

РАЗДЕЛ IV. СОВРЕМЕННАЯ ЛИТЕРАТУРА В ИСТОРИКО-КУЛЬТУРНОМ КОНТЕКСТЕ

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PUSHKIN HOUSE AS ARCHEOLOGY: IS THE ‘LITERARINESS’ OF THE RUSSIAN PAST DANGEROUS FOR THE PRESENT?

Key words: archaeology, writing, Pushkin, Tyutchev, museification of culture, desire, Other

In his novel *Pushkin House*, written in the 1960s but published only after *perestroika* in the 1980s, Andrei Bitov questions the Russian cultural past of the past 200 years, through the symbolic institution, located in StPetersburg, called “Puhskin House”. The symbolism of Pushkin as an icon of Russian culture of the 19th and 20th century, an icon, moreover, promulgated for ideological purposes during the Soviet era, also belongs to the wider symbolic significance of the title of the novel. All of Russia, grounded in the model of “classical” 19th century culture, is according to Bitov’s novel, Pushkin’s “house.” This is what Bitov sets out to challenge through his plot and the “hero of the times” – the 1960s – Leva Odoyevstev. The novel, in form and content, represents a new poetics – that of postmodernism, which is constructed as a recovery of the cultural memory of the lost Russian Modernism and avant-garde of the 1920’s, loose represented in the novel by Lyova’s Grandfather and Uncle Dickens. It is this recovery of cultural memory – represented as an “archaeology” of Russian cultural history, which brings about a revolution in the perception of reality in Bitov’s new Russian postmodern poetics. Is this revolution dangerous?

The plot of *Pushkin House* is not a chronology but a temporality and a synchronicity. The three parts of the novel: *Part One – Fathers and Sons*; *Part Two – The Hero of Our Time*, and *Part Three – The Humble Horseman*, fit together like the threads of a skein of wool, which is being

wound into a knot or a ball. Another image suggested by the plot is a spiral, which is open-ended and hence points in the direction of infinity. But since the plot also appears to return perpetually to a point which had already been passed, it could also be likened to a Moebius strip [see *12, 9*] or the reverse eight,¹ which has neither beginning nor end. Lyova, the hero and subject of this novel, constitutes himself not in chronological time, but as a position in space. This space is defined by Lyova's various imaginary and symbolic 'doubles'. Thus, Uncle Dickens materializes into an image of the ideal Father (or Grandfather) to constitute Lyova's small *other* (Lacan's *objet petit a*) of the *imaginary*. Grandfather Odoyevtsev, who appears when Lyova is at the threshold of adulthood, forms Lyova's big Other in the *symbolic* register. Together with Mitishatyev, into whose image Lyova eventually doubles (in Part III of the novel), Lyova becomes the Other of 'time' (*vremia*). This Other of 'time' is the unconscious of the 1960s of Russian history.

The investigation of the unconscious of an era (Bitov's *epokha*) has acquired a name in recent Western theory. Through Michel Foucault, this methodology of historical research has been called 'archaeology'.² Such an archaeology seeks to uncover, not totalizing unities and teleologies, but discontinuities, difference(s) and dispersions. The failure of traditional historical research to perceive discontinuities is attributed to the tendency in Western culture to want to "preserve, against all decenterings, the sovereignty of the subject, and the twin figures of anthropology and humanism" [6, 12]. The perceived failure of Western nineteenth century historicism to uncover "the whole interplay of differences",

¹ The "reverse eight" figures as a diagrammatic representation of Lacan's topology of the subject (his "interior 8") [8, 155–156]. The "interior 8" looks like "two intersecting fields", with a continuous edge, which, however, is "hidden" at one point by "the surface that has previously unfolded itself" [8, 155–156]. Lacan first situates the libido and desire at this intersection. However, he then goes on to point out that what is created by this intersection is not two surfaces but a hole, a void. It is thus this void that becomes the locus of desire and the "support" of the subject [see also *II*, 71–72].

