The Problem of Postmodernism in Russian Literary History: A Comparative Reading of *Summer in Baden-Baden* and *Moscow to the End of the Line*

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The emerging myth of Leonid Tsypkin (1926-1982) has fashioned a fitting biography for this obscure writer of a “lost” masterpiece.¹ A medical researcher by profession, Dr. Tsypkin devoted the majority of his time to his scientific work at the Institute for Poliomyelitis and Viral Encephalitis in Minsk while writing literature surreptitiously by night, producing the novel *Summer in Baden-Baden* (Leto v Badene) and a series of short stories and poems. He did not participate in the culture of the literary dissidents, nor did he attempt to publish his works in *samizdat* or *tamizdat* until very late in his life. His only attempt to enter the wider field of dissident literature took the form of a planned meeting with Andrei Siniavskii, arranged by Tsypkin’s aunt. But the very literary history from whose records Tsypkin was excluded for the duration of his life intervened, and Siniavskii was arrested just before the meeting was to take place. Tsypkin’s work was not to appear in print for many more years, and even then only in a foreign edition whose very existence points to the disastrous division of Tsypkin’s literary and professional lives by national boundaries: the rupture produced by his son’s emigration in 1977 cost Tsypkin his research job, while the manuscript for *Summer in Baden-Baden*, as well as many of Tsypkin’s other papers, was smuggled out of the Soviet Union by acquaintances over the course of the following years. The text of the novel, completed in 1981, was first published abroad in an émigré journal and six years later in English translation. Tsypkin would survive the date of his major work’s first appearance in print by only a few days, but even the existence of his novel on foreign territory would not have secured for Tsypkin his current provisional place in the canon of twentieth-century Russian literature if it had not been for
the fortuitous discovery of its English version by none other than Susan Sontag in the early 1990s.

From this brief account, it is clear just how well Tsypkin’s life and the circumstances of his novel’s creation lend themselves to the image of a totally isolated figure writing “for the drawer” while eking out a living in the oppressive and atomizing environment of Soviet Belorussia during the period of “stagnation” under the Brezhnev regime. And yet, the work Tsypkin produced is, not surprisingly, of its time as much as it is the singular achievement of this amateur writer and lover of literature. The novel depicts the unnamed but ostensibly autobiographical narrator’s train journey from Moscow to Leningrad during the winter of an unspecified postwar year on a visit to an old friend and, perhaps more importantly, to the city so powerfully associated with Dostoevsky’s novels. Along the way, he reads Anna Grigor’evna Dostoevskaia’s Reminiscences (Vospominaniia) and reconstructs episodes from the life of the Dostoevskies, especially during their trip to the German resort town of Baden-Baden, where Fedor Mikhailovich devotes most of his time to compulsive gambling. Thus, the majority of the text is actually devoted to the activity of the Dostoevskies, which is narrated with great emphasis on the psychological experiences of the perpetually bickering husband and wife. However, this is portrayed in a repetitive, heavily symbolic manner, which emphasizes the abstractness of the reconstruction. The narrator foregrounds the textual mediations by making frequent reference to various primary and secondary sources, from which he selects his information. Toward the end of the novel, the frame story regains some of its prominence as the narrator arrives and again goes about reproducing the experiences of others: he listens to his friend’s account of Leningrad’s suffering during the Second World War and walks around the city, photographing sites from the life and works of Dostoevsky. So ends this peculiar novel which, in the absence of an established narrative to guide interpretations of its substance or its creation, is all too easily read as the masterpiece of yet another thwarted talent, brought to light only with the lifting of the Soviet darkness.

The aim of this study is to rescue Tsypkin’s novel from its literary-historical and critical isolation and to examine this underinterpreted and under-contextualized work in light of a much more prominent example of Brezhnev-era “underground” literature: Venedikt Erofeev’s 1969 Moscow to the End of the Line (Moskva-Petushki). The latter work is, after all, another (meta)physical train journey de-
pictured for the reader by a quasi-autobiographical narrator whose peculiarly individual quest provides an opportunity for an extended discussion of the Russian cultural heritage and of contemporary Soviet life. Insofar as the critical tradition has by now linked *Moscow to the End of the Line* inseparably to the concept of Russian postmodernism, this paper will draw *Summer in Baden-Baden* into the discussion surrounding that literary-cultural category. The task of this study is not, however, to ascertain the “postmodernity” of *Summer in Baden-Baden* so much as to read this novel against that other, much more famous work and its attendant interpretive tradition, and in the process to contribute to the elaboration of the meaning of modernism and postmodernism in the Soviet and post-Soviet Russian contexts.

My analysis of *Summer in Baden-Baden* and *Moscow to the End of the Line* will concentrate on several themes and characteristics salient in both works: the evocation of and engagement with the Russian literary tradition, the broader place of history and the contemporary socio-political environment, and the nature of subjectivity as a structuring principle of the narratives and as a philosophical problem. The final aim will be the elucidation of some peculiarities of the cultural environment in which these works were produced and the addition of some qualifications to the concept of Russian postmodernism, which threatens to obscure the specificity of individual works and the non-contemporaneity of even the specifically dissident literary production in the late Soviet period.

