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## Chapter IIIB

# Double Consciousness and Bilingualism in Aleksei Remizov's Story "The Industrial Horseshoe" and the Literary Journal *Chisla*

"A wheel on the door is an 'industrial horseshoe.'"

—Aleksei Remizov, "The Industrial Horseshoe"

The nineteen thirties mark the second stage in the history of the Russia emigration, when writers of the older generation, such as Ivan Bunin, Boris Zaitsev, Zinaida Gippius, Marina Tsvetaeva, Aleksei Remizov, and Vladislav Khodasevich, were still taking an active part in literary life. The conditions of émigré life in this second stage present special difficulties for beginning writers, for example, Gaito Gazdanov, Iurii Fel'zen, and Vladimir Nabokov, all of whom became adults in Europe. As discussed above, émigré critics were troubled by the weakened ties with the Russian language and the Russian literary tradition that came about in the absence of any dialogue with Russia since the late 1920s. It was during this period that the Russian diaspora forged valuable contacts with contemporary European literature and culture, French in particular—contacts that would reanimate the literary discourse within the Russian emigration. As Gleb Struve writes, "The flourishing of émigré literature coincided, as strange as it may seem, with the time of the most embittered arguments about its very existence and purpose."<sup>1</sup>

The journal *Chisla* (*Numbers*), the organ of the younger generation of writers that promised to change the emigration's conservative attitude toward contemporary literature, began taking an active part in these debates in 1930. The journal's artistic design and format recalled the prerevolutionary journal *Apollon*, which obliged the new publication to strive

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<sup>1</sup> G. P. Struve, *Russkaia literatura v izgnanii*, 199.

for the high quality of its predecessor. The continuation of the modernist traditions of the Silver Age, now impossible in the Soviet Union, was projected here as one facet of the emigration's mission.<sup>2</sup> The editorial note in the first issue of *Chisla* emphasizes the journal's apolitical stance, its literary aesthetic, and its cultural ties with the West. There is no concrete platform, but the note points to the "new world-view or something that is still elusive but is already felt ..."; and further on, that there are "hopes ... for something completely new and important." The treatment of contemporary Western culture in the journal, in particular the "ratification" of Proust's genius, clearly brings Russian writers into the context of European modernism and represents the emigration's conscious position and its ties with Europe at this point in history. At the same time the role of Russian culture in the West is noted here as well: "We are witnessing Europe's continuous absorption of certain Russian influences ..., which suggests a change in attitude of the West to Soviet Russia in the late 1920s and its rapprochement with the emigration."

Accounts of the journal's literary evenings give a more detailed description of its role, which above all focused on efforts to fill in the gaps left by literature in Russia: "the obligation to revisit such forgotten subjects in Russia as death, God, fate ...."<sup>3</sup> This mission on the part of the emigration is confirmed by the discussion "Politics and Art" (12 December 1930), in which the editor Nikolai Otsup cautiously asks the question: "But shouldn't we, for Russia's sake, take a closer look at the West?"<sup>4</sup> This appeal to the Western cultural context is given with a nod to the older generation and the mission, which remained unchanged, despite the new literary currents.

*Chisla* was founded at a time when the answer to the question about whether Paris was the "capital or the backwater of Russian literature" was particularly acute. At the same time the position of the Russian émigré writer remains far from easy, which is confirmed by the questionnaire "Do you believe that Russian literature is experiencing a decline at the present time?"<sup>5</sup> In this regard, Marc Slonim's answer is particularly

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<sup>2</sup> N. Otsup, "Serebrianyi vek," *Chisla* 7-8 (1933): 174-178.

<sup>3</sup> "Politika i iskusstvo. Večer 'Chisel,'" *Chisla* 4 (1931): 260.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>5</sup> Questionnaire, *Chisla* 3 (1930): 318.

important, because his opinion had changed since 1926, when to Khodasevich's question "There or Here?" he answered that there was "more *joie de vivre*—there."<sup>6</sup> His answer in 1930 reflected the changes in the political circumstances in the Soviet Union: "Art in Russia is constantly subjected to forced coercion"; he concludes by saying that despite "the lowered spirits of many émigré writers ..., nevertheless, by comparison spirits are higher here than over there."<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the questionnaires about Proust, authorship, contemporaneity, and contemporary literature represent a turning point in the emigration. Of course, the journal also featured the familiar arguments about language, literariness, the state of literature in the Russian abroad, and its future.

As a member of the older generation of modernists, Aleksei Remizov played a minimal part in the journal, but he does enter the literary fray in his story "The Industrial Horseshoe" (*Industrial'naia podkova*), which appeared in *Chisla* in 1931. In this polemical context the story reads as a meta-text, directed at a whole range of issues that had been discussed in the journal. Later, the story would become part of his literary reminiscences of the prewar Parisian period (1924-1939), *Uchitel' muzyki* (*The Music Teacher*), which Remizov compiled during the course of the 1930s, but which would not be published until 1949.<sup>8</sup> Bilingualism as a characteristic phenomenon of the diaspora and an expression of its dual Russian and European cultural consciousness plays a special role in the story.

