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László Dienes

Russian Literature in Exile

The Life and Work of Gajto Gazdanov

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LASZLO DIENES

RUSSIAN LITERATURE IN EXILE: THE LIFE AND WORK OF GAJTO GAZDANOV

VERLAG OTTO SAGNER · MÜNCHEN
1982

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To Klara, Claire and Theo

Lingua amoris, caeteris barbara.

Печальная доля - так сложно,
Так трудно и празднично жить,
И стать достояньем доцента,
И критиков новых плодить...

(A. Blok)

(Depressing fate: to live a life
So complex, hard and festive
Only to end as young don's prey
And serve to breed new critics...)

(tr. S. Hackel)

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PREFACE

This book is a revised, updated but also considerably abridged version of the author's doctoral dissertation written at Harvard University and completed in 1977. Interested readers should consult the original dissertation for numerous further details as well as for its significantly more extensive documentation which it was impossible to reproduce here. As it is offered here, the present work attempts to provide a comprehensive, although by no means exhaustive, monographic study of the life and work of Gajto Gazdanov. It is intended not only for the specialist in Russian emigre literature but also for the general reader interested in Russian or contemporary or emigre literatures. How we decided to accomplish our task is explained in the "Introduction". Here we should perhaps say a few words on what this study is not. First of all, it cannot claim to exhaust its subject matter. There are aspects to Gazdanov's literary work, such as, for example, certain periods in his creative life, certain themes in his fiction, and in particular his critical work which spanned, with long interruptions, over forty years, that could not be dealt with. Some aspects and periods of Gazdanov's personal life could not as yet be touched upon or brought to life more fully either; nor have his manuscripts, now deposited at Harvard University, been fully studied and integrated into our discussion of his published oeuvre. There remains a wealth of material, both in his manuscripts and in the published work, that is still awaiting the critic and the literary scholar. It is our sincere hope that our work will be but the first in a series of studies devoted to this writer who certainly deserves much more attention and recognition than has been accorded so far.

Since the present volume is not meant exclusively for the specialist who knows Russian all quotations are given in English. The

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Russian original is included only in two cases: when it has never been published before; and when it may be of interest to the specialist, particularly for consideration in matters of style. Except for the titles of the two novels published in English all the titles of Gazdanov's novels and short stories are given in our own translation. The original Russian title is added at the beginning of each chapter or sub-chapter in Part Two, where the particular work is discussed in more detail. There are no footnotes in this book. All quotations are referenced in the text with the minimum information necessary to identify the work. Essentially, two different kinds of bibliographical reference are used. The more common is a numerical reference, for example "(no. 109)" refers to M. Slonim's article, the corresponding number in the "Bibliography" at the end of this study. In most cases this system without page references is used to identify the bibliographical data of very brief critical reviews about Gazdanov. Quotations from Gazdanov's fiction, on the other hand, are usually identified in the text itself, with page references given in parentheses. If the work was published over several issues of a journal the parenthetical reference will first list volume number, then page number; for example on p. 161 "(vol. 17, p. 26-7)" refers to the journal *Novyj žurnal* because that's where the novel *The Specter of Alexander Wolf*, mentioned in the text, was published. All such volume and page references are to the first Russian edition; if a novel was both serialized and published in book form all page references are to the book edition. When Russian quotations are transliterated the so-called scholarly system is used. For the English speaking reader who has no Russian the following rules may prove helpful: č is ch (as in cheer), š is sh (as in sheer), ž is the s in measure, i is i (as in hit), j is y (as in you), x is the ch in Bach and c is the z in Mozart.

Segments of this study were published, in somewhat different form, in an article entitled "An Unpublished Letter by Maksim Gor'kij Or Who Is Gajto Gazdanov?" in *Die Welt der Slaven* (1979) and in the introductory essay to *Bibliographie des oeuvres de Gajto Gazdanov*, Paris, 1982.

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We wish to express our sincere appreciation and gratitude to the following individuals and institutions without whose support and contribution this book could not have been written. Our most special thanks are due to Mrs. Faina Dmitrievna Gazdanov, the writer's widow, who shared with us all her knowledge of Gazdanov's life, character and work and whose generous gift of the entire Gazdanov archives to The Houghton Library of Harvard University will undoubtedly foster future research. It is our pleasure to note here that this study in its initial form has been read by Mrs. F. D. Gazdanov and her valuable corrections and additions have been incorporated in the present work. We are also grateful to her for permission to use unpublished materials; as to Gazdanov's published works, we had the good fortune of being able to rely on the incomparable collection in the Harvard College Library where we had easy access to almost all of them.

We are most grateful also to the many individuals whom we had the privilege of meeting in Paris, Geneva, Munich and elsewhere and who were kind enough to share with us their knowledge and their memories of Gazdanov. Some of the most valuable contributions came from the following, now deceased, distinguished representatives of the first Russian emigration: Marc Slonim, Vladimir Vejdle (Weidle), A. Marchak, Ju. Terapiano, V. Varsavskij and Vadim Andreev. Through interviews, correspondence or conversations we have been aided by Ju. Ivask, T. A. Osorgina, A. Baxrax, N. Berberova, G. Struve, L. Rzevskij, R. Guerra, M. Lamzaky and N. Reisini. We are greatly indebted to Radio Liberty, its Paris Bureau and particularly the Munich center where all the Gazdanov materials were kindly put at our disposal, and its staff members, especially to Mlle Helene Robert, Witold A. Ryser, John Bue and Z. Sztumpf.

For his advice and suggestions we are most grateful to Professor V. M. Setchkarev of Harvard University without whose initial encouragement and continued support this study would never have been undertaken, nor completed.

It is our pleasant duty to also acknowledge and thank here the material support of the International Research and Exchange Board which made consultations in Europe possible, the Russian Research

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Center at Harvard University where a fellowship enabled us to engage in full time research for a year; the University of Massachusetts whose Faculty Research Grant allowed us to continue and update our work; and the American Council of Learned Societies whose grant-in-aid helped us significantly in bringing this project to completion.

Finally, we wish to thank Ms. E. Dworan for her typing; friends, native speakers of English, who agreed to eliminate the most glaring mistakes in our English; and, last but certainly not least, members of our family for their patience in putting up with it all for so many years.

Amherst, Massachusetts L. D.

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INTRODUCTION

> "Nous sommes très longs à reconnaître dans la physionomie particulière d'un nouvel écrivain le modèle qui porte le nom de 'grand talent' dans notre musée des idées générales. Justement parce que cette physionomie est nouvelle, nous ne la trouvons pas tout à fait ressemblante à ce qui nous appelons talent. Nous disons plutôt originalité, charme, délicatesse, force; et puis un jour nous nous rendons compte que c'est justement tout cela le talent."
> (Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu*)

1. JUSTIFICATION OF THE SUBJECT MATTER

The neglect and ignorance that has surrounded Russian emigre literature until recently needs no comment. Excellent writers and poets remained unknown or unappreciated, sometimes, unfortunately, even within the Russian emigre literary world. Admittedly, the situation is particularly difficult in the case of an exiled literature, and all kinds of natural and theoretical problems arise in connection with the possibility of having a literature exist, let alone thrive, outside its natural linguistic sphere. Yet, such a phenomenon is not unprecedented. In one of its greatest periods French literature was an emigre literature--after the Great revolution. In this century many of the greatest writers of English lived abroad, expatriates from the United States or Ireland (like Ezra Pound, Ernest Hemingway or James Joyce, to name just a few). In Russia herself the phenomenon of a writer

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living abroad was not new either. Gogol', Turgenev, Dostoevskij have all written some of their greatest works while living abroad.

Now, sixty five years after the 1917 Revolution we know the situation in the case of Russian literature of the twentieth century was different. It was not, however, as apparent earlier, particularly between the two world wars. The "Petersburg" period of Russian literature (that is to say, modern Russian literature from the eighteenth century, but particularly from its Golden Age, through roughly the one hundred years before the revolution, that gave it its glory and fame) was considered to be continuing after 1917 in the emigration. Nearly all the representatives of this literature went abroad, most of them to Paris, and those who did not, either perished or were silenced in Soviet Russia.

Yet, for various reasons, the recognition that there was an important continuation of the "Petersburg period" in Paris (as well as Berlin and Prague) was slow to come. What was more obvious was the death of "westernized, Petersburg" Russia and her culture and a return to something that resembled more a pre-petrine, Muscovite type civilization. And, since this return has been an accomplished fact for more than half a century now, we can probably speak of the "Petersburg period" in the past tense--with only one modification. It died not in 1917, not even a decade or so after the revolution, but later, roughly with World War II. The additional period, circa 1920-1940, is the final stage of this great era and is the time of the first Russian emigre literature.

As Professor Gleb Struve, author of the as yet only history of Russian literature in exile, put it: "Generally speaking, the role of the emigres in the history of Russian culture between the two wars will loom no less large, when all is said and done, than that of the French emigres in French culture in the period following the Great Revolution. And the part of literature in it should not be minimized... Russian emigre literature has proved to be, in volume, duration, and vitality, a unique historical phenomenon." As early as 1927 Dovid Knut, a poet of the emigration, had his reasons to make the following prediction: "The time is near when it becomes clear to all that the capital of Russian literature is now not

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Moscow, but Paris." Jurij Ivask, another emigre poet, declared: "One day the historian of Russian poetry and culture will give the name of Paris as the title to one of the chapters in his book." The day has come. It has become common today to speak of the "Paris school" in the history of Russian poetry. A revival of interest has already produced, in the United States alone, a special collection of essays, bibliographies, a special double issue of the journal *Triquarterly* and a fair number of books, articles, and dissertations on individual authors. The emphasis is, however, almost always on the "old generation" or on poetry and one important area has been largely ignored so far. This is the "new," "young" prose, the works of those Russian emigre writers who started their careers in the emigration, usually in the 1920's. There is only one exception to the general neglect: Vladimir Nabokov. Yet, at least one of his contemporaries, Gajto Gazdanov, was considered to be as talented, as original and as interesting in his own right as V. Nabokov. But the name of this writer is almost completely unknown, not only to the public (except the small Russian emigre reading public) but even to most scholars and students of Russian literature. We believe that the time has come (quite definitely here, in the West--and will come slowly, but inevitably in the Soviet Union) for the rediscovery and reappraisal of this important segment of modern Russian culture.

Unification of the two streams of twentieth-century Russian literature has already begun. Bunin (whose Nobel prize in 1933 could stand as a symbol for the achievement of Russian writers in the emigration), Cvetaeva, Kuprin, Bal'mont as well as some members of the younger generation, such as A. Ladinskij, V. Andreev and others, are "re-introduced" into Russian literature in the Soviet Union. In reality they have never been outside it. The indivisibility of Russian literature can nowhere be seen more clearly than in the case of the latest emigration. Shall we now instantly forget and ignore Solženicyn, Maksimov, Brodskij, Sinjavskij (Abram Terc) and others as members of a negligible group of emigres?

To write on Gajto Gazdanov (1903-1971) means to do completely original research. No book, not even a single article in its

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entirety (other than book reviews) has, in our knowledge, ever been devoted to his work. Yet he is a major writer, a brilliant stylist, a genuine innovator in his prose style as well as in his literary themes and attitudes, a really modern, twentieth-century (in the Western sense) writer whose work unquestionably deserves attention and discovery on its own as well as a significant part of Russian literature in exile.

2. HOW THIS STUDY IS ORGANIZED AND WHY

The present study has a tripartate structure. Part One could be described, paradoxically, as a "self-portrait of the writer by the critic" for it is a biography of the writer written by the critic and yet at the same time it is also an autobiography written by Gazdanov himself. What we have done here, that is, was using the writer's fiction to write his biography, or, in a sense, to write an autobiography for him. This was possible because we have determined, on external evidence, that Gazdanov's fiction was factually largely, and "essentially" almost entirely, autobiographical; that a great many of his stories and novelistic episodes record, with no or very little fictional distortion, but with the "higher truth of art," actual events of his life and can be read, without much danger, as autobiography or as memoirs. Although we are aware of the theoretical and methodological dangers inherent in such an approach we have felt it justified here for the following reason. In our research interviews we succeeded in establishing the facts of Gazdanov's life--never, except in the sketchiest form, published before--and this enabled us not only to see the autobiographical foundations of Gazdanov's fiction but also to determine whether in fact a certain story or episode reflected real life, and if yes, to what extent. Thus in every case we rely on the fiction in Part One for information we felt we could assume it on the whole to be factually true.

Yet, while it is as complete a biography as it was possible to write at the moment, it is an incomplete "autobiography." It is

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primarily Gazdanov's childhood and particularly youth, up to the beginning of middle age, that is well documented in his fiction. The aging writer keeps returning to the events of his youth and for the second, longer yet less important part of his life we have little or no fictional accounts and have, therefore to rely on the information we received from other sources. Naturally, in the first, more "fictional" part of our life-story too, whatever additional validity could be brought upon our "self-portrait" by extratextual evidence, such as the testimony of the writer's widow, and of his friends and acquaintances, was and in this sense the portrait is neither "self," nor belonging to the author of this study alone, who, and this should be stressed too, was far from merely gathering the facts for they were interpreted as well and the writer's view of himself analyzed in a way that may not have always enlisted the support of its object.

If Part One is, then, the writer's life derived from his art, Part Two deals with his life in art, his *biographia literaria*, and attempts to present the facts and problems of his literary career from 1926 when Gazdanov's first piece appeared, until the writer's death in 1971. In addition to his literary life, however, it also surveys the works chronologically, with emphasis on those novels and short stories that, for one reason or another, were felt to be more important or particularly representative of a larger group of works, others of which therefore were not dealt with in detail. Certain works are analyzed at some length because it was believed that such analysis would help make a comprehensive picture since the general results of the analysis can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to other works as well.

The separation of personal life and literary life was found justified on the ground that there was such a separation in Gazdanov's real life as well. His "real" life, the poverty-stricken life of an emigre nighttime taxi-driver in the Parisian underworld, stood in tragic contradiction to his spiritual life of a refined, educated intellectual author. This duality (or, in fact, multiplicity) of existence was for him a heavy burden and a constant

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theme; one of the most difficult tasks Gazdanov felt he had in his life was precisely the separation (or rather the prevention of confusion) of these two irreconcilable and incompatible existences.

In our history of Gazdanov's literary life we devote a great deal of attention to the contemporary critical reception his works were accorded. Again, there were several reasons for our decision to do so. First, a consideration of the critical literature inevitably leads to a broader framework: other viewpoints will be introduced, grounds for comparison provided and the general cultural atmosphere of the period suggested. The possibility of such an extension was all the more welcome since this study is essentially a monograph, limited on the whole to the writer's life and work. Second, in our study of the critical reaction to Gazdanov we have found ourselves so much in disagreement with most of what was said there that we have felt it imperative to enter into a (perhaps sometimes too detailed and too lengthy) polemic with several critics and this we could do fairly only by reproducing as much as possible their viewpoints (which we believe is always preferable to paraphrasing), all the more so that most of this critical literature was published in newspapers and is not easily accessible. Part Two is in fact very much an effort on our part to correct the critical image of Gazdanov that was made by the unusally superficial and hastily written, occasional criticism of Adamovič, Xodasevič and others. An analysis and a refutation of this contemporary criticism is all the more in order since we make claims and present Gazdanov in a light that would not be possible by a mere development of these critics' theses. Finally, Gazdanov's literary fate depended on critical response in a double sense. It has prevented him from attaining the recognition and attention he certainly deserves. It also actively influenced his literary work; in the interwar period by provoking him to respond to pointless criticism creatively, making him write what we might call "polemical fiction"; and after the war by leaving him in such a critical void of neglect and indifference as to bring about a several-year-long silence in his creative life.

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In Part Three we attempt to explore Gazdanov's aesthetics as well as his major themes, in particular his vision of a sensual-emotional world deprived of intellectual substance after the experience of what we termed (following Tolstoj and Šestov) "the terror of Arzamas"--the loss of the self--this single most significant feature of the structure of experience for twentieth-century man, by now a commonplace, perhaps, in Western literature and literary scholarship, yet still a novelty in Russian prose whose natural growth (undoubtedly in this direction) was forcibly arrested after 1917. It is important to distinguish in Gazdanov, however, the impact of this shattering spiritual experience (when man remains alone in the world, having deprived himself of everything above him in his "humanized" world, with the direct result that the only meaning life now has is the one he gives to it, and this being arbitrary and subject to the caprices of the human mind it directly leads to relativism which in turn results in agnosticism or its contemporary form, existentialism) and his natural disposition toward a sensualist perception of the world which one can arrive at also after having seen the limitations and insufficiency of reason. Dismissing the orthodoxies of the Modern Age and the Scientific Revolution, Gazdanov remains untouched by the supposedly new problems (or solutions) of the modern world. He knows of no new problems, only of old questions for the questions of existentialism as well as the fundamental problems of philosophy are, according to him, coeval with mankind: they are built into the human mind and human condition and cannot be done away with.

3. PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON THE ART OF GAJTO GAZDANOV

The philosophical depth in Gazdanov is in his exquisitely expressed--or posed--questions which, because of the way they are formulated, become so suggestive and so comprehensive as to make the reader feel that the writer knows everything, all the problems involved, all of their implications; and not in his answers or solutions for he offers none: none because he belives that there are no, can be no answers (final, conclusive answers, that is) to life's

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absurdities. Agnosticism this is, to be sure, if we must label it and yet, curiously enough, it is accompanied by a strong urge to believe in the contrary; to assume that there is something somewhere that is above the human and that the spectacle of life and death, suffering and joy, history and philosophy is not, after all, a totally meaningless series of phenomena in a universe without creator or purpose, that, after all, thousands of years of human life produced more than a slightly different shadow of the Earth on the Moon, as Santayana says, even if it is beyond our capacity to see this purpose, to understand this universe. Nothing has been solved, nothing *can* be solved yet there is emotional authenticity, there is the truth of the heart that we all share, knowingly or not, and there is in it a kind of answer, a kind of solution, one that can only be felt, not rationalized for it loses its authenticity the moment logic touches it. It is a brittle emotional solution, a synthetic state of mind, a bliss that some are more receptive to, others never graced with, in which contradictions are temporarily reconciled, divisive, analytical reason suppressed and the unity, the oneness of all (dissolving all intellectual problems) is directly felt. His art opens up new insights, suggests emotional values and spiritual possibilities by the way it employs language and imagery, linguistic, rhythmic, conceptual and associative resources, means that are here formal elements turned into vehicles of meaning that do not, cannot quite exist in ways other than those of his art.

Gazdanov knows well, in a sense perhaps too well, being almost obsessed by this knowledge, that "an unexamined life is not worth living." His emotionalism is not a sub-intellectual position, but a return to the sources after an examination of the mind and its life. His characters engage in adventures in the deeps of the mind, face what appear to them unfathomable mysteries of existence, his works attempt "to translate the eternal conjectures of a curious humanity" (Baudelaire) into prose, that is, not into ordinary language but into the art of language where prose itself is expressive as color and line are expressive in the visual arts; yet it is their affective meaning that the reader carries away from these works full of a continued fascination with the realities of

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the senses, of the emotions, of memory and the imagination, and an overwhelming interest in what lies behind or beyond everyday experience or, what is the same thing, reality perceived with "prosaic" eyes, without creative imagination, without its illuminating contribution.

Gazdanov probes the human condition through a series of emotional landscapes which is what his novels and short stories primarily are. His heroes' emotional lives are projected into their external existence rather than *vice versa*. His realism is the realism of the "soul," the "private soul," not that of man in society or man in history. His novelty is not in any daring of subject nor flashy technique, even though some of his topics are relatively daring within the context of Russian literature (and led to conflict with emigre censorship although on different grounds than, say, in the case of Nabokov) and in some respects his novelistic technique and especially his language may prove to be important for the development of Russian prose. His novelty and importance is in his creative continuation in Russian literature of that spirit of tortuous doubt and metaphysical terror which so impressed and influenced the West in the works of Dostoevskij and Tolstoj (and which was brought to an artificial end by the Revolution) and in his bringing Russian prose into the Western twentieth century by his existential concerns and approach, yet doing it with what in the West would be called classical means (in which respect he much resembles Camus) but which in Russian literature still had to be created for, if there was Classicism in Russia, it was mostly in poetry and drama, classical prose not having been brought to the same high level (except in Puškin's fragmentary attempts) that was attained subsequently in the non-classical prose of a Gogol' or a Lermontov.

Gazdanov has the courage not to appeal to all; he has the courage not to be accessible to all; not everybody can appreciate poetry or a lyrical sense of life; not everybody knows such intense and yet so delicate emotional life; not everybody shares a belief or an interest in certain esoteric conceptions any more than a disregard for politicians, social conditions, or, in very broad terms, for a historical view of life. Few, indeed, are interested in

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trying to see all phenomena *sub specie aeternitatis*; few can find genuine meaning in metaphysical speculations. On the other hand, many of those who can, do not share with him his talent to see things as simply, as clearly, shed of all unnecessary accretions as he does. The complex questions have, for many, to be complicated, trying for the intellect, and expressed in a correspondingly specialized vocabulary. His is not the simplicity that comes from the absence of internal differentiation, to use Plotinus's distinction, but the simplicity of an organic unity that is the result of a high degree of internal differentiation. Nor does he make it easier by following a trend, a fashionable writer or thinker, style or school of thought; this deprives him of a cotery of supporters, makes labelling or classification difficult. As often happens in cases like this, this results in a "conspiracy of silence," deliberate or not; the intellectual inertia of both readers and critics leads to dismissal by silence or neglect.

Gazdanov's style is characterized by a classical economy of means, a clear awareness of the artifice (but without the artificiality), a symmetry (and to some extent, a predictability) of design of the narrative movement as well as the various points of view, a careful selection of suggestive detail, a reliance on sound and rhythm and a fine sense of language. The emotional intensity is subdued by the firmly controlled classical style which does not allow the turmoils to disrupt the prose, to disfigure the expression His diction is smooth, his sentences flow with freedom and ease, despite his fondness of complicated compound sentences, their impeccable sustained rhythm turns his prose, in his best paragraphs, into genuine poetry. Ultimately, his stories operate through language and style: the separation of "contents" becomes impossible for what he says is in how he says it. The way he articulates his knowledge contains his knowledge: the two are not separable. This means that our paraphrases of his ideas and his themes can only be approximations and, paradoxically enough, so would be even the quotations from the fiction for they do not carry their full meaning, their full weight without the context in which they

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are brought to life--and meaning. His prose has an intelligent elegance for it is never purposeless and an elegant intelligence for it is never confused. One can argue against--or reject--his positions, his agnosticism, his sensualism, yet one cannot deny that he tries to, and is, true to himself, that his books are true to their inner music and it is this consistency that creates an individual, and therefore unique and sovereign vision of the world. His language fully expresses and conveys his knowledge; we never feel he knows more than he can suggest, nor that he manages to express more than he knows, as it sometimes happens with writers and poets whose poetry or fiction are richer than their non-literary works would suggest.

The many levels of his oeuvre reflect the many levels of the world as he sees it, yet his is not a decentered universe. The lyrical I of the author-narrator-protagonist is firmly at the center controlling this literature of memory ("archives of recollection"...), this autobiographical, personal, lyrical fiction. The narrative perspective is always that of the lyrical narrator-hero and the narration is "associative" and reflective: ego form passages are freely intermixed with what appears to come from an objective, omniscient narrator, yet which too is only a disguised authorial monologue. Commentary is often expressed in the angle of vision and objective description is never given for other than psychological reasons. "What we see is determined by what we are," his people say and believe. His characters are dominated by their fleeting thoughts and images, sentiments and sensations, yet these are vitally important for them. All his autobiographical personae are intellectuals, helplessly mental beings who cannot help thinking and the only salvation they know is the immersion in an instinctive, passionate, sensuous life from where the world of consciousness appears pale and so obviously unsatisfying. Their undoing is in that they cannot remain in this life forever: they are not "poor in spirit" as Salome, the heroine of one of his short stories, or Gustave Verdier, the hero of another, are who can renounce everything--wealth, family, society, comfort, memories, roots--to become, after a well-to-do bourgeois, yet intellectual life, the wife of a

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primitive shoe-maker or a Parisian tramp without needs and desires Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven because they are beyond the life o the intellect: Gazdanov's protagonists all dream of this life yet very few of them find themselves chosen. They are all pilgrims in search of the "real," of what is real to them, their true identity and the world as it truly exists in and for that identity. Rendering this search, rendering it plainly and truthfully is the central concern of Gazdanov's fiction. Compared to the magnitude of this task there remains only disdain for formal experimentation for its own sake (not however if done to find new means expressive of new realities). His books are records of this search or journey, as he likes to call them metaphorically, into the spiritual-psychological ordeal of personal existence and if the author is not detached from the seekers that crowd his novels this may show a weakness, a lack of distance and therefore of control, but on the other hand, this may account for the intense emotionality, the poetic tension of his best pages where the search's ordeal is expressed in Gazdanov's customary classicistic clarity, a combination that calls to mind that supreme example of a perfect balance of these two principles, Puškin.

"Dans certains états de l'âme presque surnaturels, la profondeur de la vie se révèle tout entière dans le spectacle, si ordinaire qu'il soit, qu'on a sous les yeux. Il en devient le symbole"--Baudelaire says (*Fusées. Mon Coeur Mis à Nu*), and it is in this sense that we can claim a profundity for Gazdanov's emotional landscapes, briefly described characters, episodic narratives. Events, as well as "souls," are presented in their essence, not along the horizontal, temporal axis of causal relationships but along the vertical, atemporal, "essential" axis where everything is seen (or so is at least the desire) *sub specie aeternitatis*.

To give the essentials of a character (or an event) requires a great deal of careful *selection*: a selection of carefully chosen, minute yet all the more expressive subtle details. Selection, in its turn, implies hierarchy: what is chosen and what is left out will be equally significant. A prerequisite for successful selec-

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tion of expressive details is observation: open eyes to see the appearance of things as well as insight into the nature of things. (The frequently repeated critical charge that most of his heroes are foreigners is, first of all, even numerically untrue, and secondly, irrelevant anyway, expressing the heritage of nineteenth-century nationalism which required a writer to be national in a narrow and entirely unjustifiable way.)

Gazdanov's language is a distillation of literary Russian and as such it has its advantages and drawbacks as well. By simply being "the quintessential Russian literary prose," as Gazdanov himself characterized it in an interview he gave in 1971, it is something that has never quite existed before and is a great novelty in Russian letters. Older literatures all have writers who represent a summing up of the achievements of their language up to that point and after whom new directions become inevitable, writers who distill and unite in their works all the essential features of the preceding period. History may find Gazdanov such a writer from a strictly stylistic point of view. The drawbacks are equally obvious: being nothing but the essential, it is almost like a dinner that consists of steak only; it is a relatively lifeless prose missing the liveliness of contemporary living speech, of dialects, of *skaz*, etc. and it is not always easy to enjoy the essence, unrelieved, unbalanced. Gazdanov himself complained, admitting this shortcoming and explaining it as a direct result of exile, of the absence of a live connection with the people and the language of the homeland. His language is "the quintessence of Russian literary language" also in terms of vocabulary: no dialectal words, no neologisms, no innovations on this formal level. His originality here is in his ability to give back the words their original meaning and in his combination of extreme sensitivity to linguistic as well as emotional subtleties and a controlled, classically clear expression of them. He "felt the motion of vowels, the shift of accents and all the nuances of meaning," "consonances were for him," as well as for St. Augustine about whom the following words were written and who seems to have had a considerable influence on

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Gazdanov after the war, "echoes of...truth, and the enjoyment that the senses derive from musical harmony (and its visual equivalent, proportion)," and, we should add, its verbal equivalent, prose rhythm, "is our intuitive response to the ultimate reality that may defy human reason but to which our entire nature is mysteriously attuned" (Otto von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, New York, 1964, p. 40). Gazdanov is one of those who have dreamed, as Baudelaire says in the preface to his *Petits Poèmes en Prose*, about

> le miracle d'une prose poétique, musicale sans rythme et sans rime, assez souple et assez heurtée pour s'adapter aux mouvements lyriques de l'âme, aux ondulations de la rêverie, aux soubresauts de la conscience.

In the relationship between structure and appearance there is in Gazdanov a transparency, a deceptive, illusory simplicity; in this sense his is a "diaphanous" prose: there is nothing "behind" the words, the words (with all their meanings, of course) are everything. The suggestiveness of such prose comes from its sensuous quality: it leads us directly to the essence of things (and their mysteries) by evoking them in their sensuous, material aspect. We are made to physically experience, feel, smell, touch; it is a biological, physiological kind of art where insight, intuition, intellectual contemplation are effected through and by the sensuous aspect of being. There is nothing truly anti-intellectual in this, although short of a sharp distinction between intellectual and rational, this may not be obvious. This prose is transparent in the sense a stained-glass window is; by analogy, its essential element is not light but its equivalent here, a lyrical high tension, a subtext, if preferred, that gives it depth and meaning. There is nothing behind, except the source of light, the source of intense emotions, and should these be lacking, or perceived as lacking, the window will be dark, the prose bland and insignificant. Its deceptive simplicity comes from the apparent ease with which the writer can manipulate his material; and the seeming lack of means with which he can create his landscapes of mood and atmosphere. His prose is direct and unembellished, towards

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the end almost terse and curt, yet it is always highly polished and never plain, never banal. Despite its straightforwardness it is always vivid and lively, partly because of its rhythm, partly because of its extraordinary graphic quality, something that Gazdanov got the critics' unanimous praise for. Another unusual combination in Gazdanov is the presence of both a story-telling talent that makes his writings very "interesting" and readable even when they are about "nothing" and a propensity for meditative, intellectual prose. In the latter he is a truly remarkable innovator, with Nabokov, in Russian literature where non-fictional, discursive, philosophical prose has never been highly developed. The existence of such prose is of enormous importance for it is arguable that if a language or culture does not have the linguistic tools to render or express certain ideas or certain ways of thinking, then those will simply not be possible in that culture. Although Gazdanov, any more than Nabokov, was not writing philosophical prose, he has many passages where great philosophical problems are dealt with in exemplary clarity, simplicity, in a very good, natural, yet sophisticated Russian which is something that has not been done very much before. Whereas many of the greatest masters of prose in Western literatures were not fiction writers, in Russia good prose has been largely synonymous with good fiction. The stylistic achievements of Nabokov and Gazdanov in this respect (even though they both remained within fiction) may prove to be of great importance for the future development of Russian prose.

Gazdanov did not evade the question of the much-criticized episodic nature of his art. The tendency is present from the very beginning: his first short stories are sequences of usually three independent episodes which are there even formally separated. Later the formal separation disappears or is reduced to the use of an asterisk to divide one from another. As to the introduction of minor episodic digressions into an otherwise fairly unified narrative this may have begun with the short story "Black Swans" (1930), although certain signs of the tendency can be discovered earlier. His episodes are like motifs in a musical composition, his episodic characters like "guests in the narrative," his

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descriptions like lyrical meditations. In "Happiness," in describing the young André's literary vicissitudes he gives us a self-portrait at the age of twenty-nine (1932), an ironic portrait of his own literary manner that again shows the essentially lyrical characters of Gazdanov's talent: diaries, memoirs of one's emotional life are his natural genre where one can comment on everything without restrictions. His is not the art of invention.

Besides other virtues and flaws, episodic narration has also the virtue of not limiting the narrative movement to one direction, as is usual in a straightforward plot, or to two, forward and backward, as when it is begun *in medias res*, but lets it develop in a great many directions successively and/or simultaneously, thereby tremendously increasing its value. It is this movement, suitably transposed into the sphere of psychic life, that Gazdanov calls "the movement of the soul," "dviženie duši," "the evolution of feelings" and these movements, narrative and psychological at the same time, make up the "plot" of his works. Seen in this light it becomes clear that the more "episodes" (each containing one or more "movement of the soul") a novel contains the richer it must necessarily be. This compositional structure is a reflection of a vision of life. Each human life, according to Gazdanov, is made of a sequence of episodes the beginning of which is lost in darkness and the goal of which is unknown to us. Any attempt to structure it (when representing it in art) as if it had a meaningful inner consistency or consequentiality (posledovatel'nost') is bound to fail. Thus on this horizontal plane, as we might visualize it, there can be no unity other than that of perception, of an "underlying vision" or a sentimental, lyrical context or subtext.

On the vertical plane, however, Gazdanov says there is a "focal point" to every human life to which all that preceded it seems to have been leading and after which everything appears to be its consequence. This central moment into which all the forces that play a role in a life converge and which determines the significance of the past as well as the direction and the possibilities of the future, this focal point does not lend itself to "horizontal perception" any more than it does to "horizontal treatment."

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This is the most profound explanation of the episodic nature of Gazdanov's art. Each episode is about one such focal point. What preceded or followed this crucial event is given in the light of this event and only to the extent it is relevant to it. Thus there is no plot, there can be no plot, for there is no causal relationship any more (unless we assume a "retroactive causality") and we are presented with a series of such focal points in a series of lives: with a vertically profound and unified vision in a horizontally disjointed, segmented presentation. However, until this crucial moment comes--and for many it comes as the last event of their lives, as death or dying--there will be no ends and no beginnings in the endless flux of life, that is to say, ends and beginnings which make sense in that between them a meaningful progress could be established. The idea of course runs counter to our habitual view of things for we need to, and do, organize reality according to the expediency of our everyday needs and in that sense we can certainly establish meaningful processes in our lives that appear to have a well definable beginning and end. Yet this is only an appearance, a delusion for the beginning is never an absolute one and on closer scrutiny it can always be traced back to earlier sources; and of course ends similarly are never absolute and may exert their influence anew even when they are thought to have been completely lost in the past. Having Tolstoj in mind we might offer marriage as an example: for Gazdanov the the interest of the story (the "emotional movement") does not stop when the lovers get married, nor does it, however, start there. For him the beginning is, in a sense, before birth (inherited traits, anamnesis, some kind of reincarnation, etc.) and the end extends beyond death (not in the sense of what happens after death--Gazdanov does not appear to believe in physical afterlife--but rather in the form of an interest in the afterlife of the "sentimental movement" which may not have died with the person but kept affecting people). However fragmentary the story may be horizontally, the interest on the vertical plane is always total, trying to encompass the whole gamut of a given existence even if

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in a large part only by association and suggestion. Gazdanov's art is addressed to those who can see the ocean in a drop of water, the world in a grain of sand.

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PART ONE

THE STORY OF A LIFE
(A SELF-PORTRAIT OF THE WRITER BY THE CRITIC)

> "Every man has two lives. The first is the one he has. The other is the one he should have had."
>
> (Gazdanov)

CHAPTER ONE

FROM ST. PETERSBURG TO PARIS (1903-1923)

1. PARENTS AND THE EARLY FORMATIVE YEARS

Gajtó (as his father named him after one of his best friends or Georgij Ivanovič as he was usually called later) Gazdánov was born on the 23rd day of November (Old Style; the 6th of December, New Style), of the year 1903 in St. Petersburg, on Kabinetskaja Street, in the large house of his mother's uncle into an upper-middle-class Russian Orthodox family of Ossetian origin. Although both parents were by extraction Ossetian (a non-Slavic people living in the central Caucasus, mostly Orthodox Christians, partly Moslem, and under Russian rule since the beginning of the nineteenth century), the family was entirely Russian in culture, education or language--in fact, with the exception of a few words, Gajto never learned any Ossetian.

His father, Ivan Sergeevič Gazdanov, was a graduate of the

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Petersburg College of Forestry and, being a forester, constantly travelled across Russia, usually taking his family with him. Thus, after having spent the first three years of his life in St. Petersburg, Gajto grew up all over Russia. They lived in Siberia, in Minsk in White-Russia, in the Tver' (now Kalinin) district, in Smolensk; later, during Gajto's school years, in Poltava and Xar'kov in the Ukraine, until--still later, during the War--he spent some time in the Caucasus and in Kislovodsk; finally, during the Civil War, he fought in the Crimea and in the neighboring mainland.

Gajto's mother, Marija Nikolaevna Abacieva came from a rich, aristocratic family. Gajto had two sisters, both of whom however died young. Gajto's father, too, died in 1911, when the boy was eight years old, but the sensitive and premature child preserved many memories of his father and his sisters. Later, the young, twenty-six year old writer chose, as it so often happens, his own life for the subject matter of his first novel. This book, *An Evening with Claire*, finished in July, 1929 and published in December of the same year, provides excellent portraits of his parents.

From his father Gajto inherited his excellent health, his "sensuous perception of the world," his "inclination towards the sensuous pleasures of life," to all kinds of physical exercise, swimming, gymnastics, to gastronomic delights, also his love of nature, of animals, of rain and snow, or rivers and the sea, of forests and long walks. His father's intellectual interests were directed towards social problems, sociology and philosophy as well as science--and he had his own private library on these subjects. The young, *very* young boy was exposed to these books and he began reading them very early.

His mother was a very different type of person. Her interests, her tastes, her habits were all different from her husband's. She was obsessed by a love of literature, *good* literature. Under her quiet, reserved manner enormous psychological forces were at work. Gazdanov inherited this inner unbalance and turmoil of his mother,

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her susceptibility to restlessness and a kind of mental cleavage as well as her phenomenal memory, which later became such an unbearable burden for Gazdanov who was to have too many and too terrible things to remember. Gazdanov's mother passionately liked literature and knew it very well. The family library had all the classics but not the contemporary fashionable literature for the lower classes to which the boy became temporarily attracted and which only provoked contempt in his parents.

Gazdanov's parents appear to have had a happy family life: they loved each other a great deal in spite of the differences in their characters. But their family happiness did not last long. The first disruption, the death of one of their daughters, came only a few years after their marriage. Then the father died, followed soon by the second daughter. Of the large family only Gajto and his mother remain. Yet, soon she is to endure one more loss. Within a few years, still as an adolescent, he will leave her too, to join the army in the Civil War--and never to see her again.

Gajto matured very early. A never ending tale told by his father about an imaginary voyage around the world started to develop the boy's imagination at a very early age. His natural curiosity found satisfaction in the books of the house. He became an avid reader and before he was eight he had read all the children's classics. Next came the real classics, mixed--to the consternation of his parents--with contemporary trash. He must have read all the "yellow" novels of the period: later, in his fiction, he utilized this knowledge--many of his petty-bourgeois characters read the books, not only of the relatively well-known Verbickaja and the almost respectable Arcybašev, but also of Bebutova, Čirikov, Salias, Lappo-Danilevskaja, Agnijcev, Krinickij, and other completely forgotten, third-rate trash writers. He may have been drawn to this literature to satisfy his desire for "interesting" books full of action and complicated plot--something the great Russian classics do not ordinarily offer--a romantic-idealistic trait which explains his lifelong infatuation with such a book, for example, as Dumas's *The Count of Monte Christo*, which he knew

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by heart, and the presence of such characters in his own books who are rich, handsome, intelligent, strong, successful in everything, have everything and so on. This trait, inborn no doubt, was so strong that all the suffering and poverty that befell Gazdanov could not eradicate it and it emerges in his fiction as a peculiar, at first sight somewhat disappointing, but, on closer scutiny, rather attractive feature. For plot, suspense and action he reads also the classics of European detective and mystery stories, Conan Doyle, "Nick Carter" and whoever else he can find in the attic of their house. His love of animals makes him read and re-read the volumes of Brehm's *The Life of Animals* and Kipling is among his childhood favorites.

But before he reaches the age of adolescence--a crucial age that life did not allow Gazdanov to have--he turns to more serious, in fact much *too* serious, reading. His "course of philosophy," at the age of thirteen, included--in addition to Hume--Feuerbach, Spinoza, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Guyot, Comte, Spencer, Kant, soon to be followed by his apparently beloved Jakob Boehme (who may have been the source of some of Gazdanov's esoteric ideas and beliefs) and Voltaire (who may have been the first to instill in him his lifelong attitude of irreverence and irony) and such fashionable thinkers and books of the time as Stirner, Kropotkin or Renan's *Life of Jesus*. Sensuous nature (which is so indispensable for an artist) that he inherited from his father was combined in him with love of genuine literature from his mother; and the combination has proved to be, luckily for the future writer, stronger than the intellectual faculties developed in the precocious child by his early exposure to analytical thinking. Moreover, it must have helped him avoid the trap of rationalism: the mature person could not help seeing the limitations of the mind. He became too intelligent to be self-conceited or to believe that he (or anyone else) can have final, definitive answers to the complex, "ultimate" questions of human existence. "The possibility of a complete and clear answer (to anything) appears to be real only to a limited imagination," he wrote in his second autobiographical novel, *Night Roads*,

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criticizing that "most intelligent way of being unintelligent," that is, Descartes's influence on French culture. This is the essential error in all rationalism and all systematic thinking, that it reduces reality to such an aggregate of facts as can be fitted into a pre-conceived system; that it reduces any complexity so as to make a one-sided, partial solution appear to be total and final. The mind, Gazdanov learned soon enough, is not to be trusted because it is not capable of grasping life in its totality. What it is really good at is asking questions and what its immediate biological function is not cognition as such but cognition to the extent it is necessary for the sustenance of life. An intuitive and sensual understanding brings us closer to the heart of reality; it *includes*, in non-rational forms, all the mind knows but, not fettered by logic, it also knows what is beyond the categories of reason. Upon the "logical requirements of clarity, freedom from contradiction and unambiguousness of reference" it superimposes no fear of contradiction or ambiguity, and the "wisdom of confusion."

Such an attitude may have helped him to remain, as he did, childlike in some respects, as well as to support his tendency not to admit, not to respect any authority, be it a famous author, an officer in the army, a divinity teacher at school or just an elderly member of the family.

All these passions (for the literature of suspense and adventure, for the animal world, and for philosophy) remain for life. In the last years of his life Cazdanov reads mostly English and American detective stories. As late as the 1950's he is fascinated by the stories of Jim Corbett about India and reads all his works. There was also found a big, illustrated book on animal mimicry in his library. And he still enjoys the philosophers. He buys the complete works of Plato, Spinoza and Descartes; Bergson and Berdjaev are among his favorite contemporary thinkers and he discovers the beauty of St. Augustine's books.

But probably more important than all this, for the child's early formation, were his readings in literature. The amount and variety is not less amazing than in his "philosophical training." He read

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Dante, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Caesar, V. Hugo, Puškin, Lermontov, Tolstoj, Dostoevskij, Avvakum, Tredijakovskij, Deržavin, Blok, Annenskij, Brjusov, Byron, Maupassant, Heine, Voltaire, Chénier, Baudelaire, Dickens, Poe, Hoffmann, Gogol'--all this, whether within the curriculum of the gymnasium or at the inspiration of his mother or the family library, before he was sixteen.