Before proceeding to the analysis of *Summer in Baden-Baden* and *Moscow to the End of the Line*, it will be necessary to address the established theorization of postmodernism in Russia and the late Soviet Union. Attempts to expand this concept to encompass the Second World have tended to embrace the French theorists, such as Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, and Roland Barthes, whose work, relatively disconnected from historical or geopolitical considerations, speaks to conditions in culture as such. Postmodernism is then seen as a phenomenon emerging in the late Soviet Union in response to local cultural conditions about a decade after its first manifestations in the West. As for its origins, the argument is either that elements of postmodern “hyperreality” were latent in Soviet culture from its very beginning (Boris Groys)—if not even earlier in Russian history (Mikhail Epstein)—or that they emerged as the official ideology of the Soviet Union became manifestly incompatible with the experience of everyday life, thus opening a gap between people’s lived experience and the
officially sanctioned language available for its articulation (Lipovetsky, *Fiction* 5-6). More materialist accounts of postmodernism, such as Frederic Jameson’s prominent attempt to identify postmodernism with the “cultural logic of late capitalism” are, perhaps understandably, less favored in discussions of the Soviet and post-Soviet contexts (*Postmodernism* 1-54). But aside from the possibility that ‘late capitalism’ may be a worldwide force whose cultural manifestations could permeate the Soviet Union even when, by most accounts, it was at least in some respects resisting the global capitalist system, Jameson’s account is not limited to the economic dimension. For him, the rise of postmodernism coincides with such aspects of the “international order” as “neo-colonialism, the Green Revolution, computerization and electronic information,” which could not possibly have passed the Soviet Union by entirely (Jameson, “Consumer Society” 3). This is not to say, of course, that technological and economic developments caused the emergence of postmodernism in East or West.

Regardless of the specific causal relations between any of these features of life in the last forty or fifty years and the emergence of a peculiarly postmodernist culture in the First World and the Second, the more important point is that Russian postmodernism, if it is to be accepted as a viable concept at all, can be understood either as yet another import from the West, gratuitously grafted onto a perpetually lagging Russian culture, or, on the contrary, the nearly simultaneous emergence of phenomena, comparable as postmodernism(s) but still sufficiently distinct to merit separate analysis, and therefore can be understood as the effects of a global cultural, technological, and economic system from which the Soviet Union could not be entirely excluded. Similarly, postmodernism could be seen as a relatively inevitable evolution of modernism occurring under the influence, again, of the ubiquity of certain structural features of contemporary economic and technological developments. The objection that postmodernism could not have emerged in the Soviet Union on account of the regime’s extirpation of modernism in fact only lends credence to the idea of a an evolutionary connection between modernism and postmodernism: the emergence of the first Soviet postmodernist literature, such as Erofeev’s *Moscow to the End of the Line* and Andrei Bitov’s *Pushkin House* at the end of the 1960s follows the publication or republication of many of the great modernist works of the Soviet 1920s and 1930s.2
The problem of the origins of postmodernism concerns not only the question of whether Western developments ‘influenced’ or ‘caused’ similar developments in the East, but also how postmodern aesthetics propagated, in unofficial form, through Soviet culture. Against the abstract concept of Russian postmodernism, which is implicitly assumed to spread evenly throughout all levels of Russian (or Soviet) society, experiencing only the opposition of ideological censorship along the way, it is necessary to take into account the issues of class, ethnicity, and geography as they affect the movement of texts and discourses not only between nation-states, but within them as well. In the case of the relationship of Leonid Tsypkin to Russian postmodernism, the author’s Jewishness and the distance between Minsk, the Belorussian capital in which he lived most of his life, and the centers of underground literary production in Russia need to be taken into account. The importance of Russian literature for Jews seeking a way to enter Russian culture has been widely acknowledged. That is to say, from a biographical or cultural-historical point of view, the appropriation of the Russian literary heritage in the work of Tsypkin means something different than it does in the work of the Russian Erofeev, and so, naturally, does any transformation of such basic terms as tradition, canonicity, history, and culture in any potentially postmodern cultural shift. The inevitable opposition between the non-Russian subject and his Russian literary material in the case of Tsypkin finds its way into the text at numerous points, and may have something to do with the complex system of textual mediations so prominent in the narrative.

The few extant biographical sources attest to Tsypkin’s distance from the contemporary literary scene, whether official or unofficial. It is thus unlikely that he had access to Moscow to the End of the Line when it circulated in samizdat during the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s. As Erofeev’s “poema” was first published in the Soviet Union in 1988, six years after Tsypkin’s death, it is exceedingly unlikely that Moscow to the End of the Line is a subtext in Tsypkin’s work. That both works seem inspired by the tradition of Russian travel writing and, in particular, by the narrative and ideological complexity of Aleksandr Radishchev’s 1790 Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow (Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu) may explain some of their broad narrative similarities and suggest a certain consonance in their socially critical dimensions, although this would do little to explain deeper affinities between the works. These affinities, as well as telling differ-
ences, only emerge upon a closer examination of *Summer in Baden-Baden* and *Moscow to the End of the Line* in stylistic, thematic, and narrative terms.

The resulting inter-illumination should create a path by which *Summer in Baden-Baden* could enter literary history without immediately falling into a pre-existing period designation. *Moscow to the End of the Line*, for its part, is now firmly associated with postmodernism in Russian literature, and the abundant critical commentary on Erofeev’s “poema” ensures that the following analysis will in no sense exhaust its meanings or alter its place in literary history. Whereas Erofeev’s text has been subject to extensive and varied interpretations, focusing on such aspects as the picaresque influence on the narrative of *Moscow to the End of the Line* (Beraha), the Christian eschatological subtext in the work (Paperno and Gasparov), or the psychopathological dimensions of the narrator’s experience (Blagoveshchenskii), *Summer in Baden-Baden* has been relatively neglected by critics.