*Jeux bilingues* (bilingual games) that play on the language of another country, that is, France, play a dominant role in the narrative, along with a deep connection with the Russian language that permits its literary evolution in the emigration. One of the variants of bilingualism in Remizov is the interlingual pun, which forms the basis of the story "The Industrial Horseshoe." We should note that a similar linguistic game appears in Remizov's work in the first year of his Berlin emigration, in the

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<sup>6</sup> M. Slonim, "Literaturnyi dnevnik," *Volia Rossii* 7 (1928); quoted from Struve, *Russkaia literatura v izgnanii*, 69.

<sup>7</sup> Questionnaire, *Chisla* 3 (1930): 320.

<sup>8</sup> A. M. Remizov, "Uchitel' muzyki. Katorzhnaia idillia," in his *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 9, ed. A. d'Amelii (Moscow: Russkaia kniga, 2002). Page numbers given in the text refer to the journal publication: A. M. Remizov, "Industrial'naia podkova," *Chisla* 5 (1931): 103-143.

story “*Kriuk*” (“*Hook*,” 1921), where the Russian word is linked with the German *Krücke* (crutch).<sup>9</sup>

Bilingualism as a characteristic phenomenon of the diaspora is currently receiving a good deal of attention from scholars.<sup>10</sup> Various forms of bilingualism, particularly playing with the language of another country as a source of irony, allows the foreigner to maintain his personal identity and at the same time opens up new possibilities for his native language, thereby enriching it, all of which Remizov demonstrates in his story intended for the Russian reader, writer, and critic in the Russian Abroad. In addition to the incomprehensible word *zut* and a number of everyday words, the story contains two texts in French, one from everyday language and the other a literary quotation, namely, a letter from a neighbor in his building and an extract from Proust. Bilingualism in the story is not only a fact of the main character’s surroundings, but it is also a literary fact, which recalls Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, one of the literary subtexts in the story. This device allows Remizov to take part in the émigré debates about authorship, and to do so in his own way.

The realia of émigré life in Paris serve as an opening for Remizov to take part in the conversations about language, literature, and the very concept of literariness, which have engrossed both writers and critics. The story reflects the topics of the critical discussions that took place at the evenings sponsored by *Chisla* and which appeared on its pages. For example, the conflict between tradition and innovation is already visible in the very first issue, where the discourse “about the new” is represented by the “Questionnaire about Proust.” The writers’ various reactions to the question about Proust and his significance in contemporary literature, and in Russian literature in particular, reveals the emigration’s ambivalent

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<sup>9</sup> I want to thank Lena Obatnina for her valuable communication regarding the story “*Kriuk*,” which was first published in *Novaia Russkaia Kniga*, no. 1, pages 6-10, with the subtitle “Pamiat’ peterburgskaia”; later under the title “Skriplik” in *Posolon: volshebnaia Rossiia* (Paris: Izd-vo Tair, 1930), 192. It’s curious that the anonymous reviewer of the story did not understand the bilingual pun (*Rul’* 390, [26 February]: 6). While he shows that in German *Krücke* is a crutch, and not the same as the Russian word *kriuk* (hook), he does not consider the form of this object as a visual component of the pun.

<sup>10</sup> See “Introduction,” *Bilingual Games*, 1-20.

attitude towards modernism.<sup>11</sup> While the majority of writers recognize Proust's genius, they are skeptical about the possibility of his influence. An exception is Mikhail Tsetlin, who believes that Proust's influence might be "beneficial" for Russian literature, which "lives only on Russian traditions."<sup>12</sup> Ivan Shmelyov expresses a radically nationalistic opinion: "Where will Proust take us? Our path is the high road, there's no need for us to wander off into little alleyways for a stroll."<sup>13</sup>

While the "Questionnaire about Proust" would seem to establish the journal's leaning towards the "new" in literature, Georgii Adamovich's "Kommentarii" ("Commentary"), published in the same issue, reveal precisely the opposite preference in literature; for Adamovich what is important is the "human document," which finds "invention absolutely unnecessary."<sup>14</sup> In this understanding of the creative process, the writer's "sincerity" is considered a condition of the new art.<sup>15</sup> This position represents a continuation of one of the old debates from 1927-1928 between Adamovich and his opponent Khodasevich, who insisted on the necessity of artistic craft.<sup>16</sup> A brief survey of *Chisla* will show that the debate on this issue is continued in subsequent issues.

In the journal's third issue, an editorial note invites a "lively and unbuttoned exchange of opinions on all issues of Russian culture." The fourth issue (1931) publishes a report on Iurii Sofiev's speech at the Union of Young Poets. In keeping with the opinion of Otsup, the journal's editor, and Adamovich's "Commentary," Sofiev welcomes the journal's new direction, in particular the "return from the Parnassan heights" in the name of the mass reader. This position is seen as a challenge to the older modernists, as well as the "young Proustians"—for example, Gazdanov and Fel'zen, who published their works in the journal, and Sirin, who did not.<sup>17</sup> This report confirms that a schism had taken place, which sepa-

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<sup>11</sup> M. Raev, *Rossiiia za rubezhom. Istoriia kul'tury russkoi emigratsii* (Moscow: Progress-Akademiia, 1994), 131-133.