² In his book [6] Michel Foucault defines this new methodology of the social sciences as something like the old history of ideas and yet quite different from it. The difference is in the fact that "archeology" takes discourse itself as its object of research. It treats the past as discourse or as numerous discourses and it regards these past discourses as "monuments". "Archeology" is thus not "an interpretive discipline. It does not seek another, better-hidden discourse. It refuses to be 'allegorical' [6, 139]. In *The Order of Things* – a book that preceded *The Archeology of Knowledge*, and whose methodology Foucault undertakes to "explain" in the latter – the method of investigation described as "archeology" is defined as a desire "to reveal a positive unconscious of knowledge" [7]. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences (Les Mots et les choses*, Paris, 1966) (London, 1992), p.xi (from the Foreword by Michel Foucault, 1970, not published in the original French edition).

or to see “discontinuities”, “transformations”, the function of “levels” (dare we say, with Deleuze and Guattari, “plateaus”), “limits”, and “specific series”, is diagnosed by Foucault as issuing from a general fear of the Other as a category by which our own thought defines itself: “As if we were afraid to conceive of the *Other* in the time of our own thought” [6, 12]. While it may be true that historical discourse has eschewed the category of the Other in its methodology, the representation of the Other has been a fact of European aesthetics at least since the times of Modernism. However, it is only through postmodern discourse that an imperative has been established to extend this representation to the entire epistemological field. Hence Foucault's call for a new 'archaeological' methodology of history and the human sciences. In his own way, Bitov answers this call.

With *Pushkin House*, Bitov undertakes a complex task. His novel, which combines features of a work of fiction and an essay on art¹, must serve, in the context of Russian culture of the 1960s, both as a recuperation of a lost Russian cultural past – that of the Russian avant-garde and Modernism of the beginning of the twentieth century — and as a 'scientific' project, aimed at a radical re-evaluation of Russian history of the first half of the twentieth century and the dissemination of a new epistemology that would uproot the Soviet metaphysics and Socialist Realism.

That is why Lyova, Bitov's hero, is engaged in an 'archaeological' project on Russian culture of the nineteenth century. This he does through his study of Pushkin, Tyutchev and Lermontov, which results in various articles appearing as titles or in paraphrase only (“The Belated Genius”, “The Median of Contrast”, which addresses the *Bronze Horseman*). The exception is an article entitled “Three Prophets,” part of which appears in the text of the novel, at the end of Part Two. Here, while apparently going over old themes of Russian literature, Lyova manages to offer a new, individual re-evaluation of old material: this novelty results from the introduction of a single new element – namely, Lyova's own experience. Lyova's article on “The Three Prophets” is not, the narrator alleges, about Pushkin, or Lermontov, or Tyutchev, but about Lyova himself. This imparts to Lyova's critical work, which the narrator evaluates as even somewhat naive and unscientific, the quality of 'inner freedom' [I, 125]. It is this unabashedly subjective study of the past that becomes a kind of 'monument' at Lyova's Institute, circulating in a well-worn and slightly tarnished samizdat-like copy: it is something “without precedent”, unique and “different”.

¹ Thus Susan Brownsberger writes, in her “Translator's Afterward”: “At least one academic bookstore, deceived by appearances, has shelved this novel under criticism instead of fiction” [I, 360].