Tsypkin’s novel has received very limited critical attention, and most of what has been written has focused on a narrow range of issues. The commentary on the book, mostly in the form of magazine reviews, has taken two general approaches to its evaluation: first, the discussion of the novel’s obscure author and the relationship between the work and the political context in which it was written. In this sense, *Summer in Baden-Baden* is celebrated as an individualistic triumph, as an exemplar of “neangazhirovannaia literatura” (“non-engaged literature,” Ustinov) written “for the drawer” in opposition to the deforming influence of tendentious, ideologically motivated projects. The other approach is to discuss the relationship of Jews to Dostoevsky and of Dostoevsky’s anti-Semitism more generally. Viewed this way, the book is easily assimilated to a narrative emphasizing identity politics: this is a Jewish novel largely about the Jewish question in Russian culture or about the legendary and perhaps masochistic attraction of Jews to Dostoevsky—an attraction amply attested by the long list of Dostoevsky scholars Tsypkin mentions in his novel (155). Given the emphasis already placed on these two aspects of Tsypkin’s work, they will be subject to relative neglect in this study.

Instead, the comparison of *Summer in Baden-Baden* to *Moscow to the End of the Line* in terms of these works’ thematization of Russian literature and history, as well as the related issues of the narrators and the language they employ, will serve to propose new connections between *Summer in Baden-Baden* and roughly contemporaneous literature while
rescuing it from the marginalization imposed by the marginal identity of its author.

The Literary Heritage

It is immediately evident that both Summer in Baden-Baden and Moscow to the End of the Line constitute, in their own ways, histories of Russian literature, or at least enumerations of the most important works and authors in the Russian literary tradition. Tsypkin’s novel concerns itself most manifestly with the reconstruction of the life of Dostoevsky and his wife Anna Grigor’evna, but manages to introduce Turgenev and Goncharov into Dostoevsky’s world and makes reference, among others, to Pushkin, Tsvetaeva, Akhmatova, Solzhenitsyn, and Siniavskii in the course of the narrator’s reminiscences. The way in which these writers are mentioned, typically without explicit identification, folds them into the thoughts of the narrator as if they were acquaintances or if their experiences were for him matters of everyday life. At the same time, the narrator addresses the mythologization of these figures in Soviet times, particularly in the sardonic passage about Pushkin where, passing the Izhorskie Works, the narrator imagines Pushkin eating Pozharski cutlets and contemplates the verses that the great poet may have thrown together while passing by this place on his way to yet another fashionable party. In a century, he imagines that the Pushkin scholars will no doubt spill gallons of ink onto thousands of pages over these hastily written lines. Meanwhile, the narrator imagines a symbolic painting of Pushkin and his monstrous wife: even while mocking the Pushkin myth, he has appropriated a certain part of it so completely that the idea of a painting about Pushkin’s personal life occurs to him repeatedly. This is the same myth of Pushkin whose existence Venichka ironically denies on more than one occasion, when it is displaced by the common knowledge of various bits of gossip or recipes for alcoholic beverages: “Не буду вам напоминать, как очищается политура – это всякий младенец знает. Почему-то никто в России не знает, отчего умер Пушкин, – а как очищается политура – это всякий знает” (73).

In most cases, Tsypkin’s narrator imagines his writers in the course of their lives—not as static inhabitants of museums, but as living people. They do not need to be named, both because his audience—even if initially conceived as his immediate family only—would share the intimate knowledge of these figures from cultural history and because the names would “seal” them as historical monuments.
The narrator’s implicit desire, however unrealized and contradictory, is to free the canonical figures from their imprisonment in literary history. The means for doing so involve the utilization of details from their lives preserved precisely by that history and recognizable to others because of the mythologization that has already claimed them.

Venichka’s relationship to his literary predecessors is undoubtedly colored by the pervasive irony of his narrative. His attempt to enlighten the proletariat by introducing them to Blok’s “Soloveinyi sad” (“Nightingale Garden”) is only partially successful: “вопреки всему, она на них сказалась удурчающе: во всех магазинах враз пропала вся «свежесть»” (52). At the same time, however, the language and form of his narration are utterly dependent upon literary antecedents: even the generic self-identification—“poema”—links Moscow to the End of the Line to Gogol’s Dead Souls and, by extension, to Dante’s Inferno or, indeed, to the entire progress of the Divine Comedy as the “ascent” from Moscow to Petushki. The association with Gogol’s “poema”—a fiercely funny work subtended by an utterly serious message—introduces on the very first page the possibility that Moscow to the End of the Line is similarly grounded in a basically Christian sensibility. Regardless, the work’s saturation with references and intertexts makes it utterly dependent upon the tradition to which it refers with such irony—indeed, as any parody is dependent for its substance upon the material parodied. It should be clear that the engagement of Erofeev’s “poema” with the literary tradition makes the term “pastiche,” as used by Jameson, inadequate. Although there may well be a great deal of doubt that “alongside the abnormal tongue you have temporarily borrowed, a healthy linguistic normality still exists,” the clichéd layers of language are given a new voice as they are recombined (Postmodernism 17). As for the passage with Blok quoted above, Lipovetsky notes that the de-legitimization of Symbolist language is not total: in a sort of dialectical movement, “the lofty comes down not to be discredited, but to take on a new form of existence—a different state of reality—in the ‘lower’ realm” (“Postmodern Poetics”).

Literary figures enter the realm of everyday life in a similar way in Erofeev. Venichka’s mustachioed drinking companion introduces Goethe as an exemplary figure: a man who did not drink:

— Да. Я имею в виду Иоганна фон Гете, который ни грамма не пил.
— Странно... А если бы Фридрих Шиллер поднес бы ему? … бокал шампанского?
It had earlier been established that Schiller drank champagne by the glass as he composed his dramas. Here, of course, he would tempt his friend with an alcoholic beverage. The text abounds with similar examples: Rimsky-Korsakov finding Mussorgsky drunk in a ditch and forcing him to compose his “immortal opera,” the Khovanshchina, Gogol’s boredom, the despair of the Decembrists.

