name most readers outside of Russia may be familiar with. The myth of Pushkin, who is far from being as universally known or even worshipped as he still is in Russia, has condemned most of the other outstanding poets of the Golden Age of Russian literature to international invisibility. The only exception might be Lermontov, in whose case it is probable that his relative fame is indebted more to his prose than his poetry. Anatoly Liberman's main objective in preparing this remarkable book of translations is clearly to make English-speaking readers acquainted with the work of a great poet of whom they are, most likely, unaware. In doing so, Liberman has opted for an interestingly hybrid format.

The book contains only Liberman's English translations, with almost no Russian original texts available, except for a handful of examples in the introduction and in the commentary selected to show Baratynsky's euphony. The commentary itself occupies about one third of the book, with the introduction being a substantial forty pages. The consistent scholarly apparatus of the volume means that the reader, who is, presumably, unfamiliar with Baratynsky and the Russian literary context of his time, will be confronted with a significant amount of information. This is possibly much more information than one would expect for a book conceived as an introduction to the legacy of an unjustly neglected writer. But it is, of course, a positive quality of the book, not a flaw. At the same time, however, it is likely that a considerable portion of

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the readership of the book will consist of students of Russian literature and scholars of contiguous disciplines with at least a reading knowledge of the Russian language, who would clearly benefit from the co-presence of the original Russian poems together with Liberman's translations. His claim that 'this book is meant for those who cannot read Russian' (p. 42) appears to collide with the richness and the scholarly depth of the book. One is left wondering whether a combination of a smaller font with a different page layout might have solved this issue, allowing the book to be bilingual (as it would clearly deserve). Liberman himself seems to be aware of this problem, with each poem being introduced by its title or first line in transliterated Russian, and an index of Russian titles and first lines concluding the book. The translator and the publisher would likely reply that, in the age of the Internet, finding Baratynsky's originals is an uncomplicated task, which is certainly true. Hence, the reader is left with Liberman's translations, which turn out to be extremely pleasant company.

In Liberman's English, Baratynsky paradoxically sounds 'at home' in spite of the peculiarity of this poetry in the context of the English language and poetic tradition. Liberman's translations are so artfully crafted – one can only imagine the amount of work behind the book – that they might appear to be original poems by a slightly extravagant, unjustly forgotten voice from the past. In the final part of the lengthy introduction, Liberman shares the joys and tribulations of his work as a translator. He openly states (p. 38) that 'since [...] the message of a lyric is inseparable from its form, [he] followed the conservative model despite the problem it entails', thus opting for rhyme. Delving even deeper into the subject, he poses the question (p. 39), 'whether it is possible to translate a large corpus of Russian poetry into English and retain feminine rhyme and the rest without losing or impairing the artistic effect', immediately giving an expected positive answer to it. Liberman's consequent applica-

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tion of his theoretical premises to his actual translation practice cannot but impress his readers.

The introduction itself reveals Liberman's non-standard approach to the publishing of poetry in translation. It contains a great amount of useful information for the diverse categories of readers that Liberman clearly expects, but its style is far from sounding impersonal or academic. The introduction is divided into several subchapters, each of which is provided with a longer title that somewhat resembles a summary.

Liberman places Baratynsky against the background of European romanticism, often stressing his proximity to such diverse poets as Leopardi, Keats and, obviously, the French poetic tradition, widely quoted and discussed in the commentary. As for Leopardi, Liberman stresses their common interest in darkness, although doubting that Baratynsky might have known the Italian romantic. Liberman claims that Baratynsky is 'the opposite of Pushkin' (p. 25), universally praised for his Apollonian clarity, and 'probably the most tragic poet in the history of Russian literature' (p. 27). Even readers unfamiliar with Russian poetry of the Golden Age will not fail to sense the particular role of melancholy and the attraction of death in Baratynsky's poetic world. Liberman also rightly points out the cultural premises of the misfortune of Baratynsky's later works, with his mature years coinciding with the coming of the age of prose in Russian literature and the diminishing prestige of poetry in the second third of the century.

Liberman has a deep knowledge of Baratynsky scholarship in different languages, which enables him to provide his readers with a comprehensive overview of the – surprisingly not so abundant – academic literature on the poet. A name that is missing among the scholars that Liberman cites and discusses is that of Daria Khitrova, in whose 2019 monograph Baratynsky and the place of his poetry in Golden Age poetry are discussed in detail.

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Liberman is an extremely prolific scholar of both Germanic and Slavic languages and cultures. He is also a translator with a remarkable record of translations from and into both Russian and English, including the poetry of Tiutchev, Lermontov and Shakespeare. As a result, Liberman is sure to convince his readers of the greatness of Baratynsky's poetic gift.

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Vesyoly, A. [Kochkurov, N. I.] *Russia Washed in Blood: A Novel in Fragments* (trans. by K. Windle). London, UK: Anthem Press, 2020. ISBN 978-1-78527-484-8. 385 + xvi pp.

Artyom Vesyoly is the *nom-de-plume* of Nikolai Ivanovich Kochkurov (1899-1938). In his 1931 'Avtobiografiia' he pithily summarised his occupations as 'factory – tramp – newspaper seller – cabman – clerk – agitator – Red Guard – newspaper – party work – Red Army soldier – student – sailor – writer' (p. xi, n1). However, as Bolshevik control of literature became more complete, Vesyoly increasingly became *persona non grata* to the establishment. This culminated in a denunciation by Shpunt in 1937 as a counter-revolutionary writer (using the evidence of *Russia Washed in Blood*). Nikolai Yezhov, then head of the NKVD, arranged for his arrest in October of that year, which resulted in Vesyoly's execution in April 1938 (p. xiv).