<sup>12</sup> *Chisla* 1 (1930): 276.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>14</sup> Adamovich, "Kommentarii," *Chisla* 1 (1930): 140.

<sup>15</sup> On Georgii Adamovich's literary views, see L. Livak, *How It Was Done in Paris*, 139, 154 *passim*.

<sup>16</sup> Struve, *Russkaia literatura v izgnanii*, 206.

<sup>17</sup> See Livak, "The Prodigal Children of Marcel Proust," in *How It Was Done in Paris*.

rated the young writers into two camps—the first one particularly valued “craft,” and the second “some ultimate truth.”<sup>18</sup>

The continuation of this discussion in the fifth issue, in which Remizov’s story also appeared, paid particular attention to the problem of the “return from the Parnassan heights” with its address to the older generation. In answer to the question “What do you think about your work?”<sup>19</sup> Remizov answers: “Why should I speak of my work, when the readers of *Chisla* haven’t even heard of my books?”<sup>20</sup> In the name of discussion, the editor cites the question “For whom do you write?” and includes in the fifth issue (1931) Mikhail Osorgin’s comments from *Novaya Gazeta*. Like Adamovich and Sofiev, Osorgin expresses the opinion that “respect for the reader ... requires that the writer be as comprehensible and ... readable” as possible.<sup>21</sup> He criticizes Remizov for writing “for himself” and for the “difficulty” of his style which the reader finds a burden. Remizov’s brusque reply to this opinion of the average reader clearly outlines his position: “When he is writing, a writer has in mind neither reader nor calculation, but only that which he is writing and which cannot not be written.”<sup>22</sup>

This discussion reveals the coexistence of contradictory desires: to attract the average reader and preserve Russian culture; but also to afford an opportunity for the development of the young émigré literature. In the debates on Russian literature in the context of European modernism, these juxtapositions were inevitable. For this reason, one hears a note of rivalry in Boris Poplavsky’s 1930 essay “On Joyce”, which appeared in the fourth issue: “... as far as literature is concerned, we believe that Joyce burned through absolutely everything, even Proust seems schematic and artificial by comparison, although of course *Notes from Underground*, *Demons*, and “The Death of Ivan Ilyich” and several other books are untouched by this devastation.” It’s interesting that the rivals to contemporary modernism are not examples from Russian modernism, but the Russian classics, which only serves to confirm the conservatism of the

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<sup>18</sup> *Chisla* 4 (1931): 258.

<sup>19</sup> “Literaturnaia anketa,” *Chisla* 5 (1931): 286-289.

<sup>20</sup> *Chisla* 5 (1931): 287.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

emigration's cultural values. The ambivalent approach to the European context, which was so important for the young writers, is expressed in Otsup's article on the novel *Vecher u Kler* (*Evening with Claire*): "the most talented of the young prose writers in the emigration are influenced by the major French contemporary writers, mainly Proust, and each one of them tries to overcome this influence in his own way."<sup>23</sup> Otsup voices a negative opinion about the prose of Sirin, who did not publish in *Chisla*, emphasizing that Fel'zen and Gazdanov's ties with French literature were "more organic" than those of Sirin.

### **The Story "The Industrial Horseshoe"**

Remizov's story "The Industrial Horseshoe" serves as a reply to this opinion about the "organic nature" of ties with Proust. Remizov appears here as a modernist of the older generation and gives an object lesson to the young writers about the history of the literary language, the theory of literature, literary evolution, and *international* literary ties. The story is permeated with irony, directed at the position of such critics as Adamovich, Sofiev, and Osorgin. The story first poses the question of literary and cultural values, which I will briefly outline.

As we know, linguistic mastery plays a major role in Remizov's innovative works and it therefore is particularly interesting to trace how this manifests itself in the conditions of the emigration. "The Industrial Horseshoe" above all is a philological and poetic conversation about the word and its polysemous nature, its semantic and expressive potential, which does not correspond to the literal, dictionary meaning. The very title of the story contains a paradox through the seeming absurd connection of the contemporary and the ancient, but in reality it had a direct relation to the writer's poetics, which are based on the refutation of binary oppositions in the literary tradition of the nineteenth century: oral/written, old/new, literary/non-literary, one's own (*svoi*)/alien (*chuzhoi*).