In both Tsyplin’s and Erofeev’s works, the importance of literature for educated Russians—the tendency to live in literature, as it were, to seek escape from contemporary life within its pages—is taken to extremes. To be sure, the way in which the two narrators interact with their literary predecessors is very different. Tsyplin’s traveler seeks an immediacy in his communion with the writers of the past—most obviously Dostoevsky—but his attempts are undercut by the necessity of textual mediation. Venichka and his drinking partners respond to the old writers as if to alcoholic acquaintances. In both cases, the massive proliferation of literary references and the infiltration of everyday life and its discourses by these references suggest a textualization (and concomitant semiotization) of everyday life, a transformation of life itself into an endless series of intertexts as a result of excessive reading. If literature becomes necessary for the articulation of the narrator’s ordinary experiences in Tsyplin’s novel and if these literary articulations cannot but be mediated through texts, then he must become estranged from the ordinary experiences themselves and in fact from his own existence. Taken in this direction, Tsyplin’s novel about “loving Dostoevsky” (the title of Sontag’s original article about the novel) becomes a story of how the pull of literature separates the narrator from the immediacy of his own life, which becomes, at best, an opportunity for reading. In a similar fashion, the multiplication of literary figures in Venichka’s squalid environment de-realizes the latter. His traveling companions are no more substantial than Aleksandr Blok or Karl Marx (who loved women for their weakness). The intertexts supporting life become a surrogate reality and drive a wedge between the narrator and his experiences. This is the darker side of the saving power of literature so well attested in such works as Evgenia Ginzburg’s memoirs.

The retreat into literature at the expense of everyday life is in itself a disavowal of that life. While the narrator in Summer in Baden-Baden does not “solipsize…many of Soviet culture’s most sacrosanct
“myths” in the manner of Venichka (Borden 275), the supersession of the present by the world of nineteenth-century literature in the former book nonetheless constitutes a forceful denial of Soviet modernity and of “really existing socialism.” Herein lies the political dimension of a novel otherwise so reticent about issues of contemporary ideology. But the disavowal of the present is not total, and in the sections contemporaneous with the narrator, the reader finds a complex engagement with recent Soviet history.

History

In general, while history permeates the present-day sections of Summer in Baden-Baden, it does so, like everything else in the novel, through the mediating consciousness of the narrator. To the extent that the novel engages with the complexities of the individual and collective filtering of history, one can discern a privileging of the former over the latter. This collective monumentalized history appears most clearly in the lives of the great writers, as discussed above. Here, the spread of images and stereotyped symbols or traces brings to mind Jameson’s characterization of the disintegration of historicity in postmodern culture where any narration of historical events aims at the resurrection of the dead of anonymous and silenced generations, the retrospective dimension indispensable to any vital reorientation of our collective future…has meanwhile itself become a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum… [T]he past as ‘referent’ finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts. (Postmodernism 18)

Leaving aside the question of whether the past was ever actually accessible in any other form than as images, this passage articulates one of the major problems confronted by Tsypkin’s narrator—that of a just or faithful preservation of traces of the past. This can be seen as the ultimate purpose behind his vast re-imagining of Fedor Mikhailovich’s and Anna Grigor’evna’s journey, for which the narrator’s empathy tries to breathe new life into ossified images and records republished and read a thousand times. The extent of the narrator’s success is, to be sure, uncertain. The unreality of these “recreations” is everywhere in evidence, and he does not hide the fact that these images are drawn from Anna Grigor’evna’s writings. Even if he prefers the immediacy of the Diaries to the omissions and emen-
Alongside the narrator’s major project are the passages depicting both contemporary life and his own memories. In his descriptions of his youth, the narrator recalls the devastation of Minsk in the years after the war. His commentary is as dispassionate as the later reporting of his old friend Gilia’s memories of the siege of Leningrad and the Terror:

Я уже шел по улице, торопясь вверх, туда, где ходили красные, лакированные трамваи, одиночные, редко попарно сцепленные вагоны, — улицы, по которым они ходили, могли быть названы улицами тоже весьма условно — по обе стороны от трамвайной колеи простиралась засыпанная обломками кирпичей, поросшая крапивой пустыри, между которыми стояли чудом уцелевшие дома или просто коробки с оторванными, свисающими, слегка колеблемыми ветром лентами бывших обоев или торчащими где-то на высоте третьего этажа краном или выложенной кафелем голландской печкой, — быстрей к трамваю, — он вез меня в институт — расположенные на окраине города здания клиник, тоже уцелевшие, как и больница, в которой мы жили, — немцы специально пощадили здания больниц, чтобы использовать их для себя. (73)13

The nonchalant treatment of the destruction is striking: the physical traces of the war are left to speak for themselves; the narrator’s family must live in the hospital for lack of habitable buildings in the city, the rarity with which one sees trams with more than one car, for the city was so thoroughly depopulated during the war that the public transportation system’s capacity far exceeded demand, and, most obliquely, the preserved hospital itself—a reminder of the absolute indifference of the occupiers for any infrastructure or resources which may have been indispensable for the occupied population but was not immediately useful for them. No mention is made of rebuilding, or resistance, or even of military action. With the exception of the mention of the Germans, this account contains only the details of daily life.