Owing to the title and half-title, I was a little apprehensive when volunteering to review this novel. However, any apprehensions were misplaced. *Russia Washed in Blood* certainly requires focus and stamina, but the rewards are many: a vivid evocation of the Russian Civil War of 1918-1921, employing wonderfully rich language,

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punctuated by passages characterised by a mordant sense of humour. Because of the alchemy between Vesoly's manuscript and Kevin Windle's translation, I am not surprised that this book was nominated and shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Translation Prize (<https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/awards/nsw-premiers-translation-prize>).

Whilst the half-title (*A Novel in Fragments*) alerts the reader to the salient structural characteristics of this novel, he or she is not fully prepared for what ensues. As the introduction states (p. xii):

[the novel] lacks a unifying plot, and a definite beginning, middle and end. Most parts of the book can be read independently of the others as a series of extended episodes rather than a connected narrative. Nor is unity provided by the characters, though some appear in more than one chapter ... its focus is less on individuals than on the crowd, and the voices we hear, often of unidentified speakers, are mostly those of ordinary people with little education.

The translation includes the seven completed chapters of some twenty-four planned by Vesoly, followed by twelve études which were originally designed as 'musical interludes', to be placed as separators after every third chapter. A novel of almost 400 pages, structured in this way, certainly makes many demands of the reader – specifically in the areas of concentration and endurance. But the atmosphere the author creates and his use of language in the novel spur one on to the next chapter or étude.

The milieu created by Vesoly in *Russia Washed in Blood* must rank as one of the best evocations of the confusion and ambivalence of war that I have read. The novel is a litany of instances of the evils attendant on a Civil War where the pressure of warfare makes for volatile relations with comrades and, additionally, for alliances

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between a number of parties (peasants, Bolsheviks, kulaks, Cossacks, anarchists, Cadets, to name a few) that appear changeable, often daily. Add to this the inevitable concomitants of rapine, looting and drunkenness, as well as the description of wounds – mortal and otherwise – and the reader finds him- or herself immersed in a realistic fog of war.

If this were all, one might be forgiven for bridling at the prospect of reading this novel. Mercifully, it is not – the leavening is supplied by Vesoly (ably assisted by his translator) in the form of the richly evocative language that cushions the description of events, acting as a counterpoint to the harsh reality it describes. The first aspect of this leavening can be seen in the inspired, sometimes lyrical, use of simile and metaphor, examples being:

‘Again and again the town went back to work, like a not-very-bright but willing little horse harnessed to a heavy cart.’ (p. 300)

‘The housewife gave off an aroma of pancakes, her youthful face as red as the sun dipped in butter.’ (p. 351)

In addition to the lyricism evidenced by Vesoly’s use of metaphor, his humour often relies on a wicked turn of phrase, covering all aspects of life:

‘The smell of spirit hung like a cloud over the village. Nowhere did they actually drink any, they only tasted it, but they tasted it so thoroughly that they couldn’t remember where they’d spent the night.’ (p. 330)

‘The district lay buried beneath snow and decrees.’ (p. 313)

‘Shpulkin appeared out of nowhere, like a cholera bacillus, and took Pavel by the sleeve ...’ (p. 302)

In view of his trenchant wit applied unsparingly to all actors in the novel, it is small wonder that Vesoly, like Babel, was yet another tragic casualty of the purges of the late 1930s.

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The translation reads consistently well, with virtually no infelicities. Only two renderings evoked questions: the use of ‘threesome’ rather than ‘troika’ when describing horses harnessed together (p. 68), and the use of ‘daub-and-wattle’ rather than the more colloquial ‘wattle-and-daub’ when describing the construction of dwellings (p. 69). The use of various typographical mechanisms (for example, Courier for a headline on p. 57) was entirely consistent with the content, jolting the reader out of any comfort zone he or she might have inhabited. All things considered, the translation effort is masterful, being consistent and sustained over around 400 pages. It is supplemented by an informative introduction by the translator and Kochkurov’s granddaughter (and Vesoly scholar), Elena Govor.

In summary, *Russia Washed in Blood* requires a considerable investment of time, concentration and emotional energy. However, the reader is amply repaid by a dividend of rich language and an evocative treatment of the Civil War of 1918-1921 in microcosm.

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James Rann, *The Unlikely Futurist: Pushkin and the Invention of Originality in Russian Modernism*. Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2020. ISBN 978-0-299-32810-8. xi + 343 pp.

The Unlikely Futurist is an important contribution to the study of Russian Futurism, which goes much beyond the analysis of the works of individual writers to situate the movement both within the Russian literary and artistic culture of the early twentieth century and to contextualise it theoretically within European modernism as a whole.

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In discussing Vladimir Mayakovsky, Velimir Khlebnikov and Aleksei Kruchenykh in detail, James Rann at the same time produces a compelling and thought-provoking account of the period in which they worked.