The story's code about the Russian émigré writer is announced in its first sentence: "A Russian learns a foreign language not with a dictionary

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<sup>23</sup> Petr Otsup, "Vecher u Kler," *Chisla* 1 (1930): 232.



but with the sweat of his brow.”<sup>24</sup> The narrator’s *skaz*-like familiar address to the reader sounds simultaneously like an ironic statement of well-known fact, an invitation to agree with the narrator, and at the same time a challenge. The sentence brings the reader into the context of “somebody else’s speech” and the narrator’s ill-natured disposition to it acts not only as a value judgment but also as an explicit gesture of “estrangement” (*ostranenie*) in the broad sense of the term, regarding the dislocation of exile.<sup>25</sup> With his characteristic stenographic speed, Remizov portrays the “homelessness” of the Russian in emigration in Paris, in the milieu of the French language. The story is built on a linguistic misunderstanding and its consequences, all of which involves a venerable institution of Parisian everyday life—the concierge.

The story’s orientation on bilingualism depends on an interlingual pun, for which Remizov chose one of the most expressive short words of French conversational speech—*zut*. This enigmatic word is accorded extraordinary power, before which the story’s protagonist, the writer A. A. Kornetov, is defenseless. Despite the fact that he does not understand the word, the implacable concierge, who thinks that she has heard *zut* from Kornetov’s lips, takes it as insult. The story’s upheavals, the protagonist’s unlucky adventures, begin with the moment of his linguistic misunderstanding, after which the concierge does everything possible to drive Kornetov out of the apartment: “A. A. endured a month’s siege on the part of the concierge and, after losing his last bit of patience, he was forced to abandon the homey apartment and left for God knows where.”<sup>26</sup> In the sphere of everyday life, this exclamation and its bearing on the hero’s fate is directly connected with the theme of authorial homelessness and the “bleakness of history”: “In the course of these ten years of free émigré life this damned life on the run grew wearisome.”<sup>27</sup>

Like a hero in a fairytale, Kornetov with the help of fellow émigrés spares no efforts in trying to find the key to the mystery and thus elude

<sup>24</sup> Remizov, “Industrial’naia podkova,” 108.

<sup>25</sup> S. Boym, “Poetics and Politics of Estrangement: Victor Shklovsky and Hannah Arendt,” 586.

<sup>26</sup> *Chisla* 5 (1931): 112.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

punishment—the loss of his apartment.<sup>28</sup> He tries to explain to the concierge that she didn't hear him correctly, that he was merely saying with a Russian accent the phrase *onze heures du soir* (eleven o'clock in the evening).<sup>29</sup> Another possible source of the linguistic misunderstanding is his Russian pronunciation of a station on the Paris metro: *Nord-sud*, which the French woman did not understand.<sup>30</sup> During the course of the story, the reader follows Kornetov as he tries to discover the meaning of this word on which his fate depends. The riddle of the word *zut/ziut* is an ingenious sign, *un significant vide* (an empty sign), which Remizov utilizes to put into play an entire complex of linguistic games as he demonstrates the amazing semantic potential of this minimal lexical unit, both in colloquial and literary contexts.

The lesson about the semiotics of behavior in an alien setting continues. The impossibility of direct acculturation is demonstrated here not only through vocabulary and semantics, but also in the semiotics of gestures. When Kornetov is advised to smile politely to the concierge when he speaks he cannot for the life of him coordinate the word *bonjour* with a smile: "He didn't know how to smile like *that*: in Russia, thank God, they didn't teach this art, and thank God, they never will."<sup>31</sup> An explanation follows: "And not without the language—in this short time he had learned and uttered mechanically all the little flattering expressions which nobody takes seriously."<sup>32</sup> Then follows a cultural evaluation of these empty gestures, dripping with irony, which censures the European "invention of this most profound recognition and scorn for a person with whom one comes into close contact, the only defense against which is 'civility'."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> In the broadcast "On Remizov" on Radio Liberty (Munich, 1970-1971), Gaito Gazdanov spoke about Remizov's complaints to acquaintances about moving from apartment to apartment, all occasioned by the "absolutely fantastic and implacable hostility of the concierge." Gaito Gazdanov, "Iz Dnevnika pisatel'ia," *Druzhba narodov* 10 (1966): 173. I wish to thank Maria Rubins for informing me of this remarkable instance in which the boundary between fact and fiction is erased. Remizov's homelessness during his Berlin period is taken up by Viktor Shklovsky in chapter 5 of his book *Zoo, ili pis'ma ne o liubvi*.

<sup>29</sup> *Chisla* 5 (1931): 116.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

When it becomes clear that all the efforts of Kornetov and his friends to understand the ill-fated word have come to naught, he turns to a neighbor for help, the Frenchman Dora. Following the example of the well-known device of bilingualism in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Remizov introduces a French text into his story—the letter written by his neighbor, with a literal translation into Russian. The neighbor tries to sort out the situation, but comes to the conclusion that there's nothing to be done, that the concierge is in a “state of latent madness.”<sup>34</sup> At the same time, the necessity of living in the French environment, and particularly in his own apartment, is presented as the only possibility in making a normal life for the poor emigrant: “the apartment that had been bound up with his proud sense of independence and inviolability had turned into a trap.”<sup>35</sup> The sense of incomprehension intensifies his existential uncertainty, which finds expression in the lexical coupling of antonymous concepts: “freedom/trap/liberty/prissonnier/reclus.”