The narrator’s individual struggle against the combined forces of the monumentalized distortion of history on the one hand, and of its simple disappearance through forgetting on the other continues in
his experience of contemporary Leningrad. As he walks through the city, retracing Dostoevsky’s steps, he photographs the buildings connected to the writer’s life, trying not to arouse the suspicions of passersby in the process. Here the events of the novel come into contact with Leonid Tsypkin’s biography in a most concrete fashion, for he produced an album of photographs depicting sites from the life of Dostoevsky, which he offered to donate to the Dostoevsky Museum. The most significant aspect of these photographs from the point of view of the narrator’s attempt at the preservation of history is that, while ostensibly aiming to capture something from the life and times of Dostoevsky, they in fact reveal to the contemporary viewer the Leningrad of the 1970s, with the signs, lampposts, weather conditions and accidental passersby of the moments in which Tsypkin looked at these places and captured them on film (Ustinov).

The attempt to conjure up images from the lived memory of living individuals as well as the semi-mythological biographies of the great writers and, by means of empathy, to bridge the temporal and experiential distance separating these memories and histories from the narrator’s immediate experience is ultimately unrealizable. All events and experiences are mediated, whether by books or personal or collective memory. The personal attempt to mend the historical rupture is itself riven by contradiction. In its impossibility, the narrator’s task in Summer in Baden-Baden finds affinities with Venichka Erofeev’s relationship to history, even if the difference in tone between the two works obscures their point of contact in the confrontation of this problem.

The impossibility of grasping the historical and social totality in Moscow to the End of the Line begins with the famous first sentences:

Все говорят: Кремль, Кремль. Ото всех я слышу про него, а сам ни разу не видел. Сколько раз уже (тысячу раз), напившись или с похмели, проходил по Москве с севера на юг, с запада на восток, из конца в конец, насквозь и как попало — и ни разу не видел Кремль. (36)

Not only history itself, but even the metanarrative that obscured it—as well as the very metonym of Soviet power—have disappeared. What remains is a world at once radically constricted to shops selling alcohol and the unattainable Petushki, and radically expanded, at least in surrogate form, by the confabulation of cultural history and the personal memories by Venichka and his fellow drinkers.
The disappearance of even the stereotyped markers of a mythologized history extends to Venichka’s purported travel abroad:

Мне только три вещи хотелось там посмотреть: Везувий, Геркуланум и Помпею. Но мне сказали, что Везувий давно уже нет, и послали в Геркуланум. А в Геркулануме мне сказали: «Ну зачем тебе, дураку, Геркуланум? Иди-ка ты лучше в Помпею». Прихожу в Помпею, а мне говорят: «Дались тебе эти Помпеи! Ступай в Геркуланум!» (97)

The story could easily be false, but that would make reality unimaginable for Venichka: not even the images of antiquity would remain. Insofar as the difference between things and the images of things is that the former have a history—an aura—the disappearance of things and of history is much the same phenomenon.

Of course, even if the images of history have disappeared, the memory of these images has not. Venichka can still speak about the places that he can no longer find. The past exists in miniature, as it were, as in Venichka’s never-ending narration of world history to the ticket controller: “Но всякая история имеет конец, и мировая история — тоже” (103).16 Certainly, the end of history is not the completion of some quasi-Hegelian teleology, but rather the exhaustion of Venichka’s creativity in delaying the ticket controller. Just as in Summer in Baden-Baden, a highly mediated form of history is still available, although the distortion of this history in Moscow to the End of the Line is far greater than in Tsypkin’s novel. In fact, even the memory of the images of history does not ‘belong’ to Venichka: many of them come from the memoirs of Il’ia Erenburg. However,

Если Эренбург как мемуарист демонстрирует объективную память [i.e., his actual experiences], то в случае с Ерофеевым мы имеем дело с памятью субъективной, сохраняющей имена, детали и факты, однако каталогизирующей их не согласно закрепленности за определенным событием, а исходя из демонстративной незаинтересованности в объективности и верности факту. (Vlasov 212)17

In the final lines of Summer in Baden-Baden, the narrator observes a destitute Finnish family: a little girl and her stumbling, drunken parents. These people could not possibly enter history, except, perhaps, in the digested form of statistical data. Tsypkin’s narrator preserves them against oblivion. Venichka preserves only the endless-
ly mediated remnants of historical memory: “разрушение Ерофеевым диахронических связей с предшествующими текстами и установление синхронного соотношения своего и чужого” can leave only images, but Venichka’s subjectivity could not have accommodated anything else in any case (Vlasov 213).18

Subjectivity and Reading

Venichka’s spiritual isolation “precludes all but the most superficial communication with other human beings; and this is what isolates [him] physically, emotionally, and intellectually from the world at large” (Baslyk 55). But Venichka’s predicament is, at most, a parody of the isolated subject of Dostoevsky or other modern(ist) writers. Venichka’s language is a tissue of quotations; his subjectivity reflects the shallowness of the world he inhabits, and his inarticulate despair points not to a transcendental spiritual horizon but to alcoholic hallucinations. In fact, Lipovetsky contends that alcohol, or, more precisely, its effects, serve Venichka as the opening into the transcendent in the absence of God (Paralogii 295-297). But the confinement of the experience of transcendence to human neurophysiology thus reconfirms the absence both of a realm of existence far beyond Venichka and of its echoes in any kind of spiritual depths.