However, it is not just that Lyova's archaeological project is different and without precedent; it is that such a project is a project *on* difference, discontinuities, and series which do not form totalities. Thus, instead of looking for the continuity of Pushkin's poetic tradition in Tyutchev's poetry, Lyova looks for and uncovers a 'secret' duel going on across the generations, a duel between Tyutchev and his predecessor. This duel is one-sided, since Pushkin is not aware of his poetic adversary. In fact, Pushkin is not a 'real' opponent for Tyutchev, but Tyutchev's Other – a phantasmic being, constructed by Tyutchev in a relationship of *jealousy* or *envy*. According to Lyova's study, it is this Other that enables Tyutchev to define himself in the history of Russian poetry, as a *vtorostepennyi* (“second tier”) poet in relation to the 'Pushkin tradition' or 'Pushkin line' in Russian literature. Bitov's reader knows that this is a monstrously unfair judgement of Tyutchev, which cannot possibly be taken at face value. The point of Lyova's study of Tyutchev, Pushkin, and Lermontov (the latter figuring only nominally) is not in its truth value: its value lies in its relation to Lyova's own experience. And Lyova's experience consists of his total identification with Pushkin and his subjective reading of Tyutchev as Pushkin's envious and presumptive heir in Russian poetry. It is not that Lyova rejects or denies Tyutchev's genius as a poet. On the contrary. Lyova gives Tyutchev his historical due, his place in Russian poetry as the “master of *concrete* poetry” [2, 275]. Lyova even asserts, in his drunken polemic speeches during his night on duty at the Institute (which resemble Grandfather's drunken confession to Lyova), that there is no such thing as the 'Pushkin line' in modern Russian literature. This is because modern Russian literature is closer to the poetics of Tyutchev than it is to Pushkin. What Lyova uncovers in his study – and this is the actual novelty of it – is that Pushkin was Tyutchev's *desire* (“first love”) [2, 278], and that this desire shaped Tyutchev's subsequent destiny as a poet. This desire took on the form of a desire for recognition by the Master (Pushkin) that was never granted. What Lyova does not say but what his study 're-enacts' (not as a 'historical' re-enactment but as an *intertextual* replay of the theme of desire in Bitov's novel) is the fact that desire is by definition unsatisfiable. As such, it is the agency of something called infinity. This infinity is not something transcendental or beyond the human subject. It is part of the constitution of the subject and the subject's relationship to language. It is in the *jouissance* of language – the *jouissance* beyond the phallus – that man experiences the infinite and the sublime. However, Lyova's study does not take us that far. As a typical *homo sovieticus*, Lyova is still below the level of appreciation of the sublime, even if he can intuitively grasp the category of the Other of discourse. This is not so for Bitov. The author of *Pushkin*

House (or the abstract level in the structure of the text representing his discourse) is no longer a *homo sovieticus* and can therefore show, using his hero, the *excess* that is productive of discourse. This he does in Lyova's final orgy of writing (albeit for only a brief spell) during his night of duty at the Institute, when Lyova discovers his 'old' manuscript on "The Median of Contrast", which he relives ecstatically for a moment as both reader and writer (archaeologist) in an attempt to complete the unfinished work. This *jouissance* of writing is accompanied by a blaze of light-music [svetomuzyka] [2, 338], which is the synaesthetic effect of Lyova's inebriated state in which he, in an orgiastic mood, switches on all the chandeliers at the Institute.

It is in fact Tyutchev with whom Lyova identifies more than with Pushkin, even if, unlike the reader, he does not realize it. Lyova understands Tyutchev because Lyova has come to understand the dialectic of desire through his own experience of desire. Desire is not just one of Lyova's experiences: it is his self-defining experience.

Just as he was for Tyutchev, Pushkin is also Lyova's desire. As Lyova's desire, Pushkin, for all his historical concreteness (his poetry, letters, his documented historical personality), shares the elusiveness of Lyova's beloved, Faina. Pushkin was unattainable for Tyutchev, his contemporary. Pushkin is even less attainable for Lyova, who is his "belated" contemporary [2, 338]. For Lyova imagines, vainly, that he would have reacted differently to Pushkin, had he been in Tyutchev's place: he would have embraced Alexander Sergeevich. Here, the narrator Bitov shows skepticism. Did we not, he asks, see Lyova's reaction to Grandfather, who, it is implied, was Lyova's contemporary and carrier of a cultural (critical) tradition that Lyova aspired to inherit? The encounter with Grandfather – Lyova's Other – resulted not in a loving rapprochement, but in total alienation. However, this alienation was not nihilistic; this 'encounter' with Grandfather transformed Lyova into a 'mature' unconscious and his 'life' into *logos*. For it is after the encounter with Grandfather and during Faina's habitual absence, that Lyova's work on his postgraduate dissertation gets off the ground (to Mama's satisfaction), eventually leading to the study "Three Prophets". The archaeological project, which is the form Lyova's *logos* assumes, is in itself not unproductive. It enables Lyova to look into the past and see his own image reflected in it. This is Tyutchev's 'guilt' before Lyova: "He [Tyutchev] was to blame for Lyova's recognition, the recognition of himself in the ugly face of his own experience" [2, 338]. This is what Lyova held personally against Tyutchev even if, in the same breath, Lyova recognized that it was Tyutchev's poetics (not Pushkin's Classicism) that formed the bridge to the Russian