Pushkin was a notable point of reference for writers from widely differing literary orientations during the period of Russian modernism. Merezhkovsky's essay on Pushkin published in his 1897 collection *Vechnye sputniki* (Eternal Companions), Briusov's interpretations later collected in his *Moi Pushkin* (My Pushkin, 1926), Akhmatova's studies of Pushkin from 1924 onwards, Tynianov's novel *Pushkin* (1936) and Tsvetaeva's memoir *Moi Pushkin* (My Pushkin, 1937) all point in their different ways to the centrality of Pushkin to Russian culture asserted by Dostoevsky in his 1880 speech at the unveiling of the Pushkin Monument in Moscow.

The Futurist response to Pushkin is best known through the reference to Pushkin in the manifesto 'Poshchechina obshchestvennomu vkusu' (A Slap in the Face of Public Taste) issued by Mayakovsky, Kruchenykh, Khlebnikov and David Burluk in 1912. This famously advocated the throwing of 'Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, etc. overboard from the Steamship of Modernity' in the interest of creating a new literature for the new century that would be free of what they purported to see as the deadening shackles of past convention and practice.

In rejecting the 'national poet' in this way, of course, the Futurists were being deliberately provocative, but in fact, as Rann shows, their dependence on Pushkin was no less than that of their immediate predecessors and contemporaries in less radical branches of modernism. Rather than throwing Pushkin off the steamship, in fact, 'they were happy to keep him on board (albeit mostly below decks) and put him to work' (p. 5). For the Futurists no less than others, Pushkin was a powerful source of inspiration.

In exploring how exactly each of his three subjects put Pushkin to work in the interests of the Futurist cause and their own self-actualisation and self-

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mythologisation, Rann takes as his starting point a specific image or device. For Khlebnikov, given his obsession with discovering the laws of time and causality, the central Pushkin text is 'Prorok' (The Prophet, 1826). Rann shows how this poem informs a number of key Khlebnikov poems, notably 'Odnokii litsedei' (The Lonely Player, 1921-1922), as he examines his own role as a prophet-poet and the relationship between poetry and history.

For Mayakovsky, whose private persona became much more closely linked with the political agenda of the state, the dominant Pushkin image is that of the statue, an artefact that necessarily projects the private into the public sphere. Statues appear in several guises – whether the moving statue symbolising political or moral force as in *Mednyi vsadnik* (The Bronze Horseman) or *Kamennyi gost'* (The Stone Guest), the poetical monument that Pushkin foreshadowed in 'Exegi monumentum', or, indeed, the 1880 Pushkin Monument in Moscow in the context of the cultural debate it inspired. Statues are an unavoidable remembrance of the past, and Rann traces the different values placed on them through Mayakovsky's use of Pushkinian motifs at different periods, from outright rejection in the early 1920s, to recognition in works such as *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin* (1924), that for the revolutionary state to have authority it must necessarily espouse recognition at least of its own past and foundational history. *Vo ves' golos* (At the Top of My Voice, 1929), written not long before Mayakovsky's death, reflects on the idea of the poetic legacy in the context of Pushkin's own self-memorialisation.

In discussing Kruchenykh, Rann's focus is less on poetic imagery than on the way he manipulates and transforms Pushkin's texts to produce new meanings, using similar techniques to the exponents of Cubo-Futurist art or of photographic montage. The key text here is *500 novykh ostrot i kalamburov Pushkina* (500 New Witticisms and Puns from Pushkin, 1924), which takes quotations from Pushkin and creates new

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readings by changing the word boundaries: for example the line from Evgeny Onegin, ‘So sna saditsia v vannu so l’dom (after waking he sits in a bath with ice) becomes ‘Sosna saditsia sol’dom’ (a pine sits like a solido [Italian coin]). Kruchenykh uses a supposedly ‘systematic’ approach to reveal some seven thousand of these shifts, and Pushkin is thus remade as a Futurist writer.

While Mayakovsky’s work is relatively accessible, that of Khlebnikov, and especially Kruchenykh, is much less so. In setting their writing clearly within the context of the Futurist project, yet also emphasising the manner in which they remained a product of the literary culture from which they emerged, Rann has not only produced an important work of literary history: *The Untimely Futurist* also provides a valuable introductory approach for the three poets, which should lead to an overall greater and more nuanced appreciation of their achievements.

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Zakhar Prilepin. *The Monastery*. London, UK: Glagoslav Publications, 2020. ISBN 978-1-912894-78-9. 653 pages.

The Monastery, the latest novel by the contemporary Russian writer Zakhar Prilepin, is a substantial piece of literary work, devoted to one of the controversial phenomena of early Soviet Russia – the Solovki Camp.

In his foreword, Professor Benjamin Sutcliffe gives an extensive overview of Prilepin, his literary, but mostly political and social activity, and, overall, praises *The Monastery* for its ‘artistry and introspection’, however, arguing that the author ‘under-

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scores the sad consequences of the intolerance and bloodshed he has often encouraged' (p. 18).

This review offers an overview of *The Monastery* as a literary piece and a reflection on some of the author's philosophical ideas. With regard to Zakhar Prilepin's literary talent, the novel continues the tradition of skilful portrayal of characters, unhurried plot development and, most importantly, exquisite command of the Russian language. The author has been commended by many critics for the latter and has been called the 'Tolstoy of modern Russia'.

In *From the Author*, Prilepin provides an interesting story of his family, in particular, his great-grandfather, a strong charismatic man, who was cruel to animals and feared by his wife, but kind to his grandchildren. His great-grandfather's name was Zakhar (the name that Prilepin took as his literary pseudonym), and he was imprisoned in a camp at Solovki.