For the generations born at the beginning of this century one or two years of difference in their year of birth is of enormous consequence. Those born in the last years of the nineteenth century can still finish their secondary education. For those born in 1903 World War I comes at the age of eleven, the Revolutions at the age of fourteen, the Civil War at fifteen and sixteen, and exile at seventeen or eighteen. The turmoil in which young Gazdanov finds the world that surrounds him does not leave him unaffected. Deep inside, in his real self, he suffers from a lack of self-assurance and from his inclination to be a dreamer; to make up for his shyness he becomes outwardly a very impudent and insolent boy. His "inability to penetrate into the essence of abstract ideas," which in his case only meant his ability to go beyond their ordinary rational content and reflected a search for the "meaning of meaning," the raison d'être and the true nature of ideas, only confused the boy and he complained of "the innumerable contradictions that later immersed him in fruitless daydreaming." His concealed diffidence and apparent insolence remain a source of conflict for a long time. Many years later, in Paris, already a well-known writer, he still has the reputation of someone who has a sharp tongue and does not hesitate to use it. As a defense mechanism to counter-balance his sensitivity and insecurity he is aggressive and critical of everybody.

2. SECONDARY EDUCATION AMID WARS AND REVOLUTIONS

We ran ahead too much; we should return to the years immediately preceding the war when Gajto is about ten years old; his high school years and World War I are about to start. There is no information about his earliest school years, up to ca. 1912-13. This is a

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period that Gazdanov never mentions in his autobiographical fiction; on the other hand, his military school ("kadetskij korpus") and Gymnasium years from 1912-13 to 1918-19, were, by virtue of Gazdanov's early maturity and the great events of history, of tremendous importance for the young man and the young writer. Nearly everything Gazdanov wrote during the first five years of his "literary life" (about 1926 to 1930) is on, or related to, these experiences. In addition to the vivid pictures of his school years in his autobiographical *An Evening with Claire* he gave a slightly fictionalized account of his Gymnasium life in the short story "On the Island" (of which there remains a non-fictionalized "real-name" draft among his manuscripts) and he even wrote, as late as 1937 (but never published, as far as we could determine) an obituary article on one of his favorite teachers, the director of the Šumen Gymnasium in Bulgaria.

The exact date for the somewhat complicated story of Gazdanov's secondary education are not known but there can be no doubt about the general accuracy of the following picture. He probably started in the Xar'kov Gymnasium in 1912 and got to the seventh grade there in 1919. He went back to school in Constantinople in 1922, finishing the eighth and last grade in the Šumen Gymnasium in Bulgaria in 1923. However, to these gymnasium years we have to add his experiences at the military school in Poltava, spending there probably one year before entering Xar'kov Gymnasium.

Because of the child's exceptional maturity, powers of observation, and unusally sensitive and impressionable nature; because of the profound impression some of the teachers and classmates made on him; because of the truly extraordinary events and circumstances under which the second half of his secondary education was spent, from 1917 to 1919 and, in the perhaps even more unusual conditions of exile, in 1922 and 1923; and last, but not least, because to his intellectual and emotional precocity was added a premature urge for action and independence leading the thirteen-fourteen year old boy to "bad company" (to which he was drawn, inexplicably, or forced, less inexplicably, later on in his life) we have to pay particular attention to these years, to the effect they had on the young man.

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We are fortunate in that we can study this period through Gazdanov' own writings getting thus a picture not only of what happened, to his body and mind, during these years but also of how the writer later remembered and judged himself and the times.

The first school Gazdanov recalls in *An Evening with Claire* is the military school of Poltava, or, as he "fictionalizes" it, of "Timofeev." He did not like the place; its military character was foreign to him. The only thing he learned there, he says, was walking on hands; and the one thing he learned to hate there was the Orthodox service and organized religion in general. Perhaps the most disconcerting of his early experiences was this disillusionment with religion. We know of his father's anti-clerical attitude. But as if that was not enough he seems to have had a succession of very unsatisfactory divinity teachers and was only in the third grade or merely twelve years old when he learned how easy it was to bribe these priests.

The young boy's typical trait, the inner conflict of diffidence and arrogance develops and strengthens under the pressures of coping with school life. The transition from the secluded, warm and familiar small world of home to the necessity to absorb the impact of a great many foreign lives that come in contact with him now is not easy. The shy dreamer becomes, for all but his closest, an insolent rowdy. The roughness leads him to unexpected quarters. His newlyfound friends have the roughness but not much else. This society of suspicious characters includes not only billiards players, middlemen and speculators; there are also--we should not forget we are in the social whirlwind of 1917 Russia--counterfeiters, drug dealers, prostitutes, agents provocateurs, terrorists, robbers, anarchists, informers and plain murderers. Several of Gazdanov's earliest short stories from the late 1920's tell us episodes of his life at this bottom layer of society. One of them, "The Society of the Eight of Spades" is about a very mixed group of people, cocaine traffickers and poets, terrorists and dreamers in which the thirteen-and-a-half, fourteen-year-old Gazdanov--called, in the story, "realist Molodoj," "realist Young" and said to be, for the sake of greater credibility, fifteen--gets

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involved and very soon learns the sad truth that "life, if broken down to its basic elements, consists of robbery, trading and love."

3. FIGHTING IN A CIVIL WAR OUT OF CURIOSITY

All this is in 1917, before and after the Revolutions, and in 1918. Gazdanov is in the fifth, sixth and seventh grade of the gymnasium, travelling, every summer, to the Caucasus to visit his still living grandparents; and to Kislovodsk--a watering place he likes for its combination of provincial tranquility with the appearance and customs of the capitals--to visit his favorite uncle, one of the most memorably drawn characters in *An Evening with Claire*. It is to him, to this "uncle Vitalij" that the not quite sixteen-year old Gazdanov confesses, in the summer of 1919, his intention to fight in the Civil War on the side of the Whites. This conversation is extremely revealing; we learn the reasons for Gazdanov's decision, his attitude toward the Civil War and, although it is mostly uncle Vitalij speaking, some of Gazdanov's own philosophical views.

The stubborn Gajto is driven by the indomitable urge to discover the still unknown realms of life. He decides to join the Army (leaving the Gymnasium just before graduation) but before he leaves for the front he goes back to Xar'kov to say good-bye to his mother. They never see each other again. Once, before evacuation, in 1920, in the middle of war, Gajto, standing on his armored train which was slowly moving South, saw a classmate from the Xar'kov Gymnasium on a North-bound train and yelled to him to tell Mother that he was alive and going South. We do not know whether she ever got the message. But the connection was later reestablished. Gazdanov, already in Paris, could and did correspond with her and she very likely received and read his early fiction, including the novel *An Evening with Claire*, of which several copies were sent to the Soviet Union.

Gazdanov was very much attached to his mother. In the 1930's, when he heard that his mother became seriously ill he rushed to the Soviet embassy and begged them to give him a visa. They of

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course refused; fortunately for Gazdanov, who probably would have wound up in the Gulag instead of seeing his mother. She died (we do not know exactly when) a natural death during World War II.

It was at the end of 1919 that Gazdanov left for the front, to join his unit, an armored train, at Sinel'nikovo, in the South of Russia. In the actual fighting his place was on the machine gun platform. The exactly sixteen-year-old boy sees all the horrors of war. No wonder that very soon "his soul is burned out," as he said later about his generation; that he loses all the illusions people live by, that he becomes unable to believe in anything any more. His armored train is constantly traveling and fighting all over the Crimea and the neighboring mainland, but all this stops in November, 1920 when, after several retreats, Vrangel's defeated army has no choice other than to evacuate the Crimea, or, in other words, to leave Russia and go into what was then believed to be a short exile.

The last third of *An Evening with Claire* is the story of this year. It begins in Sinel'nikovo, a city Gazdanov will remember forever for a certain smell and the bodies of Maxno's soldiers hanging from telegraph poles; Gazdanov draws a number of portraits of the strikingly different human characters who are caught together in wartime: primitive or shrewd peasants, cowardly or stupid officers, a teacher of literature, youngsters who left school or who had no school to leave, men who changed sides many times without any scruples, not even understanding what is wrong with that, men without fear, singing and joking in the midst of the most intense shooting, a mužik so lazy and sleepy that the falling bullets could not make him get up and run, ruffians and murderers, thieves and ruined and embittered middle or even sometimes upper-class people, a polygamist railroadman having a wife in each city his line served before the war and war prostitutes, a type the young boy never met before. But not only were all these desperate characters more complex; there were some truly exceptional men among them, too: brave, even heroic, magnanimous, very capable, good at war and good at some form of artistic activity, idealistic in attitude, romantic in feelings. Although this sounds like the hackneyed prototype of the

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omnipotent positive hero of children's literature, there *are* such people, not perfect of course, yet truly different from the mass of ordinary people and when one meets such a man in real life one is bound to be impressed. So it was with Gazdanov. Amidst all the horrors of war he met such characters (perhaps lifting them, with his romantic imagination, even higher than they really were) who were strong enough in their spirit to raise themselves above the spectacle and to stand fast, not demoralized when everybody else was. Such real life experiences were very likely another source for the romantic idealized characters that appear, not infrequently, in the fiction. And there was one more reason why he knew such people existed: he himself was one of them. Nor did he belong to what is so often misnamed in our century "the people." His efforts to mingle with the peasants of his unit were unsuccessful and he remained, as he aptly puts it, a "Russian foreigner" among them.

Although Gazdanov belonged to his military unit, the armored train, for almost exactly a year, actually he was not constantly on it. There were times for Sebastopol, for cafes and theaters, functioning, surprisingly, amid the ravaging war. When, in the middle of October, 1920, Gajto tries to return to his train from an assignment to Sebastopol he learns that both the train and its base have been taken by the Reds, the commanding officers are in flight and only some thirty or forty soldiers and officers are left. Nevertheless he rejoins these but not for long: soon they fall under the attack of Budennyj's cavalry and though they get relieved, their days are numbered. Before long they are in Feodosija, a Black Sea port in southeastern Crimea, forced to embark, in November of 1920, on ships that will take them along with the remaining army of Vrangel', to Constantinople.

4. CONSTANTINOPLE, A TRAMPOLINE

An early American witness (no. 100, p. 5) wrote:

> In November--a few weeks before my arrival--111 ships of the Russian navy and commercial fleet, most of them out of repair, all insufficiently coaled, and many without drinking water, had straggled across the Black Sea and down

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> through the Bosphorus and ancored opposite Constantinople.
> On these ships, packed like cattle, were 130,000 Russians--the remnant of Wrangel's Army, and civilians from the Crimea. In an official report concerning these refugees Admiral Mark L. Bristol, U.S. High Commissioner to Turkey, said:
> "They were people, like ourselves, brought up in comfortable homes: doctors, lawyers, editors and writers, musicians and artists, ladies of birth and title, officers of the army and navy, little children, as well as soldiers who had given their health and almost their lives to keep back the Bolshevik menace which threatens the world's peace. Not only were there wounded soldiers, with gangrene in their wounds, but there were nursing and expectant mothers."
> The evacuation was sponsored by the French, who had aided Wrangel in his last stand against the Bolsheviki, and had agreed to feed these Russians for three months; but distribution of rations and of water had been almost impossible on the overcrowded ships; typhus and pneumonia raged; there was no sanitation; conditions were unspeakable. It was six weeks before the refugees were finally distributed in camps around Constantinople, wherever old barracks, old monasteries, old hospitals,or old hotels offered a shelter.
> The French, with the limited means at their command, were quite unable to meet the situation. There was an immense amount of relief work needed for the women and children, the wounded and the sick, in the make-shift camps.

Gazdanov was to spend about a year "opposite Constantinople," that is, in Gallipoli, in the military camp with the remnants of Vrangel''s army. But his independent spirit, his acceptance of no authority brought him into trouble when once he disagreed with his superior (as he later on, in Paris, used to say to his friend, Marc Slonim, the critic who helped him most in his literary career, "I know no generals, Mark L'vovič, even you seem to me a captain...") and the matter was turning serious, with a military trial in sight. It should not be forgotten that in 1921 (or in fact, up to World War II) many people believed in the imminent collapse of the Bolshevik regime, so it is understandable if the remnants of the White Army wanted to maintain strict military discipline in spite (or indeed, partly *because*) of the appalling psychological and physical conditions. In short, Gazdanov had to flee. He was lucky: an officer who knew his father helped him out. Gallipoli is recorded in the fiction in the apocalyptic vision of Gazdanov's perhaps most curious, "recurrent" character, a genius who reappears under differ-

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ent names either as an artist or as a writer, as in the early short story "The Tale of Three Failures."

After he escaped from Gallipoli he got to Constantinople--his "trampoline for the jump to the West"--where life became a little easier for him. His cousin with her husband happened to be there, making a good living by dancing, and they helped Gajto. Soon he entered the Russian gymnasium in Constantinople. The poetic, almost idyllic picture Gazdanov drew of the city in an early unpublished story is in sharp contrast with the apocalyptic vision inspired by Gallipoli.

Yet, on the whole, the Gallipoli - Constantinople experience was not much better than life during the Civil War. This time he saw all the horrors of refugee life, the "unspeakable conditions"; the invalid soldiers, the demoralized White "forces," broken families, parentless children, helpless young women, aristocrats doing the most menial work, people ready for anything, robbery, murder or prostitution. He was observing these people--and the special characters and the unusual "psychological events" he encountered appeared later in the fiction, even as late as the 1960's, in the form of "sketches from the writer's notebooks."

5. A BULGARIAN IDYLL

In Constantinople there were four gymnasiums between 1921 and 1923 but in view of the obviously temporary nature of their location they were soon transferred to friendly Slavic countries, such as were, for example, Czechoslovakia or Bulgaria. The oldest gymnasium was transported to Czechoslovakia at the end of 1921 and an "učeničeskij ètapnopropusknoj punkt" was organized instead, in February, 1922, which gave both the student and teaching body to the new major Russian gymnasium in Bulgaria that started functioning two months later, in April, 1922.

Gazdanov was admitted to this new "punkt" and its outgrowth, the Gymnasium in the Bulgarian provincial town of Šumen to finish his secondary education. He had only one more year, the eighth

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grade, to complete to get his diploma. He graduated the next year, probably in September: that year (1923) there were two graduating classes, one in January, the other in September. There exists a photograph of Gazdanov dated Šumen, August 1923. (A Paris, 1924, publication, *Zarubežnaja russkaja škola 1920-1924*, offers a vivid description of life at this school.)

This school must have been truly exceptional for its spirit, its unusual teaching and student body; many of the former were highly qualified and outstanding pedagogues; all or nearly all of the latter were doubtless more mature than their peers in less troubled lands. The gymnasium in Šumen remained a bright spot in Gazdanov's memory, so much so that he wrote his reminiscences about it in factual form (which we have in manuscript), published a slightly fictionalized version, prepared a necrologue on the director when he died fourteen years later and recalled some of his favorite teachers in several of his novels, from the early *An Evening with Claire* (1929) to *The Specter of Alexander Wolf* (1945-48).

One of Gazdanov's most influential teachers was his teacher of Russian literature whom he describes in "On the Island" as well as in some of the novels. As to his dislike of, even contempt for, the priest-teachers of the Orthodox church, even this school could not help. Here, too, they were primitive and ignorant. All his life Gazdanov liked to tell an anecdote of one of them, to whom Gajto declared that he did not believe in God and did not wish to go to church when he came in the morning to order the students to the service. The priest then answered: "What does He care about whether you believe in Him or not? One must go to church, period. Move!" Another time this priest sent a Jewish student to church, announcing that it did not matter at all because God was the same for all of us.

After the adventures in the Russia of 1917 and 1918, after the Civil War, the evacuation and the refugee life in Asiatic Constantinople it is not surprising that Gazdanov remembers the year and a half in the relative peace and quiet of the Russian Gymnasium in

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the little Bulgarian town in almost idyllic terms, especially since Gazdanov met some of his best friends in Šumen. His acquaintance with Vadim Andreev, the son of the famous Russian writer of the turn of the century, Leonid Andreev, dates back to this period, although Andreev did not attend this Gymnasium. He became a very good friend to B. Sosinskij and D. Reznikov, both of whom were to start a not too successful literary career later in Paris and who remained close to Gazdanov until death or political geography separated them. They published together, mostly, at first, in the friendly *Volja Rossii*, the only "thick" journal interested in the young in the 1920's; participated in Marc Slonim's literary circle, the "Kočev'e," from 1928 on; read their stories to each other, sometimes lived together and were known as the "four musketeers."

Gazdanov arrived in Paris in the winter of 1923, at the age of twenty. Other people start travelling at this age; he finally settled, after having spent the first twenty years of his life in constant movement. For the next thirteen years he did not leave Paris. After the travels of his family across Russia from White-Russia to Siberia, from St. Petersburg to Xar'kov, Poltava and the Caucasus in his childhood and youth, after a year in the Crimea on an armored train in the Civil War, after Gallipoli, Constantinople and Bulgaria he reached what turned out to be his destination and destiny: Paris, France, French culture; also the Parisian underworld, hard physical labor and, most importantly, what Gazdanov was to live for and could only live in: free Russian culture and literature.

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CHAPTER TWO

IN THE LOWER DEPTHS (1923-1952)

1. THE FIRST TRIALS

Gazdanov was to spend about twenty years of his life as a night taxi driver in Paris. But before he found his "profession" (one which was considered, under the circumstances, relatively "comfortable," even "aristocratic") he had to try out a few other things: the very first of these, in November 1923, was carrying, for eight hours a day, six-pood (36-pound) sacks from and to the barges in St. Denis. He could bear only two weeks of this life, at the very bottom of society. But escape from St. Denis was not easy. His next job in the winter of 1923-24 took him back to the same poverty stricken working-class suburb of Paris, only this time to wash locomotives.

From 1924 until about 1928 we know what Gazdanov did--or at least part of it--but the chronology becomes very uncertain. Gazdanov possibly reached the bottom of his descent during the winter of 1925-26 when he was compelled to try out the life of clochards. It lasted three months. He slept on sidewalks and in subway stations. His Caucasian pride kept him from asking for help or from going to sleep at his friends' apartments. After being a clochard he worked at the Citroen automobile factory and stayed there, as a driller, for a longer time. Physically this was not too demanding, except that he decided to leave immediately when he noticed that he was going deaf: once, crossing the street after work, he did not hear the coming truck and was nearly killed. He wrote about certain episodes of this factory period of his life forty years later, in the 1960's, in some unpublished "sketches from the writer's notebooks," but a more immediate and more general descrip-

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tion can be found in *Night Roads*, written in the late 1930's.

Just as he was a "Russian foreigner" among the peasant soldiers of the Civil War, he finds himself very different from the real working class. As a young man--let us not forget Gazdanov is in his early twenties!--he learns that the ideals and aspirations (if these words are appropriate at all...) of the working class are not what the liberal or radical intelligentsia would like them to be; that the distance between these two types of people is greater than most think; that the imposition of the values and goals of the intellectuals on the working class is totally futile and simply makes no sense. He learns this because he lives among them, he lives their lives--and does so not out of curiosity or compassion, *temporarily*,--but because he has no other choice. And once his life is locked in the same genuine hopelessness he begins to see the other side of the coin: that the working class idealized by the intelligentsia is coarse and primitive; that it lives an almost entirely vegetative life (and has hardly any conception of anything better); that it cannot see how or why the existing system should be changed except for immediate, short-term gains such as salary increases and the like. Yet, although the spirit is hardly alive in them, they are people, people often more honest and more happy than many in the other social classes and who live their lives with a heroism because they fully realize that *somebody* has to do the work they are doing, however the social system is reformed, and that their existence and work therefore is no less important, no less necessary than that of any other class or layer of society. Gazdanov was forced to be one of them--while at the same time living another life or other lives--and this entitles him to the harsh words he sometimes has for his fellow workers. Being one of them he can go beyond the complacent compassion of outsiders, he has the right to criticize them, to show them as they really are--and what is more, he has both the civic and the intellectual and the spiritual courage to do so, to face these facts that are among the strictest taboos of our age--instead of ignoring or falsifying them as most others do who do not have his freedom and independence.

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There were other things too, to try out. For a while he was teaching Russian to Frenchmen and French to Russians. Already at that time he had an excellent command of the French language; later after many years of living in Paris, he brought his knowledge to perfection; the only accent he had was that of Parisian argot which he could imitate flawlessly. Yet he never wrote in French. Once he tried, he told a friend (oral communication by V. Varšavskij: the reference was probably to the beginning of his first novel, *An Evening with Claire*, which is extant in Gazdanov's own French trans lation) but could not get beyond the first sentence. To write fiction, and particularly his kind of fiction, one has to have the language in one's blood, in one's subconscious, one has to "feel" the words, all their connotations, all their emotional and stylisti value, one has to have possessed it from the beginning, from childhood in order to have one's memories in the "right" language, to hav one's mind and heart develop with the help of that particular linguistic medium and not another. One can write fiction in a foreign language, as Conrad or Nabokov did, but not the kind of deeply emotional prose about "the movements of the soul" that is Gazdanov's.

There is a short story by Gazdanov, entitled "An Intellectual Cooperative" and published in 1961, which is a detailed, humorous and entirely truthful account of what may have been the only business enterprise in Gazdanov's life. It happened in the "heroic" twenties and at least two of the four musketeers participated in it, the other being Vadim Andreev, while a third member of this unusually intellectual but not so unusually unsuccessful profit-making enterprise was the poet B. Božnev. What these writers did was to buy a small, used truck and deliver dairy products to suburban housewives. But the truck soon fell apart and there was no profit left after the sales.

Another somewhat "intellectual" episode in this period of Gazdanov's life (we are now after 1928) was his venture into the French publishing business. He got an administrative job at no less a renowned firm than the world-famous Hachette; yet it was a complete fiasco. Gazdanov found the efficiency of this organization disastrous and soon left the firm voluntarily, being physically unable

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to pretend for eight hours that he was "working" when he had literally nothing to do. For the next twenty-five years Gazdanov preferred taxi driving to any kind of office work. It was around 1928, probably after spending some time at the Sorbonne, to which we shall return later, that Gazdanov decided to try out what became his occupation until 1952: night taxi driving.

2. DESCENT INTO HELL: THE TAXI YEARS

In the larger context of his entire life it was rather "by virtue of senseless chance" that the young Gazdanov--already a published author--was forced to eke out a living by driving a taxi at night: a way of life that, in his comparison, is more terrible than the horrors of the Civil War. Yet, the job had good aspects as well. Since Gazdanov was a bachelor until 1936 and was inclined to live the life of a Bohemian, very little was enough for him: he could get by on what he earned during the week-ends, Saturday and Sunday nights, the most lucrative days for cab drivers. Although he could not always do this, nevertheless such a basic schedule left him quite a lot of free time that he could use for writing or participating in the literary life of the French capital. From the end of 1936 until the war broke out he already had a definite daily schedule which was as follows: around 8 or 9 P.M. he went to the garage to pick up his cab and drove it until 5 or 6 or 7 the next morning with a "break" from 2 A.M. to 5:30 A.M. when there was little or no business. This break he usually spent taking long walks across the sleeping and empty Paris or in a bar called Café D'Alençon (not in existence any more) opposite the Gare Montparnasse where he had an opportunity to meet the lowest stratum of French society just as he had before, in the south of Russia, a similar opportunity with *that* society. In this cafe he met alcoholics, prostitutes, primitive people, as for instance the one whose lifelong dream was "to make a living," idiots, clochards, broken lives, "philosophers" (like "Socrate," described in *Night Roads* under the name "Plato"), madmen, invalids and all kinds of physical and psychological deformities, enough--as he says--to poison forever several human lives.

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That Gazdanov was constantly close to this part of the human world, from the age of 13 until he was almost 50 is of enormous importance and consequence of course, both for the man's psychological and spiritual development and for the writer's view of the world and his selection of subject matter. Gazdanov descended to such depths of human existence as from which few emerge; but those who do, come back stronger and have a vision and perspective that is truer, because more complete, and more profound than that of those of us who did not have to go through such a "descent into hell," who did not experience "first-hand" death, total disintegration, utter despair, a complete loss of all illusions culminating in that metaphysical anguish which knows no God, no hope, no meaning. In the particular historical context of Gazdanov's background this means the loss of all romantic conceptions of man whether they come from idealism (religious or not) or the heritage of the radical nineteenth century; the idealistic view of man as inherently good or the naive idea of man's perfectibility, Utopian or Christian socialism or the belief in the beneficial influence of the sciences; also the complete failure (the destruction and suffering brought about) by the Russian revolutionaries and the subsequent total disillusionment about and alienation from, the "fathers" of Gazdanov's generation, the collapse of all that the word "Russia" meant, the wars and an exile without perspectives in an unfriendly land.

No wonder that under these influences Gazdanov becomes a "catastrophic," "apocalyptic," "existential" writer (admiring, later, Camus but disliking Sartre). Yet there is a tension between what life taught him and what his natural inclinations and instincts suggested to him from inside. Even the cataclysmic events of European history could not subdue his native vitality, love of life, his sensitivity to all forms of beauty and pleasure, his essentially romantic and idealistic nature, his physically very strong and exceptionally healthy body, his love of women, company, music, his delight in nature, in the sea, the snow, the rain--in all the natural pleasures of the body, the soul and the spirit. He was constantly trying to "harmonize" the world, although life did everything it possibly could to kill this urge in him. This also helps to explain the tendency in his fiction to

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idealization that we mentioned before. His female characters almost always become symbolic of male ideals; in several novels there are male characters who act like people ideally should or as ideal heroes would--pointing to his "Monte Christo complex." But there is more to this: in the final analysis this represents his re-emergence, his re-ascent from hell, really and symbolically. One can argue about the artistic success of this aspect of his work, particularly of his omniscient and omnipotent heroes and heroines, handsome, rich and "speaking several languages without accent," but if there is any credibility to the transformation of the pimp Fred, for example, in the novel *Pilgrims* (and there is); if there is any power in the story of the sick girl in *The Awakening* and if Gazdanov was able to avoid there the pitfalls of melodrama (and he was), then this is possible because behind every word that would be false without the supporting experience we feel the writer's hard-earned knowledge and sense that this knowledge comes from within, from life, not from theories, principles or ideas; moreover, not just from "life," but from life fully experienced, from life as seen, with new eyes, and understood, with new knowledge, after a "descent."

But we should return to his taxi life, continue our descent into Gazdanov's hell: in the morning when he got home he went to bed at once, sleeping through the whole day until about 5 P.M. Then he got up, had dinner and wrote until it was time again to go to the garage. This very heavy daily schedule, however, did not last very long: mostly the three years between 1937 and 1940 and for some time after World War Two. What did not change and was perhaps the most unbearable was the duality, or rather, the multiplicity of life. One could not take books and read them in the cab, to mix the two worlds--"that way madness lies." To give up real life, life in art, in the higher regions of human activity and sensibility would be spiritual death. To keep these worlds apart required a superhuman effort.

The multiplicity of existence is a major theme in his fiction. The first taxi years, from the age of 25 to 37 (1928-1940), coincide, not only with what may be the prime time of one's life, but

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also with what was perhaps Gazdanov's most productive creative period (four of nine novels, 28 of 37 short stories written mostly during these 12 years, while the rest during the subsequent thirty!) and most certainly with his most active literary life: participation in discussions both in print and in Russian literary or philosophical societies, giving public readings of his own prose, and so on. It was also a time of deep emotional involvements, some ending in tragedy (death, suicide). The range of his experiences is truly shattering: surrounded by an ocean of broken lives he feels most pity, and most respect, for the few Russian intellectuals who, like himself, had enough strength in themselves to keep up, with genuine heroism, their scientific or artistic pursuits.

On the other hand, Gazdanov often seems to write rather cruelly and mercilessly about the debris of human society, that "live human carrion." This is true and not true at the same time. He certainly has no compassion for those who are there, in these lower depths, because they have no vision of anything better. It takes courage to say that there are such people; that not all the downtrodden and oppressed are the victims of an unjust society; that some of them neither know, nor deserve, nor could live, a different life. There are no pleasures in Gazdanov's works for the intellectual who believes (without, of course, any real life experience) that he knows better and that the whole world only dreams of living his way of life: there are in fact few topics on which Gazdanov spares less his scathing irony. He does not even hesitate to compare to the animal world this human debris he met in the "fetid apocalyptic labyrinth" of a cab driver's night roads in one of the greatest centers of European civilization.

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CHAPTER THREE

OTHER LIVES (1928-1971)

1. SORBONNE AND SOME PHILOSOPHY

It is against this life--and the preceding four or five years of trials in pre-Depression Paris--as a background that we have to see, not only Gazdanov's literary work, but also his "other lives," the emotional and intellectual. The latter can be said to have started, in the Parisian period, when Gazdanov enrolled in the Sorbonne. The exact dates for his university years are not known, but it would be almost certainly correct to assume "the end of the 1920's," up to the turn of the decade, i.e. any time between 1926 and 1931. There is disagreement even as to whether he ever graduated from the Sorbonne with a degree, although in this those who think that he did are most likely wrong. There is no evidence of any diploma among his papers and there are many indications, factual, psychological, intellectual, and recollective that he left the university well before any degree was in sight. He did well as a student, but only in those subjects that interested him. He was supporting himself with odd jobs, supplementing a meager scholarship. Even entering the university was not that easy, as Gazdanov seems to recall in an episode in the novel *The Specter of Alexander Wolf*.

Once admitted, other, more serious problems come up. The twenty-five year old Gazdanov had already undergone so much, had already seen so many of those aspects of human life that are usually not within the scope of most people's ordinary experience that the theories of his professors appear to him too abstract, lifeless or simply immature. He cannot escape from his past; his merciless memory, a heavy burden on his soul, makes it haunt him all the time. His fiction will reflect this to the end of his life; in the

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end of the 1960's he will, for example, recall Constantinople, and nearly all his later novels, although the plot is almost never dated, will have their action take place in this heroic period of the author's life (ca. 1925-1935).

His course of study included "history of literature, sociology, economic doctrines." History of what literature? Presumably French--we do now know. He studied sociology and economics: external considerations may have forced him to do so; or perhaps he wanted to see what rationale humanistic scholarship had to offer about why people go to war to kill each other, what economic forces are at work behind the events that might explain to him why the things he saw happen happened; yet Gazdanov never tired to make clear how uninterested he was in such explanations! In *An Evening with Claire* he mentions how the current fashion in revolutionary Russia to talk, or read, about politics and socio-economic issues left him completely indifferent: he could sit for hours over a book by Boehme but was unable to read works about cooperatives.

In his second novel, *The History of a Journey* (1934-35) he describes his professor of sociology (Célestin Charles Bouglé, 1870-1940, author of a number of books on sociology and related topics who appears under his real name in an unpublished draft for a section of the novel) in rather unflattering terms as his fictional *alter ego*, the young student Volodja meets an old friend from Russia, Aleksandr Aleksandrovič, an artist, perhaps the most memorable character of the novel, at a lecture of this professor and remembers the Civil War--such as no theory can explain--while the professor speaks about "the sacred fire of revolution" in pompous clichés utterly devoid of any meaning.

There is a fundamental concern in Gazdanov's works: what is the true value of things? what indeed *is* this value? does it have an independent existence at all? Gazdanov was not a rationalist; he did not believe in theories and systems; he could say, with Leibniz, that "every system is true in what it affirms and false in what it denies" meaning by that that no system of the mind can grasp the totality of reality and is therefore false in its limitations, whereas there will always be at least elements of truth in what it

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includes and affirms; and he could go on adding that this rational knowledge is both founded upon and superseded by an intuitive understanding that we carry in our nerves, muscles and blood, that forms and determines our ideas, conceptions, theories after its own nature. As Marc Slonim, one of Gazdanov's best friends and critics, put it: "in Gazdanov's view all our interests, preferences or passions, whether they are the philosophy of Plato or modern painting, emerge not at the dictate of logic or reason but from our emotional depths. He calls these movements of the soul and the instincts, of consciousness and the body, elementary, yet decisive for all our inclinations and actions. This does not mean that they are right or true, they may be misdirected, they may be transitory and deceptive. Every one of us experiences them differently in his own way; they assume all kinds of different colors and they comfort and attract, therefore, the eye of the poet or the artist" (no. 236). The same critic believes that there is not, and cannot be, because of the kind of vision just described, any intellectually coherent group of ideas, any philosophy, any "system" (if one should insist, erroneously, on using the word here) in Gazdanov. This we believe is wrong, and on more than one account. First of all, although certainly it is no "system" limited, reduced or simplified in any direction by the requirements of pure logic or reason, he does have well-defined and clearly expressed views on a very large number of topics, including, and in particular, on all the "great questions of human existence." Even if Gazdanov says, as he does sometimes, that a question is unanswerable, this is an "answer," in that it expresses a certain attitude to, or a certain view of, the given question. And it is indeed to collect and point out his views, his "great themes," and to show the significance and profundity of his entire outlook, partly in answer to the common criticism of Gazdanov as a writer who had "nothing to say," that the third part of this study will have for its principal objective. Secondly, a philosophical standpoint, like that of Berdjaev or of Cassirer in his

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Philosophy of Symbolic Forms would surely find a sympathetic reader in him. In point of fact, it would probably be no exaggeration to say that the basic position of these philosophers is philosophically very near to at least one side of Gazdanov's work; that what they say approximates closely, on the philosophical plane, what Gazdanov says in his fiction, naturally in a much looser and more figurative way. If this is true, and if time should prove Berdjaev or Cassirer to be representative expressions of the spirit of our time, of our "Zeitgeist," then this fact alone would be enough to have particular significance, in matters of substance, of content, if not in style, to Gazdanov's oeuvre in the context of twentieth-century Russian literature and to place him among the very few Russian authors who are in their concerns, in their Weltanschauung, "contemporary" or "modern" according to "Western time."

We know that Gazdanov knew and liked the work of Berdjaev, whose personalism was close to him and, even though there is no direct evidence that Gazdanov was a "follower" of Cassirer (or even that he ever read him), we can be absolutely sure that even if he would react unfavorably to the life-killing tendency of logic in that philosopher, even if he would be quick to point out that every construction of the mind is first and foremost an expression, a revelation of its maker, and only secondarily a constitutive element of human culture and thus of the world itself--precisely in accordance with Cassirer's own conceptions--he could not naturally withdraw his appreciation from a thinker who is so mindful of the "essential sensuous substratum" of all human experience, who could say (in his *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, New Haven and London, 1953, I, p. 319 and 88) that "in all its achievements and in every particular phase of its progress, language shows itself to be *at once* a sensuous and an intellectual form of expression" or that art, "the very highest and purest spiritual activity known to consciousness is conditioned and mediated by certain modes of sensory activity."

2. A TAXI DRIVING FREEMASON

"And yet," Gazdanov could write for Volodja, his *alter ego*, in

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The History of a Journey, "and yet, regardless of everything, the revolution was the best thing he ever knew." It must have taken courage to say this, in 1935, in the emigre Paris, risking the alienation of many even among the "not-so-reactionary"; but what it does show beyond doubt is Gazdanov's absolute self-sufficiency and independence, his unconditional sincerity and fidelity to himself. He had always been a loner and a non-conformist, never fearing or caring about what others might say. This is a very important fact, both in general and in relation to his literary career. Such a character would, *ipso facto* as well as in its everyday manifestations, normally displease all those not having attained its level. And so it must have happened in the private and the literary life of our writer. The detailed account of his "biographia literaria" will immediately follow this attempt to tell the story of his life--and his character--yet to provide the right perspective on these years and a corrective on the hellish nightmare of night taxi driving, we must touch upon the principal facts of his literary career here too. Although the six short stories published in the Prague "thick" journal *Volja Rossii* for 1927-1929 brought him some recognition and his appearance in literary meetings and circles made him known among the literati, the turning point was the year 1930. By early January his first novel, *An Evening with Claire,* was already on sale, soon to be received with enthusiastic reviews. Gazdanov is hailed as the greatest, or the other greatest new talent to emerge in the emigration: throughout the 1930's Nabokov and Gazdanov are compared, not seldom to the advantage of the latter, and people debate over which of the two young promising writers will better live up to the critics' expectations. The whole emigration (Bunin, Osorgin, Adamovič, Vejdle, Nabokov's Berlin paper *Rul',* etc.), and even Maksim Gor'kij from the Soviet Union, unanimously praise the novel. His name becomes well-known with the emigre reading public: the book is checked out from the Turgenev Russian Library in Paris fourteen times in three months at the end of 1930 (no. 134), possibly establishing a record of popularity for a first book. The year 1930 also marks another literary sensa-

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tion, the appearance of *Čisla* (*Numbers*), the controversial, extremely handsome, richly executed and profusely illustrated "thick" journal of the "young," the emerging second generation of emigre writers, where their stories are accompanied by reproductions of Chagall's, Larionov's and Gončarova's paintings. Discussions flare up concerning the character and the tendency of the journal, yet there is general agreement that the best fictional work in the first issue is Gazdanov's short story, "The Water Prison." Add to this that in 1929-1930 he has at least two public readings of his own prose and that the activity of the only literary association in which Gazdanov participated vigorously, Marc Slonim's group called "Kočev'e," peaked around the turn of the decade. The successes of 1930 opened for Gazdanov the doors of *Sovremennye zapiski* (*Contemporary Annals*), the most reputable, "authoritative" journal of the emigration, which until then successfully resisted the pressure of the young to publish them, and in the 1930's his stories and novels regularly appear on its pages side by side with works by the greatest names, Bunin, Merežkovskij, Aldanov, Nabokov, Xodasevič and others.

Another event of great importance follows soon. In the spring of 1932 Gazdanov is admitted to the Parisian Russian lodge "Northern Star": he becomes a Freemason. This is not the place to discuss the role of Freemasonry in Russian emigre culture; nor are we entitled to divulge numerous facts related to it or to Gazdanov's masonic life. Some aspects are, however, public knowledge or can be freely dealt with. M. A. Osorgin's masonic activity is well known; it was he who invited Gazdanov, along with other talented young men, to become a "brother." Very soon after he joined, a new, independent, unofficial group was organized, under the name of "Northern Brothers," primarily for young members wishing to study and discuss seriously the traditions, rituals and ideas of Freemasonry. This group, in which Gazdanov took a very active part, existed from 1932 until 1939; it had about 150 meetings, that is, lectures with discussions on a great variety of topics from Orphism, Pythagoreanism, Jakob Boehme or Kant to literary criticism, Maeterlinck and all forms of symbolism to modern science and prob-

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lems of contemporary society. After the war this group could not be revived; in fact, even the official lodge began to decline, membership dwindled, primarily because of deaths, but also for lack of interest on the part of the new emigres. Gazdanov remained a Freemason until his death, achieving a very high degree. He continued to give lectures after the war, mostly on literary matters, including Solženicyn and other recent developments. All these lectures as well as the complete archives of the lodge and the group are deposited in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and will be available to the public after a period of thirty years.

What drew Gazdanov to Freemasonry? At first, it may have been the personality of M. A. Osorgin who, as we shall see later, helped Gazdanov a great deal in his literary career. Then, some of his closest friends, young writers or intellectuals, were also members or were about to become members of the Russian lodge. The secretive nature of Freemasonry must also have appealed to Gazdanov who, as a private man, had a very secretive character. But it goes deeper than that. Gazdanov disliked all political parties, public societies, organizations--all social groups--and never belonged to any. He could not tolerate the individual's degradation which inevitably occurs when he becomes part of any group, any "mass." Secrecy is one way out. When a person is not known to be a member of a group, then, for society, he is not: he can preserve his independence. In addition, Gazdanov was a very modest, self-effacing man; thus, from a psychological angle too, such an arrangement must have been attractive to him.

Beyond all this then there is of course the substance of Freemasonry. Its simple definition, as given to us by a senior member, must have been shared by Gazdanov too. "Freemasonry strives to unite all people seeking perfection...there is no universal truth, no ultimate truth, there is only a quest for it. This quest, this never-ending quest is the goal of Freemasonry." Gazdanov was an agnostic in not believing in the possibility to have final answers, yet believing that such a quest had meaning, made him, in a sense, a gnostic. He was not a believer, yet he was a "religious" man. He could say that "only a complete idiot can *not* believe in God," yet he remained aloof from organized religion to the end of his

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life. He was a deist, or maybe a theist; very likely he was not a Christian in so far as that term puts limitations on one's spiritual experience: he was not "only" a Christian. He calls Buddhism a "tempting religion" (perhaps under the influence of one of his best friends, the original Russian poet A. Ginger, member of a Buddhist temple in Paris), and even speculates on the historical accident of Russia becoming Christian when spiritually, it would seem, Russians would make very good Buddhists.

Finally, one more reason for Gazdanov's association, relating, in another sense, also to the substance of Freemasonry, were the people: the people he met in the lodge, many of the best representatives of Russian intelligentsia, historians, politicians, writers, artists, scientists and others, a truly elite group and a truly exceptional if not necessarily entirely effective antidote to Gazdanov's solitary life amidst the "live human carrion," in the lower depths of European civilization.

3. MARRIAGE AND ANOTHER WAR

It was only thirteen years after his arrival in Paris that Gazdanov was finally able to leave the city. When in August 1936 he goes, in the company of Marc Slonim and a doctor friend, to the Riviera, this first trip to the South of France immediately results in an unexpected, but major event in his life: he meets his future life, Faina Dmitrievna Gavrišev, born Lamzaky. Although at the time she was running a chicken farm, she was from a rich Odessa family of Greek extraction. From October of 1936 they live together, very soon moving into a new apartment on rue Brancion, in the 15th arrondissement of Paris, which they will keep to the end. Mrs. Gavrišev found the apartment, in a modern building with modern comfort (not a very common thing in the Paris of the 1930's) close to his garage. Gazdanov was not a practical man; until 1937 he travelled (or walked) across half of Paris to get to his taxi in the evening--or to his bed in the morning. From 1937 to 1939, until the war breaks out, the Gazdanovs go to the South every summer. He falls in love with the Mediterranean: the short stories published

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during these years were written to earn the money for these trips.

These years, the happiest period of Gazdanov's life, come to an abrupt end when the war breaks out. During the German occupation of Paris the Gazdanovs stay in Paris. There is no work; nobody uses taxis any more. They both try to find odd jobs, primarily tutoring, giving Russian and English lessons. Materially, these are among the most difficult years of Gazdanov's life, particularly the last war year, 1944. Yet these years are not uneventful. Unemployment is not such a bad thing for a writer: Gazdanov works on a number of different literary projects, novels and short stories. Most of these, however, remain unfinished or unpublished. The only major fictional work that comes out of the war period (finished, published and very successful) is the novel *The Specter of Alexander Wolf* (1945-48).