twentieth century literature (“Tyutchev *vanquished* him [Pushkin] in poetry < . . . > Pushkin's line has no supremacy” [2, 281]). Identifying the relationship of the poetic discourse of an era (Bitov's *epokha*) with a cultural Other (the Tyutchev/Pushkin relationship) is what gave Lyova's 'archaeological' project on Russian literature such a unique experiential quality. In fact, what Lyova did was question the authority of the past. He dared 'profane' the sacred monuments of Russian culture and use them to further or assimilate knowledge about himself and his own time. Thus Tyutchev became Lyova's mirror. In this sense, Lyova utilized the past in a constructive way. He brought the past out of its 'museum' and turned it into an analytic tool of the present moment. This constituted Lyova's 'archaeological' methodology.

But it is also Bitov's methodology. With his novel, Bitov, too, is offering an archaeology, not of the past, but of the 1960s — his own 'time' or contemporaneity (*vremia*), which is the time of the writing of his novel. Bitov's archaeological project overlaps with Lyova's. For it is Bitov's original and deconstructive reading of the past which reanimates the (historical) relationship between Tyutchev and Pushkin. The question of whether Bitov's analysis of that relationship is factually correct or critically plausible is irrelevant. In a work of fiction, the author is allowed to use everything as metaphor. The only constraint he faces is that his metaphor be relevant to his project, the main concern of his fiction. Bitov's metaphor, built on the Tyutchev/Pushkin historico-poetic dichotomy, ends with a parallel reading of two poems on madness. Both Russian poets had visions of madness, which they expressed in poetry. Each of them depicted madness as either a flame with a shadow or a shadow surrounded by a flame. Which poet's vision was which remains unclear and, ultimately, irrelevant. The point is made that each poet's *logos* was like a light illuminating dark space and that either this light or this surrounding darkness corresponded to the concept of madness or non-meaning, which is the same thing. But this madness or non-meaning is not the end-point of their poetry. On the contrary, it is the precondition of *logos*, its reverse or underside, the concealed portion that corresponds to the concealed intersection of the Moebius strip. This generative or originary madness, symbolized by light and its shadow, is a metaphor. Light is the image of metaphor, a metaphor of metaphor. A similar image occurs at the end of Grandfather's writing. The madness Tyutchev and Pushkin described but which only Pushkin 'feared' (Pushkin, the Classicist, would have balked at the Futurists' *trans-sense* language or the *literature of the absurd*) is the same madness embodied in Grandfather's life and written word. It is a madness coeval with non-sense or with *silence*, both of which are on the other side — beyond the *limit* — of language. Silence is opposed

to *mnogovorenie* [2, 283] (babbling), both in Bitov's 'critique of critiquing' (his attack on 'negation' and 'nihilism') and in Grandfather's attack on "mediocrity" (*poshlost'*) and "consumerism" (*poterbitel'stvo*). But if both Bitov's and Grandfather's critiques of the 'production' of words (criticism, critical thought) were to prevail as the sole principle of discourse, then discourse itself would become an impossibility. This *reductio ad absurdum* can only be overcome through archaeological criticism. And it is as an archaeological project that Bitov's discourse ultimately functions.