The author offers an eloquent, yet subtle, depiction of the inmates – Chechens, Chinese, a Mexican consul in Egypt, a commoner from Ryazan – many of them do not even have names. However, they represent all layers of society: killers and gangsters, as well as intelligentsia, priests and scientists. Their experiences at Solovki are very different: the intelligentsia are given access to easier jobs, such as picking berries, acting in the theatre and the orchestra, attending concerts and performances. The priests are almost untouchable, suffering no cruel beatings or unjust punishments, while the scientists and political inmates who, one would think, would be mostly oppressed in such kinds of camps, in fact carry out research, live in individual rooms, are allowed to have family members to live with them and even to go to the mainland to collect material for their research. It becomes clear that they are being closely observed as a result of their political beliefs, but they do not undergo half the hardships that 'commoners' do.

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Despite a myriad of minor, and some colourful main, characters, the protagonist of the novel is Artiom Goriainov who killed his father after he had found him in bed with another woman. The plot of *The Monastery* develops around Artiom's life at Solovki, and it is mostly through his inner speech, his thoughts and his actions that the reader finds out about what life is like in the camp. 'From his very first day in camp, he knew one thing: the most important thing was not to be noticed...' (p. 37). However, Artiom always finds himself in trouble, and we see Murphy's law in full action – he is always at the epicentre of all events, seen and known by Chekists and, as a result, dealing with the consequences. Prilepin chooses to portray Artiom as neutrally as possible, so that he is no different to millions of other Soviet citizens of the time, and the reader trusts Artiom, feels for him and sees reality through his eyes.

The complexity and ambiguity of camp life manifest themselves in various ways in the book. For example, following the literacy plan of mainland Russia, illiterate inmates must sign up for school. At the same time, one of the brigade leaders thinks, 'it would be better to shoot all of you' (p. 39). Theatre performances, literary evenings and concerts are organised alongside severe punishments for petty misdemeanours and cruel humiliations aimed at instilling fear in the inmates.

As in most Russian novels, discussions of God and religion are dispersed throughout the book. The ideas of submission and repentance are central to the novel, and through them Prilepin seems to be trying to reconcile the reader with the atrocities of the camp leaders – if there is no reasoning behind them, they should be accepted as one's destiny. God, 'master of our life' should be separated from 'governor of this camp' or 'leader of our country', as he 'remembers everyone, even you and me'. The way to his purer and brighter gentleness is through the endurance of earthly sorrows, without complaints (p. 51). Father John preaches to the inmates who never engage in a discussion, nor do they talk back to him. Other former priests tell stories of the

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monastery, which has been turned into a camp, of the sorrows and horror its walls witnessed in the past. Thus, the reader is constantly lulled into believing that nothing extraordinary, nothing outstanding is taking place at Solovki. Another powerful technique amply used by the author to balance off and to distract the reader from the sickening punishments carried out by the Chekists is describing the stunning beauty of the surrounding nature and providing every possible detail of the smell, taste and look of ordinary food, such as butter and a piece of boiled meat.

Besides the almost matter-of-fact depiction of inhumane conditions for the inmates of the camp, Prilepin, through the Solovki warden Eichmanis, speaks at length about the camp's organisation. For example, if the country is living in poverty, why should it be different at Solovki? It's not the Chekists who punish the inmates, but the inmates who punish each other. After such long conversations with the camp warden, Artiom and the reader come to believe that the camp could not be organised and function otherwise.

Finally, the translation of the title of the novel is worth mentioning here. The Russian title *Obitel'* suggests at least two meanings, 'monastery' being one of them. The other meaning is 'place of living', 'inhabitancy', and it is closely connected with a widely used idiom, *obitel' zla* ('place where evil lives'). Moreover, the author mentions in the Afterword (p. 616) that he 'has very little love for the Soviet government ... but those who especially hate it are the kind of people whom [he abhors], as a rule, even more', and in *Some Notes* (p. 651) he finishes his narrative with some questions: 'what if I had looked at all that had happened from another point of view, with the eyes of Eichmanis? Galina? Burtsev? Mexernitskii? Afanasiev? Would it have been a different story? A different life? Or would it all have been the same?' Prilepin does his best to provide an unbiased depiction of a controversial phenomenon of very

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controversial times for Soviet Russia in the 1920s, and it is a rather slanted view to analyse the novel through the lens of the author's current political stance.

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Ben Macintyre, *Agent Sonya: Lover, Mother, Soldier, Spy*. London: Viking, 2020. ISBN 978-0-241-40850-6. xxiii + 377 pages. Illustrations, maps, bibliography, index.

Ursula Kuczynski (1907-2000), alias Ruth Werner, Ruth Hamburger, Ruth Beurton or Burton and Sonja or Sonya, occupies a place of honour among the most extraordinary of *agents extraordinaires* in the service of the Soviet cause. Those whom Putin has proclaimed 'super-agents of military intelligence' and on whom he has posthumously conferred the Order of Friendship are few indeed. Born into the family of a well-to-do Berlin lawyer, she joined the Communist Party while in her teens, battled against Brownshirts in the streets and went on to a distinguished career in international espionage. Ben Macintyre, known for his biographies of Kim Philby and Oleg Gordievsky, has produced a thorough and highly readable account of that career.

