

“The Dialectics of Nature in Kara-Kum”: Andrei Platonov’s *Dzhan* as the Environmental History of a Future Utopia

MIEKA ERLEY

In the Soviet cultural geography of the early 1930s, the Kara-Kum desert of Turkmenistan—the setting of Andrei Platonov’s novella *Dzhan*—represented an environmental challenge to Soviet technological utopianism, just as its nomadic inhabitants challenged Stalinist narratives of political development. In this article, I offer new contexts for reading *Dzhan*, locating it within Russian and Soviet discourses of natural and national development and within the context of Platonov’s second profession as a *meliorator* (land reclamation engineer). I argue that *Dzhan* offers a vision of *vernacular socialism*, first, in its attention to the specific ecology of the desert and its inhabitants, and second, in its resistance to two totalizing Soviet master narratives forming in the early 1930s: in the political domain, new Stalinist doctrine on modes of production, and in the literary domain, the socialist realist plot.

“The Mountain of the Mind”: The Politics of the Gaze in Andrei Platonov’s *Dzhan*

PHILIP ROSS BULLOCK

This article explores the prominent role played by visual tropes in Andrei Platonov’s Turkmen novella, *Dzhan* (Soul). While acknowledging Platonov’s literary inventiveness, it seeks to identify the equal importance of the gaze as a means of emotional and ideological cognition, thereby arguing that the shift in emphasis in his prose in the mid-1930s entailed not just a move away from explicitly linguistic experimentation but also a greater embrace of visual imagery. With reference to both *Dzhan* and the author’s letters and notebooks, this essay examines how the geographical relocation to Central Asia is accompanied by a heightened engagement with the world through the gaze, which functions principally in terms of gender and national identity. It concludes with a consideration of how the gaze is integral to a theory of Platonov’s understanding of language, arguing that the “situatedness” of the individual is predicated on his or her being seen in a visual context by an interlocutor.

Soul Incorporated

NARIMAN SKAKOV

In this essay I explore how Soviet policymakers, biologists, and writers negotiated the borderline dividing the human and animal domains and conceptualized the animal world for ideological purposes. I link the classic Soviet clash between *stikhiinost’* (spontaneity) and *soznatel’nost’* (consciousness) with biological experiments of the 1920s that were set to deconstruct the human-animal hierarchy and to create a vision of “classless” biology. I show why *Dzhan*, one of Andrei Platonov’s first earnest attempts to evolve into a socialist realist writer glorifying the Soviet state’s firm strides toward the com-

Slavic Review 73, no. 4 (Winter 2014)

munist future, fails to achieve the semantic certitude of the Stalinist text. Various recurrent and profoundly unconventional themes, often connected with animality and corporeality, drastically muddle the ideological coordinates of the text and preclude the possibility of a clear passage from *stikhiinost'* to *soznatel'nost'*. The (a)political status of the Dzhan people as a newly formed Soviet collective body manifests itself in the complex interplay between two rather commonplace categories: *body* and *soul*. The body acquires abstract political qualities by becoming collective, while the soul, as a designator for the Dzhan people and as a category, gains flesh. The novella reveals the “Turkmen” nation as a site of bare life itself in its indestructible corporeal glory.

The Diaristic Form and Subjectivity under Khrushchev

ANATOLY PINSKY

At the start of the post-Stalin period, writers and literary critics began to embrace the diaristic form as never before in Soviet history. In this article, I explore the gravitation toward this and other short and documentary genres. I foreground the subject of literary form, which has, I maintain, for too long remained in the background of scholarship on Soviet literature. The rise of a new privileged form was related dialogically to the emergence of a new normative subjectivity—one that called on citizens to engage in meticulous empirical investigations of Soviet life and to arrive at and advance their own critical conclusions about Soviet reality. In advancing these arguments, I revise the interpretations of Soviet literary history that have highlighted the significance of the novel, contributing to a growing body of scholarship on the history of Soviet subjectivity.

Images of the Nation Foreseen: Ivan Meštrović's Vidovdan Temple and Primordial Yugoslavism

ALEKSANDAR IGNJATOVIĆ

This article is an interdisciplinary study of the Vidovdan Temple (c. 1906–13), a sculptural-architectural whole that was Ivan Meštrović's most controversial and most widely interpreted work. I analyze visual culture and intellectual history to show how this particular artwork became highly instrumental in creating and strengthening Yugoslavism's primordialist dimension, which sharply marked the South Slavic territories' political landscape in the decade preceding the first Yugoslav state's creation. Not only did Meštrović's artwork epitomize the idea of a South Slavic primeval unity, dismissing the national distinctiveness of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, it also enunciated an emphatic message of South Slavic political unification. By analyzing the Vidovdan Temple's contemporaneous critical reception, I question its classical interpretation as a symbol of Yugoslav multicultural synthesis, arguing for a more context-sensitive and nuanced understanding of the ideology of Yugoslavism.

Stalin's Answer to the National Question: A Case Study on the Editing of the 1938 *Short Course*

DAVID BRANDENBERGER AND MIKHAIL V. ZELENOV

As a cornerstone of early Bolshevik propaganda, nationality policy allowed the revolutionary regime to cast the Soviet “experiment” as emancipatory in both ethnic and class terms. Paradoxically, much of the attention paid to the national question vanished from the party canon in 1938, for reasons that have never been fully explained. In this article we investigate this dramatic turnabout by examining how party historians and Iosif Stalin himself drafted what was to be the official narrative on nationality policy in the infamous *Short Course on the History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)*. In so doing, we not only supply a new answer to the national question but also highlight a key new source for other investigations of the Stalin period.

The Witches of Wilno: Constant Litigation and Conflict Resolution

DAVID FRICK

Seventeenth-century Wilno, capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and thus the second capital of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, was home to five Christian confessions (Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, Greek Orthodox, and Uniate) and three religions (Christians, Jews, and Muslims [Tatars]). Against the general question of how they “made it work” arises the issue of witchcraft practice in local perceptions and in prosecution in the courts. Witchcraft trials are treated here as an integral part of “constant litigation” and the “use of justice” in restoring communal peace. My conclusions and propositions include the following: that religion and confession played no role in witchcraft litigation; that although there is no doubt that beliefs in the existence of witchcraft persisted, there was nothing like a “witchcraft scare,” and allegations of sorcery were treated on a level with that of petty theft and general misbehavior between neighbors; and that the goal of recourse to the courts was here, and in other types of cases, the restoration of a status quo ante. My final proposition, which invites testing, is that the Grand Duchy of Lithuania represented in this question, as well as perhaps in others, a transitional zone between the European west and east.