The two 'archaeologies' – Lyova's and Bitov's – form a unified whole. They frame each other in a combined function, namely as cultural *memory* and as the contemporary unconscious. And while memory is always of something already past, memory as archaeology is brought into the present and becomes the 'chronotope' (Bakhtin) that supports the culture of the present. Memory as chronotope or as archaeology, or as the unconscious of 'time' (*vremia*) is not subject to *museification*. It does not turn into a dead monument. And while Bitov's novel appears to be littered with monuments of the Russian past – the very setting of *Pushkin House* embodies such a notion – Bitov's archaeological method of evoking this past is radically subversive. All the concretized 'monuments' of the past – Pushkin's pistols (a 'proven' historical artefact), Grigorovich's inkwell (an 'unproven' artefact, which has the flavor of yet another double literary allusion, namely to Ivan Karamazov's inkwell, which is a 'graft' onto Luther's inkwell), the Bronze Horseman, Pushkin's death mask – are subjected to laughter and parody. Pushkin's pistol, used by Lyova in the symbolic duel with Mitishatyev, is left smouldering not from gun powder but from Mitishatyev's semi-extinguished cigarette butt, which the latter stuffs into the barrel of the gun before disappearing from the Institute and from Lyova's life. Pushkin's death mask, which is broken in the scuffle, turns out to have been only one of hundreds of copies held in the basement of the museum. Grigorovich's inkwell is retrieved, unbroken. Lyova straddles the bronze lion in front of the Admiralty Building, scratching the monument with a coin, to prove that this was not the "marble beast" [285/E] straddled by Pushkin's hero Yevgeniy in *The Bronze Horseman*. Historical artefacts, which belong to the museum of Russian culture, are played with *transgressively* and exploded as 'relics' – objects of worship and quasi-religious admiration. History as *factual* museum of dead exhibits and decontextualized artefacts is subverted in favor of history as *archaeology* or the lived unconscious of time (*vremia*). Since an historical fact can never be reinstated in its fullness outside of its past context, all factual history is of necessity distortion

of the facts [2, 281–282]. Bitov's entire novel, with its quasi-historical title and its monumental network of literary allusions, is hence an exercise in transgression and in sacrilegious treatment of traditional cultural authority. When Bitov says that he is offering a 'museum novel' (*roman-muzei*), he does not mean it literally. Quite the opposite. Or rather, he does mean it, only he is not telling the whole story. The other side of his story is that by allocating the past its place in the museum, his 'museum narrative' becomes a deconstruction of the museum of the past. The museum of culture can be deconstructed through the methodology of 'archaeological research' into the national cultural tradition. This past manifests itself as the intertextual Other of the present cultural and historical moment. This Other, constituted out of the material of the past as a living *logos* or *present* (*presence*), is embodied by the hero, Lyova, whose identity as 'hero of his time' is established through and by his writing. This writing belongs to two realms: that of the conscious and that of the unconscious. While Lyova may think of himself as a conscious agent of his writing and a conscious carrier of his culture, the unconscious of cultural memory is always at work in his deliberations and his own writing. This is "writing" in the sense in which Jacques Derrida has defined it.¹

Conclusion. This "writing" constitutes "the linguistic turn" in Russian postmodern culture. The novel is a "supplement" [compare 3, 149] (interpretation), in the postmodern register, of the Russian culture of the past 100 years. With its emphasis on culture as memory – which means culture as unconscious memory trace and *writing* (inscription), this postmodern register is defined by the mechanism of *displacement*. All meaning is 'displaced' in language, whose basic structure is that of the *supplement* [*interpretation*], so that language always expresses "more, less or something other" than it wanted to say (*voudrait dire*). To try to infuse the discourse of the past with 'reality' is to attempt the impossible. What exists on the plane of 'reality' – in the sense of the 'real,' which is impossible and unrepresentable – is God. What exists outside the real is always that which has separated off from it and is "divided, multiplied, canceled out, and the canceled

¹ Compare Jacques Derrida, who, in taking Freud's definition of the unconscious as his point of departure, says in "Freud and the Scene of Writing": "<...> for the main thread of the article on "The Unconscious", its example, as we have emphasized, is the fate of a representation after it is first registered. When perception – the apparatus which originally enregisters and inscribes – is described, the 'perceptual apparatus' can be nothing but a writing machine. The 'Note on the Mystic Writing Pad,' twelve years later, will describe the perceptual apparatus and the origin of memory" [4, 221]. *Writing* is thus *inscription*, which, however, can only take place in conjunction with the simultaneous *erasure* of what is inscribed.

out is annihilated” [3, 149; Modified translation]. There are no pure, “authentic grounds” of “existence” (*sushchestvovanie na chestnosti podlinnykh prichin*) [2, 411]. There is only *supplementarity*.