Despite all his efforts, Kornetov's removal becomes inevitable. The address of his new place of residence is not known and the narrator sets out in search of his friend. The narrator at last finds his friend in the remote region of Boulogne. In this episode of searching for Kornetov's apartment it is important to understand the concepts of “locus” and “non-locus” in émigré thinking, about which the Italian scholars Karla Solivetti and Mariangela Paolini have written.<sup>36</sup> The story portrays the semiotization of personal space in “Russian Paris,” which is lost after the misunderstanding with the concierge. This situation reminds Kornetov of the uncertainty of the homeless man “doomed to emigration.”<sup>37</sup> Boulogne, the region to which he moves, is a remote, *unknown* part of the city, which is located outside the boundaries of “Russian Paris,” that is, it is a “non-locus.” As we will see, in the story this concept also has relevance for the dynamics of the Russian émigré reader's relation to languages and literature, and his concept of “one's own vs. alien” (*svoi/chuzhoi*).

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>36</sup> Karla Solivetti, Mariangela Paolini, “Paradigmy ‘izgnaniia’ i ‘poslannichestva’: evropeiskii opyt russkoi emigratsii v 20-e gody,” *Europa Orientalis* 22:2 (2003): 157-158.

<sup>37</sup> *Chisla* 5 (1931): 130.

## A Language Lesson

The question of forgetting Russian, and learning French, is posed at the very beginning of the story: “In ten years’ time, barring something extraordinary, all of us living in Paris will be hopelessly crippled.”<sup>38</sup> Remizov’s serious regard for the mission of the Russian writer abroad is clear when he gives Kornetov two reference books seen as indispensable for the Russian émigré writer: Shakhmatov’s authoritative *Sintaksis* (*Syntax*) stands right next to the French *Larousse*, which the hero consults in his search for the word that has had such an ill effect on the concierge.

The narrative becomes a lesson in the history of the development of the Russian language, which incorporates lexical elements from foreign languages. If we take into account the story’s rich vocabulary, it becomes clear that it seems to transport the reader to the eighteenth century, the period when the literary language as we know it came into being. Aleksei Shakhmatov writes about this in his textbook *Ocherk sovremennogo russkogo iazyka* (*A Study of the Contemporary Russian Language*): “In the course of the eighteenth century the flood of French and German words did not abate.”<sup>39</sup> As Remizov shows, an analogous situation is taking place among the Russian diaspora in Paris. “The Industrial Horseshoe” contains a whole assortment of new words from colloquial French—macaronic language, calques, equivalents—which have become part of the Russian émigré’s everyday vocabulary. Moreover, several words are written in French and sometimes in Russian; the alphabet forces the reader to be reminded of the inherent bilingualism of the Parisian context. Just a few examples: *Zut/Зют, консьержка, ажан, onze heures du soir, bistro, Vous êtes menteur, жеран, escalier de service, allez vous en, локатер, cinquième à droite, prisonnier, стило, Crème glacée Ch. Gervais.*” Even the main character’s surname, Kornetov, comprises an interlingual aural pun with its two possible variant spellings: *cornet*—вафля мороженого (ice cream cone); *carnet*—тетрадь (notebook).<sup>40</sup>

The dominant in the narrative is the use of *skaz*, which represents a form of “bilingualism” in and of itself. By using colloquial language in a

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 108

<sup>39</sup> A. Shakhmatov, *Ocherk sovremennogo russkogo literaturnogo iazyka* (Leningrad: Gosizdat, 1925), 49.

<sup>40</sup> I wish to thank Francoise Caffin, a specialist in Paris on the French language and literature, for this information.

literary context, *skaz* also opens up the possibility of diglossia and dual consciousness in the narration, in which the author and the narrator are not identical.<sup>41</sup> In Remizov's story this linguistic resource acquires additional potential in the context of the foreign language that plays a central role in the narrative, not only as a fact of everyday life for both character and reader, but also as a fact of the history of Russian literature.

Now, let's return to the first ironic phrase in the story that serves to prepare the reader for the hero's travails: "A Russian learns a foreign language not with a dictionary but with the sweat of his brow."<sup>42</sup> Kornetov finds the following synonyms for *zut* in his dictionary: *le mépris* (contempt); *le dépit* (scorn), and *l'indifférence* (indifference).<sup>43</sup> But another possible meaning is missing, which can be found in the dictionary *Petit Robert*: "onomat<opée>. Fam<ilier>. Exclamation exprimant le dépit, la colère (euphémisme pour merde)." As d'Amelia's commentary to the text in *Uchitel' muzyki* explains, the word *zut* is an "exclamation that expresses negative emotions, a euphemism for the word *merde* (shit), which is often translated as 'damn!'"<sup>44</sup>