Having moved to Shanghai in 1930 with her architect husband Rudi Hamburger, Sonya tired of the company of idle expatriates and fell in with such colourful figures as the American writer and revolutionary Agnes Smedley, Arthur and Elise Ewert, both valued agents of Moscow, the writers Lu Xun and Ding Ling, and the redoubtable Richard Sorge. A young Englishman by the name of Roger Hollis moved in the same circles. Smedley, already engaged as Moscow's agent, recommended Sonya to her lover, Sorge, who found her a more-than-willing recruit to secret work for his Soviet masters.

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Sonya's private life was no less colourful, as evidenced by her affair with Sorge and her three children by three fellow undercover agents. As Macintyre makes clear, family life and children formed a useful part of her cover, and she proved adept at 'entwining danger and domesticity' in China, Poland, Switzerland and Britain. The danger was very real, and the slightest mis-step could prove fatal.

Having undergone a training course in the USSR in 1933, Sonya became proficient in spycraft and a skilled radio operator. So highly was her work valued that in 1937 she was in Moscow again to receive the Order of the Red Banner. She could hardly fail to notice that the ranks of her loyal comrades in intelligence, the Party and the army were being savagely culled, but 'she looked away, while constantly looking behind her'.

She would go on to head a spy ring in Switzerland and work with her sub-agents Alexander Foote and Len Beurton (later her husband) on a plan to assassinate Hitler, experimenting with explosives for the purpose, only to see it called off by the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. (The pact 'shocked her to the core', but only temporarily.)

In Britain from 1941 to 1950 she was to make her greatest contribution to Stalin's drive for super-power status, by forwarding to Moscow details of the 'Tube Alloys' project (the atomic bomb) from the nuclear physicist Klaus Fuchs and Melita Norwood, a secretary at the British Non-Ferrous Metals Research Association. This material was naturally of supreme importance to Moscow Centre, which noted that in the period 1941-1943 Fuchs supplied 'more than 570 sheets of valuable materials'. (This is a rare instance of incomplete or unclear attribution.)

To readers familiar with the history of British counter-intelligence, Macintyre's pages dealing with MI5's undistinguished record of operations against the Soviets when Roger Hollis was director will be of great interest. Following the failures of the 1950s and early 1960s, Hollis himself fell under suspicion of being a Soviet

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agent soon after his retirement. Possible contacts with Sonya in Shanghai and later in Oxfordshire fed the suspicions. Macintyre disposes briskly of the suspicions, blaming incompetence rather than treachery, and making the point that no corroborative evidence of any kind has emerged from Soviet or post-Soviet sources. Incompetence, it seems, was rife: MI5's 'grand inquisitor', Jim Skardon, who questioned Sonya in September 1947, is the object of some irony, although it is acknowledged that he did extract Fuchs's all-important confession.

As the net closed after the arrest of Fuchs in 1950, Sonya decamped to East Germany and retired from the business of espionage. Her husband Len and three children followed. For the next fifty years she would live in Berlin and occupy herself mainly as a writer, lionised by the GDR's intelligence service and the KGB for her achievements. She and Len starred in a teasing Soviet television documentary at the time when the investigation of Hollis was making news in Britain and Australia, thanks to Peter Wright (with Malcolm Turnbull) and Chapman Pincher.

Sonya's first husband Rudi enjoyed a less charmed life: despite his services to Soviet espionage he would spend the years 1943-1953 in the Gulag, and when repatriated to the GDR became a Stasi informer. His memoir *Zehn Jahre Lager* appeared posthumously, when the GDR itself was defunct.

We know that some other operatives of comparable status, like Maclean and Philby, after some years in the USSR, became 'liberals'. Though Sonya chafed at the intrusions of the Stasi and was appalled by Khrushchev's revelations in 1956, she appears to have overcome any misgivings about the justice of her cause.

Sonya has figured in numerous works on Soviet espionage and Western, particularly British, efforts to counter it, and much of her own writing (as Ruth Werner) is autobiographical (*Ein ungewöhnliches Mädchen; Sonjas Rapport*), but Macintyre's is the first full-length biography in English. He has benefited from a mass of family

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papers and letters, and has been commendably thorough in mining British and German archives. Russian sources, by contrast, number only three, all of them published. Christopher Andrew's and Vasili Mitrokhin's *Mitrokhin Archive*, available in English and famed for outing Melita Norwood, offers limited coverage of Sonya. We can but hope that at some future point the GRU files will fill some gaps.

We need to be reminded periodically that the Soviet cause was abetted by able and dedicated foreigners, such as the 'Cambridge Five', George Blake, Sorge, Smedley, the Ewerts, and Sonya. The latter's story is well worth telling, and Macintyre has performed a valuable service by his telling of it. A splendid selection of photographs, of the heroine, her family, her lovers and partners in espionage adds interest to the volume.

Kevin Windle
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IN MEMORIAM: MICHAEL ULMAN

4 JUNE 1932 – 13 JUNE 2021

On 13 June this year, we lost Michael Ulman – Misha – a remarkable colleague, mentor and friend. His unique personality – warm, generous, and optimistic – made an impact on all those who were fortunate to have known him. Michael will be remembered as an academic, educator and an intellectual in the best Russian tradition, whose vast erudition went hand in hand with his high moral standards. He was the heart and soul of what used to be the School of Russian, and later the Department of Russian Studies in the School of Modern Language Studies at UNSW.