In 1939 all aliens were called in by the French authorities to sign a declaration of loyalty to France (which in practice meant an expression of readiness to fight in the French army). Gazdanov goes and signs without hesitation. This is the time when another great Russian writer with an entirely different hierarchy of values, Vladimir Nabokov, says no and has to leave the country. The Gazdanovs stay and help those in danger cr need. They save the lives of some friends (Marc Slonim among them) by taking them out of Paris to unoccupied French territories. Gazdanov was a very responsive person; he could never find enough egoism, indifference or detachment in himself to refrain from helping people even if it meant danger or privation for him or even if they were at some distance from him as the case of the Soviet refugees-partisans with whom Gazdanov had little in common will show. This was probably one reason, a psychological one, for Gazdanov to have been caught up in the events that gave him the subject matter of his only non-fictional book: the Russian partisan movement of resistance to the German occupation.

There were many Russian (Soviet) partisans in France. They were refugees from camps, prisons or factories in France, in Germany or in some cases even from occupied Russian lands. These people got gradually organized, established contact with the French maquis

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and fought an underground partisan war against the Germans. One day, in the middle of the war, a friend (A. P. Pokotilov) invited the Gazdanovs; there they were introduced to two Soviet partisans (Nikolaj and Pavel) and asked right away if they would be willing to help out: he with editing their underground news information bulletin (the previous editorial board had just been arrested), she with serving as a liaison. The answer was a quiet, unhesitating and simple "sure, we can do it" (no. 189). This is how their participation in the resistance movement started.

It is a paradox that the detailed description of the life of these Soviet partisans on French soil, by a Russian emigre writer, has never been published in Russian. In fact, many even believed that Gazdanov wrote this book, *Je m'engage à défendre*, originally in French and that no Russian version ever existed. Yet the truth is that he wrote it in Russian (at the request of the French publisher); the original Russian text was discovered among his manuscripts exactly 30 years later, in 1975.

Gazdanov's "Russianness," if there should be any doubt about it, was very obvious at this time: he was overjoyed at the opportunity to meet "real" Russians, young (or youngish) men and women, directly from the new Russia, different people speaking a new language, and yet, deep inside, very Russian, very un-Western. Gazdanov's meditations on the Russian character (and the character of Russia as well as the Soviet Union) are among the most interesting pages of this documentary work. He has always been a "Westerner": he is very critical of Soviet ideology or mentality and sees it as a continuation of certain very important tendencies of pre-revolutionary Russia. He detests their new--and degenerate--language and their intellectual poverty (such that it makes them unable even to conceive of intellectual freedom), he deplores the fact that the USSR keeps up, even enforces, the totalitarian traditions of old, patriarchal Russia and yet, parallel to all this, in his comparison of Russians and Europeans the scale is not unequivocally in favor of Europe: he sees in Russia, in pre- and post-revolutionary Russia alike, a primordial, young civilization that has, and lives for, its future, not overburdened by its past or flourishing present, and

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he sees this youth of the race in such things as bodily movements, the voice or the ability to withstand physical suffering.

In the Russian press the book was passed over in almost complete silence (nos. 187, 188). The reasons are not hard to establish. That it was published in French made it "non-literature," of only documentary interest. And as such, as an expression of Gazdanov's position, it certainly could not be expected to be very popular: for the "right-wing" of the emigration it was much too leftist, close, in fact, to treason ("collaboration with the Soviets"); for the "left-wing," which was, during the war and immediately after, in the middle of an upsurge of patriotic (and pro-Soviet) feelings it was much too rightist. This was the time when many emigres took up Soviet citizenship and, in some cases, returned to Russia. It was precisely the taking of Soviet passports by some of Gazdanov's closest friends that put an end to their longstanding friendship. Gazdanov shocked many people; they could not understand how he could help the Communist partisans, risking his life and then abruptly break off all relations with his best friends for their pro-Soviet (or perhaps more precisely: less and less anti-Soviet) feelings. Yet there was an internal logic to Gazdanov's actions. His participation in the Communist underground was *in spite of* his ideological disagreement with them. It went deeper, once again, to the emotional and biological foundations of his character. The romantic ideals (and religious virtues) of duty, compassion, humility and gratitude were for him more real, more important than, say, art with an ivory tower type detachment as in the value system of Nabokov, to take a contemporary parallel Russian example. He could not remain indifferent to either the evil that Nazi Germany presented or the truly appalling conditions in which these Soviet partisans lived and fought. As he said at the end of the book, he could not find in himself the "dead apathy" needed to remain dispassionate.

Another document, dating from this period, deserves to be quoted in full, because it is a measure of Gazdanov's liberal attitudes and ideological tolerance, features seemingly so rare among Russians. It is a draft of a letter (it is not known if the original

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is extant or not) written by him to V. F. Zeeler, the President of the Russian Union of Writers and Journalists in Paris in protest against political discrimination in the Union and a declaration of his withdrawal from it:

> Dear Vladimir Feofilovič,
>
> I have just learned from newspaper accounts of what happened at the meeting of the Writers' and Journalists' Union. I did not attend the meeting because at the time I was informed that it would take place on November 29 and I received no notification of the change of date.
>
> I understand that a new paragraph has been added to the by-laws of the Union according to which no person who has taken a Soviet passport, and consequently a pro-Soviet position, can be a member of this Union. Until now the Union has always distinguished itself by its extraordinary tolerance toward the political views of its members; and it seems to me that it is precisely in this tolerance that the immense superiority of a democratic organization is embodied. In my view the addition of such a paragraph is contradictory to the basic principles of our Union which, theoretically, can be joined by people of the widest variety of persuasions, from anarchists to monarchist.
>
> I have never been involved in politics and feel no inclination at all toward it. Yet I think that unless a member violates the rules of elementary decency the Union has no right to exclude him just because he has certain political opinions. Even more inadmissible this would be in relation to an entire category of people who would be excluded precisely according to such a political criterion. Therefore, I have to ask you, dear Vladimir Feofilovič, even though it saddens me greatly, not to consider me a member of the Writers' and Journalists' Union any more. I would be most grateful to you if you found it possible to read this letter at the next regular meeting.
>
> Respectfully yours,
> G. Gazdanov

Gazdanov never spoke about his book on Russian resistance; so much so that many of his new, post-World War II friends never knew he had written one. This was partly out of modesty; even when asked he was reluctant to talk about his "partisan" experiences. But there were other reasons too: this book was the only one Gazdanov ever wrote *on request;* something he was very much against in principle. And last, but not at all least, this was his only documentary, journalistic, non-literary work--a genre he was never interested in, a genre he in fact disliked if not

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detested.

Yet the book brought in some income: not much, although for the Gazdanovs after the very lean years of the war it was a "colossal amount." Its publication in 1946 proved to be a good omen: two new Russian novels followed suit (*The Specter of Alexander Wolf* and *Buddha's Return*), this time with great success and in only four years a translation of the former is published in New York. This means further income and so, for the first time in his life, Gazdanov can almost live on his literary work. It is still a very modest life, financially; the publishers do not pay much and he has to continue to do some taxi driving; although much less than in the pre-war years.

The early fifties is an exciting time for Gazdanov. It looks as if something is finally "stirring" around him. *Buddha's Return* also is published in England and the U.S.A. and very soon French, Italian and Spanish translations of *The Specter of Alexander Wolf* appear. In 1951, when the French version comes out and is well received, Robert Laffont, the publisher, arranges a publicity reception and a radio interview. But Gazdanov is late, deliberately, and nothing comes of the opportunity. This episode illustrates clearly his self-effacing character. Any feeling of self-importance was foreign to him; he never took himself too seriously, as semi-intelligent people so often do, never spoke about his "attacks of graphomania"--as he called his genuine passion for writing in his usual humorous-ironic tone--in big words, yet he knew the value of his work and made it felt subtly when a conversation touched upon the topic of Russian emigre literature.

A similar case, illustrating his self-effacement, occurs within a year when, toward the end of 1952, V. V. Vejdle writes to him (the Gazdanovs have no telephone) to come and meet some people because of a possibility for work. Gazdanov goes only at the insistence of his wife--the meeting is with the organizers of what becomes first Radio Liberation, then Radio Liberty--and is offered a job on the spot. He accepts, and from January 1953 until his death in 1971 he works full time for Radio Liberty in different capacities.

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But before he joined Radio Liberty there was a chance for another job, this time in America. The New York Russian publishing house "Čexov" needs an editor and Gazdanov's name comes up. He already has some "fame" in the United States. Two of his novels were just published by E. P. Dutton & Co. in 1950 and 1951. An old friend, N. Reisini, invites Gazdanov to New York, pays for the transportation and receives him in his house. But things do not work out well, Gazdanov does not like New York, compares it to Brussels, and before the year 1952 is over he is back in his beloved Paris.

4. THE LAST YEARS

According to the official employment history provided by Radio Liberty, Gazdanov started working there on the 7th of January, 1953, that is from the very beginning of the Radio's existence as a "writer-editor" at the Russian Desk. Three years later he becomes Senior News Editor and in 1959 he goes back to Paris to be the Radio's Paris Correspondent at its Paris Bureau. In 1967 he is transferred back to Munich as Chief, then Senior, Editor of the Russian Service.

He receives an "American" (as opposed to the smaller European) salary and is a highly-esteemed member of the staff. In the beginning among his colleagues are such people as V. V. Vejdle, the critic, B. Zajcev, the writer, or I. Činnov, the poet. But they soon leave and Gazdanov complains of intellectual loneliness in Munich. He badly misses the literary life of the French capital, he needs people with whom he can talk about literature and who will understand without lengthy explanations. The old friends from Paris (Ginger, Adamovič, Slonim, Vejdle and others) are far away, only occasionally visiting Munich. The journalists of the Radio, mostly of the new, post-war, Soviet emigration, cannot replace the culture of the old generation. As inevitably befalls every editor, he is criticized by some, usually those whose style leaves much to be desired, for rewriting other people's writings too much, making them look as if they were his own.

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The regular, and high, income brings out new traits in Gazdanov and makes possible things he never dreamed of being able to do. After 25 years of taxi driving Gazdanov buys his first car. After 16 years of living there and paying rent the Gazdanovs can finally afford to buy the small apartment on rue Brancion. He can become a collector, of watches, fountain pens, lighters and other such things. But in his character--and where else is our real life, our "fate"? --he has always been a "rich man." During the long poverty years he could still easily spend whatever he had as if he were rich. He had only one suit but that was of the best quality. He bought his favorite authors in the best, most expensive editions. He gave large tips and lent money freely if he had any, without giving any thought to it, hardly expecting ever to see it again. Places other than the South of France are now within reach. After the first trip to Italy Gazdanov falls in love with that ocuntry, and especially with one city, Venice, with which he feels a spiritual affinity and which he goes to visit nearly every year thereafter, always staying in the same hotel on the Lido.

Renaissance art has an enormous influence on him, particularly Michelangelo--who elicits from him that highest response so simply and beautifully expressed in a fragment of a favorite line by a favorite poet (Rilke): "Du musst dein Leben ändern" (from the poem "Archaischer Torso Apollos" cryptically quoted in the fiction)-- and sculpture in general. References to great Italian painters (Giotto, Titian, Veronese and others) also appear in the fiction of these and later years. The Radio Liberty editor is very far, in "real life," from politics, history or social life.

The years from 1953 until his death are not too eventful to the outside observer. Full-time editorial work apparently leaves less time and energy for literature than taxi driving at night did. Gazdanov's literary production is reduced: he in fact falls completely silent from 1954 until 1959, although already the previous years are relatively barren: *Night Roads,* published in book form by the Čexov Publishing House in 1952, was written just before the war, *Pilgrims,* published in *Novyj žurnal* in 1953-54, has 1950 dates (July, December) on its manuscripts and he has only one short story

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published between 1950 and 1959. If we compare this with *four* novels written during the preceding six years (1944-1950) and if we consider that both of his last two novels (*The Awakening* and *Evelyne and Her Friends*) were begun (and these early versions are extant) in 1950-51, then abandoned until 1964 or later, it becomes obvious that there was indeed a "perelom," a turning point in Gazdanov's life in the early fifties, as Marc Slonim wrote, related to his personal life as well as to his new and demanding occupation (no. 236). His job was challenging but time-consuming, particularly because, being an honest and conscientious man, he was very thorough in correcting and editing the material to be broadcast as well as in researching the topics he himself wrote scripts on. Until the late 1960's he wrote mostly on social and political themes. There are over fifty such titles in the Radio's catalogues. Only during the last years of his life did he start, with feverish activity as if feeling he did not have much time left, writing literary-critical articles, on theoretical topics (on literature and propaganda, on tendentiousness in literature, on literary language, on the historical novel, on the nature of literary criticism, on emigre literature, etc.), on Russian classics (Gogol', Čexov, Dostoevskij) or his contemporaries (Aldanov, Remizov, Osorgin, Nabokov, Zajcev, Sartre, Valéry, Mauriac), mostly in the series "The Diary of the Writer."

There is a photograph of Gazdanov where, being over sixty years of age, he stands on his hands on the beach of the Lido. All his life he was in excellent physical condition, never had any disease and expected to live, like his Caucasian ancestors, a long life. For those who knew him, his strength and vitality, "Gazdanov and death" was, as he wrote about F. Stepun, an "unnatural and impossible" combination. Yet as a result of heavy smoking, cancer attacked his lungs and as it usually happens in the case of lung cancer, it soon finished him. He had a Tolstoyan hatred of doctors, even of hospitals. He probably suffered a great deal but his Caucasian strength and pride did not let him show it. So much so that the people who were near him during the end disagree as to whether he had considerable pain or not--moreover, there is not even general agreemen

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as to whether or not he knew at all that he was dying. He fought off the illness for about a year. Just before the end he suddenly got better and even went to work. His friends and colleagues started to talk about a miracle. But the relapse came quickly and Gazdanov died quietly, almost in sleep, on the 5th day of December, 1971, just one day before his 68th birthday, in his own bedroom, at 55 Osterwaldstrasse, in Munich, near the English Gardens, surrounded by his wife and other friends whom he so dearly loved.

His body was soon sent back to France, and buried in the Russian cemetery of Ste-Geneviève-des-Bois near Paris. Like his father, he wanted no religious burial and, like his father, he was still given the last honors by a priest. The inscription on the plain white stone simply reads: Georges Gazdanoff - Gajto Gazdanov 1903 - 1971.

In attentive America, the New York *Times* honors him with an obituary notice four days after his death. In the New York Russian daily, *Novoe Russkoe Slovo*, on the 11th of December, G. Adamovič, perhaps the best-known Russian emigre critic, starts the series of memorial articles. He is followed, a week later in the same daily, by the more substantial, more informed and more sympathetic essay of a lifelong friend, another outstanding man of letters of the Russian emigration, Marc Slonim. A more personal article was devoted to Gazdanov's memory by his friend L. Rževskij, writer and professor of Russian literature, in *Novyj Žurnal* in 1972. There was not a word, as far as we know, about Gazdanov's death in the French press, nor, what is much more surprising, in the other West-European Russian publications, particularly in West Germany. Radio Liberty broadcast both Adamovič's and Slonim's articles (in slightly different form) on the 8th and 9th of December, just a few days after his death and remembered him three years later, in December 1974, with an article by a colleague at the Radio. A. O. Marchak, the since deceased president of the lodge of the remaining Russian Freemasons in Paris, read the memorial minutes at the next meeting of the lodge. Quoting some of the words of this Masonic necrologue would be, it seems, an appropriate way to end the story of Gajto Gazdanov's life:

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This year we lost two brothers: Brother P. left us on the 4th of October 1971, and exactly two months later, during the night of the 4th of December, brother Georgij Ivanovič Gazdanov...Brother Gazdanov was one of the most valuable and outstanding members of our Lodge. His lectures were always extremely interesting and distinguished by a deep penetration into their subject matters. They were written without false pathos, expressing the main, and never banal, thoughts of their author with lucid simplicity. He was a brother devoted to Freemasonry and his disappearance is a great loss for all of us. He was a man of high culture and a talented writer...He was a most honest and warm-hearted human being...he was one of those secretive people whom the more one got to know the better one learned to love and value...He was a man of great nobility and correctness; a natural aristocrat. He was an excellent storyteller and possessed an extraordinary memory. It seems that he knew by heart not only his beloved Puškin but also all the poems of his favorite poets. Poetry, he used to say, is the highest form of writing...He was of happy disposition, never irritated; he was not downcast even during the last weeks of his illness and never complained about his pains. Only once, five days before his death, did he write to me that he was tired of the repeated periods of weakness but he never spoke of the inevitability of the fateful issue and was still building plans for the future...His memory will remain with us.

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PART TWO

LITERARY LIFE AND WORKS

CHAPTER FOUR

LITERARY BEGINNINGS (1926-1929): THE FIRST SHORT STORIES

In the absence of autobiography or personal memoirs it is impossible to know exactly when Gazdanov, the writer was born. His first published piece seems to be the "early" (not too typical and very short) story entitled "Hotel of the Future" ("Gostinica grjaduščego") published in the Prague journal *Svoimi putjami* in 1926. It is clear, however, that he began writing earlier, *much* earlier, as a matter of fact. From *An Evening with Claire* we know that as a child he wrote a story at the age of eight (p. 24). Whether he was a prolific child writer we do not know: for the period from 1911 (when he was eight years old) until 1920 there is no evidence of any juvenilia. In one of his early stories ("Stories About Free Time," p. 31-32) he says he started writing in Constantinople. This would mean 1921 and 1922, assuming, as we think we should here, that this fictional statement reflects real life. It is also almost certain that Gazdanov was writing at the Šumen Gymnasium in Bulgaria (1922-23). Nothing is extant from this period; and since his juvenile efforts were likely to be inferior to his first published story, probably not much is lost. In fact it is very likely that Gazdanov himself destroyed his early pieces: he had a strong sense of self-criticism and belonged to the "Mallarmé-type" of writers, that is, to those whose output is small, who write little, but who polish

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their work to the degree of perfection they are capable of.

Thus the real début of Gazdanov's career in Russian literature is not 1926, but February 1927, when his first mature and original short story appeared, in illustrious company, between Zamjatin's *We* and Pasternak's poetry, on the pages of the "other" thick literary journal of the emigration, Marc Slonim's *Volja Rossii*. Gazdanov himself considered this his real start and indeed the publication of "The Tale of Three Failures" ("Povest' o trex neudačax"), as the story is called, should be seen as the birth of Gazdanov, the writer for Russian literature.

From 1927 until 1930 Gazdanov published eight short stories in *Volja Rossii*. Critics turned their attention to him very early. Already in 1927 two reviewers mention his name (nos. 101, 102) and in 1928 Georgij Adamovič starts the first paragraph he ever wrote on Gazdanov by saying that "Gajto Gazdanov's name appears fairly frequently" (no. 104). By May, 1928 when Adamovič was writing, four Gazdanov stories had been printed. Adamovič's attitude to Gazdanov is ambivalent from the very beginning: on the one hand he is perfectly right in saying--and will keep saying so to the end--that Gazdanov has his own, original and unique technique, that one can tell his stories from the works of others. On the other, whether there were any "ultra-Parisian" influences at all in Gazdanov, as he claims, is a moot point; and, although some similarity between Gazdanov's earliest fiction and contemporary Soviet literature is beyond doubt, it is also highly questionable whether these early Soviet avant-garde influences should be called "nižegorodskie" (that is, provincial, backward, lowbrow).

Much more substantial is Marc Slonim's "summary," in 1929, of the first two years of Gazdanov's literary production (no. 109). Slonim speaks of lack of verisimilitude ("nepravdopodobie") in it and he does not share Gazdanov's vision of the world. He sees, correctly, the enormous role given by Gazdanov to chance yet Gazdanov's unique fictional universe (a "world of chance," a "play of events and feelings") to him is "very far from reality," is only "fantastic reality" ("fantastika real'nosti"). We believe here we are at the root of the problem why Slonim, Gazdanov's "discoverer"

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and patron, grew disappointed with his work later and ultimately refused to see in it a major achievement. The preoccupation with non-Russian themes ("inostranščina") Slonim refers to in his article begins with the story called "The Transformation" ("Prevraščenie," end of 1928). But before we turn our attention to this and the subsequent stories with Parisian settings we should go back to Gazdanov's first four stories all of which deal with Civil War Russia.

"The Tale of Three Failures"("Povest' o trex neudačax," in the second, February number of *Volja Rossii* for 1927) is, then, Gazdanov's debut in Russian literature. This is already in many ways a characteristic, and rather good, work. Three separate stories are united by a common narrator; this structure will be repeated, formally, in his next published story and will stay with Gazdanov as an essential feature of his compositional method to the end of his life. The story is told in ego form and takes the narrator (author) through a series of episodes each clearly based on identical, similar or "composite" autobiographic events or acquaintances. This is not to say that Gazdanov never invented anything for, or in, his fiction; nor that he always borrowed a real life sequence of events for his plots. He did have completely invented characters and plots, although not very often. V. Vejdle is certainly right when, drawing a distinction between Gazdanov and Nabokov three years later, he praises the "iskusstvo vymysla" (the art of invention) in Nabokov and states the almost complete lack of it in Gazdanov. The latter's art is in our opinion completely "autobiographical" in the sense all lyrics are "autobiographical." The "inward turn of the narrative," so typical of twentieth-century prose, is fully applicable to Gazdanov. In the final analysis his stories and novels are concerned with "emotional landscapes," with "the movements of the soul"; the great questions of human existence, the meaning and purpose of life, of death and love, the nature of God, fate or chance are presented under a very personal, sentimental and "lyrical" aspect with very little epic distancing. There is always a central hero (structurally incomparably more important than all the others), who is usually the narrator himself (or, even if not, the point of view of the book is still clearly that of this central hero, as for example

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in Gazdanov's second novel, *The History of a Journey*, told in the third person), who is the lyrical I of these prose poems and whose meditations on life and reflections upon events happening around or to him as well as the events of his own emotional life are the stuff Gazdanov's works are made of. The episodic character of Gazdanov's prose is explained precisely by this, that these episodes are, one after the other, as it were material for the continuous reflection of the narrator's mind, for the continuous reaction of his psyche to them.

From his 1927 story on Gazdanov is a notably mature writer in whose themes and style there is remarkable continuity. If the next short story, "Stories About Free Time"("Rasskazy o svobodnom vremeni," *Volja Rossii*, 8/9, 1927), still has a very similar tripartite structure it represents a step forward in the thematic evolution of Gazdanov. While all the three (untitled) stories of "The Tale" are about Russia of the late 1910's, about pogroms, revolutions, and the Civil War, only the first part of "Stories," called "Rebellion" ("Bunt") has its action take place in a Ukrainian village around 1919. The second part, "A Weak Heart" ("Slaboe serdce") is about refugee life in Constantinople, and the third, "The Penguin's Death"("Smert' pingvina"), takes us to Paris, the place of action of nearly all of Gazdanov's subsequent stories. (Although the last part of "The Tale," an apocalyptic vision of the Civil War and Russia through the eyes of a madman also has a French point of reference--Il'ja Aristarxov, the mad writer whose works are supposedly quoted, ends his life, after wanderings in Vienna, Berlin and Paris, at Charenton--it is still primarily about Russia and the tragedy of the revolution.) There is some formal continuity between the two short stories in other ways as well. One of the characters (Volodja Čex) reappears, while another, Asket, the hero of "The Penguin's Death" may be modelled after the same person as Il'ja Aristarxov was (a real life friend, Sergej Sergeevič Straxov). Memory, both as theme and as organizing principle, appears already in these first two stories and will almost never cease to have a central role in Gazdanov's fiction. In "Stories" he begins using epigraphs, from Balzac, Gogol' and the Bible--and mottoes become a favorite

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device.

Gazdanov's third short story, "The Society of the Eight of Spades' ("Obščestvo vos'merki pik," dated April 18, 1927 and published in the last number of *Volja Rossii* for 1927) with an epigraph from Blok, one of Gazdanov's favorite poets, does not have any more the tripartite composition, nor the ego-form of the first two. It is a more unified piece, a *tour de force* in fact in that it manages both to bring to life eight characters in twelve pages, each created with just a few strokes, and to keep them distinct for the reader without any confusion as to who is who. The story is about a rather mixed group of people in a southern town in Russia in 1917-1918. They traffic in drugs, counterfeit, commit robbery, read poetry and publish an anarchist newspaper. One of them,"Molodoj," a young boy from the fifth grade of Gymnasium, is clearly an early self-portrait of the author.

"Comrade Brak" ("Tovarišč Brak," dated December 1, 1927 and published in the February 1928 issue of *Volja Rossii*) with a motto from Puškin is the last of Gazdanov's short stories with a Russian location. It is again on the Civil War period (circa 1918-1919) and is the story of an anarchist-terrorist group. The one common feature of these first four pieces that will completely disappear from Gazdanov's works afterwards is their mannerisms, the clear influence of early Soviet prose, forced originality of expression, deliberately striking (and therefore not too effective) imagery, even typographical play, ladder-like printing à la Majakovskij, occasional blending of poetry and prose and the like.

The next story, "The Transformation" ("Prevraščenie," dated July 10, 1928, published in *Volja Rossii*, October-November, 1928) with a motto from Baudelaire ("O Mort, vieux capitaine, il est temps levons l'ancre!/Ce pays nous ennuie, ô Mort! Appareillons!") marks the beginning of a series of short stories already with the intonations of the great works of the 1930's. It is a study of death and its effects, and it also introduces a number of Gazdanov's major themes: the theme of life as a journey, the theme of transformation (metamorphosis), the theme of merciless memory, the theme of life's meaninglessness, the theme of what we shall call the

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"Valéry-complex," man's destiny to tragic solitude and the impossibility of communi(cati)on.

Finally, "Martyn Raskolinos" (not dated, no motto, published in *Volja Rossii*, 8-9, 1929, that is, almost a year after "The Transformation") is the last work that appeared before the great success of Gazdanov's first novel *An Evening with Claire* in the beginning of 1930 changed his position in the emigre literary world. It is a Chekhovian story of a saintly monk in Paris, of his temptation, sin and redemption. Several of the great themes introduced in "The Transformation" reappear here: the theme of life as a journey, the theme of the meaninglessness of existence. Other thematic elements in the story that are very important in the later Gazdanov are the theme of a chance event that turns out to be the beginning of a long sequence of events leading to unsuspected and unexpected consequences or the theme of music as an expression of internal, psychic conditions or states (in some ways a poetic version of Susanne K. Langer's philosophy of music).

Along with his first publications, Gazdanov began his participation in the literary life of Russian Paris very early. We know from the interview he gave in 1971 that he visited the monthly meetings organized by the editorial board of *Zveno* (principally by G. Adamovič) in 1926 and 1927. From the beginning of 1925 there exists a "Young Writers' Club" ("Klub molodyx literatorov") at the Russian Club under 79, rue Denfert-Rochereau. Although Bal'mont, Zajcev and other not so young writers also appear to be active here, we find the names of Jurij Terapiano, Bronislav Sosinskij, Vadim Andreev, Boris Poplavskij, Dovid Knut, S. Luckij, and Antonin Ladinskij in the newspaper announcements and very likely Gazdanov is already aspiring to be one of the "young men of letters" if he is not among them already. Late spring the club seems to grow into the "Union of Young Poets and Writers" ("Sojuz molodyx poètov i pisatelej"), a remarkably successful literary grouping that had a large number of literary evenings throughout the years of its existence, mostly again at 79, rue Denfert-Rochereau. There is documentary evidence of Gazdanov participating in the meetings of the "Union" every year from 1927 to 1930. The first such meeting was

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on April 30, 1927, that is at a time when Gazdanov had as yet only two published short stories to his credit. On November 4, 1927, he has a public reading of his "The Society of the Eight of Spades"; other authors of the night include V. Andreev, B. Sosinskij, Asja Berlin, Irina Knorring and others. This and the next meetings are held at the Turgenev Society, at 77, rue Pigalle. On Febrary 17, 1928 the main program of the evening is Gazdanov's "Comrade Brak" read by the author himself.

"House of the Friends of Russian Culture" ("Očag druzej russkoj kul'tury," at 35, rue Vital) started in April 1927. After a number of evenings devoted to such well-known emigre authors as Kuprin, Remizov, Tèffi, Šmelev, Osorgin, Zajcev, Saša Černyj, Roščin, Lukaš and others programs are organized to present, first, the young poets of the emigration, then, the young prose writers as well. The latter is on the 10th of April 1928; after Ladinskij's introduction, V. Andreev, A. Berlin, A. Ginger, I. Knorring, G. Gazdanov and others read their poetry or prose. The "House" seems to have existed only until the summer of 1928. At the "Union" Gazdanov's next recorded appearance is on January 26, 1929 when he reads "Maître Rueil" ("Mètr Raj"), a short story that will be published two years later in *Čisla*. On April 13 he is announced to read "his new short stories," probably "The Transformation" and "Martyn Raskolinos."

But the group with which Gazdanov is most closely associated and in the activities of which he participates most enthusiastically is "Kočev'e" ("Nomadic Settlement"), the group Marc Slonim organized exclusively for the young in the spring of 1928. But before we turn our attention to "Kočev'e" we have to glance at a very interesting, yet little known episode in the cultural history of the Russian emigration in France: the initiative of Vsevolod Foxt (Wsevolod de Vogt) to bring about a meeting of representatives of both cultures. The task was not easy: neither the traditional self-satisfaction of French intellectuals, nor the stressed anti-Western attitudes of many Russian expatriates helped Foxt's enterprise. Yet, although Gleb Struve may be right--unfortunately--when he regards the *Studio franco-russe* (as it was called) unsuccessful on the whole, it was still something of an achievement, particularly if we consider that

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the transcripts of all the fourteen meetings (from 1929 through 1931) have been published. Several Russian literary associations may have been felt to be more important or more impressive at the time, or later on, if seen within the context of Russian literature alone, yet none of them appears to have respected the printed word well enough...The only group whose meetings have been published, mostly much later and never, to our knowledge, completely, is Merežkovskij's and Gippius's circle, the "Green Lamp" ("Zelenaja lampa"). Moreover, in his history G. Struve mentions only the first four meetings of the *Studio franco-russe*, yet there were ten more (no. 210).

Gazdanov's name occurs only in the 1930 volume (no. 127) containing the first four meetings (and it is probably the first mention of his name in a non-Russian language publication). He was clearly present at the inception of the enterprise; whether or not he frequented the later meetings we do not know. He was very outspoken in his opinions and harsh in his criticism. This is evident from his only recorded contribution to the debates of the *Studio*. At the December 18, 1929 meeting he sharply criticized Zajcev's Orthodox presentation of Dostoevskij's philosophy, and ended his remarks by belittling the importance of the 1917 Revolution. This provoked protests and it is possible that Gazdanov thereafter did not participate in the work of the *Studio*.

We intend to prepare a detailed documentary record of the history and activities of Marc Slonim's "Kočev'e" elsewhere (no. 258). All we can do here is to concentrate on Gazdanov's own work in the group. The first Gazdanov night, "a closed meeting devoted to the analysis of G. Gazdanov's works," as it was announced in the newspaper, took place on the 24th of May, 1928, as usual in the Taverne Dumesnil. The works discussed were, presumably, the two short stories Gazdanov had recently read at the "Union of Young Poets and Writers" and published in *Volja Rossii*: "The Society of the Eight of Spades" and "Comrade Brak." The twenty-fifth meeting of the group (and Gazdanov's second) was probably a regular public evening on January 10, 1929 when Gazdanov "read his new short stories." Which ones we do not know. Since February 1928 he published only

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"The Transformation." He may have read this or "Martyn Raskolinos" which was published only in the fall of 1929 but may have been written before January 10. Another piece he almost certainly read at this literary evening is "Maître Rueil," a short story published only two years later, in the fifth issue of *Čisla* in 1931 but which was read by him (whether in a first, or in the final version is now known) also on January 26, 1929 at another evening of the "Union of Young Poets and Writers."

The third Gazdanov evening was on November 22, 1928. He read a lecture on the theme of anguish in Gogol', Maupassant and Poe; this lecture was published half a year later in *Volja Rossii*. In April 1929 Gazdanov reviews Vladimir Pozner's new study on Russian literature entitled *Panorama de la littérature contemporaine russe*: the book, and Gazdanov's review of it, arouses heated debates. At the last meeting of the season (June 6) Gazdanov reviews another work called *Sovremennye pisateli*. Gazdanov's first night during the 1929-1930 season is on October 24 when he reads his essay on "The Myth About V. Rozanov." He opens, with an introductory speech, the night devoted to I. Boldyrev's novel *Mal'čiki i devočki* on January 16, 1930. Marc Slonim's introduction opens the debate on March 6 when the literary evening is devoted to Gazdanov's first novel *An Evening with Claire*. The last time Gazdanov gave a public reading in "Kočev'e" was probably on March 3, 1932 when he read excerpts from his new work-in-progress *Aleksej Šuvalov*. (He never finished this novel. Portions of it seem to have been published separately as independent short stories; "The Great Musician" and, perhaps, "The Third Life" are what became of the novel.) In addition to the above Gazdanov participates in practically all the other "Kočev'e" nights which altogether number well over a hundred.

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CHAPTER FIVE

AN EVENING WITH CLAIRE (1929-1930)

A real and truly remarkable turning point in Gazdanov's literary life comes fairly early, in the beginning of 1930. By the summer of 1929 he finishes writing his first novel, *An Evening with Claire* (*Večer u Klèr*, the published text is dated "Paris, July 1929"; it is his only novel for which the manuscript is not extant). Publication for a young author was not easy, yet it seems, surprisingly enough, that neither was it very difficult. A large number of books were printed in Russian in Paris between the two world wars and, as Gazdanov said later, the principal difficulty had never been publication. (Rather, it was related to the reception of literary works, to the quality, or absence, of a cultured reading public and of a sustained critical response.)

There were, it seems, two possibilities for Gazdanov to publish his first book. M. A. Osorgin was preparing a new series intended precisely for the new generation of young writers emerging in the emigration. At this time, and later for a while, they had very good relations: Osorgin valued Gazdanov's original style and his excellent Russian (not a common virtue among younger emigre writers) very highly as we can see in the very laudatory review he wrote on the book. There was personal friendship too. Gazdanov was to visit the Osorgins very often, reading his new works, endlessly discussing literary and philosophical matters. (Oral communication by T. A. Osorgin, the writer's widow. See also no. 211, p. 193.) Osorgin's personality was very attractive to many of the young intellectuals. This attraction may have been a strong reason for Gazdanov (as well as some of his friends, fellow writers) to join, two years later, the Russian Masonic lodge and be in constant contact with Osorgin.

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And yet *An Evening with Claire* was not published in Osorgin's series by the "Moscow" Book Company. Gazdanov was very poor and needed all the income he could get. This was the time when he is still a factory worker, then a student living on a minimal stipend. Marc Slonim recommends the book to Povolockij (oral communication by V. Vejdle, confirmed by M. Slonim), who pays a little better, and the book is printed by the press of the Société Nouvelle d'Éditions Franco-Slaves, in one thousand and twenty-five copies, in the series "Contemporary Writers" ("Sovremennye pisateli"), in December of 1929 for the Ja. Povolockij and Co. Publishing House. In retrospect we can say that this series has every right to be called distinguished and important for the history of Russian literature. In addition to several novels by Nabokov we find the following authors published there: N. Berberova, Z. Gippius, R. Gul', G. Ivanov, Il'jazd, D. Knut, B. Poplavskij, V. Smolenskij, M. Osorgin and others.

An Evening with Claire was an immediate success, both with the general reading public and with the critics. The first review, by M. Osorgin, appeared on the sixth of February 1930 in the largest emigre daily, *Poslednie novosti*. After stating that Russian emigre literature does not offer too many new delights for the literary connoisseur, Osorgin underlines Gazdanov's "genuine young talent," considers his "artistic abilities exceptional" and ends his article by declaring "Gajto Gazdanov's novel a true literary event in the young Russian literature abroad." Osorgin correctly notes that the emphasis in the novel is not on the events themselves of the life of the reminiscing narrator-hero (the writer himself), in spite of the fact that the book is a series of tales, but on his "deepened sense of life" ("uglublennye mirooščuščenija") and its formation; in other words, beyond the "interest" of the story of the life told (the plot) and the entertainment and pleasure derived from the mastery of story-telling, the novel is essentially psychological and philosophical, dealing with the "most complex spiritual problems of life and death and love and that insoluble chain of events that we could call either fate or history." An autobiographical novel can--and most good ones do precisely this--"define the value and the quality of

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its experience not by appended comment or moral epithet, but by the texture of the style" (no. 224).

As to the structure of the novel, Osorgin is the first to mention Proust's influence, and everyone else is going to repeat him later. In the twenties Proust was, of course, *the* writer to read, to admire and to talk about; after the initial failure of criticism and the *N.R.F.*, it is during these years that Proust is elevated to the highest ranks of the French literary pantheon. The effect is not lost on the Parisian Russian literary world: Proust is a constant theme of articles, debates or questionnaires. And yet, when interviewed forty years later, Gazdanov said that at the time he had not read Proust yet! Although Gazdanov later did read Proust carefully, every one of his volumes, calling him "the greatest writer of the twentieth century," and probably was quite naturally influenced by him to some extent, we have no reason to doubt that *An Evening with Claire* was written without the influence of the author of *À la Recherche du temps perdu*. Gazdanov in fact says in the same interview that the similarities or what might be construed as "influence" were really only a "coincidence in time." Neither the formal structure of his novel (the beginning at the end, and then "travelling back into the depths of memory" by recalling the events of the narrator's life that led to the present moment with which the book both ends and begins), nor the freely episodic, digressive narration, the apparent lack of plot as unifying structural principle, nor the importance given to the role of memory are necessarily Proustian. Gazdanov's later works clearly show that he was a master of original composition in the novel and he certainly did not need Proust's example for the structure of *An Evening with Claire* (which is not, after all, so original, although according to one critic it was new for Russian literature; cf. no. 116); they also show that he was not only a very talented story-teller but had a natural, organic inclination toward seemingly loosely structured, digressive narration and that memory, along with his other major themes, was a natural subject matter as well as structuring principle for him, a writer of essentially lyrical meditations on the great questions of human life and the human psyche. From the very beginning

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Gazdanov had his original, individual style and vision of the world, his own "way of seeing and feeling the total push and pressure of the cosmos," as William James says, and there can be little doubt that he would have developed essentially in the same way had there been no Proust in modern French letters. One of the most important things one can, and should say about his work is precisely this, that it has a unique style peculiar to him alone, a style not borrowed or imitated (nor easy to imitate!) and one that is clearly an organic outgrowth of his own natural talents, character and experiences--a fact acknowledged usually explicitly, sometimes indirectly, by every single Russian reviewer of Gazdanov's works. This is not to say that he was "immune" to literary influences (and why should anyone be?). Slonim is clearly more in the right when he emphasizes that, together with, or even instead of, Proust, if we have to look for literary connections, we should consider the influence of early Soviet experimental prose on the young writers in the emigration, including Gajto Gazdanov, who, according to Slonim, would be, if living in the Soviet Union, among the Serapion Brothers (no. 236).

But Osorgin's review (in which also Gazdanov is called an "excellent stylist") is only the first one in a series of critical responses. In the February 22, 1930 issue of *Illjustrirovannaja Rossija* G. Adamovič--after calling Gazdanov "one of the most talented among belletrists of the 'dernier cri'" and praising Povolockij for having finally turned his attention to the young--promises to write on *An Evening with Claire* and he does so, two weeks later, in his regular literary column, on the pages of the same journal (no. 113). Proust is again mentioned, although Adamovič adds the name of Bunin as another source of influence. He will remain attached to this idea, to the point of declaring, in 1934, Gazdanov to be "Bunin's follower" and his "only true disciple" (no. 146). There is of course some truth in Adamovič's intuitive feeling of closeness between these two writers of lyrical prose, yet in the interview Gazdanov gave in 1971, one month before his death, Gazdanov says--and this is the more important part of the truth--that the world of Bunin (and Zajcev) was alien to him; it was for him,

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in form as well as in content, a nineteenth-century world that he neither knew nor could truly empathize with. His sensibility was, despite important accretions of nineteenth-century romanticism and idealism, profoundly twentieth-century, reflecting the shattering spiritual experiences brought on mankind by our era.

It is here in this article that Adamovič for the first time accuses Gazdanov of "having nothing to say." There can be no doubt that the implication inherent in Adamovič's evaluation of Gazdanov's work as stylistically outstanding but "having nothing to say" would have given Gazdanov great delight, and would not have failed to remind him of Flaubert's ideal of a book which is nothing but style. This accusation will recur in the 1930's, in particular from Xodasevič, and we shall return to the problem and Gazdanov's witty reaction to it.

Adamovič notes a further peculiarity of Gazdanov's prose, a feature that deceives many a reader and critic: "From the beginning, from its first pages, *An Evening with Claire* appears as a thing more ordinary, more banal even than it in fact is." The superficial impression one gets from Gazdanov's books can be very deceptive. His smoothly flowing narration, his story-telling talent, the lack of heavy-handed, difficult or pretentious authorial philosophizing, of "pseudo-profundities," his ability to convey the most complex psychological situations with a few carefully chosen details (a Tolstoyan feature), his ability to suggest profound philosophical problems by means of ordinary dialogues, a lightness of touch that makes his works appear particularly refined and delicate to the discerning eye (something that he may have acquired, or at least developed, under the constant influence of surrounding French belles-lettres), all of these things tend to create the impression that there is nothing substantial and profound behind the easy flow of skillfully chosen words and episodes. How completely false such an impression is (except in one, strictly limited sense, namely, that there is no solution put forward to the problems of the world in Gazdanov's early works) will become obvious, we hope, after our discussion of his themes and ideas in Part Three. But even while maintaining that Gazdanov has "nothing to say" Adamovič praises

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the cleverness, sharpness and irony of his vision; although how one can have a clever, sharp and ironic vision of "nothing" escapes this writer.

In the first issue of *Čisla* Nikolaj Ocup, after the compulsory reference to Proust and Mnemosyne, as the main muse of the novel, points to its episodic structure--a feature for which Gazdanov was criticized, instead of being praised, as he should have been, all his life. Others were more openly critical. Xoxlov speaks of an "absence of central plotline" (no. 118) and this idea, understood as an indication of a significant artistic failure is repeated in the critical literature up to this day, in particular it is a standard comment on Gazdanov's works in all the articles on emigre literature by Gleb Struve. The fallacy here is, of course, in criticizing a writer for not having something he never wanted to have; such criticism is simply malapropos, irrelevant and, therefore, is not to be taken into account. The artistic unity of Gazdanov's novels is not to be looked for in their plots: it was a serious *critical* failure not to see this. Xoxlov gets very far from this when praising Gazdanov's "sharp and unquestionable talent" he says in the same article: "The creative dynamics that defines genuine literary inspiration is alive and clearly felt in the novel, having overcome the immobility of the material by uniting its diverse parts through stylistic linking."