After studying his *Larousse*, Kornetov decides that *zut* "is something like the Russian *tsyts!*"<sup>45</sup> It's a brilliant equivalence—both words comprised of just three letters—of the colloquial exclamations that produce the sound play of an interlingual pun. The explanation given with its Russian equivalent provides the basis of the pun that provides the structure for this story about an everyday misunderstanding between a simple, poor Frenchwoman and a poor Russian intellectual. Dahl's *Dictionary*, which as we know was Remizov's constant reference, gives the following explanation of the word *tsits*: "quiet, don't you dare, not a word, silence! Example: "*Tsyts, sobaka, ne s'esh' soldata!*" (Tsits, dog, you don't eat up a soldier!)"<sup>46</sup> As we see in the course of the story, that's exactly how the protagonist behaves, after he decides that it's useless to argue with the con-

<sup>41</sup> On *skaz*, see the seminal works by Boris Eikhenbaum, "Illuziia skaza" (1918), Viktor Vinogradov, "Problema skaza v stilistike" (1925), and Mikhail Bakhtin, "Slovo v romane," in *Poetika Dostoevskogo* (1929).

<sup>42</sup> *Chisla* 5 (1931): 108.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>44</sup> A. M. Remizov, "Uchitel' muzyki. Katorzhnaia idilliia," 482.

<sup>45</sup> *Chisla* 5 (1931): 122.

<sup>46</sup> *Tolkovyi slovar' zhivogo velikorusskogo iazyka Vladimira Dalia*, 3d ed. (St. Petersburg: Vol'f, 1911).

cierge and that he might as well move. But finding an equivalent is only one stage in the search for a word. Kornetov continues to be disturbed by the semantics of *zut* in the broader cultural context.

## The Book: Proust

This story, which has its basis in bilingualism and a play on words, raises the issue of the inadequacy not only of a literal understanding of language, but also of the complexity of cultural and literary translation. The story's literary underpinnings arise from its major theme: "A. A.'s world is a book."<sup>47</sup> The hero's life in Paris, "this cruel, lively life with its calculation, resourcefulness and style laid bare, both caresses and slaps in the face," is compared with the independent internal life of Kornetov, the Russian writer, where Cervantes and Gogol reign, where Dostoevsky and Tolstoy are recalled, and where we also encounter allusions to Remizov's own works of the Petersburg period, as well as his favorite apocryphal tale, "The Holy Virgin's Descent into Hell."

The inadequacy of translation, as a synonym for incomprehension and misinterpretation in literature, is emphasized in an episode in the story in which the nephew of the neighbor Dora makes an appearance. He is a "young scholar, a graduate of the Ecole des langues orientales, now enrolled in the Ecole des chartes," who reads and speaks Russian,<sup>48</sup> and wishes to help Kornetov understand the cultural semantics of the word *zut*. With this goal in mind, he cites a quotation from the first volume of Proust's seven-volume *In Search of Lost Time*. This key French passage about the series of "reflections" represents an example of the rhetorical refinement of the French master of the contemporary novel and his aesthetic purpose: "*Et voyant sur l'eau à la face du mur un pâle sourire répondre au sourire du ciel, je m'écriai dans mon enthousiasme en brandissant mon parapluie refermé: 'Zut, zut, zut, zut...'*"<sup>49</sup>

The explanation of this short, rhetorically charged sentence not only does not correspond to the text, but completely distorts its meaning: "I'm having difficulty translating it, but it's nothing special, something

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<sup>47</sup> *Chisla* 5 (1931): 115.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

like ‘leave me in peace.’” The commentary to *The Music Teacher* contains an accurate literary translation of the quotation: “After seeing on the water and on the wall, how the pale smile answers the smile of the sky, I exclaimed in delight, shaking my closed umbrella: ‘Damn, damn, damn.’”<sup>50</sup> As this example makes clear, the colloquial exclamation “*zut*” acquires a particular meaning and intonation in this passage, but the scholarly nephew is unable to help Kornetov in his search for the meaning of this word.

What is the role of inadequate and arbitrary translation in this story? Selecting a quotation from Proust fulfills a metaliterary function in Remizov’s narrative and emphasizes the connection between Proust and Kornetov, both the autobiographical hero of the story and his “bookish” world.<sup>51</sup> The quotation turns our attention to the key passage from the novel *Swann’s Way* (1913), the first volume of *In Search of Lost Time*. The passage appears in the second chapter of the novel, in a chain of the young narrator’s reflections on his walks around his beloved Combray. This chapter is important because memories from childhood are connected with young Marcel’s dream about a career as a writer. It contains important observations on the poetics of the new prose in comparison to realism. The passage with the exclamation “*zut*” that Remizov quotes appears during the walk around Montjouvain, which Marcel takes after becoming tired from a long stint of reading. He recalls the moment of his “modest discovery” of the “lack of correspondence between our sensations and their customary expression” at that moment when he is contemplating the sunny reflection of a hitherto unnoticed tiled rooftop on the water of the pond. As he recalls this impression, he cannot find adequate semantic and expressive means for its description and he gives voice to his dismay (one of the meanings of *zut*), as he repeats the exclamation four times for the amplification of his emotions, all of which is accentuated by his shaking the umbrella.