Tsypkin’s narrator is even more isolated than Venichka: in the entire novel he speaks to one person, and spends most of his time so deep in introverted thought that his fellow passengers on the train merit, at best, mention as reflections in the window. This is to be contrasted both to the constant sense of humiliation experienced by his Dostoevsky and to the shame felt by Venichka when the other passengers suspect him and the suddenly undressed ticket controller of homosexual relations. But whereas Dostoevsky experiences constant torment on account of his incongruousness with an antagonistic environment, as well as his (characteristically Dostoevskian) self-abnegating vanity, Venichka effectively extols shame as a necessary condition for malodushie (Epstein, “Charms” 433-435).

And yet, the narrator in Summer in Baden-Baden retains a certain structural integrity; it is he who intrudes into the Dostoevsky portions, and it is always clear that they are ultimately subordinate to him and to his reading. In part, this effect is achieved through the style of the novel’s language: whereas Venichka’s monologue foregrounds the words of others, reanimating and re-appropriating them in a classically Bakhtinian manner, the sheer extent of the quotations and their multi-
layeredness effectively drowns any organizing narrative voice in the discordant cacophony. The linguistic detritus of a discredited ideology, lacking any agency of its own, nonetheless manages to revenge itself by stifling the quiet voice trying to reanimate it. Tsypkin’s narrator, in contrast, speaks in a fairly unmarked modern Russian style with few if any quotations or stylistic references. The image of Dostoevsky does not bring with it strong traces of Dostoevsky’s language.

Gabrielle Cavagnaro, seemingly regarding the narrator in *Summer in Baden-Baden* as a metonym for the author of the novel, contends that “Tsypkin—through reading—may be understood to inscribe his own journey and consciousness onto the already existent Dostoevskian parchment, assimilating the Dostoevskies’ journey into his own biography” (495). But this process can be understood in reverse. In a review, Vasilii Aksenov notes that the Dostoevsky portrayed in the novel is so pathetic that the stereotyped images of the ‘great writer’ rise in opposition to this portrait of a perpetually irritated, short-legged xenophobe (34). The narrator, appearing in the novel as pure interiority, with no physical details of his person save for the single image of snow accumulating on his shoes, in fact rewrites the “Dostoevskian parchment” in his own words. Just like the portions of the novel devoted to Dostoevsky, all the other references to writers and dissidents are arranged around the narrator’s subjectivity. Rather than forming his language out of clichéd fragments, he suspends recognizable (stereotyped) portrayals of literary-historical figures in the mnemonic flow of his endless sentences. Syntax becomes the tool of memory as it brings together layers of time and events separated by differing types and levels of mediation into a single flow of reflection made possible by a discrete subject. Tsypkin’s narrator struggles to wrest the concrete and personal existence of individuals from the accumulated layers of dead language, even as he tears their literary personae away from their respective styles.

Venichka is not even alive (Lipovetsky, *Paralogii* 319-320). With the literalization of the death of the author (or at least the narrator), reading predominates—but reading of such intensity that it gains autonomy over against the subject ostensibly doing the reading. All that remains is the layering of one quotation on top of another, the endless proliferation of intertextuality, the obviation of any search for literary origins by the transformation of the text—and the narrative itself—into an endless oscillation: “tick-tock” (Tumanov 111-112).
Much has been written about Venichka’s despair, as well as the resistance of his moral pronouncements to dissolution in the dark humor that pervades the “poema.” These claims coexist uneasily with the manifest abundance of intertexts—“In fact, intertextuality itself may be posited as an object of parody” (Ryan-Hayes 67). Even Venichka’s death scene may be a borrowing from Ehrenburg (Vlasov 214).19 As commentators have noted, the ending of Moscow to the End of the Line, with Venichka’s sudden return to Moscow, his murder at the hands of the mysterious attackers, and the last sentence—in which Venichka seems to annihilate the entire preceding narrative—transforms the linear narrative into an endless oscillation. The text becomes, in effect, a mechanism engaged in perpetuum mobile, obviating the agency of a narrating or synthesizing subjectivity.

The narrator in Summer in Baden-Baden may be understood to be negating his existence in favor of Dostoevsky’s and Anna Grigor’evna’s. For much of the narrative he allows them to occupy the space in which his own experiences and reflections could have existed. But as elaborated above, their presence in this mental space is mediated through the narrator’s subjectivity, which continues to linger on the margins, as well as through his active reading.

Conclusion

Summer in Baden-Baden and Moscow to the End of the Line address many of the same societal and philosophical problems that had become apparent in the later 1960s and 1970s. Both works make strong gestures in the direction of repudiating the governing conventions of Russian literature, eschewing the positive hero and narrative conventions of Socialist Realism (including its later permutations, such as Chingiz Aitmatov’s 1980 novel The Day Lasts Longer than a Century [Idol’she veka dlitsia den’] or the novels of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn), and especially that literature’s general suspicion of subjectivity.

Both texts were deeply political in the context of their time precisely thanks to their silent disavowal of dominant concepts in the political discourse of the late Soviet period. Similarly, both texts, in their individual ways, reject both the claims of Soviet culture to the existence of progress and to its desirability, whether in material, moral, or even simply chronological terms. The retreat into subjectivity corresponds to a retreat into language, and especially written language. The narrator of Summer in Baden-Baden takes to its extreme the personal engagement with literature which was characteristic of the intelli-
gentsia’s attitude toward the revered writers of the past. For Tsypkin’s narrator, this life in literature becomes a surrogate for an ersatz existence whose impoverishment is implied by its diminution in the novel. Venichka’s involvement in the textual tradition is of a very different form: in *Moscow to the End of the Line*, the weight of the accumulated language crushes the narrating subject, and his dissolution in it becomes, in its own way, a serious critique of the valorization of canonical literature on aesthetic, moral, and spiritual grounds which, in large part surviving its association with the Soviet regime, allowed the literary tradition to retain its axiologically privileged status for educated Russians.