Savel'ev in his review of the first issue of *Čisla* (no. 124), reacting to Ocup's article on *An Evening with Claire* in it, says that from Ocup's review one could conclude that only Gazdanov's novel and Fel'zen's works reflect any Proustian influence--which is not very much--and therefore the general impression a foreign reader might get from reading the critical articles in *Čisla* discussing the enormous influence and importance of Proust for contemporary Russian emigre literature would be quite misleading. Savel'ev is quite right, of course. The discovery of, and enthusiasm about, Proust among Russian writers and critics is one thing, Proust's actual influence on their literary work quite another. As Vejdle notes (no. 119) it is only natural and necessary for a young writer to be in accord with the main literary trends

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of his times, to learn from and even imitate the great masters of his age (let us not forget: imitation used to be a virtue).

In the Berlin newspaper *Rul'* A. Savel'ev was the novel's reviewer. Contrary to Vejdle, he finds the book so mature, at least from a formal point of view, that even the flaws of the work appear to him to be more like the flaws of older, experienced writers. He is the critic who considers the novel's compositional structure a novelty in Russian literature, yet adds that it is an external and borrowed feature (presumably again from Proust--he does not specify) and that the author's strength is in his powers of observation and story-telling rather than in such originalities of composition. He sees clearly that, thanks to the novel's special lyrical point of view, the emphasis is not on the stories and episodes themselves ("the plot") but on how they affect the narrator and how the narrator reacts to them. Savel'ev ends his review, just like Osorgin did two months earlier in Paris, by predicting great success to the novel. It is curious to note that some of the reviewers were remarkably prophetic in certain of their insights. Vejdle was profoundly right when he saw an essential difference between Nabokov and Gazdanov in their inventiveness. Gazdanov remained to the end an autobiographical writer, or, more precisely, an author of lyrical prose works, a very personal, "first person singular" writer concerned primarily with the "mouvements d'âme"--where there can be no "vydumki" (invention) as Tolstoj said--whereas Nabokov's greatest gift may well be just that. A. Savel'ev was quite right in that the compositional novelty was not the only virtue of our author's first book and that therefore one did not have to have any misgivings about the young writer's future.

But the unquestionably best, most penetrating essay on *An Evening with Claire* was written by Marc Slonim, who, having the advantages of being a personal friend, could analyze the novel more in terms of Gazdanov's own intentions and ideas than those who had to rely on their impressions and speculations. Slonim's remarks (no. 117) go to the very heart of Gazdanov's art. Fundamental to it are the high degree of emotional tension, the half-lyrical, half-ironic tone of narration, the constant anguish and anxiety permeating the nar-

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rator's life (and style), a duality of existence--and these features will never disappear, nor even diminish in significance, in Gazdanov's works. Slonim is the only critic who denies Proust's direct influence on Gazdanov. As a friend and as the leader of the "Kočev'e" group he could have known that Gazdanov had not yet actually read Proust. Yet one cannot entirely agree with Slonim about the differences between Proust and Gazdanov. There *is* some "psychological particularization" in Gazdanov already here and there will be more later--although it certainly never even approaches the degree to which Proust took it. In this Fel'zen is probably the only Russian follower of Proust, indeed. Gazdanov was too much of a story-teller to turn his prose entirely into a poetry of memory: he was capable of turning action into symbolic forms of psychological events; but on the other hand, chance, fate, the senselessness and unpredictability of external events and their outcome was another of his major themes. The themes of life as a journey or pilgrimage to an unknown destiny requires action, complicated with suspense and sudden turns of events to illustrate the underlying "philosophy of chance." Although this theme becomes much more prominent later it is present already in *An Evening with Claire* as well as in some of the short stories written before 1930.

Coming to matters of style and language Slonim is the first to point out that lightness of touch, that elegance and refinement in Gazdanov which was very probably the result of general French influence but which also threatened with "inostranščina," "èsperantizm" and exoticism in the context of Russian literature. Yet such new voices and directions, Western influences on the young generation of emigre prose writers, were, or could have been, of the greatest importance for the development of modern Russian prose (and they may still be so: Nabokov has already reached the young Soviet writer and is said to have enormous influence on him).

The novel's truly great success was not restricted to the "official" critics. Fellow writers, among them such a severe critic of everybody else as Bunin, reacted favorably as Adamovič recalls forty years later in his obituary article on Gazdanov: "*An Evening with Claire* was approved by that strict judge, Bunin, who especially

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valued the stylistic mastery of the author, the light flow of his language, and his ability to find unexpected, yet invariably apt epithets. Gazdanov sent his book to Maksim Gor'kij as well--something that emigre writers almost never did...Gor'kij quickly answered Gazdanov and acknowledged his talent without reservations..." (no. 235).

Gor'kij's letter is indeed extant and its original Russian text has been published by this writer (no. 250), but before we give a translation here the pre-history of this correspondence should be provided. Adamovič is wrong when he says that Gazdanov's mother knew Gor'kij well. They did not know each other at all. Moreover, according to Gazdanov's widow, it was not Gazdanov himself who sent a copy of the novel to Gor'kij but M. Osorgin. Yet Gor'kij's letter starts by thanking Gazdanov for *sending* the book: very likely what happened was that Gazdanov sent the book upon the advice and encouragement of Osorgin who may have written an introductory letter to it. Whether or not Gazdanov wrote an accompanying letter, and if he did, whether or not it is extant, we do not know. Gazdanov's answer to Gor'kij's letter, dated March 3, 1930 is, along with the original of Gor'kij's letter, in the Gor'kij Archives in Moscow and is published here for the first time by courtesy of Prof. Alexander I. Ovcharenko of the Moscow Institute of World Literature who was kind enough to send us the text (although not a photocopy) of this letter along with that of another from 1935 which see below. The story of how Gor'kij's letter got back to the USSR is as follows. Gazdanov was regularly corresponding with his mother at this time. She was very proud of Gor'kij's praise and asked her son to send the letter to her. Why she did not send it back is not clear--but it was very fortunate that she did not; a few years later when she was called in by the security police she was apparantly saved by this letter. She was released and the confiscated letter found its way into the Gor'kij Archives.

Gor'kij's letter is addressed to Gajto Gazdanov and is not dated (probably date: February 1930):

> Thank you very much for your gift, the book you sent me. I read it with great pleasure, even with enthusiasm. This

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rarely happens even though I read not a little.

You feel it yourself of course that you are a very talented man. I would add to this that you are talented in your own special way. I have the right to say this not only on the basis of *An Evening with Claire* but also of your short stories, of "Hawaiian Guitars" and others. But permit me, an old man, to say that it would be a great misfortune for art as well as for you personally if your awareness of your extraordinary talent satisfied and intoxicated you. You are not quite yourself yet; it seems to me that influences foreign to you can still be felt in your short stories. Apparently the virtuosity of French literature confuses you and the "naive" ending of "Hawaiian Guitars," for example appears to be made "by reason." Reason is a wonderfully useful power in science and technology but Lev Tolstoj and many others were split by it as if by a saw. You seem to me to be a harmonious artist; when you speak for yourself reason does not intrude in the sphere of instincts and intuition. But reason can be felt whenever you succumb to verbal brilliance alien to you. Be simpler. You will feel better, you will be freer and stronger.

It is also noticeable that you are telling your stories in a particular direction: to a woman. Naturally, here your age is acting. But a great artist always speaks in a "general" direction, to a person who is conceived by him as his wise and intimate friend.

Forgive me for these remarks, perhaps unnecessary, perhaps familiar to you. But every time a talented man enters this world you feel anxious about him and would like to say something to him from your heart. But almost always what you say is awkward and not too understandable. And the world is cruel, and is becoming more and more cruel; apparently it wants to take its cruelty to the extreme in order to get rid of it forever.

Be well and take good care of yourself. I shake your hand.

A. Peškov

P.S. Yesterday I sent the copy I had of *An Evening* to Moscow, to the publishing house "Federacija." You have nothing against it? I would very much like to see your book published in the Union of Soviets. A. P.

On March 3, 1930 Gazdanov sent the following answer to Gor'kij's letter:

Глубокоуважаемый Алексей Максимович,

не знаю, как выразить Вам свою благодарность за Ваше письмо; признаться, я не думал, что Вы столько читаете и помните, что можете упоминать даже "Гавайские гитары". И когда мне говорил М. Слоним: "О, вы не знаете, Горький все читает"- я думал, что "все"- это значительные новости литературы, но не мелкие рассказы молодых и неизвестных авторов, особенно печатающихся в нераспространенном журнале.

Я особенно благодарен Вам за сердечность Вашего ответа, за то, что Вы так внимательно прочли мою книгу и за Ваши замечания, ко-

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торые я всегда буду помнить. Многие из них показались мне сначала удивительными - в частности замечание о том, что рассказ ведется в одном направлении - к женщине - и что это неправильно. Я не понимал этого до сих пор, вернее, не знал, - а теперь внезапно почувствовал, насколько это верно.

Очень благодарен Вам за предложение послать книгу в Россию. Я был бы счастлив, если бы она могла выйти там, потому что здесь у нас нет читателей и вообще нет ничего. С другой стороны, как Вы, может быть, увидели это из книги, я не принадлежу к "эмигрантским авторам"; я плохо и мало знаю Россию, т.к. уехал оттуда, когда мне было 16 лет, немного больше; но Россия моя родина, и ни на каком другом языке, кроме русского, я не могу и не буду писать.

Вы советуете мне, дорогой Алексей Максимович, не быть увлеченным своей собственной книгой и тем, что я ее написал. Эта опасность для меня не существует. Я вовсе не уверен, что буду вообще писать еще, так как у меня, к сожалению, нет способности литературного изложения: я думаю, что если бы мне удалось передать свои мысли и чувства в книге, это, может быть, могло бы иметь какой-нибудь интерес, но я начинаю писать и убеждаюсь, что не могу сказать десятой части того, что хочу. Я писал до сих пор просто потому, что очень люблю это, - настолько, что могу работать по 10 часов подряд. Теперь же вообще у меня нет просто материальной возможности заниматься литературой, я не располагаю своим временем и не могу ни читать, ни писать, т.к. работаю целый день и потом уж совершенно тупею. Раньше, когда я имел возможность учиться - что я делал до сих пор - я мог уделять целые долгие часы литературе, теперь это невозможно - да к тому же я вовсе не уверен в том, что мое "литераторство" может иметь смысл.

А то, что я напечатан только за границей, очень обидно. У меня мать живет во Владикавказе и преподает там иностранные языки, французский и немецкий; я у нее один - ни детей, ни мужа у нее не осталось, они давно умерли. Она знает, что я выпустил роман - а я даже не могу ей послать книгу, т.к. это или вовсе запрещено, или, во всяком случае, может повлечь за собой неприятности. Я не видел ее 10 лет, и я представляю себе, как она должна огорчаться тем, что не может прочесть мою книгу, которая ей важна не как роман, а как что-то, написанное ее сыном. Кстати, я думаю, что книга моя вряд ли может выйти в России: цензура, по-моему, не пропустит.

Когда я только начинал вести переговоры об опубликовании своего романа, я думал о том, что непременно пошлю Вам книгу, но не укажу адреса, - чтобы Вы не подумали, что я могу преследовать какую-нибудь корыстную цель - хотя бы цель получить Ваш отзыв. Но я только хотел подчеркнуть, что если Вы думаете, что здесь, за границей, в силу политических причин вся литературная молодежь относится к Вам с оттенком хоть какой бы то ни было враждебности - то я не хотел бы быть причисленным к тупым людям, ослепленным и обиженным собственным несчастьем. И еще поэтому же я особенно думал о том, что не напишу адреса. Но потом я узнал, что Вы постоянно переписываетесь с М. А. Осоргиным - и это все изменило.

Простите меня за несколько сбивчивое письмо. Но помните ли Вы, как Толстой говорит о разнице между тем, когда человек пишет

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"из головы" и "из сердца"? Я пишу из сердца - и потому у меня так плохо получается.

Я бесконечно благодарен Вам за Ваше письмо. Желаю Вам - Вы достигли всего, о чем может мечтать самый знаменитый писатель, Вас знают во всем мире - желаю Вам только счастья и еще долгой жизни; и я никогда не забуду Вашего необычайно ценного ко мне внимания и Вашего письма.

Гайто Газданов

(Dear Aleksej Maksimovič,

I don't know how to tell you how grateful I am to you for your letter. I admit I didn't think you read and remembered so much as to recall even "Hawaiian Guitars." And when M. Slonim told me, "Oh, you don't realize Gor'kij reads everything" I thought "everything" meant important new works of literature, not insignificant stories by young and unknown authors, especially those published in little magazines.

I am especially grateful to you for the warmth of your answer, for having read my book so carefully and for your suggestions that I will always remember. Many of them at first puzzled me, particularly your remark that the narration was carried in a certain direction--to a woman--and that this was wrong. I did not understand this until now, or rather did not know it; now I suddenly realized how true it was.

I am very grateful to you for the suggestion to send the book to Russia. I would be happy if it could come out there because here we have neither readers nor anything whatsoever. On the other hand, as you perhaps could tell from the book, I do not belong to the category of "emigre authors": I have a poor and insufficient knowledge of Russia since I left her when I was just a little over 16. But Russia is my motherland and I can not and will not write in any language other than Russian.

You advise me, dear Aleksej Maksimovič, not to be carried away by my own book and by the fact that I have written it. This danger does not exist for me. I am altogether not sure that I will keep writing at all as I unfortunately do not have the ability to express myself in literature. I think that if I could transmit my thoughts and feelings through my book, then it might be of some interest but as soon as I start writing I feel convinced that I cannot express one tenth of what I want to. I have been writing until now simply because I enjoy it very much; so much in fact that I can write for ten hours straight. At the present moreover I don't have the material conditions to engage in literature: I do not have control over my time and cannot read or write since I work all day long and after that I am mentally exhausted. Earlier when I had the opportunity to study (which was the case until recently) I could devote many long hours to literature; now this is impossible, besides I am not at all sure that my writing makes any sense.

That I was published only abroad saddens me a great deal. My mother lives in Vladikavkaz and teaches foreign languages, French and German, there. I am her only one; neither her other children nor her husband are alive any longer. She knows I published a

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novel but I cannot even send her a copy since this is either completely forbidden or else would create difficulties in any case. I haven't seen her for 10 years and I can imagine how depressed she must be that she cannot read my book which is important to her not as a novel but as something written by her son. By the way, I think my book can hardly appear in Russia: in my opinion the censorship won't let it through.

When I began to conduct negotiations about the publication of my novel I thought I would by all means send you a copy but without the sender's address, so you wouldn't think I was pursuing some selfish goal: to get your response, if nothing else. But I only wanted to emphasize that if you think that here, in the West, all young writers think of you with some degree of hostility for political reasons, then I would not want to be included among those stupid people blinded and insulted by their own misfortune. And for this reason too I thought I would not give you my address. But then I learned that you were corresponding with M. A. Osorgin and this changed everything.

Forgive me for this somewhat confused letter. Remember how Tolstoj speaks about the difference between writing "from the head" and "from the heart"? I write from the heart and therefore nothing comes out right.

I am infinitely grateful to you for your letter. I wish you--you have achieved everything the most famous writer can dream about, you are known all over the world--I wish you only happiness and a long life; I will never forget your letter and your extraordinarily precious attention to me.

Gajto Gazdanov)

The other Gazdanov letter preserved in the Gor'kij Archives in Moscow and dated July 20, 1935 is the one in which Gazdanov asked Gor'kij to help him return to the Soviet Union. This is the period mentioned in his biography when, because of his mother's illness, Gazdanov applies for a Soviet visa and is refused.

Глубокоуважаемый Алексей Максимович,

пять лет тому назад я послал Вам свою первую книгу "Вечер у Клэр" и Вы были так добры, что ответили мне письмом, которое лежит у меня. Я напоминаю об этом просто для того, чтобы оправдать мое обращение к Вам и еще раз поблагодарить Вас за Ваше тогдашнее внимание.

Сейчас я пишу это письмо с просьбой о содействии. Я хочу вернуться в СССР и, если бы Вы нашли возможным оказать мне в этом Вашу поддержку, я был бы Вам глубоко признателен.

Я уехал за границу шестнадцати лет - пробыв перед этим год солдатом белой армии - кончил гимназию в Болгарии, учился четыре года в Сорбонне и занимался литературой в свободное от профессиональной шоферской работы время.

В том случае, если бы Ваш ответ - если у Вас будет время и возможность ответить - оказался положительным, я бы тотчас обратился бы в консульство и впервые за пятнадцать лет почувствовал, что есть смысл и существования и литературной работы, которые

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здесь, в Европе, ненужны и бесполезны.
Прошу Вас, дорогой Алексей Максимович, принять уверения моего искреннего и глубокого уважения.

Г. Газданов

(Dear Aleksej Maksimovič,
Five years ago I sent you my first book *An Evening with Claire* and you were kind enough to answer me with a letter that I still have. I am reminding you of this merely to justify my turning to you now, and to thank you once again for the interest you showed in me then.
Now I am writing this letter to request your cooperation. I want to return to the USSR; if you find it possible to give me your support in this matter I will be deeply indebted to you.
I went abroad at the age of 16 after spending a year as a soldier of the White Army. I graduated from high school in Bulgaria, studied at the Sorbonne for 4 years and have been spending my free time after daily work as a taxi driver writing.
In case your answer (if you have the time and the opportunity to answer) proved to be positive I would immediately go to the Consulate and I would feel, for the first time in 15 years, that both my existence and my literary work, so unnecessary and useless here in Europe, had meaning.
I beg you, dear Aleksej Maksimovič, to be assured of my sincere and deep respect.

G. Gazdanov)

A draft of Gor'kij's brief reply is also in the Moscow Archives:

Желанию Вашему возвратиться на родину сочувствую и готов помочь Вам, чем могу. Человек Вы даровитый и здесь найдете работу по душе, а в этом и скрыта радость жизни. Привет. М. Горький.

(I sympathize with your wish to return to the motherland and I am ready to help you any way I can. You are a talented man and here you will find work pleasing to your soul: in this is hidden the joy of life. Greetings. M. Gor'kij.)

An Evening with Claire soon became popular with the general reading public, too. It sold well and, as mentioned in Part One, it was one of the most frequently requested new novels in the Parisian Turgenev Library. L. V. Šejnis-Čexova in her reminiscences about the history of the Turgenev Library (no. 225) recalls the time when *An Evening with Claire* was published and the episode throws light on Gazdanov's self-effacing character:

When publishing their book, many authors expressed their gratitude to the library in writing. When these authors donated their books to the library we always asked them to inscribe their name, and they wrote: "To the Turgenev Library from the author" or something like that. But we could never persuade Gazdanov to sign *An Evening with Claire* when he brought it to us. He refused, saying he was "no Turgenev." A week later we received in

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the mail Zdanevič's book *Rapture*, written not in transrational but comprehensible language, with the author's inscription: "To the Turgenev Library from the new Turgenev".

Among Gazdanov's papers is preserved a letter from the Berlin Russian publishing house Petropolis Verlag, dated July 19, 1930, concerning a contract either for a reedition of the novel in Germany or, more likely, for the rights of his next work. There is also reference in this letter to a German publisher who was presumably approached by Petropolis for a German-language edition of the book.

The general feeling of the Russian reading public, that of gratitude, was best expressed by a piece in the Berlin newspaper *Rul'* (March 30, 1930) entitled appropriately "A Word of Praise to Gajto Gazdanov" ("Poxval'noe slovo Gajto Gazdanovu").

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CHAPTER SIX

THE SHORT STORIES OF THE THIRTIES (1930-1939)

1. *ČISLA*. PROJECTS. *SOVREMENNYE ZAPISKI*. "THE THIRD LIFE."

The beginning of 1930 was marked by another literary event as well. A new literary journal, under the title of *Čisla (Numbers)* came out and immediately became the center of controversy. Its "direction" was not clear; some of its critics in fact charged that it propagated and tried to represent something that did not yet exist. There was some truth to the criticism. Young writers, who would not be printed, as yet, in *Sovremennye zapiski* are published here together with such "respectable," established authors as Anton Krajnij (Z. Gippius), Merežkovskij or Remizov. The journal is apolitical, concerned only with questions of literature and the arts, yet some of the most interesting theoretical or polemical articles are far from being apolitical. The young, among them Poplavskij, Šaršun, Varšavskij and others, publish their works in *Čisla*, yet Gazdanov is not a very frequent contributor. There are only two short stories and two book reviews by him in the ten issues that the journal had during its existence from 1930 to 1934. One of the short stories, "Water Prison" ("Vodjanaja tjur'ma"), appeared in the very first number and this, together with the general opinion that it was the best piece of fiction in the issue, no doubt contributed to the unfortunate effect that Gazdanov was later constantly remembered as the author of *An Evening with Claire* and of "Water Prison": these two works being the ones (maybe the only ones) read by "everybody" at a time (the only time) when he was "compulsory reading." The tyranny of fashion and public opinion is a well-known fact. It is no wonder, then, that up to

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this day to many of Gazdanov's contemporaries these are not just the only titles they would immediately recall but also the works they consider Gazdanov's best. Such an opinion is of course merely the result of intellectual inertia or of ignorance, and could not bear serious criticism. Yet, one has to admit that to some extent Gazdanov himself was responsible for letting such an impression stay in the minds of his readers. His second novel, *The History of a Journey (Istorija odnogo putešestvija)*, was not published in book form until the end of 1938; and his third and fourth novel *The Flight (Polet)* and *Night Roads* (*Nočnaja doroga,* as the first version of *Nočnye dorogi* was called) were published in periodicals just before World War Two, in 1939 and 1940, in the very last issues of *Russkie zapiski* and *Sovremennye zapiski* respectively and were in fact left unfinished for the publication of these journals stopped long before the complete texts of these novels could be printed. Naturally the pre-war and first war years did not help Gazdanov's novels to have their normal impact and to receive an appropriate response; moreover emigre literary life was steadily declining in the second half of the thirties and it certainly never was the same after the war.

He did publish short stories, however, about twenty of them, many of his best, during the decade from 1930 to 1939 and they kept him in the foreground as far as the second generation was concerned. But none of these stories made an independent "sensation," as *An Evening with Claire* or the first number of *Čisla*, with the best fiction in it by Gazdanov, did in 1930. This explains the erroneous but very widespread opinion on Gazdanov's "best works" and leads us back to *Čisla* before we can go on to the stories of the thirties, most of which are actually better than "Water Prison." Xodasevič, reviewing the first number of the new journal, finds Gazdanov "more inventive, more picturesque, more brilliant than Fel'zen (no. 125). Savel'ev in the Berlin *Rul'* (March 26, 1930), acknowledging Gazdanov's story as "the most talented" in the journal nevertheless wishes Gazdanov began writing "without Proust." The idea of Gazdanov being indebted to Proust for his technique and even for some of his themes now comes from the coincidence that Proust was an important subject

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matter of the first number of *Čisla* (in which there was even a questionnaire about him). Proust was "in the air," of course, and the debates centered around his influence on modern Russian literature. As some of the young were indeed learning from him, especially Fel'zen, a little critical laziness was enough to lump them together as "Proustians," particularly when the whole journal (with Fel'zen in it) seemed to be preoccupied with Proust. Osorgin (no. 123) agrees with all the other reviewers of *Čisla* as far as Proust is concerned, but he is alone with Slonim in not considering "Water Prison" one of Gazdanov's best. The reader will recall that these two men of letters, Slonim, Gazdanov's discoverer and publisher, leader of "Kočev'e" and Osorgin, who was soon to become Gazdanov's Masonic mentor, knew Gazdanov's work much more intimately and therefore their assessments naturally will have more weight in our survey of the critical literature devoted to Gazdanov.

It is basically thanks to the great success of *An Evening with Claire* that Osorgin can speak about Gazdanov as one of the first among the young writers. Fame makes is possible for Gazdanov to have his own evenings of public reading (although the first one he had was before the publication of the novel, on May 21, 1929). Toward the end of May, 1930, *Poslednie novosti* announces the next Gazdanov-night three times. Gazdanov will read an excerpt entitled "The Great Musician" from his new novel *Aleksej Šuvalov*, "Hawaiian Guitars" and other short stories in the Debussy Hall, 8, rue Daru, on May 28, 1930. (As mentioned before, he never completed this novel. "The Great Musician," a longer short story, was published in two parts in *Volja Rossii* and there exists a separate printing of the story dated Paris 1931 but without the name of the publisher or any indication that it is a reprint from *Volja Rossii* which it apparently was even though the pagination is not identical.) The reading was not free to the public; tickets could be bought at Povolockij's bookstore. From similar newspaper advertisements we know of two more Gazdanov-evenings in the thirties: one in 1934 and one in 1939 (no. 149 and 181). There may have been others. After the war he read his own works a few times in the small auditorium of the Russian Conservatory in Paris but had no more literary readings,

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according to his widow, after 1953. Mrs. Gazdanov remembers one night in particular, when Gazdanov read "An Intellectual Cooperative" ("Intellektual'nyj trest") with great success. There seems to be no printed response to Gazdanov's literary evenings in the thirties, although they had to be successful if they were thought capable of attracting listeners who would pay for the entertainment.

Still in 1930, in *Volja Rossii*, Gazdanov published two more short stories, which are among his best and which, at least the first, "Hawaiian Guitars" ("Gavajskie gitary," in the January issue) very likely contributed to the "fame" that came to Gazdanov in this year--although *Volja Rossii* was perhaps less read than the local, Parisian publications (for political reasons) and indeed these stories, "Hawaiian Guitars" and "Black Swans" ("Černye lebedi") are recalled as some of Gazdanov's best mostly by M. Slonim and those of the then young who were connected with "Kočev'e" or read the Prague journal (which was however actually printed in Paris).

In one of Gazdanov's notebooks that belong to this period we find a table of contents for a projected, or imaginary, edition of his "Collected Works." Only twenty-seven years old and with only one novel published, the young writer dreams of a project that includes four: "Gajto Gazdanov. Complete Works. Volume One: Hawaiian Guitars. Short Stories. Vol. Two: Hotel of the Future. Short Stories. Vol. Three: An Evening with Claire. A Novel. Vol. 4: Aleksej Šuvalov. A Novel. Vol. 5: Indian Ocean. A Novel; and thre supplementary volumes: 1. Cooperation As System. 2. Iron Member. Roman d'amour et d'angoisse. 3. The System of Fiscal Taxation in French According to the Theory of Mirkin Gecevič." There remains a fifteen-page-long manuscript entitled "Indian Ocean" ("Indijskij okean") among Gazdanov's papers. There is no reference to, or explanation of, the title in the text (such as there is in the episode in *An Evening with Claire* where the narrator's--Gazdanov's--father tells the very young Gajto a never-ending tale about a never-ending sea voyage around the world--a tremendous imaginative and emotional experience for the boy), except perhaps in the epigraph from Rilke:

"Est-ce aussi une histoire? Non, c'est un sentiment." (Probably quoted from the French translation by Maurice Betz (Paris,

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1927, p. 73) of Rilke's *Geschichten vom lieben Gott*, from the short story "Das Lied von der Gerechtigkeit.")

The proposed novel is about the life of sentiments; it appears to be a first effort at what later becomes Gazdanov's second novel, *The History of a Journey*. One of its heroes, Aleksandr Aleksandrovič appears here under the real-life name of its model as Straxov; Professor Bouglé's pompous speech at the Sorbonne about the "sacred fire of revolution" is taken from here and at least one other episode was used again, much later, by Gazdanov in his unpublished "From the Writer's Notebook" ("Iz zapisnyx knižek").

Nothing is known about the complementary volumes. Whether the first volume would have been indeed on economics, whether the second was a project for a new novel of which there remain no traces and whether the third was meant as a satire or a parody we do not know. More enlightening is the information given in the same notebook about the contents of the first two volumes of short stories. Volume One would have contained (besides "Hawaiian Guitars") "The Society of the Eight of Spades," "Martyn Raskolinos," "The Prisoner," "Romans," "Maître Rueil," "The Dragon," "The Adventurer," "Water Prison" and "Black Swans." According to L. Foster's *Bibliography of Russian Emigre Literature 1918-1968* (Boston, 1971), "The Prisoner" was published in *Mir i iskusstvo* in 1930. This is the only work listed by Foster that we had no access to, nor could we find its manuscript among Gazdanov's papers. It is uncertain whether "Romans" and "The Dragon" were ever published. Gazdanov indicates their approximate length; since they are among the shortest, with "The Prisoner," they were probably published, if at all, also in *Mir i iskusstvo* or in other daily periodicals (none of which did we have the opportunity to look through completely) and not in the "thick" journals. Finally, V. Varšavskij and M. Slonim in a conversation with us recalled "The Adventurer," another fairly short short story, as published but could not remember where. Fortunately, the text of this story, one of Gazdanov's most interesting, about E. A. Poe in Russia, was found among Gazdanov's manuscripts and has been recently printed in *Gnosis*, one of the new journals of the third emigration (no. 48).

The second volume of short stories in this imaginary edition of

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Gajto Gazdanov's "Collected Works" would have contained the following: "Comrade Brak," "The Transformation," "Stories About Free Time, The Tale of Three Failures," "Hotel of the Future," "The Cemetery Where the Dogs Lie Buried" ("Kladbišče zarytyx sobak") and "The Spy" ("Špion"). In this list only the last two titles are new to us. "The Spy," also very short, is very likely hidden in one of the emigre newspapers or Sunday supplements. "The Cemetery Where the Dogs Lie Buried" is about the same length as "The Transformation" (or circa fifteen pages in *Volja Rossii*). It is unlikely that is was printed in a daily; we could not find it in any of the "thick" journals, nor is there any trace of it among his manuscripts. All in all in spite of the above, Gazdanov's pre-World War Two works are *relatively* accessible, most of them having been published in *Volja Rossii* (nine short stories), in *Čisla* (two short stories), in *Sovremennye zapiski* (nine short stories and two novels), and in *Russkie zapiski* (three short stories and one novel): the only exceptions are the titles mentioned above (and possibly some others we do not know of) that appeared in dailies and are therefore extremely hard both to locate and to have access to. This applies to post-war newspapers too; however, it appears that Gazdanov published very little in them and therefore it is most unlikely that discovery in the future of some "new" short stories by him in *Russkaja mysl'* or *Novoe russkoe slovo* would necessitate any major revision in this study. If all the six "mystery" titles were indeed published in or around 1930, and all in the dailies, that would only add a new dimension to Gazdanov's popularity at the time.

Also in 1930, in the first issue of *Russkij magazin*, a small literary paper edited by Jurij Ivask in Estonia, there appeared a "portrait gallery" of Russian writers in Paris, four drawings on one page by A. M. Remizov, under the following heading: "Russian Writers in Paris. Drawings by A. M. Remizov." The four writers, according to the inscription under the very original drawings, were: "Svjatopolk-Mirskij, author of *Contemporary Russian Literature*--Paris MCMXXIX," "Br. Br. Sosinskij, author of *Time's Guests*--Paris MCMXXIX," "I. A. Boldyrev, author of *Boys and Girls*--Paris MCMXXX," "Gajto Gazdanov, author of *An Evening with Claire*--Paris MCMXXX." Gazdanov's

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portrait, perhaps the most interesting, is--not entirely appropriately--a cubist one!

In 1931 Gazdanov publishes his last pieces in *Volja Rossii*: the two parts of "The Great Musician." In 1932 *Volja Rossii* ceases publication; its literary editor, Marc Slonim, tries to bring out a new literary paper already in the Spring of 1931, foreseeing the closure of his Prague journal. Gazdanov appears twice in *Novaja gazeta*, Slonim's new Parisian biweekly, with a short story, "Streetlights" ("Fonari") in the third issue (April 1, 1931) and a critical article, "Thoughts on Literature" ("Mysli o literature") in the fourth (April 15, 1931); but *Novaja gazeta* too has to close after five issues.

The successes of 1929-1931 finally open the gates of *Sovremennye zapiski* for Gazdanov. Some of the young are already published there (Nabokov, "G. Peskov" and others), but most are not and they resent the journal's indifference to them. The alleged general conservatism and the lack of specific, definable literary direction on the part of the editorial board which included no literary critic, no literary "expert," gave rise to serious criticism and, sometimes, to permanent, "petrified" resentment by some of the ignored or neglected among the young or the "too modern" writers. (Perhaps the best known examples would be V. Varšavskij for the young and Marina Cvetaeva for the "too modern.") Yet the fact remains that, whatever the personal feelings or the contemporary perspective of the participants on these matters may have been, *Sovremennye zapiski* did publish almost everybody of any real value and today, in retrospect, the journal is impressive precisely for its varied contents, its democratic spirit of welcome to its opponents and its enforcement of no literary school, trend or taste, even if its eclecticism had its limits, even if not *all* tastes were satisfied and not *all* ideas represented. There was no literary editor on the editorial board and this is probably what made it so awkward or difficult for writers and poets to deal with *Sovremennye zapiski*. The editors "knew nothing about art," but in the long run this may have been an advantage, as M. Višnjak, one of the editors, admitted (no. 239). Once a writer or poet was more or less established,

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Sovremennye zapiski usually opened up for him; but it certainly was not an experimental literary journal where beginners could try out their talent. This made it "exclusive" for the young when they were "debutants" or when they seemed to "remain debutants" forever; but, on the other hand, this raised the level of the journal considerably. One can safely say that publication in *Sovremennye zapiski* was a mark, an accomplishment and conferred a "rank" precisely because it presupposed the achievement of a high level of literary distinction.

Gazdanov himself liked to tell anecdotes about the literary ineptness of the editors. One of these, perhaps his favorite to characterize the taste of the editorial board, he recounts in the 1971 interview. The young Gazdanov goes to the editorial offices of *Sovremennye zapiski* to find out why the journal does not publish the young writers of the emigration. He meets V. Rudnev (or, according to other versions, M. Višnjak) who is surprised at the question and answers with naive sincerity: "What do you mean we do not publish the young? What about Aldanov?" (Aldanov was seventeen years older than Gazdanov, thirteen years older than Nabokov and was, in 1931, forty-five years old; not exactly "young" as a person, nor as a writer: his literary career began during World War One, in prerevolutionary Russia.) Yet the initially indifferent relations between Rudnev and Gazdanov improve and he becomes Gazdanov's "supporter" at the journal. Gazdanov made a strong impression on another of the editors, the one so beloved by V. Nabokov, Il'ja Bunakov-Fondaminskij. Galina Kuznecova's memory (no. 296, p. 200) is our witness of the meeting: "(Fondaminskij) met Gazdanov. He said that Gazdanov produced on him the impression of a sharpest and smartest and boldest and most self-assured person. He gave *Sovremennye zapiski* a short story that was written 'very simply.' Discovered this year the truth; concluded that one has to write 'very simply'."

The entry in her diary is dated January 4, 1931. The first Gazdanov story to appear in *Sovremennye zapiski* was "The Disappearance of Ricardi" ("Isčeznovenie Rikardi") in the 45th number that came out in the beginning of 1931. The reference is almost certainly to this story; the next piece by Gazdanov appears four issues later, in

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the Spring of 1932. Gazdanov's new ideal of "simplicity" may have been the result of the influence Gor'kij's letter had on him: "Be simpler. You will feel better, you will be freer and stronger." Indeed, "The Disappearance of Ricardi" as well as most of the short stories written during the following years, especially "Happiness" ("Sčast'e") "Iron Lord" ("Železnyj lord"), and some others, do represent a new, "simpler" Gazdanov from a technical point of view: structure and compositional devices become less apparent, the "flaunting of the artifice" that was more noticeable in such earlier "arty" pieces ("kunstštuki") as "Water Prison," is replaced by a striving towards the ideal of "ars est celare artem." Not that these stories are any less polished in their style, or exquisite in their markedly subtle composition, fine portrayal of characters or elegant choice of words or that they display a less admirable sensitivity towards their unchanging subject matter, the delicate movements of sentiments, the subtle events of the soul; no, these emotional phenomena are rendered in the verbal medium with even greater mastery than before: the short stories of the thirties, those just mentioned as well as "The Third Life" ("Tret'ja žizn'"), "The Death of Monsieur Bernard" ("Smert' gospodina Bernara"), "Recollection" ("Vospominanie"), "Bombay" ("Bombej"), "Hannah" ("Xana") and "The Night Companion" ("Večernij sputnik") are Gazdanov's masterpieces in the genre, an achievement which can be ignored only if literature is evaluated by non-literary standards as, alas, it has so often happened in the history of Russian letters.

It is interesting to note what contradictory responses "The Disappearance of Ricardi" (although not one of Gazdanov's very best yet) evoked from its critics and it is equally instructive to ponder its reasons. "Al. N." (A. Novik) in *Volja Rossii* (no. 136) still stresses the importance of the artifice; he liked "Water Prison" more and considers "The Disappearance of Ricardi" a failure if compared to the former. Yet he knows that along with Gazdanov's concern for art there is an even more profound concern with "the most difficult and eternal questions of life" in Gazdanov, which "informs" his forms. Artistic perfection is

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sought because in art form is content; but only if it is made significant, if it *is* content; form, the "how," has to express the meaning without which the work of art ceases to exist, to mean, formally, anything. Genuine art, by definition, is not *about* something; it *is* it in a special way. Life's great questions are not discussed in "The Disappearance of Ricardi"; they are made to be lived through, to be experienced, imaginatively, but none the less "really," in the reader by the subliminal devices of art whether they be the reproduction of certain emotional situations, the evocation of certain gestures, intonations, facial expressions and the like, or the transference of inner biological and psychological rhythms and moods by corresponding expressive verbal means, such as length of rhythmic units of prose, tempo of narration, tonality of words used, etc.

In most cases of art, particularly of non-fantastic or non-religious art, it is not the story itself, but the writer's approach to it that is the point, the real subject matter of a work of fiction. This is largely true of Gazdanov's short stories and novels, too, and in general we shall refrain from retelling their plots to satisfy the desire to know what they are "about" for the simple reason that that is usually *not* what they are "about." Oftentimes, however, the story (the plot) itself has a meaning, a "significant form" in which case its disengagement is part of the critical, analytical process. And indeed, for Novik's understanding of the story, its "heightened, careful and translucent tone, the graphic harmony it gives to the deep anxiety that permeates it, and its vision of the world as cold, contingent and transparent," the plot is hardly relevant. The story did not have to be about a famous singer who learns, entirely unexpectedly, that he is infected by leprosy and doomed to death. Nor is the love Ricardi feels for Helen and its importance for the doomed man or Ricardi's dependence on Grillier, the best doctor of tropical diseases in Paris, whose fiancée Ricardi seduced many years ago, have much importance for Novik's conception. Not so for Julia Sazonova who, reviewing the 45th number of *Sovremennye zapiski* has a completely different reading of the story:""The Disappearance

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of Ricardi" enchants with genuine youthfulness, spiritual well-being, with a joyful faith in life" (no. 132).

Its juxtaposition to Novik's is instructive for an understanding of Gazdanov's own inner dichotomy, a dichotomy not inborn, but imposed by life and one which Gazdanov may not have been able ever to overcome completely. If Novik sees the short story as informed by "learned experience," Sazonova understands it as informed by Gazdanov's "inborn experience." What we mean by this is the tension between Gazdanov's character or his "inborn experience" (that is, the native inclinations, attitudes, tendencies of his personality that he brought with him into the world, which may have been modified or changed, but not created, by his life experiences) and what life made him, what his "learned experience" taught him. The discrepancy is tragic; what makes a life tragic is not how it is perceived by others but how it is felt, in all sincerity and honesty, by its owner. Gazdanov's native personality is idealistic, romantic, with a generally happy disposition, it is full of *joie de vivre*, vitality and energy, predisposed to believe in the nobility of man and in love as the supreme force in life. Gazdanov's "acquired personality" is a tortured one; the questions of human life appear as *problems*, moreover as problems that can be neither solved nor understood. This Gazdanov sees everything under the aspect of death which, as Valery says, deprives life of all seriousness, or, Gazdanov would add, all possible meaning or justification; and under the aspect of chance which turns all things in life into cruel or, if the outcome is pleasant, gratuitous, jokes. In this world faith, love, magnanimity, friendship or devotion are absurd and useless things whose insistence on survival only makes life more unbearable. The main reason why it was thought important to sketch, in the first part of this study, the story of his "personal life," the story of his "acquisition of his learned experience" or his "second personality" was precisely this, that it is crucial for understanding this dichotomy to know, at least in broad outlines, the events that occurred around, and to, Gazdanov in his private, non-literary life, half of which would have been, as he himself said, enough to poison several human lives

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forever. These events and experiences poisoned him, to be sure, yet the receptacle was not particularly attuned to such input and could never quite absorb it or adjust to it. Hence the inner tension, a duality in his "mirooščuščenie" ("world feeling," to paraphrase the English "world view" into something more imbued with Slavic emotional mysticism) which, if the irreconcilable attitudes that result from it are not assigned to different characters but are all meant to be expressive of the ultimate single point of view of the story, as in "The Disappearance of Ricardi," can damage his works; conversely, this tension can give a peculiar depth to his works, increasing the range of emotional experience expressed in them from one extreme (that of a joyful, romantic, happy, satisfied feeling of life) to the other (of total despair, anguish and anxiety) as in his best short stories and most of his novels where either the stance of the narrator-hero goes through corresponding successive changes, or, sometimes, the different views of life are assigned to different characters (who, however, are only projections of the central hero, the narrator-author, as is particularly clear in Gazdanov's last novel, *Evelyne and Her Friends*).

Unlike Gazdanov's sympathetic critics, others will never quite understand or befriend themselves with the inner dichotomy of his works. Adamovič in particular will preserve his ambiguous attitude to the end of his life. In the thirties, reviewing every number of *Sovremennye zapiski* as well as reacting to all the literary events in his permanent column in *Poslednie novosti*, he wrote frequently about Gazdanov, always mixing praise, sometimes the highest praise a writer can be bestowed upon, with severe criticism. In 1932, writing on "Happiness" ("Sčast'e"), Gazdanov's second story in *Sovremennye zapiski*, Adamovič begins by placing Gazdanov next to Nabokov: "G. Gazdanov writes about Frenchmen. He is a very talented prose writer. In the sustained brilliance of his style he stands next to Sirin or immediately behind him." After considering Gazdanov's language Adamovič sums up the theme of the story and gives a rather negative evaluation (no. 141).

A great deal in what Adamovič writes is more revealing of him than of the writers he reviews. Yet there is some truth in what he

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says: there is a profound calm in the happiness found by Henri Dorin, the blind French businessman, a tranquillity coming from the acceptance of life in spite of everything ("Das Leben ist *doch* so schön," as Schiller expressed the same "world feeling") congenial to Gazdanov's innate personality; he *can* quietly tell of quiet people. But the spiritual experience ("duxovnyj opyt") is not necessarily wanting if there is no laceration ("nadryv"), or "Parisian note" ("parižskaja nota") or an effort to solve an eternal question (Adamovič's usual prerequisites). And yet, Adamovič's criticism is, in spite of fortuitous insights, often so misdirected, so superficial that it should not be let stand without the proper corrections. (Unfortunately, most of his reviews in *Poslednie novosti* were cursory and subjective and cannot be taken too seriously, particularly when he was reviewing the first installments of novels published in the "thick" journals without having access to the complete text, as it happened, in Gazdanov's case, with *The History of a Journey* and *The Flight* in 1935 and 1939 respectively.)