Michael's life and work spanned three countries and several historically significant periods. Born in 1932 in the former USSR, he spent his formative years and part of his adulthood in Leningrad. His critical views of the Soviet system were manifested early. In Chelyabinsk, where he had been evacuated with his parents during the war, he had his first run-in with the NKVD for distributing, together with a group of school friends, leaflets saying that the Soviet government was lying to its people. He was kept under arrest for a fortnight before being released because of his young age.

Back in Leningrad, having finished school in 1949, Michael was admitted to the Chinese department of the Faculty of Oriental Studies at Leningrad State University (LSU). The leading Soviet sinologist, Academician Vasily Alekseev, was one of his teachers. Later, in the literary magazine *Znamya*, Michael would pay tribute to Academician Alekseev who had been victimised during the anti-Cosmopolitan campaign. During his five-year time as a student, Michael also worked as an interpreter with Chinese students and wrote articles about Chinese writers, and later edited two books on Chinese literature (in 1960 and 1962). He completed his studies with excel-

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lence, but his degree thesis, contemporary Chinese literature, was not looked kindly upon by the party bureaucrats, and the thesis was never published. In the words of his colleague and friend, Robert Dessaix, ‘Michael Ulman thought radically differently, and in Russia at that time to think differently was life-threateningly dangerous’ (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 July 2021). This remark provides an important context for the decisions Michael subsequently made in matters where principles could not be compromised – including during his life outside the USSR.

What followed in Michael’s further studies and work was anything but smooth. His career as an educator teaching Russian to Chinese and other foreign students at the A. Krylov Shipbuilding and Armament Naval Academy, where he also acted as an interpreter, lasted for three years. He gave up his future as an educator at the Academy when he resigned, having refused the directive to join the Party and become a career officer.

At the same time Michael continued his studies in philology at the LSU Department of Russian literature which led him to undertake postgraduate studies. Michael’s teacher and mentor, the eminent scholar, Professor Grigory Bialy, shared ideas ‘with generosity and joy’, providing help and guidance to students, and going well beyond the topics of their studies in personal conversations (‘Памяти учителя, Григорий Абрамович Бялый (1905-1987),’ *Russkaia mysl’*, 13 November 1987). Predictably, Michael’s completed doctoral thesis (*кандидатская диссертация*) about the Russian writer and human rights advocate, Vladimir Korolenko, was axed, because in it Michael revealed Korolenko’s views which were unacceptable to the official Soviet scholarship. A copy of the thesis was later confiscated at the airport as Michael and his family were leaving the USSR. In 1964 he was invited to work as a researcher at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences, also in Leningrad.

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The impact of Stalin's death on late 1950s-early 1960s Soviet politics is self-evident to anyone familiar with Soviet history. During this exciting and initially promising period known as 'the thaw', Michael was part of a rich circle of Leningrad's non-conformist creative *intelligentsia*. He met literary giants, among them Anna Akhmatova and Kornei Chukovsky, whose daughter, author Lydia Chukovskaya, became a friend. Michael's friendships included those with the writer Viktor Nekrasov and the renowned scholars Dmitry Likhachev and Efim Etkind. Boris Vakhtin, a groundbreaking author and a leading member of the *gorozhane* writers' group, was also a close friend. During these years Michael and his wife Sophia – they were married in 1956 – began to read *samizdat* and *tamizdat*. They read these books, printed on cigarette-thin pages, overnight, and circulated them further: among them were Slutsky's poem on Stalin's death and Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, later Svetlana Alliluyeva's *Twenty Letters to a Friend*, and Nadezhda Mandelstam's memoirs. Friends invited them over to listen to tape recordings of forbidden composers and bards, such as Okudzhava, Galich and Kim.

The 'thaw' was limited and short-lived. The hounding of Boris Pasternak, and the trials of Brodsky, Sinyavsky and Daniel, were only the first signs of the changing climate. In late 1962 Michael could see the end of 'the thaw' coming, and, as he wrote in a letter to his wife Sophia, 'наступили холода'. The decision to emigrate built up over several years. Michael had never accepted the insularity of Soviet existence, the fact that, even as an academic specialising in Chinese culture, he was not allowed to set foot abroad. He actively sought out contacts and information outside the USSR. His refusal to toe the official Soviet line, his friendships and activities such as inviting foreigners to his home and spreading *samizdat*, attracted KGB attention and created considerable risks for him and his family. The 1968 Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia and the 1970 'aeroplane hijacking affair' (*самолетное дело*) crystallised the

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family's decision to emigrate. It was inconceivable for them to continue to live in the USSR and bring up children in the climate of double-think and double-speak.

In May 1972 Michael, Sophia and their three children left the USSR in the early 'third wave' emigration of Soviet Jews. Shortly after their arrival in Israel the Hebrew University of Jerusalem employed Michael as a Lecturer in the Department of Slavic Studies. For the next two and a half years Michael also was part of an active team of scholars who created the *Shorter Jewish Encyclopedia* (*Краткая еврейская энциклопедия*) in eleven volumes, working as a literary and scholarly editor in the sections on Russian literature, as well as contributing his own entries.

In August 1974 Michael and his family moved to Sydney where he took up the position of Senior Lecturer in the UNSW School of Russian that had been created five years earlier. Initially this move was planned to be temporary, but eventually Sydney became Michael's permanent home.