Epstein posits the multiplication of realities as the determinant feature of postmodernism, at least in the Soviet and Russian context (*After the Future* 189). This process corresponds to the collapse of absolute points of reference, including the voice of the author. As the integrity of the work as a self-contained object disintegrates, metaliterary narrative features appear: an author-simulacrum appears as a character in the text (Lipovetsky, *Fiction* 18). Indeed, the narrative of *Summer in Baden-Baden* is, in large part, the story of the creation of the novel itself, so that the portion of the text featuring Dostoevsky is left unfinished, displaying the seams at which the narrator-author has attempted to combine various textual sources but has not yet resolved their contradictions and discrepancies. Tsypkin writes about an unnamed simulacrum of himself doing what Tsypkin must have done—as his photographic album of sites from the biography of Dostoevsky attests. As Sontag writes, “Nothing is invented. Everything is invented” (31).

Venichka refers frequently to his audience, posing questions in their name. At one point, he accentuates the generic self-consciousness indicated by the appellation “poema” to the text by meditating on its changing narrative form. When he discovers that his alcohol-filled suitcase has been stolen, Venichka must launch an investigation. The change in activity prompts a metaliterary reflection: “Черт знает, в каком жанре я доеду до Петушков... От самой Москвы все были философские эссе и мемуары, все были стихотворения в прозе, как у Ивана Тургенева... Теперь начинается детективная повесть” (77).

In all the above-mentioned respects, *Moscow to the End of the Line* has come to represent the first unequivocal statement of Russian postmodernism. At the same time, accounts of the advent of post-
modernity in the Second World frequently attribute to the Soviet period many of the characteristics of a postmodern condition *avant la lettre*. Epstein even goes so far as to trace the affinity between Russian culture and the postmodernist tendency to replace reality with simulacra to the Middle Ages:

The production of reality seems new for Western civilization, but it has been routinely accomplished throughout all of Russian history. Here, ideas have always tended to substitute for reality, beginning, perhaps, with Prince Vladimir, who adopted the idea of Christianity in 988 A.D., and proceeded to implant it in a vast country where it had, until that time, been virtually unknown. (*After the Future* 190-191)

However, against this claim to something like a “primitive postmodernism,” one might quote the preface of Feuerbach’s *Essence of Christianity* (1843): “But certainly…the present age…prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, fancy to reality, the appearance to the essence,…for in these days illusion only is sacred, truth profane” (emphasis in the original, xxxix). Needless to say, the postmodern is not a wholly unique cultural development in every respect, but if this period concept is to have any usefulness, it will be necessary to limit its application to changes beyond a certain *quantity*, if the vicissitudes of historical evolution preclude a *qualitative* definition. In any case, Epstein’s formulation comes close to homogenizing Russian history itself out of existence and reiterating the well-worn view of Russian life as the product of eternal attitudes or characteristics of the Russians themselves.

The necessity of limiting the concept of postmodernism applies to the classification of such works as *Summer in Baden-Baden* as well. In all likelihood, Tsypkin was unaware of Erofeev’s work and *vice versa*. Tsypkin was reticent about his own writing and seems not to have moved in the circles in which exposure to *Moscow to the End of the Line* in *samizdat* would have been likely. The many similarities between the two works examined in this study must be understood as the result of *parallel* developments. And the usefulness of a period concept such as postmodernism for the improved understanding of these texts—and the viability of the concept in general—has much to do with the degree of *synchronicity* in late Soviet culture and with the elaboration of mechanisms which would account for the distribution of ideas, attitudes, feelings, and aesthetic forms. Here the deficiencies
of fundamentally abstract definitions of postmodernism (or any other analogous concept) become apparent.

How, then, should one position Summer in Baden-Baden with relation to modernism and postmodernism? A purely chronological approach would answer the question while stripping it of any possible interest. The investigation of Tsypkin’s avowed influences would be equally unhelpful given the absolute centrality, in the novel’s form and style, of its modification of the typical earlier relationship between the intelligent and the Russian literary heritage. The endurance of the narrating subject seems likewise to suggest the endurance of a modernist concern with individuality. The text’s preoccupation with mediation, as well as its strongly pronounced metaliterary dimension seemingly point to emergent postmodernist tendencies, although this is complicated by the presence of these (and many other postmodernist features) in earlier modernist works of the 1920s (Lipovetsky, Fiction 11-12). Ultimately, it is not the aim of this paper to come to a decision on this question, but rather to question the usefulness of a dilated concept of the postmodern for literary and cultural analysis. Edith Clowes is surely right to stress that postmodern theory should be “used as stimulation to develop an accurate model of economy and culture in late-Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, not as a simulation that disguises more than it reveals” (342). In particular, it might be hoped that the obvious fruitfulness of the division of cultural history into discrete periods will encourage the rigorous theorization of—and serious research into—the mysteries of the diffusion of cultural dominants through cultures, of the multiple influences and lines of development present in any given cultural production, and of the complex interaction between individual producers of aesthetic objects and the context(s) in which they work.

Notes
1. For more detailed biographical information, see the remarks of Tsypkin’s son, published as the introduction to Leto v Badene i drugie sochineniiia, as well as the article by Susan Sontag, published as the introduction to the English translation of Summer in Baden-Baden and reprinted in At the Same Time: Essays and Speeches.
2. For an objection of this sort, see Perloff.
3. See the classic account by Osip Mandel’stam in “Knizhnyi shkap” from Shum vremeni. For a more recent examination in the context of Russian Jewish culture around the turn of the twentieth century, see Slezkine
4. The literature on Erofeev’s work is large. Major commentaries and interpretations include Geisser-Schnittmann, Levin, and Vlasov.