The fundamental theme of the short story "Happiness," one of Gazdanov's best, is the juxtaposition of two archetypes, two views of life, and their eternal, inevitable coexistence. Henri Dorin is a happy person, not because he is rich or successful, although he is both; he is happy because of his character's innate happy disposition, because, as André, his son says, "he was born to be happy." His fate is in his character and nothing can change it: he loses his first wife--whom he loved more than anybody else--when she gives birth to their only child, André; his second wife is unfaithful to him when he remarries many years later; he loses his eyesight as a result of an accidental overdose of quinine; his son, André inherits his mother's melancholic personality, her tragic sense of life; and yet, after each stroke of fate he regains his native stance, his organism reaffirms its basically happy disposition, he discovers the beauties and pleasures of the new situation that life puts him in. He is a human incarnation of light, happiness and joy even when blind, deserted and lonely. There are such people; not only among saints, such as St. Francis of Assisi, whose example Henri Dorin mentions when presenting his

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"argument for happiness" against his son's, André's gloomy view of everything; among non-saints too, there are such "happy people" whose natural equilibrium is not upset thanks to their stoical transcendence of life's "slings and arrows" and her "thousand natural shocks"; and this is precisely Gazdanov's point. Henri Dorin is a type; rare, perhaps, yet a type, a possible avenue of human attitudes, who is contrasted here, in the story, with another psychological archetype, André, who is also, equally, "right" in his dejection and pessimism. André's is a world of darkness, sorrow and terror, even though he is blind neither literally nor figuratively (seeing all the horror of life), even though he holds out the promise of future achievement. Henri's happiness is not, any more than St. Francis's, that of a Philistine; he knows the darkness, the sorrow and the terror of his son, of all the less "happy" people, yet he "sings the praise of life" by his very being. His is a love of life that comes after and beyond the understanding of evil. His heroism is the only one Beethoven knew: to see the world as it is, and still to love it. "Can't you imagine an infinitely wise man who sees and understands all--insofar as it is humanly possible--and finds only the good in everything?"--he asks his son who, however, cannot imagine such a man despite the example of St. Francis. Both of them, father and son, are centrally important to the story, as light and darkness, day and night, sun and moon are to traditional mythology, thus invalidating critical remarks as to the discontinuity of the plot or the shift of emphasis from child to father. They express the two sides of Gazdanov, whose instincts made him an Henri and whose reason and life experience developed in him an André. At the end of the story, when after a moment of doubt, after his wife's infidelity, Henri Dorin regains his balance and reaffirms his belief, or rather his sense of life, we learn, as the story soars into a cosmic image full of metaphysical meaning, that these two primordial principles of life, light and darkness, will coexist forever, as long as the world stands, unblending, unchanging, never to be resolved, never to disappear.

The not less convincing evocation of the complex emotional world of the adolescent André, the detailed description of Henri's devel-

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opment of his new tactile, auditive and telepathic sensitivity after the loss of his eyesight, the impeccable, sustained rhythm of its prose ("written in one breath, so that having begun, the reader could not tear himself away from it," as André characterizes, in his daydreams, the style of his future works), the gentle, warm humor and a little healthy irony all make "Happiness" one of Gazdanov's masterpieces, a work of fiction that would not suffer from comparison with the best of Čexov, Bunin or Nabokov.

This relatively "traditional," somewhat Chekhovian or Buninesque story is followed in the next, 50th issue of *Sovremennye zapiski* (also 1932) by another masterpiece, extremely characteristic and revealing of Gazdanov's real, psychological life, a "modernistic" short story entitled "The Third Life" ("Tret'ja žizn'"). It is truly a key work where we have many of his major psychological themes in a very condensed, difficult form. What the three lives are is explained in the story itself as well as, differently, in a notation to the manuscript. According to the printed text (p. 209) the first life is that of the child, the second is the adult's external life, and the third life, the only truly "real," the essential life, in comparison with which the others are only a mirage, is that of the imagination, of the psychologically and spiritually creative life where the individual achieves the highest possible level of being (and cognition) he is gifted for. In the manuscript notation we find the following explanation: "The first life: bed, food, (illegible)--all that happens to every person. The second life: psychological tensions. The third life: madness with an erotic tendency." This is a note by the writer for himself, for purposes of clarification; but as such it helps both the reader and the critic. The only major divergence appears to be in the interpretation of the third life; yet the "madness with an erotic tendency" is only a symbol, a "fictional correlative" of creative life.

Insanity, or the nearness of insanity, emotional unbalance, sickness of the soul, mental shocks, disorders or disturbances are Gazdanov's constant themes. He himself seems to have intensely suffered from his hypersensitivity and "The Third Life" may be the clue to an understanding of the nature of his psychic illness and

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thus may also help to interpret his many narrator-heroes (in *The Specter of Alexander Wolf* and in *Buddha's Return*, to mention only two major later novels) who all seem to suffer from the same disorders. Gazdanov often follows his characters, in other works and in other aspects of mental life as well, beyond the borderline between ordinary consciousness and what appears as dissolution but is, in fact, the higher consciousness of the third life. This condition of the transition from the second life to the third, of being on the verge of the third life yet not being able to enter it, is described in "The Third Life."

The single and unique vision of a female image in this story is strongly reminiscent of what Robert Graves later described in his book *The White Goddess* as the essence of all poetry and the surest sign of its being genuine. If one wished to one could interpret this short work as a study of the artist as he crosses the borderline between person and poet; one could interpret the mysterious female image the protagonist sees in his visions (and in "real life"; but the distinction is blurred: that which is imagined is more real for the poet on the one hand, and on the other we never quite know if what he sees is imaginary or real) as the Muse (Graves' White Goddess), or a symbol of the luring force of art, imagination, creativity. If at the same time there is a lower level meaning to it too, an erotic fantasy, a strong desire to love and be loved, to find one's "goddess" on all levels of psychological existence, an obsessive attraction to a predestined complementary archetype (all of which appear to have been "autobiographically" true for the writer), it would not at all contradict or invalidate the former interpretation. That art is mentioned as one of the domains of human life that remained outside the interest of the hero is only mystification: although he appears to be a writer actually, the story deliberately avoids any semblance of allegory or parable; it operates exclusively on the psychological level (and does it so well that it is one of those rare works of art that stand A. E. Housman's test of true poetry: the hair of one's chin will bristle; or of V. Nabokov's: the shiver down the spine).

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Here we are in the realm of the irrational: the notions of beginning and end lose all meaning, as they do in most forms of esoteric thought (to which, on the intellectual level, Gazdanov's is close). The second life, or the state before the transition into the third, and the passage itself, can be read as a description of the dark and empty expectant state which the mind is in before inspiration, before the vision of the Goddess-Muse comes. The darkness enveloping the soul becomes unbearable, the idea of the barrenness and impotence of all that exists appears and when, in a last effort, the poet forces himself to return to his old ideals, they, too prove to be empty. Here we are already on the borderline which, to the outside observer, may appear as madness. It is only after conquering this last desire--to disappear, to die--only after conquering all desire and will that finally the re-ascent can begin and the hope, never really lost, to find the only narrow passage ("the narrow gate") into the third life, can reappear.

When the borderline is crossed and the entry accomplished all previous existence seems to have been a sojourn in a foreign land; the new life suddenly and unexpectedly appears familiar: the spirit recollects its former abode (anamnesis), and the Muse's face is the one the poet knew--subconsciously, by his "nerves, muscles and blood"--all his life. The road to the third life, this "unknown country," leads through the first and the second; their happiness (of childhood, of the ideals of honesty and sincerity in the second life), and their horror and the compassion and sorrow one learns there are necessary for the "radiant purity of ulterior understanding."

This final, "intellectual emotion," surpassing in intensity all others, and displacing them by its unitive, or, in another aspect, "monomaniacal," strength, is directed to the Muse-Goddess whose merely imaginary intonations or gestures mean more to those who can see them than all the rest of their psychic life. All efforts and all desires are devoted to, and ruled by, this merciless and timeless female image for whose benevolence and love all poets have to sacrifice themselves, to die in the second life to be reborn, as

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poets, as her "shadow," in the third. What we have in the final image of the narrator's dream is the birth of poetry, simultaneous with the death, in the second life, of the poet: the words he remembers ("never, never, never"), hardly hearing them, not thinking of their meaning, are from among those most highly charged with poetic meaning, from among those whose very mention or sound already evokes a poetic atmosphere; and which are here, perhaps, also a homage to one of Gazdanov's favorite authors, the only poet and writer on whom he wrote, not long before "The Third Life," both a critical essay and a fictional story: Edgar Allan Poe. The story ends with the poet's birth, his liberation from hesitation and silence and his final, permanent passage into a simultaneously lived third life where She is sovereign; and with his attainment of the gift of words.

The story is highly autobiographical not only in its psychological tonality but also in a number of minor details. The recurrent theme in Gazdanov's works of life as it is and as it should be (a tragic disagreement in the author's as well as his protagonists' lives) is one such detail; so is the motif of "endless and senseless wanderings about the nocturnal Paris" (a characteristic activity for nearly all of Gazdanov's narrator-heroes as well as their creator). And when the "I" of "The Third Life" says that he is still young, strong and physically exceptionally healthy; when he says that he was born on an early November morning in the north; when he says that he had no formal education in music yet a strong feeling for it; and when he says that at the beginning of his Parisian life he very much wanted literary fame we know that the lyrical "I"'s experiences coincide with the author's.

"The Third Life," dating from the beginning of the thirties, could possibly be read also in a Masonic interpretation. This is the time when Gazdanov gets close to the Russian Masons in Paris. His esoteric ideas, which are always very subdued, often hardly noticeable, can, however, in no way be attributed to this association: the tendency is clear already in the works written well before 1931 or 1932.

The next short story, another Chekhovian (or rather Buninesque)

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work, entitled, "Iron Lord" ("Železnyj lord"), follows in about a year. Although the manuscript is dated 17/XI/33 it is published only in the winter of 1933-34, in the 54th issue of *Sovremennye zapiski*. This similarly semi-autobiographical story recalls the tragic, yet heroic marital life of the reminiscing narrator's neighbors when he was a young boy in a provincial town of the south of Russia, in the quiet years before World War One changed everything. It is composed with a few subtly woven motifs, such as the smell of roses on the banks of the Seine taking the narrator back, in the beginning of the story, to the time when he last smelled their strong scent on the coffin of their neighbor, Vasilij Nikolaevič Smirnov (here we may indeed have Proust's influence!). Smirnov could not bear any more his heroic sacrifice and self-denial of marital life for fear of infecting his wife with a disease contracted in the only escapade of his life and long cured, and he committed suicide. At the end of the story, after the suicide of Vasilij Nikolaevič, the smells are leading the narrator back to the roses in Paris; this and other such motifs create a musical structure and an aesthetically thick atmosphere, where one pleasure follows the other, and where the prose becomes so sensuous that the words begin, as it were, to shine and ring and smell and are fresh and humid and colored. This semi-autobiographical story was the first Gazdanov writing, as far as we know, to evoke an appropriate response from Adamovič who could not refrain from praising the "physical freshness" of this prose: "Each word shines, smells, rings and if the author by the way tells us about a night in Siberia, on the shore of a big river he does it so that the reader feels an almost physical freshness as if the river and its dark wooded bank were somewhere right here, nearby, next to us" (no. 146). Adamovič will repeat the idea several times. Reviewing the first installment of *The History of a Journey* in the same year he writes: "As always in Gazdanov, the reader is enchanted by the sharp and fresh rendering of colors, shades, sounds, and scents, of the whole visible and audible world" (no. 150). This sensuality is indeed one of the most attractive and remarkable qualities of Gazdanov's prose, a sign of genuine talent and an

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inimitable feature: with his careful choice of words, exact rhythms and the delicate sound structure of his phrases and sentences he could impart his prose as organic "humidity," a sensuous liveliness, and, at the same time, the rarified air of aesthetic refinement that is not very common in Russian literature.

2. THE SECOND HALF OF THE DECADE. *RUSSKIE ZAPISKI*

After the 1934 story "Iron Lord," written in 1932, Gazdanov did not publish any short stories until early 1936, except for "The Waterfall" ("Vodopad"), a very short collection of five sketches in *Vstreči* in 1934; or, in other words, it appears that he wrote none from the end of 1932 to the middle of 1935. The time, however, was lost only for the genre, not for the oeuvre. This was the time of work on his second novel, *The History of a Journey* (*Istorija odnogo putešestvija*), the manuscript of which is dated March 20, 1935, and which was his only complete novel to be published in serialized form in *Sovremennye zapiski*. Thus, "Iron Lord" is followed, in the beginning of 1936, by "The Liberation" ("Osvoboždenie"), a short story on the theme of Tolstoj's "The Death of Ivan Il'ič," provoking a capricious and inconsistent review from Adamovič who reproached Gazdanov for his "belletristic elegance" and technical perfection at the expense of recording man's profound despair before death as in Tolstoj. With its motto from Balzac's *La peau de chagrin* ("Deux verbes expriment tous les formes que prennent ces deux causes de mort: Vouloir et Pouvoir...Vouloir nous brûle et Pouvoir nous détruit...": one of Gazdanov's favorite quotations; he used it in *The Specter of Alexander Wolf* as well as in some other works) this story illustrates an ordinary man's liberation from "vouloir" and "pouvoir," the gradual process of dying, with meditations on the futility of wealth, love and happiness in a life utterly devoid of any purpose by the presence of death.

Liberated from the tyranny of will Aleksej Stepanovič (Gazdanov's Ivan Il'ič) tries out, for a last time, his newly-given power of "pouvoir" to create happiness. Playing the role of a fairy tale benefactor he gives a large amount of money to a young man nicknamed

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Acrobat whom he hardly knows because, according to this young man, money is all he needs to obtain the hand of a beloved girl and be happy. When a year later the young man returns to kill him, he learns what he knew all along: that the power conferred on man by wealth is helpless to give people what they need to be happy; that money is not "creative" by itself even when used for "miracles," as Aleksej Stepanovič tried to do in his largess; that it can, at best, only alleviate suffering and hardship.

Two issues later in the same year is published one of Gazdanov's most remarkable works, "The Death of Monsieur Bernard" ("Smert' gospodina Bernara"), a short story with no Russian references whatsoever. It is placed in a French provincial town; its heroes belong to the local petty bourgeois society depicted in a lively and ironic fashion, while the suspenseful atmosphere in which it unfolds is one familiar from English and German literature (whose writers, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Stevenson and others are precisely the ones mentioned--for there is no Gazdanov work without literary allusions) and tinged perhaps with one important modern influence, that of Franz Kafka. This baffling story, because in a way its meaning refuses to be wholly disengaged and rationalized, is about the multiplicity of life (the hero's two entirely independent lives), about the secret life of the psyche behind the meaningless surface of events, about the meaninglessness of causality and the impossibility to explain life's phenomena by reducing them to causes and effects. "The story is written brilliantly, as is always the case with Gazdanov, with extraordinary expressive accuracy, with an elusive, noiseless, hypnotic elasticity of rhythm," writes Adamovič and he finds the same "noiseless elastic concatenation" of words endowed with the sensuous qualities of scent, luminosity and humidity in Gazdanov's next short story, "Recollection" ("Vospominanie"), his only published work for 1937 (nos. 167, 169).

"Recollection" is almost alone in Gazdanov's oeuvre in that it is his most openly, most unequivocally "esoteric" short story in its subject matter as suggested by its epigraph from Blok: "Očnus' li ja v drugoj otčizne/Ne v ètoj sumračnoj strane?" Its hero, Vasilij Nikolaevič Kobylin, another well-to-do Russian factory owner

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in Paris, and an emphatically petty-bourgeois Philistine in character, a reader of Salias and other trash writers, begins one day to recollect, first in his dreams, then awake as well, scenes from his former existences which include lives lived in Venice of the internecine feuds, in Petrine Russia and, perhaps, ancient Palestine. The theme of anamnesis occurs in Gazdanov's fiction many times and is part of his moderately esoteric philosophy. Although the idea is presented here in all seriousness, the story is nevertheless at the same time a very delicate parody of theosophic conceptions.

The last short story Gazdanov published in *Sovremennye zapiski* was "The Mistake" ("Ošibka", first entitled "Vstreča") in 1938. After "The Mistake" all the remaining three stories he managed to publish before the war were printed in a new "thick" literary journal called *Russkie zapiski* that began in 1938 as an alternative (and a potential rival) to *Sovremennye zapis*

The first of them, "Bombay" ("Bombej," in the sixth issue for 1938) is a *tour de force* of description, imagination and creative response to criticism. It describes the voyage of the protagonist (a Russian expatriate in Paris) to India and describes it so that the reader exclaims (as it actually happened with the wife of one of the journal's editors, V. Rudnev, upon reading the story): "When was Gazdanov in India?" He had, of course, never been in India, nor was he experienced in sea voyages, still Adamovič too feels compelled to exclaim when in his review (no. 171) he comes to the bravura of Gazdanov's imaginative powers of description. Yet, once again, Adamovič continues with the old assertion that behind the brilliance of prose there is no content, only a void, an emptiness; that Gazdanov knows very well how to say it only he does not know what to say, that he has nothing to say. This charge, as mentioned before, was repeated all the time in most of Adamovič's reviews as well as Xodasevič's in *his* regular critical columns in *Vozroždenie*. Aside from the fact that such a charge simply is not true, or makes any sense, it was particularly inappropriate in connection with "Bombay," not because in it Gazdanov tried to provide in a more conspicuous way what his critics had failed so far to perceive but, on the contrary, because this short story was a witty, creative response to such criticism by emphatically--almost ad absurdum--doing

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precisely what he was criticized for. Although Xodasevič noticed (and noted) it (no. 172), his major criticism here (that there is no inner lyricism, no lyrical tension in Gazdanov's works, to compensate for lack of plot as in Čexov) is so obviously wrong and it is so difficult to assume that the excellent poet and sensitive critic did not, or could not, feel it in Gazdanov's works that we have to suppose some other, probably external, perhaps personal reason for Xodasevič's failure. Gazdanov's "ideas" may sometimes be weak, especially in the sense that they are not original (in the derived sense of that word: that is, not "new") but they certainly are original in the primary meaning of "going back to the origins," to the very roots, the primordial--and therefore also ultimate--meaning, of things: a feature which, by the way, explains why to many readers Gazdanov is "plain," "nothing special," has "commonplace ideas," etc. Such readers may have difficulty in moving along the "vertical axis of human thought," so to speak, where what matters is not the novelty ("originality") of what is said but its depth and insight, where the old truths (commonplaces) are either revitalized or given a fresh (and in that sense, new) and deeper meaning. The meaning of a text (or idea) is always precisely what the reader can give to it and legitimately accomodate in it; or in other words the *level* of meaning will be that of the reader's mind. A typical case is Xodasevič's review of "The Liberation" which story is reduced by him to two truisms (no. 158).

In the first place, most great works of art can be "reduced" to elementary truths, commonplaces or truisms especially if seen in a wider cultural context than their own--and there is nothing wrong with that (we only have to find another verb without negative connotations and we have to believe that there are truths, moreover elementary truths or commonplaces which do not cease to be truths just because they are commonly and frequently repeated; and perhaps we should also change "elementary" to "basic" or "fundamental") --Tolstoj's, Dostoevskij's or Xodasevič's works very often are an elaboration of, or a commentary on, such "commonplaces." To mention only Tolstoj's "The Death of Ivan Il'ič" (to which Gazdanov's "The Liberation" is compared by Xodasevič as well as Adamovič) which, if

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reduced to a short rational statement and deprived of all the tremendous emotional life and tension with which it is endowed and which makes it the great work of art it is, can also be seen as, or can also be reduced to, a commonplace within the Christian frame of reference. Thus, the idea that "money will not bring happiness" (Xodasevič's first "reduction") surely does not exhaust Gazdanov's story. Even more revealing is Xodasevič's second "reduction" and his comment on it. That "money does not have a creative force" is indeed a theme in "The Liberation"; its truth is illustrated by the plot of the story: the plot that is not convincing to the critic because he could not accept the underlying idea--a very dangerous critical position that one would not like to see among emigre critics, among the representatives of the remainder of the great Russian intelligentsia of the nineteenth century. Xodasevič's disagreement here clearly illustrates our view of the vertical levels of understanding: on his level he is right, money does have a certain amount of creative force in that it could contribute to creativity or make its appearance likelier or easier. But Gazdanov is right too, on a higher level of consideration, on the level on which the story has to be read, where it is clear that ultimately there is no connection whatsoever, that no amount of money can put a creative idea into someone's head if the ability was not already there, nor make someone happy if there is no natural "ability to be happy" in that person.

But what is most disappointing, and almost hard to believe, especially with Xodasevič, is the critical tendency, first, to look for and require a "message" (as he, and also Adamovič constantly do, looking for a "what," a philosophical, psychological or spiritual statement outside and in addition to the one contained in the form), and, second, a direct result of the first fallacy, not to judge a work of art on its own terms and merits but according to the critic's preconceived and preestablished ideas, by his general standards which, however high they may be, may not be applicable or adequate in all cases. Not to perceive an enormous lyrical tension in Gazdanov is clearly a failure in sensibility. To say that he had nothing to say, yet said it brilliantly is really non-

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sense; at least this writer does not see how such a feat can be accomplished in *art* (we are not talking about ordinary discourse where it is only too easy to dress a beggarly thought into royal garments); in art where the "how" becomes the "what," or at least must contribute to it, and where therefore an artist can hardly be reproached--if his "how" is brilliant --for not having said anything *artistically* (which is all that counts in determining whether or not what we have is *art*, although it may not, as T. S. Eliot's well-known definition goes, determine whether it is *great* art).

To reproach a writer for not having done what the critic expected or thought would be a good thing to do; to reproach a writer for not having what in the critic's conception of art is considered important to have; to reproach a writer for failing *without* knowing or seeing what he was after; to do all this and *not* to try at the same time to see what the artistic intention in the work was, or if seen, not to make it clear to the reader and not to try to understand it on its own terms, within its own context and the meaning it creates; to do merely the former *and not to do* the latter is simply poor criticism.

Gazdanov's last short story published before the war, and his only one for 1939, is another outstanding work, called "The Night Companion" ("Večernij sputnik"). That the author himself considered it particularly successful is proven by his selecting it for reprinting at the end of the 1950's when the journal *Mosty* asked him to contribute. The story reveals Gazdanov's characteristic creative method: it combines real life experiences and possibilities with "fiction" in the plot; it mixes elements from the personalities of real life people with invented features to create imaginary characters. When the real life prototypes are personal friends or acquaintances their identity may properly be seen as wholly fictional; if, however, the real life model is a well-known personality whose features are recognizable, the reader will identify him and treat his fictional image according to his ideas about fiction, invention and the real person in question. The hero of "The Night Companion" is Georges Clemenceau, the famous French

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statesman; in the story, however, he is called merely by his fictional first name, "Ernest." The narrator, a young man who likes to take long walks across Paris during the night (we will recognize in him the author himself) meets the very old statesman resting, late at night, on a bench near the Trocadero (another "realistic" detail: Clemenceau did indeed live near the Trocadero and it is conceivable that he took walks in the neighborhood late at night). A conversation is begun and from this point on the story is pure fiction: the young man secretly takes the old one down to the south of France where he wants to meet--once more before he dies--the only woman he ever loved and who has been faithful to him all her life. The rest of the plot is the description of this secret trip; the theme of the story, on the other hand (one of Gazdanov's favorite recurring themes) is the idea that the "radiant delusion" ("blistatel'nyj obman") of life (or art) is worth as much as the "truth," if not more. At the end of the story we find out that the Spanish woman on the Riviera, the old statesman's only faithful mistress, has been constantly cheating on him; he does not know this, he dies without ever learning about it and his happiness is no less real, no less "radiant" than if founded on "truth." Gazdanov, as most great artists, including one of his favorites, Proust, believes in the subjectivity of truth; more than that, he *knows* that what we believe in is the truth for us (or, conversely, only those truths are accessible to us that we can believe in).

Gazdanov is often impossible to rationalize; his themes, the "blind motions of the soul" are sometimes, as in "Hannah," ("Xana," his only other short story in 1938) so subtle, so delicate that it becomes impossible, as in music, not only to paraphrase, but even to name them: they could be expressed only by the intricate work of art as it is. Gazdanov could have quoted Tolstoj--scorning the smart critics who could sum up *Anna Karenina* in a few lines--to the effect that if he wanted to say what the work was about the only thing he could do would be to write it again, as it is, every word of it. Here we have the same theoretical problem: the basic idea of a literary work is simply not expressible in language in any form other than the one found by the artist, especially when this

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basic idea (in the Tolstoyan sense) is, as it often happens in Gazdanov, an emotion or a sequence of emotional events, a "lyrical journey" in the psychological life of man; and especially when this emotion or "emotional happening" does not have a name. (The inadequate vocabulary in any language for emotions, sensations and feelings and the myriads of their nuances and possible transformations is a well-known fact.) In extreme cases, and "Hannah" appears to, be one, this makes traditional criticism next to impossible: what we have here in verbal form is the closest possible approximation to the nature of music. There is a meaning, and a beauty, to its form but we cannot "pin it down"; we cannot translate it into discursive language. As in music, after the reading is finished, what lingers on, what it will be remembered by, is not the plot, not the "contents" (we can hardly recall or state what the story was about) but the atmosphere, the tone, the melody of its spiritual or psychological content; as Gazdanov himself says elsewhere, "the interest of the story lies in the introduction of a musical melody as a sentimental and irrefutable commentary" (no. 5a, vol. 16, p. 46). This "musical melody," in the tone of the narration, in the atmosphere of the story, will be the carrier of its real meaning, of the author's "commentaries" on the psychological lives depicted--and it will be "irrefutable" because it will have to be true, for in psychology there can be no invention, no "fiction," only the "truths of life," as Tolstoj said; because it will have to be an ultimate psychological statement, that is the kind to which the only human response possible is:"That's the way it is; there is nothing we can do about it."

The meaning of the story becomes ineffable not because it is so complex or recondite but because it is like a color or an odor: easy to see and smell and clear to the sensual (or intuitive) understanding but impossible to render in rational discourse; because in this also it is like music or architecture: pleasure for the ear or the eye, an auditory or visual cognition or participation in a spiritual illumination which it is yet impossible to translate into discursive language. "True poets will agree that poetry is spiritual illumination delivered by a poet to his equals, not an ingenious technique

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of swaying a popular audience or of enlivening a sottish dinner party," Robert Graves says (*op. cit.*, p. 392) and insofar as the reader wants to share this illumination in full, he must be its equal. Gazdanov's art requires a refined sensibility not so much because his art is more sensitive or more subtle than the art of many other poets and writers but rather because sensibility, a sensuous empathy and understanding of life and the world, in short, of the "life of sentiments" is his Great Theme encompassing, and providing the context and living medium for, all the others. The fundamental modality in which this illumination occurs in Gazdanov's works is a sensuous one. Life and the human phenomenon are seen, known, understood, and judged under this aspect in contradistinction to other possible forms of artistic vision such as are, for example, the philosophical or the "volitive-active" (where the will to change, to instruct or to reform either the individual or society is an essential part of the aesthetic intention). In this sense, and in this sense only, there is an "intellectual silence" in Gazdanov's transparent prose (perhaps the kind of silence mystics say is "the language of God and also the language of the heart"), a silence (or, if we are allowed the paradox, a "silent music") reminiscent, on the one hand, of some of Vermeer's paintings, for example, and, on the other, of this "language of the heart," of genuine feeling which cannot bear to be "verbalized," to be loud and noisy and which exists as a "šum" (hum) or "gul" (drone) that permeate the souls of the participants and the air around them and which perishes at the first touch of vulgarity.

(Linguistics is to literature what geology is to sculpture, as the Indian scholar Vandeninchen says in his philosophical commentaries on contemporary Western approaches to art. Not that geology is unimportant; the characteristics of stones and metals *do* play a role in aesthetics; yet obviously the *art* of sculpture or architecture cannot be reduced to the science of geology or technology any more than the *art* of literature can be to the science of linguistics. Clearly there is something common between literature and sculpture; otherwise we could not speak of both as different forms of art, *i.e.*

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of the same thing.

Nor can we share the arrogance of modern scientific approach which acts "as if there were no knowledge which was not accessible to anybody and everybody and as if it were sufficient to have been to school to be able to understand the most venerable wisdom better than the sages understood it themselves...for it is assumed by 'specialists' and 'critics' that there is nothing which is beyond their powers; such an attitude resembles that of children who, having found books intended for adults, judge them according to their ignorance, caprice or laziness"; and "it is strange to note how far certain minds...have gone...to reduce ideas to the level of historical facts. In the case of those who are foremost in adopting what can only be described as pseudo-intellectual barbarism...their attitude of mind is accompanied by the unshakable complacency of the 'connoisseur' who arrogates to himself the role of arbiter in every field, and who treats the greatest minds of the past in the spirit of a specialist in mental diseases or a collector of insects," in the remarkable words of F. Schoen.)

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CHAPTER SEVEN

"THE SENSUOUS CHARM OF THE WORLD"

1. *THE HISTORY OF A JOURNEY* (1934-1938)

"...the music, the interior music of life..."

Gazdanov's second novel, in some respects perhaps his best, and certainly very typical of the kind of fiction he wrote in the 1930's (that is, the short stories discussed in the previous chapter and the two novels that came before and after, *An Evening with Claire* and *The Flight* (*Polet*) respectively) was first published serialized in *Sovremennye zapiski* in 1934-1935, then in book form by "Dom knigi" (a Russian bookstore and publishing house in Paris) in 1938.

The novel is a product of the "sensualist" Gazdanov. Not only does he excel in the evocation of purely sensual pleasures of life, in such physical delights as sports (swimming, tennis, hunting) or gastronomy or the contemplation and admiration of nature but the total experience of life, its events as well as their mental and psychological reflections, are all seen through, and by, the senses. "For you there exists nothing but the sensuous charm of the world," as Volodja, the book's hero and Gazdanov's *alter ego* (for this novel too is profoundly autobiographical, primarily in its psychological concerns) characterizes the perception of one of the characters, and Gazdanov repeats it in French to evoke Western associations: "le charme sensuel du monde." The book is all about sensations, feelings, the "evolution of emotions." Movements, gestures, intonations, lines, colors, contours, odors, subtle moods, nuances of atmosphere, "the interior music of life," play a central

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role in the psychological texture of the novel. The title's "journey" is a metaphor for life, and also for any of the innumerable little "journeys" in one's life. In fact, the book is nothing but a series of interconnected psychological journeys into remote, little known recesses of human sensibility, of human experience, into the subtle sources of our innermost feelings or "interior actions." But answers, rationalistic theories there are none. The sources of Arthur's, an English gentleman's ability to commit murder--one of the novel's episodes--remain unknown: "No," Volodja says, "we have to give up once and for all the illusion to understand and to bring into some kind of order all these ill-matched and incredibly joined things" (that life is made of) (p. 112). Life, and happiness, are given a "visceral," biological definition: "...and life suddenly appeared as a rushing lyrical stream. Nothing but a movement, a flight, a happy sensation of an ever-changing mass of muscles and feelings" (p. 138). Even intellectual discussions, even ideas themselves become sensual pleasures for their participants or owners as in the case of the artist-genius Aleksandr Aleksandrovič. However, if in Dostoevskij psychology is subsumed in the life of the intellect and characters become living ideas, here the reverse is true. Ideas and theories are seen as fleeting, changing sentiments coming from the same instinctual realm as feelings; as determined by character and the inner "humors" as they were called in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, the mysterious fluids of the body, and therefore reflecting or leading to an objective, "exterior" truth only in a limited degree. The primacy of the given biological, "animal" foundation of human psyche is taken for granted everywhere in Gazdanov. However, this does not mean the denial of an intellectual superstructure. On the contrary, it only means that the phenomena of that superstructure are traced back to their primeval source and foundation. In Gazdanov's view of life we are victims of fate and instruments of chance; but what is fate, he asks in his works, if not that inherited set of biological features (including intellectual inclinations and abilities) that determine what we are and what we do, that is, the choices we make throughout our lives; and what is chance if not

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those unforeseeable encounters of different forces, interests, feelings that constitute the endless stream of "journeys" or episodes of which a human life, or even a single psychological experience, is made up. This explains the structure of the book; for the structure of the book reflects the structure of Gazdanov's vision of life: novelistic form, composition here become, as always in great art, "significant." The episodic narration reflects a mosaic-like vision of life; the series of various episodes are not woven into a coherent plot leading from point A to point B because the author does not believe in the possibility to have a coherent, all-inclusive picture. It is his underlying assumption that even within a segment or "slice" of life there is no meaningful system, no true coherence, events are accidental and do not lead, purposely or consciously, anywhere. Incidentally, it is a measure of Gazdanov's narrative powers that he can make the episodes his books are made of interesting even after the reader realizes they will not make a plot in the traditional sense.

The book is the story of the emotional life of a young man, Volodja, from before he leaves Constantinople as a Russian refugee for Paris to his reaching the next saturation point in his inner life and leaving Paris for another destination. It is a book of journeys, literally and figuratively, in the lives of Volodja and a number of secondary characters, all of whose emotional journeys are, however, reflected in Volodja's consciousness. Gazdanov is constantly describing not the events themselves but the accompanying sensations in the psyche of the various characters. All things, all events, always are presented under someone's affective point of view: yet it is done so subtly that it is often not obvious at first--or careless--reading. The fluidity of life, that all things are interconnected, that nothing can be really defined without defining everything else, and that therefore definition (de-finition) is limitation, distortion; this fluidity of life, life's texture rather than its structure (which, if it has one, we do not know) is the theme of the book. That Gazdanov's vision knows no sharply drawn contours is again reflected in the formal features of his novel: it has no chapters, no rigid structure, episodes flow into

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one another, the composition itself is fluid, as the conception of life that determined it. This lyric prose, sometimes reminding one of Pasternak in its ellipticity and sensitivity, has occasional "jumps" in the narrative: links are omitted as objective description of external events is avoided. We know only what the characters live through and know it only through the way they experience it. The ultimate point of view is Volodja's (i.e., Gazdanov's, although the novel is in the third person) whose memory and sensibility serve as the basic organizing principles of artistic composition. The novel's language is lively, conversational Russian refined into polished literary prose with periods of perfect measure. Its long and complicated sentences are made lucid and melodious, evoking that inner music of life which is the theme of this book. Substituting *The History of a Journey* for the novel Mark Schorer writes about, we could quote the American critic and say with him that it is "a novel which bewildered its many friendly critics by the apparent absence of subject, the subject, the story (being) again in the style itself. This novel, which is a triumph of the sustained point of view, is only bewildering if we try to make a story out of the narrator's observations upon others; but if we read his observations as oblique and unrecognized observations upon himself the story emerges with perfect coherence, and it reverberates with meaning, is as suited to continuing reflection as the greatest lyrics" (*op.cit.*, p. 215).

A short summary of the novel's events will clearly show how much they are "psychologized" and how little independence (that is, structural significance) they have. The novel is an almost continuous series of dialogues, conversations and recollections; characters, events, ideas, sentiments are all shown through them, rather than through authorial descriptions. In fact, this book would probably not resist dramatization; one can easily imagine it turned into a Čexov-type drama with "thick emotional music" but with more humor, more wit and a French lightness of touch added to the truly Chekhovian somber colors. The novel starts with Volodja, its young Russian hero, exiled after the Civil War, leaving Constantinople by boat--and remembering his experiences and meetings in that city.

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He arrives in Paris--where his brother Nikolaj runs a company--and we learn about their parents, childhood in Russia and Nikolaj's wife, Virginia. Volodja stays with his brother, who also employs him, and is introduced to the friends of Nikolaj, including Arthur Thomson, an Englishman who lived in Russia for a while and speaks perfect Russian, and Aglaja Nikolaevna, with whom Volodja falls in love. As they play tennis, or the piano, or talk at parties, we learn more about these people from their conversations on various topics. Aglaja Nikolaevna often has to travel to Berlin; when alone, Volodja likes the company of Arthur who is depressed because he lost all traces of his former love, Viktoria. After an automobile accident without any consequences, Volodja meets Aleksandr Aleksandrovič, an artist whom he knew back in Russia, and has several important philosophical conversations with him on the meaning of life on art, music, women, Russia, the "doctoral ignorance of professors," etc. A letter from Berlin tells Volodja that Aglaja Nikolaevna loves someone else and all is over. This is followed by a party at Odette's (the company's French member's) house where a certain Dr. Stuck from Austria (Odette's former lover) tells his story about a prostitute, called Viktoria Tille, with whom he had an affair in Vienna and who was "the best woman he had ever had." Arthur recognizes his lover in her--and chokes Dr. Stuck to death after the party, on the deserted street. The murder remains unsolved, "as so many others." Arthur goes to Vienna where he succeeds in finding Viktoria who also was thinking of him all the time. They return to Paris happier than they ever thought they could be. Nikolaj organizes an automobile excursion with a picnic in the countryside; Volodja has a fleeting affair with Germaine, a maid in their house; and there are more philosophical conversations with Aleksandr Aleksandrovič. A new character, Sereža Svistunov, is introduced (also invited to the picnic) only to indulge in sensuous descriptions of food under the pretext of Svistunov being a man for whom gastronomic pleasures are far more important than everything else in life (including wars, revolutions, women, etc.) After a trip to Odette to invite her to the picnic Volodja recalls his childhood again; then we learn more about Sereža's literary

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tastes and his preparations for the outing (he is in charge of the food supply). Meditations on the novel Volodja is writing follow before the whole company travels to the countryside where they eat, swim, talk and where Sereža and Odette find each other. At the end of the novel Volodja leaves Paris on a business trip; the journey continues; all life is a journey with only accidental stops and with only one known destination, death, as the death of Aleksandr Aleksandrovič reminds us on the last page.

A review of the criticism the novel received at the time is in order, particularly because this was the only other book by Gazdanov (after his first, *An Evening with Claire*) to be accorded serious consideration. There was very little critical response to all the seven subsequent novels; thus the bulk of Gazdanov's fiction remained without serious critical appreciation. Post-World-War-Two emigre literary criticism was vastly inferior to that of the inter-war period; also, interests and attitudes shifted in favor of the new emigration and none of Gazdanov's post-war novels, although at least as interesting as the early ones, could regain for him the critical acclaim he deservedly received in 1930. But the situation was different already in the second half of the 1930's. Decline had already set in; hopes were being abandoned and although the "golden era" of the turn of the decade (which was acknowledged as such) was still the recent past, the negligence with which both Gazdanov and his publishers treated the public life of his work is astonishing. The first installment of the novel was published in *Sovremennye zapiski* in 1934 under the title "Beginning" ("Načalo") and without any indication whatsoever that it is the first part of a novel. The text was thus bound to create an awkward impression: it was no short story with an ending, nor did it say it would be continued in the next issue in which, in fact, there was nothing by Gazdanov. Xodasevič (no. 151) reproached the editors of the journal:

> If this is an excerpt, as I assume it is, then we cannot yet pass judgement on it. If it is a complete work, then one cannot help notice the weakness of its composition. I assume though that it is precisely the "beginning" of a larger work, and a very good beginning indeed, with a perfect sense of

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> style...If my assumption is correct, then I cannot help reproaching the editors for their tendency to cut young writers, to distort their works and to deprive them of their rightful opportunity to compete with the older ones on equal terms.

Publication resumed in the 58th volume, already under the final title but with the confusing subtitle "Excerpts from a Novel." A footnote reference here also explained that "Beginning" was the first excerpt. Despite the subtitle, the installment ended by saying that the final segment would be printed next, as it indeed was, in the 59the volume, with the same subtitle still attached. The manuscript of the novel is dated March 20, 1935. It is probable that Gazdanov published the first parts of the work before the later ones were written or finished. This would explain the "independent" first installment and the cautious subtitle of the subsequent two installments. Indeed, the book version is nearly 30 pages (or a few episodes) longer than the journal version; the corresponding texts are, however, identical with the exception of a few minor revisions. Although the novel is both structurally and thematically so fluid as to permit to some extent such segmentary publication, yet no part alone can make the impression of the whole. Adamovič knew "Beginning" was what it said, the beginning of a larger work and in his review of the 56th volume of *Sovremennye zapiski* he made a note of that. His article on the 58th volume begins with a comparison of Nabokov and Gazdanov since *The History of a Journey* was printed next to Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading* and finds the differences between the two novels astonishing. It is interesting to note that Adamovič here says all the episodes are insolubly bound together by virtue of the novel's easy-flowing style: nearly all criticism any of Gazdanov's novels received before or after (including Adamovič's own) emphasized the episodic nature of his works (understood as a defect) and the author's inability to give them unity! Adamovič too adds, however, that there are no definite contours in Gazdanov's vision and no well-defined subject matter, which is true in the sense we discussed it above but not true if taken to mean (as it is by Adamovič) that Gazdanov had no themes at all. In his

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review of the last installment he returns to the old idea that there is no backbone to Gazdanov's narrative forgetting that he found the episodes perfectly united in the last volume, and yet, here too, he showers Gazdanov with praise for his prose style (nos. 150, 153, 154).

Much more substantial and interesting are the few separate review articles the novel received after it was published in book form towards the end of 1938, probably in October. (On November 3, it was announced in *Poslednie novosti* that the book had come out.) Adamovič discussed the work in *Poslednie novosti*, S. Savel'ev in *Sovremennye zapiski*, V. Vejdle in *Russkie zapiski* and V. Xodasevič in *Vozroždenie* (nos. 177, 178, 179, 176). Adamovič openly admits he has no key to Gazdanov's works: he recalls Gogol' as the supreme example of a master stylist, perhaps the greatest in the Russian language, yet an author who is so elusive, so intellectually inaccessible that he defies coherent rational analysis; and he compares, *mutatis mutandis*, Gazdanov's case to Gogol''s. As to polish of style, mastery of language, "one would have to admit Gazdanov is the most talented writer to have appeared in the emigration," but he continues with the usual charge of Gazdanov having nothing to say. It does not seem to occur to the sensitive critic that not all literature is in the Russian tradition of what we might call "spiritual didacticism"; that a work of prose can be great art even if it does not do more than, say, a ballad by Chopin: evoke a fleeting feeling of unaccountable sadness...And to utterly confuse the attentive reader Adamovič then continues by enumerating a number of Gazdanov's favorite themes!