Michael's scholarship coupled with his experience of life in the USSR was unique in Australia; these attributes became central to his academic work. His expertise included primarily nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russian literature and civilisation, literary theory, history and politics, which he taught in Russian and English to students ranging from beginners to native speakers of Russian. The writers studied in Michael's courses extended from Pushkin, Gogol and Dostoevsky to Mandelstam and Akhmatova, Zamyatin and Bulgakov, to Solzhenitsyn, Shalamov and Voynovich. His vast cultural knowledge and nuanced love of the Russian language were an integral part of his teaching, and Michael's first-hand experience of the Stalinist and post-Stalinist Soviet Union shaped his students' understanding of the vast panorama of Russian and Soviet civilisation. Literary texts were analysed both for their own merit and within their historical and cultural contexts, including the influences of European literature. To quote one of Michael's graduates, Professor Harsha Ram (University of

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California, Berkeley), ‘Always attentive to matters of literary form and aware of the Russian critical tradition from the formalists to Bakhtin, Misha at the same time never lost sight of the vaster drama of Russian culture of which the texts we read were powerful markers.’

In his office lined with bookshelves from ceiling to floor and more books piling up on his desk, Michael shared his encyclopaedic knowledge with students, colleagues and visitors. It was a place of discussions, mentorship and friendship. For many of his students – and I am privileged to have been one of them – Michael was, first of all, a teacher with a capital ‘T’ – something that he once wrote about his own teacher, Professor Bialy (‘для очень многих, прежде всего, Учитель’). He did not lecture in a conventional way and always sought students’ engagement. No matter how complex the subject, he presented it in an accessible way, especially when his audience lacked background knowledge; he did it without compromising the complexity of the ideas, nor did he make them sound prosaic. This democratic approach to study also manifested itself in the way Michael interacted with people. He listened to dissenting views, even the ignorant and opinionated ones, with genuine interest, and disagreed respectfully, without putting down his interlocutor. Unfortunately, his generosity sometimes was mistaken for a licence to act with excessive familiarity, but it was mostly accepted graciously.

Another legacy of Michael’s pedagogy is the memory of his generosity. Russell Robertson, now a teacher, remembers Michael’s ‘enormous contribution’ to his studies, whereby he went ‘above and beyond in guiding, supporting and encouraging me in my research’, and his ‘unswerving dedication in imparting his extensive personal and professional knowledge of “The Great Terror”’. For Nicholas Maksimov, another Honours graduate and now the Director of the Russian film festival, *Vozrozhdenie*, conversations with Michael were what made him a very special teacher.

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‘These conversations were inspiring, they were often mixed with humour, but they always had clarity and purpose. You never needed to make an appointment to see Misha, he would always be available, ready to assist and offer advice, as needed.’

Professor Ram concurs:

His generosity extended beyond the classroom. When I once complained to him that we did not read any poetry in his classes, he immediately offered to discuss the poets I was engrossed in during his free time. Those late afternoons, often melting imperceptibly into evening, spent reading Mandelstam, Annensky, Akhmatova, Mayakovsky, Tsvetaeva, Tarkovsky and others will remain with me forever. These are poets I still turn to for comfort and pleasure today.

Michael worked closely and generously with colleagues in his department at UNSW and beyond. Barry Lewis, with whom Michael co-wrote articles and book reviews, remembers how giving Michael was in advising him on Russian literature, politics and other areas, and still marvels at his encyclopaedic knowledge and exceptional memory. Robert Dessaix speaks of Michael’s passionate commitment to the writing that was suppressed in the USSR. Together, they translated Russian literature that could not be published in the USSR and was published abroad, including Grigory Svirsky’s *A History of Post-Soviet Writing: The Literature of the Moral Opposition* (Ardis, 1981) and the novellas by Boris Vakhtin ‘The Sheepskin Coat’ and ‘An Absolutely Happy Village’ (Ardis, 1990). He collaborated closely with the late Nina Christesen, the founder of Russian Studies in Australia, and with Zhanna Dolgopolova. His articles, reviews and interviews appeared in the Australian and international press and journals, in English and Russian, including *Slavic Review*, *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies*, *The Times*, *Kontinent*, *Russkaia mysl*, *Knizhnoe oboz-*

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renie, *Quadrant*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Australian* as well as *Australian Mosaic*, *Vzgliad* and *Gorizont*. Always abreast with current affairs in the USSR and later post-Soviet Russia, Michael maintained exchanges with significant cultural figures and thinkers, inviting visiting speakers to UNSW and opening their lectures to a wider community. Among these speakers were the authors Victor Nekrasov and Fazil Iskander, the film directors Eldar Ryazanov and Aleksandr Askoldov, the scholars Igor Melchuk, Boris Uspensky and Marietta Chudakova, and the journalist and human rights activist Anna Politkovskaya.

Similarly to other Russian departments across Australia in the 1970s-90s, Russian Studies at UNSW had its highs and its lows, with the peak in student numbers at the time of *perestroika* and a subsequent decline when the USSR collapsed. It is ironic that universities were more supportive of Russian Studies during the Cold War, when Russian was the ‘language of the enemy’, than in the days when Russia’s post-Soviet openness offered new opportunities for cultural and professional exchange. To quote Professor Ram:

Institutionally, Misha was part of what now seems like the golden age of Russian studies, both at the University of New South Wales and in Australia as a whole, an age needlessly and senselessly truncated by the rationalisation of higher education in the service of ‘tangible outcomes’. But Misha always saw himself as part of something older and deeper: the quest of the Russian intelligentsia and the unfolding of the human spirit.