5. See, for instance, Joseph Frank’s review in the *New York Review of Books* from 2002.

6. In-text page references will refer to the 2003 edition of *Leto v Baidene* issued by NLO.

7. “I won’t remind you how to refine furniture polish—any child knows that. For some reason no one in Russia knows why Pushkin died, but how to refine furniture polish—that, everyone knows” (trans. H. William Tjalsma 67). Subsequent translations from *Moscow to the End of the Line* with page numbers indicated are from this edition. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of Russian texts are my own. In-text page references will refer to the 1995 edition of Erofeev’s works issued by Kh.G.S.

8. “In spite of everything, it had a depressing effect on them—Freshen-up disappeared immediately from all the stores” (37). “Freshen-up” being the cologne that Venichka’s coworkers proceed to imibe.

9. Paperno and Gasparov contend in their important early interpretation that the Gospel theme is central to the work and make the Aramaic phrase “talitha kum” (“arise and go,” in their translation) the key thematic clue in the *poema*.

10. “Yes. I’m speaking of Johann von Goethe, who did not drink a single gram.”

   “Strange … And what if Friedrich Schiller had served him something? A goblet of champagne?”

   “All the same he wouldn’t have taken it. He would have said, ’I don’t drink a gram’” (83).

11. “Богатая библиотека, прекрасный выбор книг. Это был конец одиночества. Завтра в это время ко мне придут Толстой и Блок, Стендаль и Бальзак. А я думала о смерти, глупая!

   Торопясь и ошибаясь, выписываем номера желаемых книг.

   Завтра нам принесут их по две на каждую. Вот счастье-то, что я не одна больше! Одной как бы только две книги, а так — четыре. Это уже паек, на котором можно существовать” (Ginzburg 231).

   “A rich library, a wonderful selection of books.

   This was the end of solitude. By this time tomorrow, Tolstoy and Blok, Stendhal and Balzac would come to me. And I, fool that I am, had been thinking of death!

   Hurrying and making mistakes, we write out the numbers of our desired books. Tomorrow they will bring two of them for each of us.

   What happiness that I am not alone any longer! They would have given only two books to me alone, but this way—four. This is already a portion
12. See, for instance, page 172, where the narration is suddenly interrupted with “в своих «Воспоминаниях» Анна Григорьевна обходит, однако, молчанием визит в этот день Фединой любимой сестры, Веры Михайловны…” This visit is to have fatal consequences for Dostoevsky, and the omission of the sister’s effect upon his health from the Reminiscences undermines the credibility not only of that text, but, by extension, of the diaries as well. [“In her Memoirs she also passes over in silence the visit that day from Fedya’s favorite sister, Vera Mikhaylovna…”] Trans. Roger and Angela Keys, 128. Subsequent translations from Summer in Baden-Baden with page numbers indicated are from this edition.

13. “And I was already walking along the street, hurrying up to that place where the red, lacquered trams went by—single cars, rarely joined in twos—the streets through which they traveled could only be referred to as streets conditionally—on both sides of the tramway track stretched vacant lots strewn with fragments of crushed brick and overgrown with nettles, between which there stood houses, miraculously spared, or simply boxes, from which torn ribbons of what used to be wallpaper drooped and fluttered slightly in the wind or where water pipes or the glazed tiles of a Dutch oven would protrude from the height of a third storey—faster to the tram—it took me to the Institute—the buildings of the clinic, located on the outskirts of the city, had also survived, just like the hospital in which we were living—the Germans spared the hospital so as to keep it for themselves…” This section is omitted from the English translation.

14. “Everyone says, ‘The Kremlin, the Kremlin.’ I hear about it from everybody, but I’ve never seen it myself. How many times (thousands) I’ve walked, drunk or hung over, across Moscow from north to south, east to west, from one end to the other, one way or another, and never did I see the Kremlin” (13).

15. “I only wanted to see three things: Vesuvius, Herculaneum, and Pompeii. But they said that Vesuvius disappeared long ago and sent me to Herculaneum. But in Herculaneum they said, ‘So, what do you need with Herculaneum, you idiot? It’d be better to go to Pompeii.’ I arrive in Pompeii but they say to me, ‘You’ve had it with Pompeii. Be off to Herculaneum’” (103).

16. “But every story has an end—even world history” (112, translation modified).

17. “If Ehrenburg demonstrates objective memory as a memoirist, then in the case of Erofeev we are dealing with subjective memory, which preserves names, details, and facts, but does not catalogue them according to their connection with a given event, but rather in accordance with a manifest disinterestedness in objectivity and faithfulness to the facts.”
18. “Erofeev’s dismantling of the diachronic links with preceding texts and his establishment of a synchronic coexistence of his own and that which belongs to others.”

19. «Пошел—монастырский двор, 
И двери раскрыты к вечерне. 
Маленький черт 
Шилом колет соперника. 
Все равно! 
Пил Тяжелое туренское вино» (Vlasov, “Zagranitsa glazami eksten trika” 214). 
[“I went—the monastery courtyard, 
And the doors are open for Vespers. 
A little demon 
Stabs his rival with an awl. 
No matter! 
I drank the heavy Tourainian wine.”]

20. “The devil knows in which genre I’ll arrive in Petushki. All the way from Moscow it was memoirs and philosophical essays, it was all poems in prose, as with Ivan Turgenev. Now the detective story begins” (72, translation modified).

Works Cited