In his review S. Savel'ev returns to Gazdanov's first novel for a comparison and involuntarily points to the organic unity of form and content in his works when he finds Gazdanov's organic defect (his inability to see the world in other than a fragmented way) to be reflected in the fragmentary composition of his novels. He disapproves of the "organic defect" since it is itself a reflection, in his opinion, of the "organic defect" of the age that produced people detached from their sources and incapable of a coherent, unified view of life, people who, under the "influence of

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the catastrophic inconstancy of the world" lost their ability to see in it anything harmonious, permanent or solid. Savel'ev is right: in this respect Gazdanov's sensibility is undoubtedly profoundly modern, "twentieth-century."

One of the seemingly most perceptive critical reactions ever accorded a Gazdanov novel came from V. Vejdle, a close acquaintance and later a good friend of the writer (no. 179). He first notes that Gazdanov's case is very "unusual and sad" because Gazdanov belongs to that rare type of artists who is very talented, possessing his medium almost to perfection and yet, although this is what makes him an artist, we cannot be content with his stylistic mastery alone, we should want also other, extra-aesthetic qualities which, however, unfortunately turn out to be wanting. What Vejdle goes on to say in his characterization of Gazdanov's "emptiness" presents a classic case of "intelligent misunderstanding" when the reviewer either is organically incapable of thinking and feeling and seeing the world the way the writer does and requires the reader to (or does not have, in other words, the necessary affinities for a sympathetic--that is, truly relevant--approach) or, if he is not, then he has not considered it carefully enough to arrive at the work's highest level of meaning. We know that according to Gazdanov's sense of life instincts, the movements of muscles and nerves and the blood, our inborn biological inclinations and characteristics come first, defining to a very large extent our psychological,mental and spiritual makeup. Gazdanov's art is beyond "drama, the novel or the short story" in this sense that it reaches down to those psychological-biological foundations of human life where there can be no more "fiction," even the fiction of religion or philosophy where there can be only genuine insight and a "truth of life" (in the Dostoevskian sense), where reason is beyond its proper realm since it can neither understand nor explain the origin or the purpose of things, where invention (spiritual or artistic) is no more possible and where man falls silent, having lost all illusions and all pretentions to understand the mystery of existence. This silence, this darkness in which we are ultimately enveloped, from which our life emerges and into which it falls, is indeed a kind of emptiness or

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nothingness as the East has always taught. If after reading a Gazdanov novel we have a vague feeling of the book being on nothing specific, then we only confirm that the author has achieved his goal and if we say, with Vejdle, that he achieved it with his manner of writing, that his style corresponds to his sense of life, we bestow on him the highest praise an artist can get: the achievement of a perfect union of form and substance.

There *is* "insufficient polarization of inner life" in Gazdanov as Vejdle says because he is beyond (or before) polarization, in the region from which poles emerge. He does "see with his senses only" because he deals with the pre-rational and post-rational life of the human psyche. For him joy and sorrow are joy as such and sorrow as such, metaphysical entities for the psyche and senses. It is indeed "difficult to challenge such a mode of thinking" precisely because it is not even "thinking" in the ordinary sense of the word: it is a pre-logical, pre-rational, essentially emotional, instinctive, sensuous relationship to the world where intellectual concepts will dissipate when tested in its light (and therefore it is also, of course, a post-logical, post-rational posture to which one can arrive only after having seen the inconsistency and insubstantiality of all rational thought). It is profoundly wrong, however, to claim, as Vejdle does, that "no conflicts, no concern about human destiny can be distilled" from such a vision of life. On the contrary, Gazdanov's works are full of elementary and elemental conflicts of sensations and sentiments, hopes and desires, happiness and sorrow, the "movements of the soul"; and while concern about human destiny may not be specific (that is, may not come from a well-defined point of view with a certain preferred solution or direction) Gazdanov's works are permeated, if not saturated, with anguish, anxiety, a metaphysical terror about the human condition. The metaphor of the very title, "journey," stands for human destiny, fate, life, whether from cradle to grave, one country to another or one emotional experience to the next.

But it must have been again the criticism of Xodasevič, a poet and critic highly respected by Gazdanov, that was the most discouraging and damaging to the still young author (in 1938 Gazdanov was

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only 35). Xodasevič devoted a fairly large article to the novel when it appeared in book form in his regular column "Books and People" in *Vozroždenie* (no. 176). Over two-thirds of the review articl is a rather malicious mockery of the episodic nature of Gazdanov's narrative manner. He retells the episodes, one after the other, carefully pointing out after each that it could have been entirely omitted, or added to indefinitely, without any damage to or change in the novel. Characters and their stories are unrelated to each other as well as to the life of the protagonist, asserts Xodasevič. In terms of traditional plot structure they may indeed be considered "unrelated" if by this we mean that they are not arranged in causal order to lead up to a preconceived, predetermined ending. But to say, as Xodasevič does, that none of the characters or events shown in the novel have any relevance to Volodja's life, simply means missing the point of the novel, which is precisely in this, the relevance, the influence, the relationship of all the people and things surrounding Volodja to his inner life which is where the journey tha we read the story of takes place (and not from Constantinople to Paris or to Africa, as Xodasevič mockingly remarks, since that journey as described is not a journey at all even literally but rather a stop in Paris where nearly all the action takes place).

The more substantial last third of Xodasevič's article begins by meditations on the "plotless novel," of which *The History of a Journey* would be an example, according to Xodasevič, had the novel not lacked, instead of the unifying force of plot, any other theoretical possible unifying principle. It is incomprehensible how Xodasevič could miss the high tension of Gazdanov's lyrical "subtext," that individual and unique sense of life which gives unity to his work and which was at least acknowledged, if not approved, by V. Vejdle.

2. *THE FLIGHT* (1939)

In 1939 Gazdanov appears to become, Adamovič notes, one of the most prolific young writers in emigration. He starts serialized publication of two new novels, *The Flight* (*Polet*) in *Russkie zapiski* and *Night Road* (*Nočnaja doroga*) in *Sovremennye zapiski*. History may

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well have been the single most important factor in preventing Gazdanov's literary career from attaining fruition: when the war breaks out all Russian publications cease and *The Flight* remains up to this day unpublished in its entirety. Of the scheduled four installments three were published in the last three issues of *Russkie zapiski*; the fourth, in typed manuscript form, was found by this writer among Gazdanov's papers in 1975. It is not clear why Gazdanov never published the final segment; it seems he could have done that after the war when several literary almanachs were published (which did in fact print excerpts from Gazdanov's other novels). He may have had a change of heart and decided, with his characteristic modesty and self-effacement, that the novel was not worth further efforts and nobody wanted to read the end of it anyway...Yet *The Flight* is one of the most sophisticated novels of the psychologist Gazdanov and the novel's last segment contains, as we shall see below, very important passages, illuminating Gazdanov's vision of life in an unusually clear light. This novel, if completed, together with the 1938 book form publication of *The History of a Journey* and with *Night Road,* a third novel that represented a new departure in Gazdanov's fiction (describing in realistic, semi-documentary form the nocturnal life of Parisian underground, with a shift of emphasis from pure psychologism to social criticism); these three novels could have produced, in 1940 or 1941, had there been no war, a major reversal in criticism resulting in universal recognition of Gazdanov as an important writer. But it did not happen. Even *The History of a Journey* did not have enough time before the war to make its impact. *The Flight* remained unfinished and after the war neither the old nor the new emigration was interested in what might be called a purely psychological chamber-drama dealing with varieties and nuances of love, a subject matter that seemed inappropriate to many in 1945 or 1946. *Night Road* was, however, continued; after two installments in 1939 and 1940 (again in the last two volumes of *Sovremennye zapiski* ever published) and one excerpt in *Orion*, a literary annual, in 1947, the novel was published in full for the first time in 1952 by the Chekhov Publishing House in New York--or thirteen years later than it could

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have been had Gazdanov's literary career unfolded in more fortunate circumstances.

The Flight is, then, "chamber-drama," or perhaps it would be even more appropriate to say "chamber-music." This may be Gazdanov's most successful sustained effort at a verbal style whose rhythmic qualities create a distinctly musical impression. The "chamber" quality comes from its being an intimate piece in several senses of the word. It deals with the life of a narrow circle of people, essentially one family. It deals with their most personal lives, their love affairs. It deals almost exclusively with their "psychological existence," giving a microscopic analysis of their innermost feelings and ideas. The novel is, we repeat, a study of love, an exploration of its various ways, its sentimental "journeys" and "flights." It may also be another variation (or continuation) on the theme of Tolstoj's *Anna Karenina* after "The Mistake." Sergej Sergeevič is estranged from his wife Ol'ga Aleksandrovna, who has taken a lover, although they are not separated. Their son, Sereža, falls in love with his aunt, his mother's younger sister and his father's former mistress. The wife of Ol'ga Aleksandrovna's lover also has an affair, and there is also a character, Boris Sletov, Sergej Sergeevič's friend, who is constantly in love (a type reappearing in several Gazdanov works, in particular in *Evelyne and Her Friends*, his last but very youthful novel). There are other themes and motifs that recur elsewhere: the excellent analysis of child or adolescent psychology (here in Sereža) was apparent in "The Mistake" or "Happiness." The metamorphosis of the character Lola, an aging actress, has its counterpart in many subsequent works (*Pilgrims*, *Evelyne and Her Friends*, *The Awakening*, etc.). The writing of memoirs, the type of an old and silly actress, the opening of a music hall, are all minor motifs that Gazdanov will take up again later.

It appears that the novel, or at least its first chapter, was translated into French and submitted to a French publisher. No further details are known; only a draft of what appears to have been intended as a cover letter by the author summarizing the contents of the novel and his intentions in it is extant in one of

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Gazdanov's notebooks. This is the only "plot summary" and statement of artistic purpose left by Gazdanov that is known to us and as such it is a most interesting document. Besides revealing how the writer himself saw the contents of his novel, it is also worth quoting for the simple reason that, short of publication of the final chapter of the novel, it provides us with the end of the story in the author's own words.

The novel, the main characters of which appear in the first chapter translated and submitted for publication, takes place on several parallel levels. Its heroes are tied together both by unity of time and action and by the common tragic dénouement the book ends with. The main conflict is in the fate of Sergej Sergeevič, Liza and Sereža. While on the Riviera Liza gives in to her passion whose wildness she can see clearly and becomes the lover of Sereža who is exactly half her age: she is 32, he is 16. Come fall they separate; she returns to Paris, he leaves for England to study. He cannot, however, resist the temptation to return for a few days to Paris where Liza receives him in the apartment Sergej Sergeevič rented for her earlier when they were very close. The night after his arrival Sergej Sergeevič decides, after a long walk across the city, to have a talk with Liza about the most important things in life--and goes to her apartment. He finds her alone, in her bed. She is horrified and begs him to leave. He hesitates for a while and begins to talk to her about the past. At this point the door opens and in comes his son who went out for a minute to get some food. He hears his father's last words, throws away the bag and leaves. That same night, in London, he shoots himself but the bullet misses his heart and his life is not in danger. After he leaves Liza's apartment a tragic dialogue takes place between Liza and Sergej Sergeevič: he insists that she give up Sereža in the name of that same love she talks about. He tries to convince her that genuine love is precisely in one's readiness to give up one's interests and for the first time in his life he tells her about himself not as he appears to others but such as he is: a man whose main driving force is pity for others. This pity is not, however, unlimited: in his demands to Liza he remains implacable. He leaves her saying that he would not hesitate to do anything to make sure that she would never see him again. In the morning he gets a telephone call from London and is told about Sereža's suicide, at which time Liza enters. He reserves three seats in the first available airplane--for his wife, himself and Liza. To notify his wife he sends his friend Sletov to her while he and Liza go to the airport.

In the same airplane fly Ljudmila Kuznecova, to marry a rich old man who is waiting for her impatiently, and Lola Anais, to receive the money left to her in a London bank a few years ago by one of her late lovers. Told too late,

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Sereža's mother misses the airplane, which saves her life. The plane catches fire in the air and perishes with all its passengers.

Such are, in brief outline, the main events of the novel. But what I wrote *The Flight* for is to show that inner psychological consistency of several lives that was stopped by the blind interference of an external force equalizing in a few seconds the lives of these people regardless of how much they deserved or did not deserve such a fate. In a brief outline which necessarily is limited to a description of the main plot line this, of course, cannot be decided. I will allow myself merely to quote a paragraph which contains, in a more or less concise form, some of the author's commentaries and which thus preserves the general style and tone of narration characteristic for the novel's last chapter.

The passage that follows in Gazdanov's own French translation is from the unpublished fourth installment of the novel. It is a principal statement by the writer on his philosophy of life and art in a rather abstract, but unusually explicit section just before the end of the novel. It may have been written, at least partly, in response to the rather pointless criticism of Adamovič, Xodasevič and others who were unable or unwilling to distill such a *Weltanschauung* from Gazdanov's writings, especially his previous novel *The History of a Journey*. This section, which we shall quote here also in the original Russian from the unpublished manuscript, offers a concise summary of his *Weltanschauung* and helps to interpret correctly not only his previous works, including *The History of a Journey*, but also the coming post-war novels, such as *The Specter of Alexander Wolf* and *Buddha's Return*.

В этом небольшом пространстве, внутри аэроплана, летевшего над Ламаншем, был сосредоточен в эти последние минуты целый мир разнообразных и неповторимых вещей, несколько долгих жизней, множество правильно и неправильно понятых чувств, сожалений, надежд и ожиданий, - это была целая сложная система человеческих отношений, на тщетное изложение которой потребовались бы, быть может, годы упорного труда. Их соединение вместе, именно здесь, и именно теперь, было, в свою очередь, результатом миллиона случайностей, неисчислимое богатство которых недоступно человеческому воображению, так как для того, что бы знать точную причину, приведшую каждого из этих пассажиров в аэроплан, нужно было бы знать все, что предшествовало этому полету и восстановить, таким образом, в эволюции последовательных обстоятельств, почти всю историю мира. И расчет, который привел каждого из этих людей сюда, исходил может быть,

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из давным давно совершенной - в неизвестных для нас условиях - ошибки, если слово ошибка здесь вообще имеет какой нибудь смысл. Но точно так же, как мы видим небо полукруглым сводом в силу оптического недостатка нашего зрения, так же всякая человеческая жизнь и всякое изложение событий [sic], мы стремимся рассматривать, как некую законченную схему и это тем более удивительно, что самый поверхностный анализ убеждает нас в явной безплодности этих усилий. И так же, как за видимым полукругом неба скрывается недоступная нашему пониманию безконечность, так за внешними фактами любого человеческого существования скрывается глубочайшая сложность вещей, совокупность которых необ'ятна для нашей памяти и непостижима для нашего понимания. Мы обречены таким образом на поль бессильных созерцателей, и те минуты, когда нам кажется, что мы вдруг постигаем сущность мира, могут быть прекрасны самы по себе - как медленный бег солнца над океаном, как волны ржи под ветром, как прыжок оленя со скалы, в красном, вечернем закате, - но они также случайны и в сущности, почти всегда неубедительны, как все остальное. Но мы склонны им верить и мы особенно ценим их потому, что во всяком творческом или созерцательном усилии есть утешительный момент призрачного и короткого удаления от той единственной и неопровержимой реальности, которую мы знаем и которая называется смерть. И ее постоянное присутствие всюду и во всем, делает заранее безполезным, мне кажется, попытки представить ежеминутно меняющуюся материю жизни, как нечто, имеющее определенный смысл; и тщетность этих попыток равна быть может, только их соблазнительности. Но если допустить, что самым важным событием в истории одной или нескольких жизней является последний во времени и только раз за всю жизнь происходящий факт, то полет аэроплана, в котором находились Сергей Сергеевич, Лиза, Лола Эне, Людмила и жизнерадостный человек в с'ехавшей шляпе, был именно этим событием, потому что, когда аэроплан находился над серединой пролива, люди, ехавшие внизу, на параходе, видели, как он стремительно падал вниз, об'ятый черно-красным вертикальным вихрем дыма и огня.

(In this small space, inside the airplane flying over the Channel was concentrated, during these last minutes, an entire world of widely different and unique things, several long lives, a multitude of feelings, passions, hopes and expectations, some understood correctly, some incorrectly, a whole complex system of human relations for the expression and description of which perhaps years of work would be needed. Their coincidence precisely now and precisely here was the result of a myriad of accidents whose incalculable variety is incomprehensible to human imagination since to know the exact reason that brought each of these passengers to this airplane one would have to know everything that preceded this flight and thus one would have to restore in the evolution of changing circumstances almost the entire history of the world. Moreover, the consideration that

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brought each of these people here was perhaps based on a mistake committed a very long time ago and in circumstances unknown to us--if the word mistake can have any meaning here at all. And just as we see the sky as a semi-circle because of an optical flaw in our vision, so we try to understand each human life and each exposition of events as a logical system which is all the more astonishing since even the most superficial analysis will convince us of the obvious failure of any such attempt. And just as behind the visible semi-circle of the sky there is hidden an infinity incomprehensible to our understanding, so behind the external facts of any human life there is hidden a great complexity of things whose totality cannot be encompassed by our memory or understood with our mind. We are thus doomed to play the role of powerless spectators and although those minutes when we think we can finally grasp the essence of the world can be beautiful by themselves, such as the slow motion of the sun over the ocean, the undulations of rye fields under the wind, a deer leaping from a cliff in the red evening sunset, yet they too are accidental and essentially almost always unconvincing just like everything else. But we are inclined to believe in them and especially value them because there is in any creative or contemplative effort a comforting moment when we seem to move away from that one indubitable reality which we know and which is called death. Its constant presence everywhere and in everything makes useless, it seems to me, any attempt to present life's ever-changing matter as something that has a definite meaning: the vanity of such attempts equals only perhaps their temptation. But if we accept that the most important event in the history of one or more lives is this last and only once-occuring fact, then the flight taken by Sergej Sergeevič, Liza, Lola Anais, Ljudmila and that jovial man with his cap askew was precisely this event for, when the plane was in the middle of the Channel, the people aboard a ship below saw how it plunged down deep and fast, engulfed by the red and black vertical vortex of smoke and fire.)

Adamovič may have never read this passage; but he certainly had not read it at the time he was reviewing the first three published installments. Yet those three reviews (nos. 182, 183, 185), of which two are unusually long, represent a real effort on the part of the critic finally to come to grips with the essence of Gazdanov' art to which, as he had admitted earlier, he had no key. We can hav the pleasure now to give credit to the critic because at last in these articles--the very last ones he ever devoted to Gazdanov; we know of no criticism by Adamovič on Gazdanov between 1939 and 1971! --he did begin to see the "peculiarity of Gazdanov's manner" and could, even if only tangentially, touch upon some essential features

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of Gazdanov's art. He is, as he has always been, ready to offer the highest praise to Gazdanov's style and language, if not his composition. "If by the will of fate Gazdanov's books did not reach the future reader in their entirety, but were only available in parts the author of *An Evening with Claire* would probably be included among the most original and most important writers of the post-war period" (no. 182). Adamovič finally understands that what he calls the "panoramic quality" of Gazdanov's novels is precisely one of his distinctive qualities, that he is interested in the fundamental experience of living in terms of what it means to the senses, muscles, nerves, emotions and the imagination; that Gazdanov is not looking for intellectual or even spiritual problems (or more precisely, is not dealing with them on their level and in their terms) because what he is to explore is the ground from which they spring.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

THE POST-WAR NOVELS

1. *NIGHT ROADS* (1939-1952)

This study cannot be a comprehensive and exhaustive study of *all* of Gazdanov's works. Just as we had to select the more typical or outstanding short stories for more detailed consideration so we cannot devote equal space to all the novels, and have to pay less attention to some than to others. At the present moment of critical perspective on Russian emigre literature Gazdanov belongs primarily to the inter-war period and remains the author of *An Evening with Claire*. While this study is intended partly to rectify the perspective by calling attention to Gazdanov's post-war achievement it was also felt important to discuss the pre-war fiction in more detail, particularly in order to correct the almost completely erroneous critical appraisal Gazdanov's works received. Moreover, since a study of Gazdanov's "thematics" will constitute most of the third part of the book and since Gazdanov's themes are fairly constant, recurring from one novel to the next the post-war novels will be discussed here more concisely, and, to avoid repetition, sometimes partly in conjunction with each other.

Gazdanov published six complete novels after World War Two, between 1947 and 1971. Of these post-war novels one, *Night Roads* (*Nočnye dorogi*) was finished still during the War. The novel's manuscript bears the date "August 11, 1941, Paris." After the two excerpts in *Sovremennye zapiski* in 1939 and 1940 the book had to wait twelve years until in 1952 the New York Russian publishing house brought it out.

The first version in *Sovremennye zapiski* begins with an epigraph from Babel' (omitted in 1952): "Remembering these sorrowful years,

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I find in them the source of my torturing afflictions and the reasons for my so awful withering." Although on the back of the title page of the 1952 edition it is claimed that all characters in the book are invented the novel is wholly autobiographical, both factually and psychologically. Gazdanov remembers the early years of his taxi driving life, his experiences, his meetings with people of the most different and the most astonishing sort, his inner doubling if not disintegration and gives a most revealing picture of himself as well as his life. We have relied heavily on this novel in the first, biographical, part of our study. The time the action takes place, or the period of Gazdanov's life with which the novel is concerned, the "source of his afflictions," the beginning of his "withering," is approximately the first half of the fourth decade of the century, about 1930 to 1935. Although there exists an early (probably 1932) and not too successful draft of a sketch on the life of taxidrivers the book was written at the suggestion of his wife and is his only work dedicated to her. (It remained a favorite of Mrs. Gazdanov and this may have been one reason for selecting the novel for publication in 1952.) All the characters in the book are not only not invented but closely modelled after real life people. Gazdanov did not even want to change their real names and did so only at the insistence of his wife. Platon (Plato), the memorable drunkard-philosopher was a well-known clochard nicknamed Socrate. The most attractive character in this panorama of Parisian underworld, Ral'di was called Jeanne Baldy: a newspaper account of her life after her arrest in 1935 under the title "Jeanne Baldy qui fut une des reines de Paris est arrêtée pour trafic de stupéfiants" was found among Gazdanov's papers. (In a short story of the period--"Bombay," 1938 --Gazdanov changed the names of Russian characters but left the original English names unchanged. One wonders whether a certain Mr. Peterson and a certain Mr. Green in India ever realized they entered Russian literature under their real names...) In the 1960's Gazdanov published several "sketches from the writer's notebooks," mostly slightly fictionalized autobiographical recollections. In one of them, "From the Writer's Sketchbook" ("Iz bloknota") both Platon and another character of the novel reappear.

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Night Roads (in the plural, as the novel finally came to be called) can be described as sociological literature of the highest order, literature of what the Russians call "byt" (everyday life, usually of the lower-middle-class, emphasizing activities of a lower nature), the report of a totally disillusioned, unpretentious intellectual about life in the lower depths of society. As such, it is a new departure in Gazdanov for if until now his heroes were usually well-to-do Europeans or Russians or what used to be called at the time "Russian Europeans" ("russkie evropejcy") little affecte by the financial hardships of life, here everybody is destitute and desperate and the struggle is for bread and survival, not against passions, boredom, infidelity or the metaphysical terror felt by his hypersensitive intellectuals. If, on the one hand, Gazdanov followed Tolstoj and, by making them rich, could deal with his characters in the realm of pure psychology, interested in "absolutes and ultimates," as in the preceding two novels, here, on the other hand, he starts out from the relative and contingent to explore the relationship between poverty (both material and spiritual) and psychological makeup. The conclusions he arrives at offer no consolation. *Night Roads* is a cruel, merciless book by a man who is unable to deceive himself or his readers with conventional illusions about man or mankind. The "somber poetry of human downfall" no longer appeals to him for he knows the reality behind its romanticized literary representation; and this reality, the reality of hopeless and incorrigible "live human carrion," cannot, does not, evoke in him any compassion, sympathy or love. Such an attitude is not, as the reviewers noted, in the Russian tradition. The book leaves an "untransmittable and uncomfortable feeling, as if one touched something chilly and slimy" (no. 199), which is exactly what the book's spiritual experience corresponds to on the physiological plane. There is no redemption, nor justification, for the scum of the earth. The consolations of Christianity are for Gazdanov just that; the only certainty is suffering, the inexplicable existence of evil and ignorance, and death. The rest is speculation.

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2. *THE SPECTER OF ALEXANDER WOLF* (1944-1948) AND *BUDDHA'S RETURN* (1948-1950)

> "Life is all. If a man feels and knows this, his reason is deeper than discussion."
> (Chhāndōgya, VII, 15)
>
> "Nous agissons comme si quelque chose dépassait en valeur la vie humaine."
> (St. Exupéry; epigraph proposed for the novel *Buddha's Return* in its manuscript.)

Gazdanov kept working during the war years, under extraordinarily difficult circumstances. After completion of *Night Roads* in 1941 he started on several projects that were left unfinished; nevertheless two major works emerged toward the end of the war. His documentary about the Soviet underground Resistance movement in France during World War Two, *On French Soil* (*Na francuzskoj zemle*), is dated May 19, 1945 and was published in French under the new title *Je m'engage à défendre* the following year. The other major work, one of Gazdanov's greatest novelistic successes, *The Specter of Alexander Wolf* (*Prizrak Aleksandra Vol'fa*) went through three redactions (after an extant early sketch of three pages where the hero is still called Aristid). Of the two extant redactions of the novel the first is dated May 6, 1944, the second October 5, 1946, both in Paris. Before the final version was published in the New York *Novyj žurnal* in 1947-1948, an excerpt, called "The Match" ("Matč," one of the novel's self-contained episodes) was printed in *Vstreča*, a literary miscellany, in 1945.

This novel, as well as the next, *Buddha's Return*, may have been a deliberate effort by Gazdanov to respond creatively to the sustained criticism of his previous novels for their structural insufficiency, the lack of plot. (Another plausible reason for his turning to "plotted" novels was his natural disposition toward story-telling; his previous "plot-less" novels were full of stories, too.) These two novels clearly have a plot, a story to tell; moreover,

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Gazdanov--with his characteristic irony--borrows from thrillers, fror the literature of suspense and adventure where plot is everything. Not that in him plot ever becomes everything; Gazdanov the psychologist, the sensualist, the disillusioned fatalist is still very much here: that is the real Gazdanov and he will never disappear. But apparently he decided to see if he could combine suspenseful adventure with subtle psychology, thriller with metaphysics à la Dostoevskij. The result is, as René Fulop-Miller wrote in the New York *Times Book Review* (March 19, 1950) after the book came out in English both in England and in America, "a curious, but adroit mixture of novel, psychological study and reportage." "Reportage" either because the novel draws a vivid picture of Russian emigre life in Paris in the 1930's, or, more correctly from a strictly literary point of view, because it incorporates, more or less successfully, under the pretext of the narrator-protagonist being a journalist, newspaper style accounts (especially that of a boxing match excerpted in *Vstreča*) in a highly refined journalistic style--as if Gazdanov wanted to show how to write good journalism, or how to make the "genre" literary. Although the fusion of styles is highly successful (in matters of style Gazdanov has an unerring sense) the compositional unity of the novel is not perfect. Now that there is a plot not all episodes have the same value in the hierarchy of the structure; some of them (the too detailed description of the boxing match, the inset story of Pierrot before the novel's culmination point), however brilliant they may be by themselves, strike the reader as superfluous or verbose. Therefore in our opinion these two novels are, contrary to the generally accepted critical view, structurally weaker in spite, or perhaps because of, the presence of a clear plot-line. There is an inherent tension between the imposed plot structure (which implied coherence and meaningful causal relationship) and the ideology of chance it is designed to illustrate. As if Gazdanov wanted to say to his critics: you wanted well-composed, coherent plots? Now you have them--only what you get is a jack-in-the-box--suspenseful plots with a beginning and an end, only in between the turns of fate--chance's caprices--are much too incredible! It is not im-

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possible that the unlikeliness of some of the motifs in these novels goes back to this polemic.

As the American critic describes the plot in his review, *The Specter of Alexander Wolf* deals with a murder which the narrator-hero believes he committed as a seventeen-year-old boy in Southern Russia, during the Civil War after the Revolution. The novel opens with the scene describing this encounter. His act, even though it was an act of defense, moreover, it happened during war between soldiers, and the specter of the man he murdered torment his conscience for years until he chances to read, already in Paris, as a Russian exile, a story entitled "Adventure in the Steppes" which describes in exact detail the very same incident (but, of course, from the other side). He has no doubt in his mind that only the "murdered" man could have written this story with such accuracy, so he determines to meet the author of the story, Alexander Wolf. His first attempt to meet Wolf through the publisher of the book fails. At last in a Russian restaurant in Paris, he encounters an aging Russian Don Juan, who arranges a meeting between the narrator and his specter. Wolf turns out to be a fatalist who sees the whole of life from the point of view of death and who has a curious vein of destructiveness--all of which gives ample opportunity for the author to engage in philosophical speculations on chance, fate and predestination. At the end of the novel the narrator realizes that his mistress, the strangely reserved but sensual Helen Armstrong (Elena Nikolaevna), a Russian woman who had married an American, was Wolf's lover and that Wolf's trip to Paris had the purpose of taking her back. This completes the circle and leads to a dénouement that is as unexpected as it is inevitable. Predestination triumphs when the narrator finally succeeds in doing what he failed to accomplish for the first time: he murders Alexander Wolf when he finds him in her apartment and understands the purpose of his visit. Fate proves to be inevitable: he was doomed to be Alexander Wolf's murderer. Of course the novel is vastly more than a thriller: it is full of perceptive psychological observations as well as profound ideas about the human predicament. What it is is summed up by Annie Brierre in *Nouvelles littéraires* (January 17, 1952), in whose review of the

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then recent French translation of the book every word is relevant and perceptive:

> On n'échappe pas à son destin. Cet aphorisme, qui suggère à Jacques Deval *Ce Soir à Samarcande* inspire à Gaito Gazdanow un roman d'une autre veine que ce que nous avons vu sur la scène, mais fort réussi aussi...
>
> Ces pages consacrées au thème de la fatalité de la mort et de l'amour sont excellentes. Bien que les faits soient peu nombreux et qu'il s'agisse surtout de souvenirs, le récit est si fouillé, la pensée si profonde que l'intérêt ne faiblit pas.
>
> Les personnages, les caractères se précisent peu à peu devant nous grâce à une infinité de détails savamment travaillés et, malgré l'atmosphère hallucinante dans laquelle ils évoluent, rien ne reste dans l'ombre. Tout se déroule entre deux morts, l'une imaginaire, l'autre réelle. C'est avant tout un roman philosophique et d'une philosophie du fatalisme.
>
> L'éditeur compare le talent de Gazdanow, dont ceci est le premier roman publié en France, à celui de Julien Green et d'Albert Camus. Je voudrais ajouter qu'il me rappelle aussi, non pour le sujet choisi mais pour la manière de le traiter l'écrivain italien Mario Soldati avec ses trois excellentes nouvelles réunies sous le titre *Le Festin du commandeur*.

As to her literary comparisons there can be no doubt that Gazdanov's caliber as a writer is on the same level as Green's, Camus's or Soldati's. The French translation is apparently much better than the English for on the basis of the English version such claims would properly appear as exaggerated. The rendition of style and that "hallucinating atmosphere" makes all the difference. The novel is written in first-person narration and essentially in the present tense although actually the narrator recollects the events (memory, here as almost everywhere else in Gazdanov, is the compositional organizing principle); the arising tension is one of the methods used to create suspense. Events are presented as if the narrator did not know what came after, yet we know he does and this adds further dimension, and depth, to what is said and how it is told.

In many respects *Buddha's Return* (*Vozvraščenie Buddy*) is a companion piece to *The Specter of Alexander Wolf*. The two novels share a great many features: both are set, at least partly, in the Russian exile's underworld of Paris and the actions in both take place sometime between 1925 and 1935. Both novels have a similar narrative

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technique and the two narrators closely resemble each other. Both are "metaphysical" or "psychological thrillers"; in both the hallucinatory phantom world of the narrator-hero's consciousness is interwoven with a suspense plot designed to illustrate a philosophy of fatalism and chance. Both narrators (young men, clearly *alter egos* of the author) suffer from a split personality, a state that besides being based on the author's personal experience gives him ample opportunity to introduce numerous psychological observations. Both books are written in a straightforward, limpid style without any mannerisms, with an ease and lucidity (counterpointing the hallucinatory atmosphere!) that makes them very entertaining reading but which also may make them appear lacking a deeper inner substance. Art is made here to appear wonderfully easy--a French influence, no doubt, and a rather unusually feature in Russian fiction concerned with life's "cursed questions." A Dostoevskian tension is, however, underneath the smooth, brilliant surface, as one Russian reviewer notes, and one wonders whether the translations into English have rendered this quality. As the English reviews talk about a "pseudo-fantastic novel" and an "original contribution to the shelf of tales of mystery and horror" (nos. 195, 196) it seems they have not. Compositionally, *Buddha's Return* is just as well an effort to use plot, again a criminal one, as *The Specter of Alexander Wolf* was, but a less successful one. Neither the crucial golden statuette of the Buddha, nor the entire criminal story of Lida and Amar, nor the late and unmotivated introduction of some important features, nor the novel's ending (and the elusive character of Kathreen critical to the dénouement) appear to be molded together well enough with the narrator's inner life which is where the novel's center is. The organic unity that makes the reader feel the inclusion of all characters and all details justified in one way or another is weaker than in the previous novel. Gazdanov proved himself an excellent story-teller from the very beginning: already his earliest short stories from the 1920's are eminently readable. This quality was just as striking in his plotless novels of atmosphere and sentiment as it is here when reinforced by a suspenseful narrative. *Buddha's Return* is his third novel in a row that has first person narration

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with a story told, again, by the narrator-hero's memory in the past tense but with an adroit mixture of present and past tense perspectives: events and their effects are presented as they appeared to the narrator at the time of their happening yet his knowledge of their eventual outcome gives an opportunity to meditate on them in a way he could not have done had he not been telling the story from the retrospective angle of memory.

The novel's manuscript exists in two redactions dated, respectively, "July 1948, Cros de Cagnes" and "April 23, 1949." It was published in *Novyj žurnal* in 1949-1950 and had a very favorable critical reception. One can only applaud Aronson, one of its critics, (no. 192), for saying what should have been said by Gazdanov's critics a long time before: Gazdanov is indeed one of the most modern Russian writers--together with Nabokov--in style and sensibility as well as in substance. If his previous novel reminded its French reviewer of Julien Green, Albert Camus and Mario Soldati the Russian critic of *Buddha's Return* could have thought, besides Dostoevskij and the "school of Proust," had he known European letters better, of Franz Kafka whose spirit, if not direct influence is unmistakable in the remarkable description of the narrator's nightmare visit to a totalitarian "Central State" and its judicial system. In turn, Gazdanov's own influence can be discerned in the noticeable similarities between the strangling murder scene in this novel and in Nabokov's *Transparent Things*. (For this observation we are indebted to Professor V. M. Setchkarev. We might also note here that there is no connection between Gazdanov's novel and Vsevolod Ivanov's work by the same title.)

Buddha's Return also shares many of its themes with *The Specter of Alexander Wolf*. Chance, fate, limitations of sensory experience, one's true identity, metamorphosis of character, art and reality, the multiplicity of life, death, the existential ("Arzamas") horror of post-rational understanding are all important themes in Gazdanov which will be discussed, each separately, in the third part of this study. Some of the novel's ironies, reflecting its themes, are however more properly dealt with here. It is profoundly ironic, for instance, to read on the flap of the American edition that the narrator's experiences in the "Central State" are a "foretaste of the

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events which befall him when he is actually arrested" by the French authorities--with the implication Gazdanov would have no doubt cherished that societies on this level are little different whether totalitarian or pretending to be democratic. The golden statuette of Buddha evoking a longing for nirvana in the narrator is fated, ironically, to save his life. In his nightmares, in the imaginary world that is psychologically no less real than the real world, he is in deadly peril many times, he even dies once, as we learn in the novel's opening sentence, yet the real danger waits for him in the real world when he is charged with a murder he did not commit.

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CHAPTER NINE

THE EXISTENTIAL HUMANIST

1. *PILGRIMS* (1950-1954)

> "Dear God, give us strength to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed. Give us courage to change the things that can and should be changed. And give us wisdom to distinguish one from the other."
> (Epigraph from the novel *Pilgrim*

Pilgrims (*Piligrimy*), probably written during 1950 (manuscript signed "St. Aygulf, July 1950 - December 3, 1950, 7 P.M., Paris") but published only in 1953-54, is perhaps Gazdanov's most explicitly symbolic work, a novel with a teaching and a compositional patter so blatantly obvious as to leave no doubt about its intentionality. It is an extended parable, a moral tale designed to illustrate the ideas of the novel's motto in action. It is again, as nearly alway in Gazdanov, about psychological "journeys" (here called "pilgrimages") through life towards identity, towards one's real self, expressed in the metamorphosis of characters. At least six of the novel's major characters undergo complete changes. When the novel opens Robert Berthier, the inactive, contemplative, intellectual son of André Berthier, an active "living" businessman in Paris, finds books and culture, his cultural inheritance in general, unable to help him overcome his inertia: he would have the strength or energy but he can see no worthwhile cause. His transformation begins when he meets, by accident, Janine, a young woman of very humble origins who is about to become a prostitute. Compassion turns into passion and Robert's life acquires a meaning (and finds its

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own metamorphosis) in the transformation of Janine whom he brings into the world of that same culture he found useless before. Parallel to their story we witness the remarkable transformation of Fred, Janine's pimp who, after two unsuccessful attempts to kidnap Janine from Robert and after beginning to have doubts about the worth of his life, embarks on a long journey, from the identity imposed on him by life towards his real self. And just as the educated, well-to-do Robert starts his journey by abandoning books, Fred in a parallel that would be much too obvious and simplistic, had the novel not transcended this level, ends *his* by finding them. Yet the novel is not only about the value of books or culture in general; moreover, it is not only about the value and use of knowledge either. It is precisely here that the book transcends the level on which we see the parallel; it takes us one step beyond where the two journeys are not parallel in reverse but identical. It is not books, or knowledge, but what we could call the teaching of the novel that gives meaning to both lives. What is this teaching? It appears to be new in Gazdanov, but perhaps it is only the final victory of the idealist in him over the disillusioned pessimist. The teaching, as expressed by Roger, a somewhat mysterious evangelical character who is instrumental in Fred's reformation, is as follows: "People need help. For me in this is the meaning of life. One has to be compassionate toward the vast majority of people. This is what life has to be built on." Helping others, regardless of anything, its possible uselessness, or hopelessness, regardless of death or chance, is the only activity one can feel spiritual contentment about at the end of one's life; the only activity that needs no justification or proof of usefulness to the man who leads such a life. The teaching is not new or original, as Roger himself says; one can call it evangelical Christianity, humanism or something else. But what makes the novel reverberate with meaning and, if not transcend its own teaching to a still higher level, then, at least, further deepen it is a confrontation of this teaching to that universal existential meaninglessness that is conferred upon life, all life, by chance and death. It is just when Fred has become a new person and begun a new life at the very end of the novel that

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blind fate kills him senselessly, mercilessly. This gives the novel its poignancy for one naturally begins to wonder whether Roger's idea makes any sense in the face of chance and death. And yet, upon reflection it becomes clear that the novel's subtlety is in showing what happens to its heroes in their inner lives--in which Fred's death was not tragically meaningless since he died after he reached his goal--whereas on the surface, to the outside observer such as we all are to most of reality surrounding us it must have appeared devoid of any meaning. Life, or rather fate, instead of offering "justice," is, as Robert says, a "verdict" that we are sentenced to. We not only carry it in ourselves but do everything--unaware, to be sure--to realize it. And if one lives the life Roger propagates chance or death can strike at any moment: they will not deprive that life of the inner meaning it has acquired.

The juxtaposition on one level, and the identity on a higher level, of Robert's and Fred's quests are accompanied by the self-discovering "journeys" of a number of secondary figures, most of whom represent basic types of human character. The old merchant Lazarus, a dealer in stolen goods, as well as Senator Simon, begin to wonder about life's meaning only when they feel the approach of death. Janine, Robert's love, and Gérard, a minor character, have their metamorphoses too. They were all, as Lazarus said, pilgrims who had forgotten their destination: some begin to think of it because the end of the pilgrimage, death, is near, others for other reasons. But life starts to acquire a meaning only when this journey towards one's real identity is begun: "Now you are becoming what you would have been all along had the circumstances not disfigured you...",--Roger says to Fred--"It is impossible to change a human being. One can only try to rid him from the reasons that prevent him from being what nature made him to be." We all have "two destinies, one that we have and one that we should have" until the questions "who am I?" and "what am I?" are asked with sincerity and a genuine need to know, until one is resigned to accept what cannot be changed--for there are people whom nature, not circumstances, made evil--and has the courage, the determination, the vital energy to change what can and should be changed (of which Janine is the

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illustration as a notation in Gazdanov's manuscript indicates) and until one is given the wisdom to distinguish one from the other (as Valentine, Senator Simon's daughter, was not).

This novel, which in its manuscript had the tentative titles of *Načalo i Konec* (*The Beginning and the End*) and *Neizvestnye napravlenija* (*Unknown Directions*) is the first of Gazdanov's two non-Russian, all French novels as regards both setting and characters. Like the next, his second "French" book, *The Awakening*, it is written in the third person, without the familiar narrator-hero whose split personality was such a marked feature of both *The Specter of Alexander Wolf* and *Buddha's Return*, and is told with such realism of detail, characters and psychological insight that the numerous chance events designed to illustrate the novel's philosophy appear acceptably believable and probable, as in real life, and not as an arbitrary pattern "with the cloven hoof showing." Yet here too realism is combined with subjectivity of perception: "we only feel the contours of our personality because they are determined by an external world that in turn is created by our own personality." Each character creates his own world by his own individual perception, out of a theoretical objective world.