Throughout these changing times Michael remained resilient and positive, advocating for Russian Studies to be preserved and standing up against substandard scholarship and ignorant administrative decisions. Colleagues from outside Russian

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Studies, such as Dr Jim Levy, remember Michael for his steadfast commitment to academia and what he believed should be its values. Unfailingly courteous, he stood firm to his principles.

Following his retirement in 1994 and taking-up of the position of Honorary Fellow in the School of Modern Language Studies, Michael remained active and dedicated, involved with students and colleagues, and supervising PhD students. He continuously updated his course *The Great Terror* in the light of new post-Soviet publications. His guest lectures featured topics as diverse as the cultural history of Russia's two capitals, Moscow and St Petersburg, and Soviet population and demographics – a new research topic with which he became fascinated.

In today's terms as used by university administrations, Michael's contribution to the outside community could be branded as 'Social Engagement', a term that does not really do his involvement justice. Michael's intellectual and humanistic qualities, and his approachability, gained him respect from diverse Russian emigré communities, irrespective of their politics and beliefs. He was the first point of contact to many newly arrived migrants (myself included) who sought his advice or help. The first independent Russian applicants for Australian migration at the time of the collapse of the USSR warmly remember the way in which Michael supported them.

In the local Russian-speaking community, he fostered a climate of enlightenment and cultural curiosity. In addition to writing for the Australian and Russian ethnic press, he spoke on SBS Russian radio, advised municipal libraries on the acquisition of new Russian books, and hosted the Russian Booklovers' Society on the UNSW campus where he was a regular invited speaker. Whether he spoke about Brodsky's trial, Akhmatova's *Requiem* or Russian Jewish poets, each lecture or broadcast was an event, making his audience reflect and providing new insights into familiar topics. The mathematician Florida Sheveleva explained the impact on her of

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Michael's lecture, *Tы и Бы*, about the history and use of formal and informal second person pronouns in Russian language and literature: 'His language was brilliant, his speech calm and persuasive, his narrative logical; we listened to literary texts that had been familiar to us since childhood as if they were new to us. He did not pontificate, but shared insights; he led a discussion with us as if with equals, raising us to a higher level' (*Gorizont*, 16 February 2021).

Looking back, it is difficult to say how my understanding of Michael changed and my relationship with him evolved from the time I was a newly arrived immigrant, then a student, and then a colleague and friend. I hesitate to pinpoint any changes in the dynamics of our professional relationship – another testimony to Michael's democratic style – but I never stopped considering him my mentor. Interacting with him was always an immense privilege. The legacy that he passed on was one of high standards, of intellectual excellence, moral principles and great humanity. His commitment to colleagues and students as individuals, and to their academic pursuits, was genuine, no matter the field. He saw natural connections between disciplines and was *au fait* with the most recent findings across numerous domains. I was just as likely to learn from Michael about Edward Said or Marek Hlasko as I was about Joseph Brodsky or Daniil Harms. When I was researching Soviet-Western intellectual relations, he would bring to my attention recent archival documents and articles on Babel and Ehrenburg, the Soviet Writers' Union and Comintern – but also on contemporary French intellectuals. When I later taught in the Master of Translation and Interpreting, he pointed me to the latest publications on intercultural communication and literary translation. At a time when the university climate was changing, placing new pressures and expectations on academics, Michael always remained true to his values, a reminder to those around him of what is truly important.

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Michael's wisdom, kindness and warmth will be deeply missed by all those who knew him. He leaves behind his wife Sophia and their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Ludmila Stern
UNSW Sydney

Notes on Contributors

Damian Herda is a PhD candidate in Linguistics at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland. He is the principal investigator of a project concerned with the cross-linguistic development of measure nouns into degree modifiers, funded by the Polish National Science Centre (Grant No. 2019/33/N/HS2/01695). His research interests revolve around lexical semantics, grammaticalisation theory, and corpus approaches to language analysis.

Zoja Kuca (PhD) is a researcher at the Institute of Russian Studies, State University of Łódź (Poland). She has been working in higher education for almost twenty years and is the author of many publications in the field of literature, didactics and translation studies. Contact and other details: zoja.kuca@uni.lodz.pl; www.diskussia.com; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2194-9250>

Gilly Mroz completed her DPhil in Spanish and Russian literature at the University of Oxford in 2019. Her thesis, ‘Cervantes and the Rise of the Russian Novel’, explored the reception of Cervantes in the works of four Russian writers: Pushkin, Gogol, Turgenyev and Dostoevsky. During the pandemic she moved into media and communications studies. She has conducted postdoctoral research for the Department of Primary Care Health Sciences at Oxford, examining how the coronavirus-induced shift to remote healthcare was portrayed in the media. She has since been working for the Livestock, Environment and People project at the Oxford Martin School, exploring media representations of meat and the livestock industry.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Oxana Onilov is an early career researcher with a doctorate in media and communication from the University of Technology Sydney. She has worked as a researcher on various projects, including investigative journalism, humanitarian journalism, strategic communication, and measurement and evaluation. In addition to her experience in academia, Oxana has been working as a communications consultant with the World Health Organisation Western Pacific Region.