As a model of indeterminacy and freedom of the Word (not to be confused with 'freedom of speech'), *supplementarity* is tied to one precondition only: *silence*. This silence is what characterizes the discourses of culture and cultural memory *before* they come into being, before they become discourses. At first, discourse is a gap (“an abyss”), occupying a total space which is as yet not a totality or identity. It is the gap of a continuous present, which as such does not exist *in time*. This is the silence of the 'night,' into which Grandfather has been plunged by his God (in the fragment “God Exists”). This silence is raised into a 'prayer' – not a 'silent' prayer, but silence *as prayer*. Prayer is an attitude of expectation, an opening up to something that may come (in the future). Prayer is thus an opening up to the future out of a silent present. This is what constitutes Grandfather's prayer in the fragment “God Exists”. In his prayer, Grandfather becomes a 'virtual' word: that is, he feels 'blinded' by the originary silence of language; 'castrated' would fit even better, in anticipation of the symbolism of the 'blinding' of Oedipus. Thus in his 'prayer' Grandfather stands on the threshold of transformation: from a 'heart' which is 'empty' and 'silent' like the 'sky,' into a 'gaze,' blinded by the sun. Grandfather, masking his own 'split' into subject and object under a 'lament,' thus comes 'face to face' with a faceless God, who is his silent Other. Grandfather's prayer is thus a *demand*, sent by the subject to his Other, which is the subject's 'real.' Confrontation with the real produces pain – hence Grandfather's anxiety in the 'face' of the 'silence' (total space) of the Other. But this 'pain' is also the 'open road' referred to in Blok's poem, which Grandfather's 'commentary' turned into a 'supplement' of his 'prayer.' Pain is 'interrogation,' the unanswered 'question' and the open-endedness of 'the road' to the Other. This Other is not a 'model' to be copied, not a sphere of production (of words), but a silence in which speech can constitute itself, not as 'presence' (edict, teaching) or as 'babbling', but as what has always already been said. Hence speech as supplement, which is coextensive with the Other as absence.

Pushkin House – an embodiment of Bitov's speech – is precisely such a supplement, “dangerous” not only for the repressed Russian post-Stalinist reading public of the 1960s, but no less threatening for the reader of the 21st century. For it confronts him with a horrific past not as 'literariness' and cathartic spectacle, from which he could distance himself, but as supplement, which 'castrates' through the 'real' of language

in order to perpetuate his place in the signifying chain of culture and the order of infinity. And while there may be protection (through temporal distancing) from the 'reality' of the past (Stalinism, the gulags, the disappearances, the lost generations), there is no escape from the real of the supplement. And this is why *Pushkin House* was – and still is – dangerous reading.

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«ПУШКИНСКИЙ ДОМ» КАК АРХЕОЛОГИЯ: В ЧЕМ ОПАСНОСТЬ
ЛИТЕРАТУРНОЙ КУЛЬТУРЫ ПРОШЛОГО
ДЛЯ СОВРЕМЕННОЙ РОССИИ?

Слободанка Владив-Гловер

Аннотация

В статье дан анализ романа «Пушкинский дом» А. Битова. Методологической базой исследования является концепция «археологической критики» Мишеля Фуко. Такой подход позволяет увидеть роман в новом ракурсе, а именно как интерпретацию русской культуры XX-го века. Роман Битова – это попытка оценить ушедшую культуру русского модернизма, а также переосмыслить значение Пушкина в русской культуре. Роман предлагает новую модель восприятия «писательства» и «чтения» как динамической функции культурной памяти, основанной на личном опыте и на функционировании языка с его опасными «добавлениями».

Ключевые слова: Археология, Писательство, Пушкин, Тютчев, музеефикация культуры