Chance is still an all-pervasive theme. Not only Fred's death in the closing scene of the novel or Robert's meeting of Janine in its beginning are purely accidental; there are a number of other moments where chance plays a (sometimes crucial) role. When Fred comes to Robert's house to kidnap Janine it is pure chance that saves Robert's life. And it is also pure chance that finds Gérard on the road where Valentine Simon meets her logical death, ironically in an automobile accident. The theme of death, repentance before death, and meditations on society and its leaders, on the stupidity and ignorance of politicians and statesmen further enrich the novel which is a *tour de force* in several respects. The convincing portrayal of Fred's metamorphosis from a primitive pimp into a thinking human being is a remarkable achievement. So is, on the ideological plane, the combination of Roger's ethical teaching with an illusionless approach to chance and death that deprive life of any possible meaning. One can speak of the author of *Pilgrims* as a Russian Camus,

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the Camus of *La peste* or *Le mythe de Sisyphe*: in spite of everythin in spite of our life being an eternal "state of siege" against the inhuman and invincible evil powers of existence, in spite of the "plague" be it natural or social we have to keep on living, working and helping. This is the human condition and in this is its heroism. But Gazdanov is close to Camus not only in his moralistic philosophy; there are remarkable similarities between the two artists. Their modernity is in their way of looking at life's questions, and not in striking formal innovations. Both have a "classical" style, a classical clarity and simplicity of prose without any baroque or modernistic "embellishments" or "distortions." But if for Camus, in French literature, this was a "return" or a "revival," for Gazdanov in Russian literature it was "creation": no Russian writer before had written with quite the same barren simplicity, with quite the same clarity of intellectual prose. The line of evolution in which Gazdanov belongs in Russian literature is Puškin's, Tolstoj's, Turgenev's, Čexov's, Bunin's and the day will come no doubt when Gazdanov's name will be added to this list for his creative introductic and adaptation into Russian letters of some of the best features of classical French prose.

2. *THE AWAKENING* (1950-1966)

> "Point n'est besoin d'espérer
> pour entreprendre, ni de réuss
> pour persévérer."
> (Epigraph to the novel
> *The Awakening*)

As the epigraph itself clearly shows Gazdanov's next novel, *The Awakening* (*Probuždenie*), is a variation on the theme of *Pilgrims*. It is not necessary to hope to undertake: Roger and Robert undertook their task of transforming Fred and Janine hoping yet they would have done the same had there been less hope of an "awakening.' Pierre, "the average Frenchman" undertakes what seems to be a much more hopeless task: he decides to take care of a mentally ill young woman, Marie, in the hopes of her slow, gradual return to normalcy.

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Nor is it necessary to succeed in order to persevere: we know Roger went on doing his chosen work after Fred's accidental death; Pierre also keeps caring for Marie during the long period when she is like a baby or a helpless idiot and, when the novel closes, we learn that he would have done it again--even if it had turned out in a different way, But the ending is happy, for the first time, it seems, in Gazdanov's oeuvre. Marie is completely cured and the feelings of love Pierre has developed for her are responded to.

The Awakening, then, is again a moral tale, a thinly veiled parable illustrating the *Weltanschauung* of an existential humanist. Gazdanov seems to have first begun work on it in 1950--at the time he wrote *Pilgrims*. The final manuscript is dated "July 25, 1964. Venice." The relatively short novel was published in *Novyj žurnal* in 1965 and 1966. Gazdanov is said to have worked very hard on his second all-French work. The slow process of Marie's healing is an extraordinarily difficult subject matter to portray convincingly and interestingly; and for having done so, without sentimentality, melodrama or boredom, the novel is a remarkable achievement. A great deal of research went into its making: Gazdanov visited an asylum to see and meet people like the novel's heroine. He not only consulted doctors and medical books but also was given the opportunity to don their white gown and talk to dangerous patients which he did with great tact and success. Medically, Marie's story is supposed to be entirely plausible; as to psychology, Gazdanov, just as any other genuine artist, does not need the support of "the Viennese delegation," in Nabokov's words, or of any other.

In Pierre's character Gazdanov chose another extraordinarily difficult task: the portrayal of the "average Frenchman." If in this he was not entirely successful it may have been because, with all his "average" qualities, Pierre is also a victim of fate, as most of Gazdanov's heroes are, in that in his true character, in his real self he was more than the average Frenchman which circumstances made him; that is, he too had two lives: the one he had and the one he should have had. That he is not so average is clear in some of the novel's episodes: once he has a somewhat mystical experience of

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anamnesis in the forest and the effects on him of a visit to the Louvre his family made when he was an adolescent are not very usual either. But the most obviously non-average thing he does is what the novel is about; and in this there seems to be an inner contradiction that will certainly be perceived as a structural flaw. In fact, rather than an "average Frenchman," Pierre and his story can be seen as a metaphor for the "ideal man" and his "ethical creation." Pierre Foret (whose last name may be symbolic: it is in a forest that his life begins to change, that he has his mystical experience, that he feels like a creator) in this sense can be an "average" person only in an ideal system.

The novel could be given an additional interpretation, one that was probably not meant by the author, yet one that it is capable of accomodating without violence. Pierre and his "ethical creativity" could be seen as a metaphor for the artist and his artistic creation. Just as in Nabokov a chess player or a criminal and their combinatory games could serve as metaphors for artistic "games" so is Pierre's work on Marie's physical and mental transformation a "creative effort to bring into existence and build up a world"--or a possible parable for artistic creation. As in *Pilgrims*, the themes of chance, fate, multiplicity of life, metamorphosis of characters, a spiritual search for life's meaning and meditations on society, medicine, religion give the novel its rich intellectual texture.

3. *EVELYNE AND HER FRIENDS* (1951-1971)

> "What is a novel? The movement of emotions..."

Gazdanov's last completed novel, *Evelyne and Her Friends* (*Èvelina i ee druz'ja*) was published in *Novyj žurnal* over a period of four years, from 1968 to 1971, in twelve short installments. Moreover, the text as printed is neither complete, nor in the right sequence. The installment printed first in 1968 is not the beginning of the novel, but belongs between two segments, the fourth and the fifth, printed in volumes 96 and 97 (1969); there is, however, no indicatio

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of this in the journal. Much as it happened with *The History of a Journey* this first published part of the novel is called "Excerpts from a Novel" and the novel's publication with its proper title begins only with the next installment which is then the real beginning yet reference is made to the "Excerpts" as if those had to be read first. This jumbled publication as well as the fact that not even the most conscientious reader can be expected to read an approximately two hundred page-long novel for four years and in twelve short installments and be able not only to remember the episodes he read months or years before but also to judge fairly--all this clearly contributed to the relatively weak impact the novel had and what appears to be a consensus among Gazdanov's friends and critics about the novel as being one of Gazdanov's least successful. Whether or not the novel is indeed his weakest the facts remain: first, that it cannot be judged as it is now published, and second, whatever structural weakness the book may have it is a veritable encyclopedia of Gazdanov's themes and motifs, even of his novelistic techniques and stylistic peculiarities and as such it is a very "typical" and, for the critic, a most revealing work.

This novel also, like *The Awakening*, was begun in the early 1950's. Manuscripts of the early version under the titles of *What Matters and What Does Not* (*Glavnoe i neglavnoe*, dated "Théoule, August 8, 1951") and *Evelyne* (dated "October 28, 1952. Paris") are extant. We also have the manuscript of the final version but it is not dated; we can be reasonably sure, however, that the novel was written in the 1960's, probably after *The Awakening*, i.e., between 1964 and 1968 when publication started.

The novel represents a return to Gazdanov's two earlier periods, to that of *An Evening with Claire* and *The History of a Journey* and to that of *The Specter of Alexander Wolf* and *Buddha's Return*, and it is not in the vein of his previous two novels, *Pilgrims* and *The Awakening*. The first person narrator-hero living in the poetic, "lyrical world of sentiments" returns and tells his story structured by memory, retrospectively. Yet, full of suspense, the novel is replete with separate episodes: in a way it seems to be an effort to combine the freely episodic narration of *The History of a Journey*

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with the suspenseful criminal plots of the later novels. The result is again a "curious but adroit mixture." The novel makes the impression of a youthful work, an impression achieved by its freedom of composition as well as by the revisited youth of many of its heroes. The "movements of the soul," the emotional journeys" and "flights" are in the center of attention, but so are the intellectual search, the meditations on life's meaning and purpose, and even the action of the novel's numerous episodes. *Evelyne and Her Friends* is clearly a key novel: Gazdanov is here much more outspoken and unambiguous in his statements than elsewhere. Perhaps he meant the novel as a confession of faith for he offers--in the characters of the unnamed narrator and of Mervil--what seem to be self-portraits with his personal opinions on a great variety of topics. We have here Gazdanov's explicit comments on the nature of art and literature, the function of religion, thoughts on chance, death and destiny, on metamorphosis and the quest for identity, on life acquiring meaning when lived to help others, a general scepticism towards knowledge, his ideas on crime and the judicial system, on politicians and society and so on.

As in *The History of a Journey*, here too we have a "society of friends," a union of five people, Evelyne, the female center, and her friends, Mervil, André, Arthur and the narrator. The history of each character and of their relationship makes up the body of the novel. Mervil is the type we met before: the man who lives only when in love, whose life is a series of love affairs, a search as hopeless as it is inevitable for him. André and Arthur are both hypersensitive human beings in different ways yet their stories of metamorphosis, especially the murder of André's brother, George, an extraordinarily unattractive person yet a great poet (who may have been modelled after Georgij Ivanov) are really there more for providing suspense and also more as a pretext for the narrator to comment on murder, on civil justice or on the incomprehensible combination of poetic sensibility and prosaic character in George. Besides Mervil and his love affairs the most important character is the narrator himself whose discussions with Mervil, his closest friend, on art and re-

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ligion, on life and death and whose gradual emotional return journey from a spiritual emptiness back to a "lyrical world" with the help of love he finds himself feeling towards Evelyne at the end of the novel, are in the focus of the novel. This emotional journey across long years of waiting, of despair and anguish is strongly reminiscent of the theme of Gazdanov's first novel with the important exception that there finding Claire and finally possessing her resulted in disappointment, reflecting the pessimism of the young writer, whereas here the final union of Evelyne and the narrator seems to express the willed optimism of the author (providing, thus, the only other happy ending in Gazdanov's works). Perhaps the novel in this sense is an answer to *An Evening with Claire*. In the manuscript there is a notation on the epilogue which throws light on this and can, in fact, take us one step further: "*Important*: About Evelyne: the epilogue--it has to produce the impression that there was already something like this, only not in reality, but in the imagination, and that nothing could be better than this, that what was preceded by years of not-understood expectations is finally happening." The narrator is a writer and the novel ends with his words promising to Evelyne to write, one day, the story of their love--that is, the book the reader has just finished. Perhaps the writer's optimism is derived from the artist's achievement: the novel is completed, the characters are alive, the creation accomplished, and victory over death obtained? Perhaps this novel, the story of the metamorphoses of Evelyne and her friends, more than *The Awakening*, is a metaphor for artistic creation, the characters' transformations a display of creative imagination? In an art where ethics and aesthetics are so fused as in Gazdanov's it is impossible to assign priority to one over the other.

4. THE POST-WAR SHORT STORIES (1943-1972)

That there was a break in Gazdanov's literary career in the 1950's is beyond doubt. Following a surge of creativity after the war he falls silent in 1951 or 1952 and his next dated work is from 1957. The silence is equally noticeable if one considers not the writing

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but the publication dates, although here there is, of course, a shi For five years Gazdanov completely disappears from the press. *Pilgrims*, written in 1950, is published only in 1953-1954; the next published work (the one written in 1957) comes out only in 1959. Around this time, however, Gazdanov seems to find himself again: he publishes one short story almost every year between 1959 and 196 he rewrites and completes two novels, *The Awakening* and *Evelyne and Her Friends*; and starts but cannot finish his last, *The Coup* (*Perevorot*). And yet, whatever one thinks of these last novels and his post-war short stories (some of which are undoubtedly among his best) it is clear that Gazdanov's post-World War Two production (1946-1971) is relatively meager and sporadic compared to the perio of 1926-1946 which is the time five of his nine novels and over two-thirds of his short stories were written. The years after the war see also the dying out of the old emigration and Gazdanov, who was not pampered by critics before the war either, remains in a complete critical void. There is practically no response to his works and we know this to be one of the factors that made him fall silent in the 1950's.

To complete our survey of Gazdanov's fiction there remains for us only to have a closer look at the post-war short stories. Betwee 1945 and 1953, before his "silence" that is, Gazdanov published onl two stories (if we do not count the two novel excerpts in *Vstreča* and *Orion*). The first of them, "The Scar," ("Šram") was published in *Novyj žurnal* in 1949, although the manuscript is dated October 23, 1943. It is one of Gazdanov's least successful stories, possibly because it is merely a portrait of the character and life of Nataša, a Russian emigre woman and not much more. Gazdanov did not excel in female portraits. Nataša's poverty of emotional life, her incomprehension of abstract notions, her unethical life all make her a less than attractive heroine. (The story, however, could possibly serve as the basis for a closer study of Gazdanov's creative method for it is based, in part, on a newspaper story that was preserved among Gazdanov's papers.)

The other short story of the "pre-silence" period, "Princess Mary" ("Knjažna Mèri," published in *Opyty* in 1953; manuscript not

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extant) is remarkable in that it creates a special atmosphere in which everything, all details and the most banal anecdotic events acquire a depth and reverberate with meaning, in which the characters "step out of eternity," as it is said in the story, "only to be re-absorbed immediately." The setting is the Parisian underworld so familiar to Gazdanov. The ego form gives the narrator-author the opportunity to comment and introduce a higher point of view. The poverty-stricken characters whom we see only as they play cards in a low-class café are a French woman, a former tailor and her three admirers, a "famous Russian writer," who is called "Marie" (her chosen one) and two Frenchmen, a former boxer and a failed actor. The narrator strikes up an acquaintance with the "Russian writer" but soon, in the mere ten pages of this very dense story, all the three men die and he inherits the writer's archives. It turns out that this man living in the lower depths of French society wrote a "social column" for a Russian daily under the name of "Princess Mary," giving advice on the etiquette of high society, and even on questions of female cosmetics and hygiene. The possibility of such striking duality of life makes the narrator wonder where, in which role or incarnation was the man's real life. The "magic" of this story, as one critic pointed out (no. 212) is not the purely verbal, or combinatory, technical magic of a Nabokov but a more spiritual and psychological one and therefore ultimately Gazdanov has the more to offer. His magic may be less dazzling at first sight but in the final analysis it is probably the more fully satisfying and of a more lasting impression to the reader.

Several of the short stories after the "silence" continue in this "magic" line. "Salome's Destiny" ("Sud'ba Salomei"), but especially "The Funeral Service" ("Panixida"), "The Beggar" ("Niščij") and "Ivanov's Letters" ("Pis'ma Ivanova") are outstanding and would certainly be included in any selection of Gazdanov's best short works. They are among the high points of Gazdanov's art: he becomes a master story-teller for whom extraordinary simplicity and conciseness are not inaccessible virtues. His prose becomes terse, shedding all unnecessary embellishment. The first of these stories, "Salome's Destiny," may not be quite as good as the others, yet it belongs to

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this group and is a typical "late Gazdanov" in its major themes. One of these themes, in which it is a continuation of "Princess Mary," is the theme of life's multiplicity and destiny as a metamorphosis towards one's real self, real character, that is, the fate that should have been accorded to one in an ideal arrangement of things. "Salome," as the heroine of the story is nicknamed, does not find contentment or cannot achieve the realization of her self until she is spiritually transported from the intellectual world of Paris into the materially and intellectually equally poverty-stricken world of an Italian shoemaker. What brought this transition about in her case was the nearness of death and someone's caring for her: this was that central focal point which, in one form or another, occurs in every life, says Gazdanov, and determines its direction and meaning. It can lead to a recognition of one's real nature and thus to what may appear from the outside as a veritable metamorphosis when it is in fact only a return to that destiny which is contained in one's character, one's "inborn fate."

"The Funeral Service" takes place during "the cruel and gloomy time of German occupation of Paris." The narrator, whom we know to be Gazdanov for the story is wholly based on a real-life event, meets through an acquaintance several Russians who are turning big profits on the black market trading with the Germans. These people, destitute before the war, are now rich, yet not happy. When one of them, Grigorij Timofeevič, the one who kept wondering about happiness, dies his friends arrange a funeral service in his house. The narrator is invited and there he undergoes one of the most moving spiritual experiences of his life. These simple Russians, now blackmarketeers and collaborators, most of whom were physical workers or on welfare before the war, make up a choir the like of which the narrator has never heard in his life, either before or after. They sing the Church Slavic words of the Orthodox funeral service with so much feeling, they sing life is a condemnation to death ("vsi bo isčezaem, vsi umrem, cari že i knjazi, sud'i i nasil'nicy, bogatye i ubogie i vse estestvo čelovečeskoe") with so much understanding that when he later recalls this night that so shook him "it begins to seem to him that all this did not really happen, that it

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was all a vision, a short-lived intrusion of eternity into that contingent historical reality in which we lived, speaking foreign words in a foreign language, not knowing where we go and where we come from." "Condemnation" ("obrečennost'") is all that matters; for "outside it there can be no understanding of life and no understanding of death." What does it matter, from the point of view of death and eternity, what these people--foreigners in their own lives--were doing in that contingent historical reality they happened to be condemned to live in? With an astounding artlessness and lack of means Gazdanov succeeds in evoking the atmosphere of the funeral service; one hears its painfully beautiful music and its words seem to carry the full weight of their meaning.

Of all these late stories "The Beggar" is the only one not written in ego form. It is the story of a well-to-do Frenchman with a Russian soul, Gustave Verdier, and of his long journey toward self-recognition, the realization that he was born "poor in spirit," that there is nothing for him in life worth striving for: "Tout est vain en nous excepté...le jugement arrêté qui nous fait mépriser tout ce qui nous sommes," as the proposed motto from Bossuet's *Oraison funèbre de Henriette Anne d'Angleterre* has it in the story's manuscript. When he at last understands his own nature he--unlike most people--finds enough determination in himself for the final supreme act of his life (which was then to become the central point of his life we spoke of above): for the break with his family, social class, education and tradition, all but accidental accretions on his life; and for a liberating flight into the world where his soul feels at home and finds its natural condition, the world of beggars and tramps (clochards), where there is no more responsibility, no more constraint, no more words, in fact no more meaning, no more life--the world of the "poor in spirit," where, as it is put in the Jewish tradition, he can make "the sacrifice which most pleases God...an extinguished spirit" and where he can become, in the words of Meister Eckhart, one of "those who seek neither fortune, nor honors, nor benefits, nor inward devotion, nor saintliness, nor recompense, nor the Kingdom of Heaven, but have renounced all, even that which is their own."

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"Ivanov's Letters" is also on the quest for identity, or rather on the question whether, sometimes, there *is* no true identity because all the incarnations of a person can be equally true--or false. Respectable Nikolaj Francevič, an intelligent, amiable, well-to-do Russian engineer in Paris, made his living, as we find out--shocked--in the second part of the story, by writing letters to individuals and societies all over the world in which he presented himself as sick and helpless and solicited financial help. Gazdanov is concerned not with the ethical issue involved; what he wonders about is the nature of reality, the reality of Nikolaj Francevič, alias Ivanov. The question is not only where his true identity lies; the question is whether there was any genuine reality behind any of his incarnations. All his metamorphoses, the different imaginary characters with whom he peoples his letters, all these Ivanovs, all sick but each in his own individual way, are only "attempts of incarnation" ("popytki voploščenija") and it becomes impossible to distinguish reality and imagination. Since we seldom live (and show) what we truly are our "real" existence in fact also becomes one of the many possible imaginary ones: as the narrator notes at the end of the story, even the calendar dates of Nikolaj Francevič's life (and death) dissolve as figments of the imagination because the day the man (as he was known to the narrator before that was asked to read his letters) died is no more the date of his death: it is only the day one of his incarnations died. The real date of his death, to the narrator at any rate, is, then, the day he found out the truth about him: that is when the other--equally imaginary--Nikolaj Francevič, who called himself Ivanov, was born and died at the same time. Life becomes unknowable, reality subjective and imaginary. More than that: reality becomes one form of imagination, the one most of us share, the one that makes life, action and communication more or less possible yet one that is no more and no less true, in principle, than any other. Truth is what we think it is; and the probability of error is high.

To complicate things even further, the question arises: is not Ivanov and his letters, his "epistolary literature," a metaphor--once again--for writer and literature? Is it not about (or at least

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relevant to) the relationship between *Dichtung* and *Wahrheit*, reality and imagination; is this not also about the morality of artistic make-believe? For from the existential angle from which Gazdanov looks at it the comparison becomes legitimate: the writer makes up his stories, pretending they can give something to the reader--aesthetic pleasure, moral edification, catharsis, entertainment, or whatever the reader is after--and gets his alimony for it. But, since we are condemned to death (which makes everything futile); since the meaning of our existence eludes us (which makes ethics meaningless); and since we are not even capable of telling the real from the imaginary (which makes aesthetic cognition also a deception), the artist's claims are just as spurious as Ivanov's letters. We are doomed and nothing can help: under this aspect art is as much deception as is the healthy Nikolaj Francevič's solicitation for the sick, but imaginary Ivanov.

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PART THREE

THEMATICS AND AESTHETICS

CHAPTER TEN

THE MOVEMENTS OF THE SOUL

> "Things are not at all so comprehensible and expressible as one would mostly have us believe; most events are inexpressible, take place in a realm which no word had ever entered and more inexpressible than all else are works of art, mysterious existences, the life of which, while ours passes away, endures."
> (R. M. Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*)

1. THE MOTIF OF THE JOURNEY

"Life is a journey without destination," Coleridge wrote; Gazdanov's whole oeuvre is a commentary, and an illustration, to this idea, with the exception that Gazdanov never failed to add that there was one, inevitable destination to all life, death. And yet, although death, the problem of death, its spiritual meaning (or meaninglessness) is another important theme in Gazdanov's works, under whose aspect life is always viewed, he is more concerned with the journey itself. As we have seen before, several of his novels bear the motif already in their title: *The History of a Journey, The Flight, Pilgrims* (a manuscript of which has the title *Unknown Directions*), *Night Roads*. Life as a journey, as a road to travel along, as a pilgrimage or as a flight--the motif recurs in the fiction very often although never obtrusively. A biographical or psychological source for this image may be Gazdanov's childhood and

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youth spent in constant motion. In *An Evening with Claire* he presents the armored train as a symbol for his life which consisted, up to that point, of almost uninterrupted travels and repeated departures. Journey is, of course, an ancient metaphor for life; what makes it special and newly convincing in Gazdanov is that with him the journey becomes "lyrical" and is entrusted with all the psychological subtlety Gazdanov could lend to it. In *The History of a Journey* alone he repeatedly calls life a "lyrical stream," a "flight," the "motion of muscles and emotions," a "lyrical" or a "musical journey." One of the novel's heroes is a "traveller" whose life is a "movement" and in one of the novel's most touching episodes, when Volodja asks this character whether he remembers when and how this movement began, he describes the beginning of his conscious life--not that of childhood, but that moment when one finally and truly realizes that one's life has no ultimate meaning and will dissolve into the nothingness of death just as millions of other human lives did before--the real beginning of the journey, or life, in Gazdanov's interpretation, before which everything recedes into the world of idealistic fantasy and self-deception. Chronologically the motif appears much earlier than in Gazdanov's second novel. Already in "The Transformation" (1928) the narrator-writer admits that he too "started his journeys for the usual dreams and usual thoughts." By 1931 Gazdanov is ready to write an allegorical short story ("Maître Rueil") "on the sad meaninglessness of journeys." A number of short stories in the 1930's speak about life as a "lyrical journey" ("The Great Musician," "The Liberation," etc.) some of them, like "Bombay," being in their entirety on an actual journey that can be allegorically interpreted. In *The Specter of Alexander Wolf* life is an "inward journey" ("duševnoe putešestvie") or a "long journey toward death" or again it is compared to travelling, this time, on the train. In this respect as well as in so many others, Gazdanov's last novel, *Evelyne and Her Friends*, will sum up his oeuvre, this time rather self-ironically for we can find in this novel self-references to the symbolic images of travel or of flying in airplanes...

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2. THE "MOVEMENTS OF THE SOUL" AS MUSIC

If life is a journey, then what corresponds to it "microcosmically" are the minute but significant inner or inward journeys or what Gazdanov usually calls the "movements of the soul." This is his great theme, the "world of inner existence" as he says in *An Evening with Claire;* not so much in its usual, psychological-spiritual aspect but rather as seen in the light of, or as traced back to, sensory experiences, physiological-biological processes, the "silent melody of the skin and the muscles," as psychological process is characterized in *The Specter of Alexander Wolf.* "Emotions are the only thing you know," says the narrator-writer's lover to him in *Night Roads,* when they speak of poetry and Rilke. The microscopic description and analysis of emotional life, without, however, the Tolstoyan excess and volume, is Gazdanov's *forte.* Not that he necessarily "believes" in emotions or finds life's meaning in them; in *The History of a Journey* Volodja, the author's *alter ego* can say: "Yes, Nikolaj is right: there are no problems, there are only emotions. But Nikolaj does not know that, just as problems, they, too, are deceptive and insubstantial, that they, too, fade and wear out, grow old and die" (p. 112). Moreover, in "Hannah" the narrator (Gazdanov) confesses he knows "pure emotions" seldom exist in life, except "sometimes" in children and in art.

The modifying "almost" or "sometimes," so frequent in Gazdanov in statements of this kind is very characteristic of him: he knew too well not to make categorical assertions. Because everything moves and changes, because all life is constant motion, a "fluid," an uninterrupted, indefinite sequence of sensations; moods, emotions, "the existence of one idea throughout one's whole life appeared to him as inaccessible happiness" (*The History of a Journey,* p. 13). It is the death of the "soul" when it is no more capable of changing, of learning new things, when a certain idea or emotion, or certain ideas or emotions stiffen the mind, making it rigid and unreceptive. And it is not at all the "major" ideas or feelings

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or events that are necessarily the most important. In *An Evening with Claire* Gazdanov recalls the Civil War which had an enormous impact on him personally as well as on the course of his life, and yet, deep inside, for his innermost psychic life, some "insignificant" ideas or emotions meant more and proved to be more lasting than many a major external event.

Gazdanov, his main protagonist, the "lyrical I" of his major novels, as well as most of his important characters are all very sensitive, emotional beings subject to "unseen influences," in whom the primacy of sensibility is so overwhelming that they are unable even to locate the source of, let alone interpret, their moods and feelings rationally--or at least they are sincere and intelligent enough not to pretend to be able to do so. It seems to them, therefore, that they live by someone else's will--and the idea of someone or something immense behind the immediate reality of senses is an idea fairly frequently alluded to in Gazdanov's fiction. In *Evelyne and Her Friends* we read: "as if the fates of people were thought up and realized by some sneering and cruel genius" (vol. 99, p. 46), elsewhere we see the same immense power or will in its positive aspect, or elsewhere again, as in *Night Roads* for example, in its third, "neutral" role, described as "one immense protracted breath" (p. 182) recalling Hindu theories, a not unlikely supposition in view of the fact that Gazdanov as a mason heard a great number of lectures on Oriental philosophy.

For Gazdanov's characters reason and abstract ideas are barriers to happiness rather than possible vehicles to it. For them life is a stream of sensual experiences, much like music to which life indeed is often compared in Gazdanov's fiction. It is again in *Evelyne and Her Friends* that Gazdanov sums up his seemingly anti-intellectual position. Seemingly, we say, for here again Gazdanov transcends (rather than does not reach) that level of pure rationality where mere instinctual life is overcome, yet the insufficiency of mere rational life is not yet seen. What we have in Gazdanov is not the argument of a man not attuned to philosophy: on the contrary, it is that of a "disillusioned lover" who saw the limits of the object of his love, yet longed for more.

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The "movement of emotions" is often compared to, or described in terms of, music: it is the "music, the inner music of life." Life itself, its streams of forms (recalling, this time, Taoist doctrines) is seen, or heard rather, as a "silent melody," a never-ending "hum." Everything, ideas and feelings, events and dreams, objects and images, dissolve into a single all-encompassing "auditory vision," described in *Night Roads* as a "silent symphony of the world...something hard to define but always existing and changing, an enormous and complex system of ideas, notions and images moving through imaginary spaces" (p. 156). This sensation of a "singing universe" seems to have been with Gazdanov from early childhood as he recollects in *An Evening with Claire* (p. 93) and was not, as it might also be supposed here, a borrowing from ancient or mediaeval cosmologies (with which the mason Gazdanov was again undoubtedly familiar). Later on, in "The Transformation," the young man Gazdanov is surrounded by an "ocean of sounds" (and the same image recurs thirty-five years later, in the 1963 short story "Ivanov's Letters"), his hypersensitivity transforming everything into its musical equivalent, a musical image (p. 30). But it is not only the narrator-Gazdanov who has such "musical imagination"; most of his important characters hear the world's music which is then interpreted according to their inner constitution as well as their current psychological situation or condition. Thus, for example, the awakening of Liza's love toward the adolescent Sereža in *The Flight* (vol. 20/21, p. 33-34) is depicted as the "movement of the soul" from a world of silence and lifelessness to a world where all the sensations (and particularly those of sound) come to life.

Sometimes, music or the "hum" serves as a metaphor to convey very complex inner processes. In "Martyn Raskolinos" (p. 11) the protagonist's delirium is depicted with the image of a constantly present "drone" in his mind. In "Happiness," when Henri Dorin goes blind he discovers not only the wealth of sounds emanating from all living (and perhaps even from all non-living) beings; he begins to hear what in a non-musical imagery might be described as the Principle, the Absolute, or God containing and permeating that elemental vital force that brings forth, sustains and destroys life

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in all her forms and in comparison with whose direct vision all other concerns pale as insignificant details (p. 199). Several times the rise or surge of an emotion is likened in Gazdanov's analysis to a visual or auditory overture, and its subsequent life to a melody. One of the most characteristic of these passages is in *The Specter of Alexander Wolf* when the narrator-hero analyzes his awakening love towards Elena Nikolaevna (vol. 17, p. 26-27).

In the detailed description of the inner events of the soul and in their comparison and juxtaposition to the sensual-aesthetic-spiritual experiences derived from works of art, verbal, visual or musical, there is indeed a remarkable affinity between Gazdanov and Proust. Spatial imagery for expressing psychological or spiritual realities (also common in both writers) combined with the awareness of the existence of subtle "worlds...without form...without signification," escaping all rationalization yet accessible to a certain sense, worlds such as the world of music understood as a vehicle for expressing inward realities show that the two writers are close to each other in the nature of their sensibilities, in their preoccupations with the innermost events of life, with the phenomena of senses as well as those of art, and even to a large extent in their formal approach to their representation. (Naturally, there are also important differences: our purpose here is, however, to show their affinities.)

It should be noted here that, just as with Proust, quotations from Gazdanov, even when somewhat lengthy, do not as a rule do justice to the writer or the work being quoted from because in lyrical prose of this kind the emotional context or atmosphere carefully prepared by the preceding pages is of decisive importance and without it, the tension or intensity of a scene, dialogue, or meditation (the "irrefutable musical or emotional convincingness" that Gazdanov spoke of) may be lost or fatally weakened. Gazdanov himself found this to be the case--as Leonid Rževskij recalls (no. 238)--with I. Babel' whose quoted excerpts make an embarrassing impression whereas the same sentences in their original contexts are fully convincing and artistically highly satisfying.

"More than everything else I loved the snow and music," writes

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the young Gazdanov is his first novel and he meant not only the "drone of life," the music of the movement of emotions, of nerves and muscles, but also music as an art, as a form of human expression. Musicians and descriptions of concerts occur fairly frequently in his writing: from the earliest short stories where some of the characters are singers and their singing is an important motif, through such stories as "Hawaiian Guitars," "The Great Musician," "The Disappearance of Ricardi" or "The Funeral Service," where the human voice or the sound of an instrument plays an important role, to many of the novel where music or singing accompanying an encounter of characters provides an indispensable emotional context. (One of his most successful evocations of the power of music is in "The Great Musician," p. 401-2, where he describes a concert by Šaljapin.)

The motif of music *sine materia*, expressing not so much psychological realities, but something "ineffable," "irreducible to all other orders of impressions," is, as we saw in "Happiness," a meaning frequently attributed by Gazdanov to music and an idea he shares with Proust. Sounds or the "hum" or "drone" of life can be connected also with the most diverse phenomena. In "The Third Life" sounds are the "shadows of the third life"; in *The History of a Journey* "a segment of melody flew by and hid, leaving behind a confused sonorous shadow of memory." In his trance Martyn Raskolinos hears a human voice and understands that it is the voice of his own doubled self. In several of the novels the human voice is an important means to characterize people. In "Hawaiian Guitars" (p. 41) there is a striking image of spatial memory containing, apropos a segment of a melody, a certain group of psychological events. In "The Disappearance of Ricardi" (p. 195) the surge of this drone--as a sinister noise--is a metaphor to convey the terror that overcomes Ricardi's soul, when he is first told about his disease, even before he understands the full meaning of what will happen to him. In *The Flight* (vol. 20-21, p. 32-33) is one of Gazdanov's several very sensuous descriptions of rain (that elicited lavish praise from Adamovič) where the sound of elements induces the characters, Liza and Sereža, to speak of the creation of the world, this really being

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only an extrapolation of the emergence of a new emotional world within themselves.

It is very characteristic of Gazdanov that with all his exaltation of emotional life he is not blind to its limitations, nor hesitant to write about them. In a key passage in *An Evening with Claire* (p. 22) on the extraordinary physical sensations music could evoke in him already in childhood he writes about the crucial duality of his character, his inability to see the world "realistically," (outside a poetic, deeply personal, lyrical "fluidity" where the objective and the subjective lose their relative validity becoming indistinguishable, and thus the usual contours of life's events get blurred if not lost) which is not only one of Gazdanov's most distinctive features but is also part of the psychological foundation for his visualized, spatial imagery of music as a metaphor for the stream of life's forms. Similarly, when describing the "secret" of a piece of music, of a singer or a piano-player, he may note, as in *Night Roads* (p. 242) that this secret is based, at least partially, on a limitation.

There is a tendency in Gazdanov to find *the* meaning of a piece of music, although of course he means thereby only that emotional state which most closely corresponds to, or is usually evoked by, it. Thus in *Evelyne and Her Friends* there is a "shadow character," Boris Werner, a piano-player in restaurants whose improvisations give the musical background to several of the conversations between the two principal characters of the book, Mervil and the narrator. Two of his improvised pieces are reflected upon and interpreted this way; the "content" of the first is found to be the "void" or "emptiness," the other is felt to be "on a distant transparent world resembling a receding landscape." In *The Specter of Alexander Wolf* a southern melody--a Spanish romance--is said to incorporate, in a mysterious fashion, light while in other melodies one can feel the snow or the night (vol. 17, p. 44-45). But more important than these tentative approximations is Gazdanov's idea on the psychological source of artistic strength: compassion is all the personal experience or contribution of the singer Katja, yet it is not little. On the one hand, it represents a profound understanding of the human

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condition, its helplessness in the face of fate, chance and death (and as such, the summit of one possible spiritual perspective); on the other, since in Gazdanov's analysis any theory can be reduced to a set of inborn inclinations and predispositions, it is a limitation and does not, cannot, represent an objective picture of the world, only an (ultimately) emotional attitude to it which is not necessary and which can be overcome by the creation of "new sentimental systems," new emotional attitudes. "Some people exist only in half, as it were," says Volodja in *The History of a Journey*, and the narrator of *Evelyne and Her Friends* adds: "...nature gave each of us a limited number of feelings and beyond this limit we react to what is happening around us significantly less strongly than we would expect. And this is not because we are good or bad but because we do not have the psychological strength for it" (vol. 105, p. 67).

3. THE "MOVEMENTS OF THE SOUL" AS METAMORPHOSES

If the "stream of forms" finds its expression in the microcosmos of the human psyche in the "movements of emotions" and in the macrocosmos in the metaphysical image of the "music of the spheres," then on the middle level, where man is taken as a whole, in his psychological (and social) unity, the natural corresponding phenomenon is metamorphosis: the transformation, change or rebirth of personality. That this other form of the "movement of the soul" is a fundamental theme for Gazdanov's fiction can again be seen already in his titles: "The Transformation," *The Awakening*, "The Liberation," "Salome's Destiny"; as well as in the rich vocabulary he has to express various forms or aspects of such "transmutations of inner makeup": "prevraščenie," "pereroždenie," "perevoploščenie," "nedovoploščennost'," "čuvstvennaja peremena," "perelom," "probuždenie," "metamorfoza," "blažennoe rastvorenie," "èmocional'naja katastrofa." Even a superficial acquaintance with Gazdanov's works would make it obvious that psychological-spiritual movement ("self-realization") is always and everywhere in the center of attention and is, with all the philosophical implications, what the works are

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really "about." Whether this change comes from, or results in, a love affair, whether it is provoked by disease (be it leprosy or blindness) or by the very suggestive personality of another (as in the story of Fedorčenko in *Night Roads*), whether it is brought upon the hero by war, poverty or exile or whether he bears the source of his dissolution or rebirth within, these changes are always seen *sub specie aeternitatis*, in a perspective that is not satisfied to explain events by their immediate causes and effects, in their temporal and material reality, but seeks (and cannot help seeking) an explanation, an understanding of *why* all this, cause and effect, the cause of the cause, the effect of the effect, happens, why things are what they are, what their real nature or purpose or essence (these being the same here) is, why they occur, why, in fact, they exist.

Fedorčenko, a simple person without any intellectual or cultural pretensions, suddenly undergoes a profound change: he begins to be troubled by life's great questions, the meaning of human life, the existence of God, the cause of suffering. What happened? At first sight it would seem that Vasil'ev, a bizarre character, an exiled Russian intellectual or pseudo-intellectual who believes himself to be persecuted by Soviet agents, is the immediate "cause" of Fedorčenko's spiritual awakening. And yet, however indispensable such an outside catalizator might have been, it is also clear that something else happened too; something that was "in the making" in Fedorčenko, something his psyche was bent upon but--and here is the tragedy, another inexplicable moment, of his fate--not ready to cope with. What was then that mysterious shift in this primitive man's soul that suddenly made him listen to Vasil'ev and ponder those "cursed questions" after having spent all his life without even suspecting that people can be disturbed by ideas; moreover, why did it have to happen to a man not equipped--mentally, psychologically--to deal with them? What sense does it make for "fate" to crush a man so cruelly just by bringing him into a higher spiritual world?

In a similar awakening-story of the pimp Fred in *Pilgrims* the evangelist Roger is Fred's spiritual mentor, yet he only helps hap-

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pen that which is ready to happen anyway. You cannot change a man, he says, you can only help him change himself. In Fred's story too, fate, or chance, which ever way we want to call it, plays an equally cruel joke: unlike Fedorčenko, Fred is strong enough psychologically to face the new reality his new self presents; he is crushed, accidentally, just when he starts his "vita nuova." What are the inner springs of action, lost in obscurity, what will, Higher Will, if you wish, asks Gazdanov, brings them in motion and why does it act in such a way that it is so hopelessly incomprehensible to us--these are some of the questions Gazdanov's stories of metamorphosis raise and we shall see later, when we discuss Gazdanov's epistemology, that one of his most disillusioning, yet most common, answers is that we are simply not meant to raise such questions and not equipped with an intellectual-spiritual apparatus to comprehend the higher realities the world, when seen in this light, presents. Everything, including man's psyche, is in constant motion, neither the source, nor the destination of which is known--or knowable. Thus, on the human level life does not make sense: it is incomprehensible why Fedorčenko's mind had to be awakened only to be led to insanity and suicide; not even the most ingenious philosophical or religious systems can explain why Fred had to die on the threshold of a new existence.

A simple enumeration is convincing enough to show the overwhelming presence of the theme of metamorphosis in Gazdanov's works. His "souls in motion" appear in the first short stories, and already in the second year of his literary life Gazdanov has a short story ("The Transformation") entirely devoted to the theme. From the next story ("Martyn Raskolinos") on there is hardly a work where the theme does not appear, at least as a secondary one. But usually it is the primary one: in "Maître Rueil," in "The Great Musician," in "The Disappearance of Ricardi," in "Happiness," in "The Liberation," in "The Death of Monsieur Bernard," in "Recollection," in "Hannah," in "Princess Mary," in "The Beggar," in "Ivanov's Letters" the psychological-spiritual transformation of characters is the very focus of the work. Perhaps in a somewhat less subtle way, the novels are more explicit: in *An Evening with Claire*

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the transformation of the protagonist occurs in relation to, among other things, the memory as well as the actual personality, of the heroine. In *The Flight* Lola, the aging actress, as well as, in other respects, some of the major characters, undergo substantial change. In *Night Roads* besides the story of Fedorčenko there are a number of other "episodic" metamorphoses; in this novel, according to the nature of its subject matter, Gazdanov is concerned more with the effects of the "social laboratory," metamorphoses brought about, or forced upon people, by social "movements" (yet another manifestation of the "stream of forms"). In *Pilgrims*, in accordance with the nature of a *roman à thèse*, every one of the characters, Robert and Janine, Fred, Lazarus and Gérard, Senator Simon and his daughter, is a "pilgrim" who is to make his inward pilgrimage from his initial spiritual state to another, to fulfill his or her destiny, whatever that is. In *The Awakening*, also a thesis novel but on the scale and in the tone of chamber music, metamorphosis of character is tied, as in some of the short stories, to disease. Finally, in *Evelyne and Her Friends* not only do all the major characters, Evelyne and her friends, undergo significant changes (the stories of which are, on the level of plot, what the book is about), but the novel as a whole is also about "metamorphosis in art," about the transformation of an artistic idea into the reality of a work of art and a *tour de force* depiction of the *gradual* incarnation--or embodiment ("voploščenie") or "realization"--of the heroine from her initial "nedovoploščennost'," being at the same time both an enticing structural achievement and a reflection of the narrator's, her lover's and creator's,psychological perspective. Evelyne emerges as a full, and interesting, human being only toward the end of the novel when both she and the narrator begin to realize their love to each other; until this she is in the background of the novel's psychological texture, even though her central role in this "union of friends" is never left unclear. Before their love they did not exist such as they are now: she was not "incarnated," or better, "realized" to the extent and in the way she is now made to be by their love. The gradual process of her self-realization, both "objectively" in her character, and in

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the psychological perspective of the narrator, her future lover, *and* in the perspective of the narrator-writer who would one day write a novel on her "voploščenie" (which is the novel we are reading) and for whom it is an artistic problem--these are the three levels intertwined in Gazdanov's last completed novel.

An important sub-motif within the theme of metamorphosis is the theme of "self-realization" or search for identity. Often the transformation we are to witness in Gazdanov's novels takes place in the direction toward one's real self; people grope towards their real destiny enclosed in their characters. But, one of life's curious ploys, one often does not know who he is and what his genuine character is like; for most people this is the most important, and most difficult, pilgrimage of their life: the search for identity which is nothing but finding one's real self. "Who am I?" ask many of Gazdanov's heroes and again they are not satisfied with superficial answers. Social determinism, psychological inheritance may explain some immediate cause-and-effect relationships, but they do not explain themselves. If I am like this and my father was like this, so what--the real question is why do people have to be like this? If I am a poor emigre driving a taxi after having been a general or a lawyer or a university professor this may explain certain changes in my attitudes, behavior or opinions--but it does not explain why just those changes occured in me and not others, nor does it explain the phenomenon of exile itself.