The slipshod interpretation of the passage’s meaning by Dora’s nephew seems to purposely misrepresent the refined poetry of the quotation, which presents an example of the rhetorical figure of the *mise en abyme* in which several rhetorical tropes are deployed: parallelism, repetition,

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<sup>50</sup> A. M. Remizov, “Uchitel’ muzyki,” 482.

<sup>51</sup> *Chisla* 5 (1931): 125.

solecism, *hyperbaton* (the expression of strong emotions).<sup>52</sup> Selecting precisely this passage as an example of the writer's craft should be viewed as a metaliterary device on the part of Remizov. It not only reflects the misunderstanding of the passage in the story, and thus serves as an example of the difficulty of translating from one language into another, while also illustrating the concept of translation in its etymological sense: *translatio*—to carry over, i.e., the communication of Proust's new aesthetics to the Russian literary milieu. In the novel's famous second chapter, Marcel's poetic revelations take place amidst everyday life in Combray, with its remarkable descriptions of the dishes prepared by Françoise, the talented cook. Like Dora's nephew, the Russian critics were not capable of understanding and conveying the significance of Proust's new aesthetics.

Gervis Tassis writes about the reception of Proust by the emigration and by *Chisla* in particular, in his extensive article "Lectures de Marcel Proust dans l'emigration de l'entre-deux-guerres." As Tassis notes, the arrival of the Russian émigrés in Paris coincided with the general acknowledgment of Proust's talent, but the Russian émigré critics did not have anything original to say about Proust, and in all likelihood did not pay any attention to what had been written about him in the French press.<sup>53</sup> This corroborates Remizov's parody in the story of Proust's reception and the lack of understanding of his aesthetics. As Leonid Livak writes, the literary discussions about Proust's innovations were often based on a misinterpretation of his "mimetic" simplicity and literary "sincerity."<sup>54</sup> This is precisely what Boris Shletser tried to counter in his perceptive early essay from 1921: "The striking peculiarity of this epic style of this long, detailed tale is that the story is told from the first person and that the reader has the distinct impression that the entire series of Marcel Proust's novels ... have an autobiographical element."<sup>55</sup> The implicit satire in Remizov's ironic story is directed at this literalist interpretation of Proust's narrative as a "human document." The selection of this key passage from the novel underscores this aesthetic misunderstanding.

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<sup>52</sup> I want to thank Hayden White for his rhetorical analysis of the passage.

<sup>53</sup> Available on the website L'Institut Est-Ouest (December 2005): <http://russie-europe.ens-lsh.fr>.

<sup>54</sup> Livak, *How It Was Done in Paris*, 101.

<sup>55</sup> B. Shletser, "Zerka'noe tvorchestvo (Marsel' Prust)," *Sovremennye zapiski*, no. 6 (1921): 227-238. 228.



## A Literature Lesson

This consciously metaliterary maneuver that emphasizes the deliberately offhand treatment of Proust, whose style had become the model for such young writers as Gazdanov and Fel'zen, also serves as an ironic warning against any "direct transfer" of the stylistic innovations of European modernism to the Russian context. A literal interpretation of the master distorts his poetics. Moreover, as far as both language and style are concerned, a writer should not imitate a model, but should seek and create equivalents in his own linguistic and literary tradition.

In this connection, let us recall the volume of Shakhmatov's *Sintaksis* on Kornetov's desk. The textbook will serve as a pretext for a lesson in Russian language when Kornetov explains to his guest, the narrator, that "an adverb modifies a verb," to which the narrator replies in his head: "I don't remember anything about adverbs."<sup>56</sup> But, as becomes clear, the textbook's real lesson is incorporated in the story's style. Like the Russian grammar, *Sintaksis* was published for the two-hundredth anniversary of the Academy of Sciences in 1925.<sup>57</sup> The brief introduction explains that Shakhmatov's work presents "valuable theoretical observations and methodological directions, but the chief feature is the compilation of examples, masterfully selected from various writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries ...; these examples are given in connection with information on old Russian language and phenomena of contemporary folk speech." It's interesting to trace the description of the types of sentences, as a unit of communication, and in particular the role of "internal speech": "The usual intermediary between communication and the sentence, in which the communication finds its expression, is internal speech, i.e., a thought clothed in aural signs and in some measure in visual signs as well."<sup>58</sup> Shakhmatov further explains the capacity of a complex psychological act of communication to convey a series of elements, as a "representation of relationships and feelings" and so forth. Among the examples of various types of sentences we find the category

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<sup>56</sup> *Chisla* 5 (1931): 114.

<sup>57</sup> *Sintaksis russkogo iazyka. Vyp. pervyi. Uchenie o predlozhenii i o slovosochetanii* (Leningrad: AN SSSR, 1925).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

“Interjective Subject-less Sentences,” which gives the Russian equivalent of *zut* as *tsits*.<sup>59</sup>

This lesson in literary syntax finds its realization in the text of “The Industrial Horseshoe” in the lengthy sentences à la Proust, in which Remizov utilizes the rich possibilities of Russian grammar in constructing sentences using subordinate clauses, parataxis, and various punctuation marks, including the dash.<sup>60</sup> Remizov consciously creates the Russian equivalent of Proust’s innovative structures in unusually long sentences that exploit the potential possibilities of Russian syntax about which Shakhmatov writes. It’s worth noting that this stylistic equivalent follows the description of Proust’s style in the above-mentioned essay by Boris Shletser, “The Creative Mirror (Marcel Proust)” (*Zerkal’noe tvorchestvo (Marsel’ Prust)*): the long sentences of almost a half-page, the extraordinarily difficult constructions with their numerous subordinate clauses, parenthetical words that contain still more, absolutely independent constructions in one and the same parenthesis.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, Shletser notes, “these sentences are always impeccably constructed from the point of view of syntax, but there is no doubt that their enormous complexity is at variance with the way we do things, as well as the spirit of the contemporary French language...”<sup>62</sup> In defiance of the critics, Remizov comes out on the side of “awkward readability,” by demonstrating that similar sentences are possible in Russian as well.

## Conclusion

Remizov’s stylistic experiment can be read as a lesson to “the young Proustians” and as a foray on the part of the elder modernist into a literary competition with his recognized contemporary, Marcel Proust. The juxtaposition of literary and non-literary texts—a characteristic device for Remizov—takes on particular significance in the context of the émigré debates about “sincerity” in prose. Remizov’s story plays with the “frames” of narrative form, as well as with the reader’s expectations.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>60</sup> *Chisla* 5 (1931): 111.

<sup>61</sup> B. Shletser, “Zerkal’noe tvorchestvo,” 228.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

Special attention is paid to the literary function of the everyday and the “document of life,” introduced into the narrative along with such literary texts as the passage from *Don Quixote* in a remarkable new translation: “But as he sat drinking his coffee, A. A. was able to forget for a moment about the concierge and Baldakhala, he thought instead about the fate of Don Quixote with Amadis’s fiery sword and Mambrin’s golden helmet”<sup>63</sup> Here follows a short extract from the novel, which is remarkable both for its poetry and expressivity: “The course of the constellations brings on us misfortunes, which the heavens cast down on us with rage and fury, and then no earthly power can stop them and no tricks can throw them off!”<sup>64</sup> In this episode, the word becomes a talisman, capable of protecting Kornetov from danger, from “the fury and rage” of the concierge.

Let’s return to the paradox of the story’s title, “The Industrial Horseshoe,” in which the word “horseshoe” appears as a symbol of good luck. The function of the word as a talisman in Remizov’s story recalls the poetics of Osip Mandelstam, in particular his poem “The Horseshoe Finder,” which is an implicit subtext in the story and partly explains its title. As Omry Ronen writes, *podkova* (horseshoe) and *kon’* (horse, steed) are old poetic symbols in the European tradition, which perform an important function in the poet’s work.<sup>65</sup> But it is completely possible that another subtext is at work in the story, one that has connections with European modernism. I would like to draw your attention to Kornetov’s new apartment in unfamiliar Boulogne, in which the narrator notices a strange object, namely, a bicycle wheel on the door—the “industrial horseshoe,” which Kornetov found “on the road by the church.”<sup>66</sup> This *objet trouvé* recalls the first invention of “ready-made” by Marcel Duchamp in 1913, that is, his installation of a bicycle wheel in his apartment as a demonstration of the new in art, which called into question the very “object” of art in the era of mechanization.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>63</sup> *Chisla* 5 (1931): 117.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Omry Ronen, *An Approach to Mandelstam* (Jerusalem: Biblioteka Slavica Hierosolymitana, 1983), 77-78.

<sup>66</sup> *Chisla* 5 (1931): 113.

<sup>67</sup> T. Laget, ‘*Du côté de chez Swann*’ de Marcel Proust (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 26. Laget emphasizes the international significance of 1913 in the history of modernism, when the Ballets Russe came to Paris with its production of Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring*.

Nineteen thirteen is not only the year of the publication of Proust's novel, but it is also a significant year in the history of prerevolutionary Russian modernism. Remizov, one of its principal representatives, would continue his innovative work in exile, in the context of European modernism. Despite the problems of cultural translation and bilingualism, the story "The Industrial Horseshoe" once again shows that "a Russian is never at a loss for words," and as proof we have the marvelous Russian equivalent *zut—tsits!* Both words serve as an answer to Adamovich and critics like him. In "The Music Teacher," Remizov's hero and alter-ego, Kornetov, insists that three things are essential in art: "language, description, invention."<sup>68</sup> The story published in *Chisla* nicely illustrates these conditions in the context of the history of the development of the Russian literary language within the framework of the discussions in the Russian emigration in Paris.

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<sup>68</sup> A. M. Remizov, "Uchitel' muzyki," 52.