Many of Gazdanov's characters dream of the "beautiful life" when one lived in harmony with one's *dharma*, to use the Hindu term which expresses the idea better than any word we know in the Western languages, when one's existence, the inner, psychological as well as the outer, social, was in complete correspondence with one's natural desires and abilities. In "Hannah" there is an episodic character, an elderly clerk in a small Russian provincial town who finally lives his *real* life when he realizes the dream of his life, the staging of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In "Salome's Destiny" the heroine's destiny was just this, the "desire not to accept what happened but create (at least mentally or imaginatively) that which should have happened" (p. 91). Life as is *versus* as it should be

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is a motif that colors the story of nearly every Gazdanov-character, from his autobiographical ego-form narrators to his purely fictional characters. In "Hannah" the narrator speaks about "the unbearable difference between life that I always imagined for myself and the life I had to live in reality" (p. 85). Two of Gazdanov's best short stories, "Ivanov's Letters" and "The Beggar," center on this theme.

Most of Gazdanov's characters live several lives, simultaneously or successively, and are burdened by what they call the "multiplicity of life," that is, the state in which the self is before it finds itself. In *Pilgrims* Robert repeats the idea in a conversation with Janine (vol. 36, p. 28-29). We are sentenced to our destiny and unable to comprehend--and therefore judge--its "justice." Man, however, is a more or less passionate being, ruled by impulses, instincts and emotions as well as reason, who may be able to quietly conclude in one of his unperturbed moments that evil is necessary and even "good" insofar as it enables us to perceive its opposite, yet such an attitude is hard to maintain, particularly for people not bent on Stoicism and too sensitive to bear life's blows and witness life's injustices and cruelties dispassionately. "He is too sensitive, il n'a pas la peau assez dure, Volodja used to say, in order to endure without harm that monstrous absurdity, abomination and idiocy in which ordinary human life is spent. For us it's nothing but he can't." Although this refers to Aleksandr Aleksandrovič, the artist-genius in *The History of a Journey* (p. 119) it is fully applicable to the author himself whose characterization (through Volodja) of ordinary human life is very typical. Volodja-Gazdanov himself constantly transforms *this* reality to make it bearable: "From the earliest times he has had the habit to correct recollections and to attempt to recreate not what happened but what should have happened in order to make every event correspond somehow to the rest of his system of ideas" (p. 21). Such a "corrective" to memory, or past reality, gives a truer image of the internal psychological reality of the observer (the usual narrator-hero of Gazdanov's novels) than the merely faithful reproduction of actual events or circumstances (an impossibility anyway,

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as the young Tolstoj, for example, found out as soon as he tried it in his first fragment) and is fully acceptable in art where imagination can produce or reproduce a reality that is truer--because higher--than the one actually experienced (thousands of people experienced the reality of Sebastopol, yet only one of them could produce the higher, universal reality of Tolstoj's stories). It is a tragic psychological tendency, however, in "real life" where what happened cannot be changed retroactively and therefore it usually results in a split personality, precisely what several of Gazdanov's narrator-heroes (in *The Specter of Alexander Wolf*, in *Buddha's Return*) suffer from and which we have noted in the biography of the writer himself. What saved then Gazdanov the person was Gazdanov the writer who transformed in his art the unbearable reality of his life, his times and his society, not into a falsified sweet picture or a Philistine dream of a beautiful life, but into a metaphysical cry which by its intensity and sincerity reaches to the deepest layers of human psyche and which by the power of its expression leaves us profoundly touched and satisfied, realizing thus, in its *artistic* way, the "beautiful life," life as it should be and as it only in art is.

4. THE PRIMACY OF THE EMOTIONAL

Besides his approach to the "movements of the soul," to their presentation and interpretation, explicit statements in the fiction also clearly attest to Gazdanov's deeply-seated conviction about the primacy of emotional life over the intellectual or the social. The emotional life as understood here includes, however, those "infra-emotional" (or "sub-emotional") elements that are more usually referred to as instinct and are considered to be part of man's sensory-sensual life, such as involuntary physiological processes that are taken for granted (and seldom into consideration) yet which may, and often do, so goes the Gazdanovian argument, influence, if not determine, emotion, idea or action to a much greater extent than generally recognized. "In me has already started that emotional and physical movement, against which the external

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circumstances of my life were powerless," says the narrator of *The Specter of Alexander Wolf* (vol. 16, p. 85) when he begins to feel the first stirrings of his love to Elena Nikolaevna (Helen Armstrong).

It might be charged that Gazdanov reduces our world to a subhuman level by tracing back all the phenomena of emotional, intellectual, cultural life to biological instincts and physiological sensations. While this is true if we put the stress in Cazdanov's analysis on "tracing back" it is evidently not true if we mean that his perspective does not include the human (or even the super-human: chance, fate or Higher Will). The point of view is downwards, across all these levels, to the material foundations; therefore it is appropriate to speak about "tracing back," but not about "limiting or reducing to." This world of "dark and blind movement," of "visual and auditory impressions," "of unconscious muscular attraction," "of a silent melody of the skin and the muscles," of "sensual reactions," of a "silent muscular movement," this world cannot be "explained": the world of abstract notions does not reach down here, we do not know why we take a liking towards a certain person or object or why we feel an "instinctive" dislike towards another; we do not know why--or how it is possible that--we can have a vague, but sure, presentiment of something to happen, why "feelings can precede events" ("čuvstva inogda opereźajut sobytija") as we read in *Evelyne and Her Friends* (vol. 105, p. 72), how the physical touch between the narrator of *The Specter of Alexander Wolf* and Elena Nikolaevna made them know for certain that they would belong to each other. In *Pilgrims* the inward journey of Robert is from an intellectual, cultured life without such firm emotional (as defined at the beginning of this section) foundation towards a life which, while including both, offers an unsuspected spiritual freedom because the self, having found itself, is set free: the super-structure of "civilization" is relegated to the second plane which, from the perspective of the foundations, is truly its proper place.

The most important thing, for Robert, as well as everybody else, is to find that life of intense, deeply-felt, genuine "emotional" experiences which corresponds to the natural inclinations and pre-

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dispositions of the given person. As long as this is wanting, the intellectual man will be a "dry," emotionally under-developed person, with various forms and degrees of psychic problems that come from a constant subconscious feeling of psychological insufficiency. There will be a need in such a person for saving ideologies, an immersion in all kinds of action (as if action could substitute anything), a desperate search for compensation in any form for one always knows, consciously or unconsciously, whether one had "the most important thing."

Opinions, ideas, ideologies cannot, even should not, be permanent; they become so only when they rule over a person and not the person rules over them. Platon, the remarkable philosopher-tramp in *Night Roads* has such a "movable" mind and is quite conscious about it. Similarly, in *Evelyne and Her Friends*, Evelyne's interest in metempsychosis, Pythagoras and Plato is merely "an accidental reflection of the very same feelings and sensations that made her open her cabaret" (vol. 95, p. 49), and both can be clearly seen as the result of her love affair with a certain Kotik: both her action (the opening of a cabaret) and her latest intellectual interests are traced back to their emotional sources. The sphere of social action, of social ideologies is also seen in the light of the sentiments and emotional needs that give rise to them. In the short story "Ivanov's Letters" Ivanov interprets even time (both as psychological duration and as cultural era) and space (as differentiating factor) as subjective sensations, that is to say, through his character, Gazdanov denies the objective existence of these "contingent and inconstant notions" (of time and space) and admits only sensations directed toward memory, or imagination and other forms of psychic life.

5. THE "IMPERCEPTIBLE PSYCHOLOGICAL SHELL"

"...for you there exists only the sensuous beauty of the world."
(*The History of a Journey*)

How then does Gazdanov describe those "movements of our emotions"

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that are for him more important than all the achievements of human reason? Moreover, what exactly are these movements and where and how does he perceive them? At first, as a reminder, a short recapitulation: "...for me the sensuous world was not less attractive than the contemplative...," says the young and physically very healthy narrator in *Buddha's Return*, another of Gazdanov's lyrical I's, to Ščerbakov who feels the call of a Buddhist nirvana, of "an escape from our mortal earthly shell," "from this essentially despicable physical substance" (vol. 23, p. 15). Admittedly, here the emphasis is on the contrast between the two characters representing two states of mind, yet the formulation is indicative; to repeat once again, we have here not an opposition between the sensuous and the contemplative attitudes, nor is one denied or belittled in favor of the other. Gazdanov is a "contemplative": but one whose sight is directed from up downwards to the physical-biological foundations of all phenomena visible to the human mind.

What, and where, are then those events in man's inner life, in what he likes to call "an imperceptible psychological shell" ("oboločka")? Primarily, they are of course all the things that are psychologically meaningful to the senses in one way or another. Let us have a closer look at how Gazdanov treats some of these traditional psychological motifs: intonation, gestures, bodily movements, the expression of the eyes and the lips, the sensuous appeal of hair, voice, smell, touch, flavor, the working of memory to name just a few.

For intonation the classical example would certainly be the short story "Happiness" which is based on it in more than one sense. Already at the beginning of the story we are presented with a subtle scene where intonation is the "main hero" and this is to prepare the reader for its increasing role later on. When Madeleine, his future step-mother, is introduced to André, Henri Dorin's son, at an unexpected moment--he enters his father's room when she is embracing and kissing him--she continues in the intonation she has just used in talking to the father but, quickly noticing the mistake, she immediately changes her voice... Later on, when human voice and sounds in general become particularly important for Henri Dorin who has

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lost his eyesight as they are for him the chief medium of communication with the outside world, it is again Madeleine's intonation that will make the blind Henri "see" when he overhears by accident his wife's conversation with a guest to whom she speaks--although *what* she says is totally harmless--in the intonation she had only in moments of physical closeness with her husband; and so this is how he discovers, "sees now that he is blind," his wife's infidelity. In *The Specter of Alexander Wolf* intonations and gestures are crucial in the psychological communication of the emerging feeling of love between the narrator and Elena Nikolaevna. "Zvukovaja ulybka," a "smile of sound," is a very typical Gazdanovian way of synaesthetic presentation of sensuous phenomena. A momentary intonation, a gentle touch of the skin, an inappropriate gesture at the wrong moment, a too slow or too imprecise answer, or anything, as we read in "Salome's Destiny" (p. 90) can inspire or ruin the establishment of a rapport, can be the start for a lifelong association or a lifelong unhappiness. In *The Specter of Alexander Wolf* "I," the narrator-Gazdanov, feels that Elena Nikolaeva has reached the point where she is ready to open up and thereby to give herself up to him, psychologically, not merely sexually, speaking. Yet he also knows that this readiness is a very fleeting feeling that may be ruined by the smallest thing and may never return again. In a preceding passage we see that he learned about her trust first from a gesture that said more than any words could.

Asynchronism among different forms of psychological reaction is a frequently observed phenomenon in Gazdanov's fiction as we shall see later. Touch, another form of bodily gesture, can be the source, the "first cause," of a sequence of events that can determine one's whole subsequent life, or even lead to death in what would usually be considered as an extreme case, yet, and this is Gazdanov's contention here, such extreme cases are much more frequent than we normally think. A case in point is the fate that befalls the characters in "The Great Musician," a fate that is traced back to the inexplicable attraction Romual'd's touch held for Elena Vladimirovna, the heroine of this story. The synaesthetic connection between smell and memory is often exploited but it would be gratuitous, it

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seems, to speak of Proust, not only because it occurs already in the early fiction written before Gazdanov read Proust, but mainly because this connection was known well enough before the French writer made it such an important motif in his works. Olfactory sensations are mentioned most often as the immediate cause for recollection, and memory being one of the fundamental organizing principles in Gazdanov's fiction, they occur frequently. One example should, perhaps, be mentioned, the extreme case, possibly meant, at least partly, as a parody, of Vasilij Nikolaevič in "Recollection" whose first experience of anamnesis, of recollecting one of his previous lives, is provoked by the strong smell of beans cooked for dinner by his wife.

Gastronomic pleasures were not unknown to our writer either, pointing, once again, to that side of his personality which was so full of vitality, love of life and a sensitivity to all earthly pleasures. We have sensuous descriptions of meals or picnics in several of the novels (*The History of a Journey*, *The Specter of Alexander Wolf*, *Evelyne and Her Friends*) as well as in some of the short stories. Space, particularly the vast expanses of Russia that survive in the memory of many of his characters, water in different forms, as rain, as river, as sea, recur, in symbolic functions (water-death, for example), as metaphors for realities of another, usually psychological, order.

Merežkovskij claimed that Tolstoj was the first man to notice that the human voice can smile (Ralph E. Matlaw, ed., *Tolstoj: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1967, p. 61). An astonishing claim (since it implies that all humanity before him was insensitive enough not to observe such a relatively obvious fact--obvious, as Merežkovskij himself says, if we remember that other sentiments, anger, joy, irony, love, were all well known to be expressed by the human voice) but, be that as it may, all we have to establish here is that for Gazdanov the voice is one of the most important features to characterize a person by and can even be expanded to be the carrier of a person's main characteristic feature.

On the whole, Russian literature has been traditionally rather

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prudish concerning the sphere of man's sexual life. While Gazdanov does *not* represent a major departure from this tradition, nevertheless in the choice of subject matter occasionally and in the treatment of physical attraction more regularly, he can be said to be "daring," or relatively outspoken within the Russian cultural context of the first half of the twentieth century. In the form of subject matter this occurs only in the early fiction, in "Stories about Free Time," for example, where we have an "orgy" and the theme of lesbianism. As to physical attraction and the resultant sexual or sex-related physical actions, this being an important part of Gazdanov's and his heroes' sensuality, it plays a role in the life of his characters and the writer's depiction of such acts is often unusually explicit, from early stories such as "Hawaiian Guitars" on to his last novels. Occasionally this leads to the appearance of censorship, as for example in the case of *The Specter of Alexander Wolf*, where the English translation reproduces sentences (p. 91 in the American edition) that are in the manuscript (second redaction, p. 40), yet deleted in the original, and only, publication of the Russian text in *Novyj žurnal*. As an example, not so much of an explicit depiction of a sexual scene--which it is not except perhaps by Victorian standards--but rather of a sexual scene that is described delicately and tastefully, as all of them are in his fiction, and with his usual emphasis on psychological minutiae we shall analyse a short passage from *The History of a Journey* (p. 108-109).

The first paragraph of this passage is the beginning of a new sub-section in the novel (there are no chapters) and its primary function is to set the scene. We are in Nikolaj's house where Volodja is now staying. Nikolaj and wife, Virginia are in the theatre. It is the evening, there is "no one" in the house: their young daughter is asleep, only the maid is still up. Volodja tries to continue working on his novel but it is not going; although no reasons are given the mere fact of an unrest in him subliminally prepares the reader for what is to come and can as well be interpreted retrospectively as a certain state of mind, an unrest caused by unconscious sexual desire. Not even the deep silence can help,

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not even the sounds made by the piano are inspiring now; there is in him only a presentiment of something coming, "čto den' grjaduščij mne gotovit?" or rather, of something that must come: the unconscious knowledge that the desire will have to be satisfied. And when through the door he sees the young maid come out of the bathroom, all fresh and naked under the gown, his unconscious is already in charge of his actions. With a *changed* voice (even though he did not say a word before; changed in comparison to his emotionally indifferent voice) he strikes up a conversation of which the only function is to facilitate the psychological acceptance of Volodja's sexual invitation.

The next sentence is the first explicit allusion to her body, its desirability, as seen by Volodja, in concrete, sensuous details: her white flesh at her neck, her arms, her naked legs. The following question and answer is an automatic "must," psychologically necessary small talk imposed by centuries of civilization ("It's you, Germaine? What are you doing?"): we cannot give or take a sexual offer without preparation, introduction. Then comes the decisive moment: "come in for a moment," says Volodja (again in a voice that he himself cannot recognize, it is so distorted by the tension he is under), understanding, Gazdanov adds, that he cannot now say or do anything else. Thus the moment is decisive both for him and by him. "For a moment," has to be added; it is the false modifier that we know is not true, yet that makes it easier for us to accept. If the necessity of psychological introduction can perhaps be said to be an achievement of civilization (although it might be argued that it is part of human, and even animal nature), the necessity of such "false modifiers" would certainly represent the negative side of civilization--or of human nature--its hypocrisy and perversion. The fear that appears in Germaine's eyes may be genuine but she also happens to be receptive to Volodja's approach and this produces a "double look" in her eyes. This *may* be wishful thinking but with a sensitive being like Volodja it is not likely to be for he would immediately notice the *lack* of subconscious submission in Germaine, the lack of that other look, behind the first, apparent one in which case the events would have

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to take another turn. All this he *managed* to think over ("uspel on podumat'")--an indication that what we have here described takes place in a very short time. Now comes a moment of silence, before Germaine could answer or before Volodja starts again, as it actually happens, a moment of silence indirectly "transmitted" by the eight and a half lines of text between the two sentences actually pronounced in the conversation.

The observation of a typical physiological reaction, another concrete sensuous detail ("his lips dried up; he then licked them with his tongue"), transfers the physical reality of the scene through the medium of language to the reader and the double look of Germaine is mentioned again to reinforce the impression that it is real and not imaginary, at least for Volodja from whose viewpoint the scene (as well as the whole novel) is written. Finally Volodja repeats his invitation, with a "false" appeal to her courage ("n'ayez pas peur") and an equally "false" but "light" modifier at the end ("voyons") intended to make the whole thing appear a light matter not much to be concerned about. Instinct wins out; he touches her arm *above the elbow* (a sensuous detail) and "it" becomes inevitable; the moment is felt to be the point of no return even though *they both* knew it before. Both of them--this is the subtle indication that the double look in Germaine's eyes was not only in Volodja's eyes... Sex is now inevitable and everything suddenly becomes irrelevant; the immense psychological distance between any two people is overcome and all social conditioning is forgotten. After a gentle touch of the arm the next step--an enormous jump--is Volodja's raising her in his arms and equally suddenly the complete nudity of her body becomes psychologically acceptable. The efforts of "false" civilization are impotent, the weak protest of her twisting body, just as her first words, whispered with *inexpressive* (that is, false, pretended) horror have--they both know this--no importance. The gown hanging down from Germaine's uncovered body ("kapot opustilsja i povis") can also be seen as another subliminal suggestion of her momentary uncertainty and her ensuing abandon.

We have dwelled longer on the Germaine-passage not because of its

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theme which, we repeat, is a minor one in Gazdanov's works, but because it provided us with an opportunity to have a closer look at Gazdanov's manner of presentation of his subtle, yet striking observations upon the human psyche. Not only does he notice things that are often left unperceived by less inquisitive--and less "empathic"--eyes and minds but he formulates his observations in a succinct and expressive way, with the convincingness of a musical melody that serves as the author's "sentimental and irrefutable commentary." In an early short story ("Martyn Raskolinos," p. 7) he describes prostitutes carrying their furs and breasts along the street in front of the men "as if they condensed, by gathering in themselves, muddled clouds of feelings gone astray that were sprawling on the ground like too heavy gases" ("oni, kazalos', sobirali v sebe, oni sguščali te mutnye oblaka zabludivšixsja čuvstv, kotorye stelilis' po polu, kak sliškom tjaželye gazy"). In another striking observation ("Hannah," p. 90) he describes the facial expression, well known yet so difficult to depict, of people who witness death and, in this case, the psychological situation which is expressed on their faces is further complicated because the dead man is not known personally to anyone in the story (appearing, with his red Bugatti, in this one scene only); because his death (a collision with a huge truck) is entirely accidental, thus reminding all the witnesses how much their own life is subject to blind fate; and finally because just before the accident happens the young driver speeds by the same people who will watch his dead body a few seconds later and splashes them with dirty street water. The grimace-like expression, mixing compassion and suffering with bewilderment is the same on every face; the "collective unconscious," one might say, of which this is an expression, is the same in all of us.

Asynchronism between reactions of the different organs, mentioned above, is frequently noted in Gazdanov. The eyes have not yet assumed the appropriate expression when the body is already "saying it." In *Buddha's Return* it is the eyes that are quicker and memory will catch on a few seconds later (vol. 23, p. 83). A somewhat different "microscopic" phenomenon occurs in "Martyn Raskolinos" where the hero, under great tension, forgets what he

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wanted to say, but then *immediately* remembers it; thus it is only a split second that he does not remember yet Gazdanov not only knows this phenomenon but can use it in circumstances where it is justified and highly expressive of the character's state of mind.

So far, our examples may have suggested an entirely subjective, "from inside to outside" approach to inner life. While this seems to be largely true, interaction, interdependence is not at all denied by Gazdanov and the modifications of one's psychological shell ("oboločka") under the influence of the environment are also frequently observed under Gazdanov's microscope. "Hannah" gives us interesting examples of the involuntary changes in modalities, contexts, perspectives and backgrounds against which the same psychological phenomena acquire a new tonality. In *Buddha's Return* (vol. 23, p. 79) the narrator changes so much that when he returns to the Latin Quarter in Paris where he used to live he only has the visual memories of another person as it were while their emotional meaning is lost for him together with that part of his life and personality of his "shell," which had those emotional attachments. At the end (p. 406) of "The Great Musician," just before the climax of the story--a murder, the inevitability of which is already felt by all the characters--the inappropriateness of words before imminent action is expressed in a striking image of time in space. The feeling itself is well known; yet it is seldom analyzed by consciousness to understand that the reason for our feeling is that we unconsciously know that the action cannot be averted any more, that the completion of event is--must be--assumed, and therefore we are really, as it were, "on the other side of the event" and no words can "retroactively" change that which psychologically--though not actually--has already happened. In the same story Gazdanov notices the curious transition in the process of thinking from rationality to ideas ruled by emotion as expressed by changes on the face (vol. 5/6, p. 402).

The process of "doubling," of splitting personality and of becoming mad, or rather, almost mad is analyzed by Gazdanov in "The Third Life" (p. 208) in striking detail, reminiscent of the great masters of nineteenth century Russian literature. Finally, note

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should be made of Gazdanov's presentation of child and adolescent psychology, particularly in novels like *An Evening with Claire* or *The Flight* or *The Specter of Alexander Wolf* or in short stories like "Happiness" and "The Mistake," which is all the more remarkable since Gazdanov had no children and therefore had to rely on recollections of his own childhood and adolescence as well as on his creative intuition and empathy.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE IMPOTENCE OF THE MIND AND THE TERROR OF ARZAMAS

1. THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF UNDERSTANDING

We have seen in the preceding chapter that in Gazdanov's hierarchy of values the primacy of the emotional over the intellectual is unquestionable. Introspection takes him, and the reader with him, to the biological foundations of man but it is only *after* exploring the mind, after exploring man's intellectual and spiritual life, after finding it not empowered to answer the very questions it is capable of asking that we "descend" to instincts, impulses, inclinations and predispositions, fleeting emotions and raging passions. It remains now for us to examine the conclusions Gazdanov drew from his examination of the mind and its possibilities (or impossibilities).

Immediately following the scene with Germaine that we described in some detail above, Volodja remembers his childhood and there comes then in his meditations a shift to see memories as "belated understanding" or else as revealing the impossibility of understanding. "No, we have to give up once and for all the illusion to understand and to bring into some kind of order" (p. 110-111) all the things of life that are incompatible and follow each other in an entirely improbable way; man's vision, Gazdanov argues, is always too narrow and restricted, it is unable to discern any meaningful pattern in the apparently irrational sequence of events that constitute our life. Life is greater than reason, greater than the mind, but, paradoxically and tragically, the mind knows it; that is, it knows something that is beyond it. Hence all the insecurity, all the uncertainty, all the relativism, all the insufficiency inherent in all mental reflection: "I also knew and felt all the im-

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permanence ("xrupkost'") of the so-called positive notions...in the distressing domain of understanding the ultimate truths," says the narrator-hero in *The Specter of Alexander Wolf* (vol. 18, p. 49). Already in "The Transformation" (1928) we meet with the idea that may explain Gazdanov's anti-intellectual stance psychologically. "And as I have not learned anything new ever since I remember my-self the people and the things I encounter appear to me familiar" (p. 32) we read in this stroy; there is "nothing new under the sun" for this character, and, by legitimate extension, for Gazdanov; he has experienced it all, not actually, but imaginatively, by his very large "inborn experience," by a very highly developed sense to see and understand "everybody and everything." This is what makes for psychological depth, more than actual experience. It may have been necessary for Tolstoj, Gazdanov wrote later, to be at Sebastopol, yet Sebastopol did not turn all the soldiers who were there into writers of genius. But more than that: it was his imaginative ex-perience that made it possible for him to know what it was like to be a pregnant woman, to take a rather obvious example. It is in this sense that all kinds of people and all the absurdities of life are familiar to Gazdanov--and this is of paramount importance for the correct perception of his themes and the inner level of his fiction.

Because so much is familiar and so much is obvious there remains little interest in him for anything except for the subtlest pheno-mena and except for their final, ultimate meaning. "It began to seem to me that I have lived for an infinitely long time, that I know everything that I was destined to know and that in everything that takes my attention I find something that is already familiar to me" ("Hannah," p. 78). Several points invite discussion in this cru-cial passage. The sensation for having lived for an infinitely long time is a temporal metaphor for reaching to the foundations of his interior world. It means that the whole scope of his personal-ity, all his potential imaginative experience is in sight, more or less clearly, to his consciousness or, in other words, that we are in the presence of a very advanced state of "self-realization." "I know everything I was destined to know" points, first of all, to

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the clear awareness of the organically given limits of cognition for each individual, and secondly, to an awareness of having reache these limits, or the highest state possible. There is nothing more to know; the biologically determined possibilities are exhausted, the mind (and the genes, to use the current jargon), have done everything they had the power to do to know the world. In Gazdanov's works we have, therefore, if not an objective view of the "world as such," a total picture of it as it appears to (and in) a single individual's mind. The stress is on "total" for for a man's vision of life to be comprehensive he has "to know everything that he is destined to know" and this is something not all writers could say to themselves in all sincerity and honesty (social considerations are besides the point here). Finally, the last words of the passage, "everything is already familiar," bring us back to the idea of anamnesis which means, psychologically speaking, that all that is knowable is what we already have in ourselves, what we already know and can therefore "recollect" ("gather up," as the etymology of the word may indicate) from our innate knowledge and which also means, conversely, that all knowledge is brought into the world by the knower in the form of his given cognitive patterns, psychological inclinations, directions of "interest," etc.; moreover, that this knowledge will always be necessarily incomplete as it will reflect only the individual's interests, that which "takes his attention."

Thus, one might say, Gazdanov is not a writer for "those who can think only with their heads." He may be as much of a philosopher as any serious writer must be, yet his conclusions are not purely intellectual. They demand (and cannot be appreciated without enlisting) the participation of sensory-sentimental cognition and, as is proper to good literature, are expressed in a literary (that is, non-paraphrasable) language, refusing to be fully rationalized, because the reality his vision reflects is, at least partly, beyond and above the reality that can be, and is properly, reflected by reason alone. In this connection it is not irrelevant to note here the complete lack of persuasive intent in Gazdanov's works. This is another reason why his works may appear to some (and they did, as we saw in our survey of their critical reception) as "having nothing

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to say," nothing to *assert*, that is, or even to propagate (be it involuntary as in the case of a sincere following of the *Zeitgeist*--or the fashion). All his works offer is one man's total vision of life--with its inconsistencies not intended to be remedied for the sake of a neat system and at the expense of its truth; with its subjective incompleteness and unavoidable biases, with an implied understanding of its human imperfection, with no desire to mask the inner chaos. "I do not know the meaning of life, I do not know," Uncle Vitalij says in *An Evening with Claire* at the end of a poignant conversation with Nikolaj-Gazdanov who at the age of sixteen is about to leave for the front, having decided to fight in the Civil War. "No, there is no salvation, there is no escape from death," he says, and more than thirty years later his words are echoed in one of Gazdanov's last short stories, "From the Writer's Sketchbook" (p. 49-50) by a Russian tramp-philosopher transposed to France, yet very Russian in spirit.

Human nature itself is unknowable. Gazdanov claims to have witnessed so many unexpected and unbelievable transformations, so many improbable turns of fate that he feels compelled to conclude that even a tentative meaning we can perhaps assign to an individual life is only possible after that life has ended, after death closed the door for further surprises. The reality of the present, an elusive flux, cannot be comprehended by essentially static ideas. "Laws follow reality," and not vice versa; they linger on in our minds supposedly reflecting reality long after reality has changed. Gazdanov ends an important passage in *Evelyne and Her Friends* (vol. 99, p. 44-45) by a reversal of Descartes' famous dictum "cogito ergo sum" into "sum ergo cogito," summing up thereby his nearly life-long polemic with the author of "the most intelligent way to be unintelligent," the man who may have done for France, *mutatis mutandis*, what the "Šestidesjatniki" (the radical intelligentsia of the 1860's) did for Russia. For Gazdanov "I think" and "the way I think" is determined by "how" and "how much I am"; the reverse is not denied, it only comes next. Being is first but not in the Marxist sense. Social determinism, reduced to its proper dimensions, comes in Gazdanov's hierarchy much later. Being is first

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in Gazdanov in the sense it is in some of the Oriental religions that teach us to re-enter the center of our being, to "realize pure being," "to be," not to be "something" or to be "somehow." There are numerous esoteric moments in Gazdanov, moments when the narrator-writer feels he is approaching that final illumination which has always escaped him yet which he knows to exist for otherwise he would not be searching for it. Gazdanov seems to have reached the organic limits of his perceptive powers here; whereas his is an undoubted case of anti-intellectualism (but in the sense, and only in the sense, that the intellect was weighed in the balance and found wanting), he might be called an agnostic manqué. The search for the final understanding may be futile, may only be an illusion for him, yet he knows it is possible for some and cannot help envying those. His jealousy is all the greater because his is a tragic path, a "modern" way leading to what we have called "the terror of Arzamas," that particular feeling of anguish and anxiety modern man of the twentieth century feels, having lost this "illusion," having deprived himself of everything above him, having reduced the world to exclusively human, and therefore sub-human dimensions.

On the other hand, however, Gazdanov is very outspoken in his criticism of people who "know," who are comfortably convinced in their opinions and naively sure about their ideas, who never have any doubts. We have already seen Gazdanov's sardonic attitude above, in the case of the French professor at the Sorbonne preaching about the "flambeau de la vérité" and the "feu sacré de la Révolution" from the security of his warm study, not knowing what war, suffering and death were, yet confident about the truth of his ideas. From early on Gazdanov was very sharp in his words when it came to attacking or ridiculing what Montaigne called "doctoral ignorance"; later his attitude softened somewhat, as we can see in *The Awakening* where Pierre, the French protagonist who shares many of Gazdanov's feelings, is bewildered by life's complexity and the ability of some to orient themselves in it with apparent ease.

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2. THE "TERROR OF ARZAMAS"

According to the testimony of people who knew Gazdanov well there was no substantial change in him in the beginning of the 1950's as far as his spiritual outlook was concerned. The apparently contradictory evidence of his two thesis novels of the period could be therefore misleading: there is no change, only a shift of emphasis. *Pilgrims*, for example, can still be seen as an allegory on the omnipotence of chance, yet this novel as well as *The Awakening* have a much less bleak, considerably more "optimistic" ring to them because of the new emphasis on the usefulness and necessity of doing something ("helping others") *in spite of everything*, even if we cannot see what sense it all makes. Earlier, however, this aspect appears completely lacking from Gazdanov's fiction. It is difficult to imagine a more pessimistic, more disillusioned writer: despair and hopelessness seem to be in his blood, a "biological attitude," not an intellectual pose assumed but not fully shared.

Gazdanov's path is the opposite of the more usual one. The young man with a "burnt-out soul" after his Civil War and exile experiences proclaims the futility of all efforts, the meaninglessness of all existence and writes his fiction in this spirit until the 1950's by which time he is well into middle age. In "Stories About Free Time" (1927) he begins and ends the last section with these words: "I know: it only remains--a sceptical and powerful gesture--to shrug one's shoulders deprived of their wings." In "The Transformation" the heroine's existence is described as having a "happy meaninglessness." In "Martyn Raskolinos" the protagonist "has known well for a long time there is nothing significant on earth and that joys and sorrows are equally worthless" (p. 21). "Maître Rueil" is about the "sad meaninglessness of journeys," journey having in the context of the story the full meaning of this symbol as described above. Rueil, a French secret agent, a man of action, suddenly realizes that "everything is useless and senseless" and is surprised that others "do not understand the simple and obvious idea that political matters and the temptation of danger are empty and silly things" (p. 74). We have seen in *An Evening with*

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Claire that already the very young Gazdanov felt "too strongly the imperfection and impermanence" of everything surrounding him. "It is a shame," Gazdanov says in *The History of a Journey*, "that in essence we are slaves to the coarsest and most imperfect things" and describes the conditions in which an average human life is lived as "monstrous absurdity, abomination and idiocy" (p. 117, 119). The narrator of "Bombay" feels a deadly ennui and the theme of suicide is an important minor theme in *Night Roads*.

In the same novel Platon, the philosopher-tramp thinks drinking is the only way to endure it all. Often after listening to music comes that mental condition which Gazdanov calls, in "The Great Musician," the "condition of ultimate ideas" ("sostojanie poslednix myslej"). "It's all clear...everything is illusory and deceptive; what I know is sad and not worth knowing--and why should I assume that in all the rest that I do not know and probably will never know there are still some new possibilities?" (vol. 5/6, p. 396). The question of all questions is formulated with expressive power in *The History of a Journey* (p. 125): "What mysterious thing, what terrible and incomprehensible power permeates the seas and the rivers and pulls the oaks and pines out of the earth? Where is the beginning and where is the meaning of this irreversible movement, of the air filled with anguish and of this dull pressure inside, just below the heart?" Man is only a "brittle material shell in which is embodied part of this mysterious aggregate of movements" which is life ("xrupkaja mater'jal'naja oboločka, v kotoroj voploščena čast' ètoj tainstvennoj sovokupnosti dviženij," *Buddha's Return*, vol. 23, p. 16).

Where does it come from, where is it heading? Who are we and why are we here? What is that incomprehensible terrible power that causes all things to live and move, all this motion of atoms, of the soul, of the planets? If one has the "fierce and sad courage that makes one live with open eyes" ("svirepoe i pečal'noe mužestvo, kotoroe zastavljaet čeloveka žit' s otkrytymi glazami," *The Specter of Alexander Wolf*, vol. 18, p. 41), if these questions penetrate into one's being beyond the intellect, if they become part of one's sensation of total being, one is faced with the "ter-

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ror of Arzamas." We have named this condition after Lev Tolstoj's experiences in Arzamas the literary outcome of which is his "The Diary of a Madman." This condition, analysed in detail by L. Šestov in his *In Job's Balances*, is that of man facing death and the resultant futility of life with open eyes, of man who has lost all faith in anything beyond and is, therefore, "reduced to himself," of which, however, he cannot help feeling the insufficiency. Broadly speaking, it is the spiritual condition, the *Zeitgeist* of the West in the twentieth century; there is "something wrong" with religion, it has lost its appeal and convincingness as nearly everybody admits it yet the spiritual (and psychological) void created by this loss is not replaced by scientism or a humanism that assumes man with all his flaws and frailties to be the self-sufficient goal of the universe.

God, according to Gazdanov, is with man as long as he believes in him and, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, keeps the Covenant: this is the framework in which man's mind and soul are set up. It may have nothing to do with the world as it is in itself ("the objective reality"), outside the human reference; but that really is a humanly quite irrelevant problem. God is a frame of mind, an attitude, a mood, by definition the highest object the intellect could find (or invent) for contemplation; a sentiment, and, it appears, necessarily and inevitably all or any one of these; that is, a constant ingredient of the human psychological make-up. From another angle, this is how it does, or can, exist for man, enter into man; it is never more for him than a psychological or intellectual ("ideal") reality (the reality of an idea)--but what reality is more real, more humanly relevant than that? In fact, what other reality is there? It is on this level that the question again arises: why are some people punished by not being able to "receive" God, to possess the appropriate frame of mind which makes knowledge of God possible? The horror of these people who cannot find God in the world, that is, in *their* world, that is, in themselves, who have to face and confront a void, an emptiness which is all the more empty and terrifying because it is known to be the place of something very fulfilling for others, is the "terror

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of Arzamas." Does it make sense to address a void, the Nothing when we know nobody is listening--this adding to the horror; we are alone here and find our world (i.e., ourselves) forsaken, incomprehensible, everything around us meaningless, purposeless. The answer to Job is then, Gazdanov seems to be saying, that nobody is listening.

Death is the primary source of this metaphysical anguish. Gazdanov's novels and short stories are almost always about death, or dying, or suicide, or murder. Some of his works are studies of a particular aspect of death and its impact on the psyche. In others (in almost all of his novels) murder plays a crucial role. While in *The History of a Journey* it is structurally (but not thematically) only episodic, from *Night Roads* on murder is an essential determinant of both narrative view and narrative structure in all the subsequent novels with the exception of *The Awakening*. But all of Gazdanov's murder stories are of a special kind; they always illustrate an idea that Gazdanov was obsessed by, an idea that directly results from--as well as contributes too--the terror of Arzamas: the idea of senseless, blind chance ruling over life. "The power of chance," Gazdanov says in *Pilgrims*, "is the greatest power in the world. It is subject neither to prediction, nor to definition" (vol. 34, p. 14). A chance event is nearly always the beginning of a series of unexpected happenings that Gazdanov's fictional works are built on. He repeats his definition of chance over and over again, with only very slight variations: "a strange concurrence of circumstances," "an unbelievable concurrence of circumstances," "an unlikely concurrence of chance events." The "blind and merciless mechanics of chance" (*Buddha's Return*, vol. 23, p. 45) and the human destinies it defines are the subject matter particularly of *The Specter of Alexander Wolf* and *Buddha's Return*. Alexander Wolf is a fatalist who believes in predetermination. For him any human life is miraculous in its senselessness if all its events are carefully followed and examined. There is no escape from destiny. The poor Jewish youngster from Poland who dreamt about becoming a tailor did not die on the front, or in the hospital where he was treated for his wounds, or in captivity. He

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lived through all the horrors of war, made it to England, became a tailor and it was after getting his first order that he contracted pneumonia and died. Yet despite all the obsessiveness and inevitability of this idea for Gazdanov he can regain his doubt the moment he remembers that it is, with all its convincingness, only an *idea*, a mental construction and as such is subject, bound to be subject, to doubt and to limitation. Thus in the final analysis Gazdanov does not advance any theory here either. The predominant role of the idea of chance in his fiction reflects its predominance in Gazdanov's view of things yet he knows a view is a view and not what is viewed. Nor should we forget about the "other Gazdanov" whose love of life, optimism and vitality, however suppressed they may have been for most of his creative life, have never completely disappeared. We shall also remember that, in the final analysis, creative work and the enjoyment of others' creative work (of a Rilke, a Michelangelo, a Bergson, to name a few of Gazdanov's favorites) is a kind of victory over chance and death and the spiritual pleasure derived from them is proportionate to the spiritual despair experienced during moments of the "terror of Arzamas."

To conclude, we should also consider the other side of the matter, how Gazdanov deals with positive notions on life, love and happiness. In "Stories About Free Time" "to save people" was pronounced to be a "truly meaningless verb." "There is no salvation," it is repeated several times in the pre-war fiction. Seen strictly from this limited point of view there is a remarkable change that begins already in *The Specter of Alexander Wolf*. "Life is the only genuine value we are destined to know," says the narrator hero of that tale and the following two novels develop into parables on "helping others," on "salvation." Love on the other hand has always been in Gazdanov's fictional universe a pure thing that worked to redeem life, to lessen its meaninglessness. In fact it is about the only positive notion in Gazdanov's pre-war fiction. It is exalted in *The History of a Journey*, in *The Flight*, in short stories like "Hannah" and others. It is, however, quite unrelated to happiness as Gazdanov sees it. For him everything that makes us feel happy, is only, in the final analysis, "illusory and sentimental

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consolation" (*Buddha's Return*, vol. 23, p. 11) for if analysed nothing remains that would truly justify happiness. In the short story "Happiness" Henri Dorin, the man who was born to be happy is seen by his own son as deceiving himself. In "Hannah" we have Gazdanov's confession condensing his view with great precision and full of important suggestions: "I was happy because for a short time someone relieved me of all responsibility for everything I see and for everything I know" (p. 78). This is said under the influence of Hannah's singing; her voice, her art help Gazdanov forget momentarily man's tragic predicament; for a moment he is not "responsible" for the world precisely because the world is the world as he sees it now, under the magic of art; the other world is gone, replaced by this one, where there is no Arzamas, no despair, no chance.

The predetermined structure of human thinking (that of logic, of abstraction) is for Gazdanov one of the most important barriers to happiness. In a dream the narrator of "The Transformation" hears a voice telling him to "discard abstractions and you will understand everything" (p. 30). "Nothing prevents him from being happy except for abstract, and in the end perhaps insubstantial, things" (*The History of a Journey*, p. 137). In *The Specter of Alexander Wolf* (vol. 17, p. 45) the narrator-hero obsessed by his ideas about fate and chance and disillusioned about all positive things in life is told by his lover that the only thing that bars him from happiness is his thoughts. And yet man cannot help thinking; his predicament is to contemplate the spectacle of life and death with his mind and to try to make sense of it. Without intellectual reflection of this spectacle man ceases to be man. The circle is closed; one cannot escape one's destiny; an intellectual, a writer has to face all levels of reality. Ignoring them, let us emphasize once again, is *not* Gazdanov's way, although his tendency to trace man's intellectual life back to its biological-physiological-psychological sources may give that erroneous impression. The mind's life, its search with its victories and defeats, is very much part of the Gazdanovian oeuvre. Gazdanov was, could not help being, an intellectual; but he was not only an intellectual. He

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knew more than the intellect; he knew of worlds *sine materia*, without form and signification, of things incomprehensible and inexpressible, he knew that most events, of the *real life*, take place, as Rilke said, "in a realm which no word has ever entered."

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CHAPTER TWELVE

GAZDANOV ON WRITING

> "...read as little as possible of aesthetic criticism--such things are either partisan views, petrified and grown senseless in their lifeless induration, or they are clever quibblings in which today one view wins and tomorrow the opposite. Works of art are of an infinite loneliness and with nothing so little to be reached as with criticism. Only love can grasp and hold and be just toward them."
> (R. M. Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*)

1. THE NARRATOR AND THE CREATIVE PROCESS

In much the same way as Gazdanov's writings provide us with a rather complete and detailed description of the external and internal events of his life and his characterization of them, we can similarly find there extensive commentaries on the art of writing and even confessions of the writer about his own art, self-characterizations on diverse matters including his own style. These meditations on art are an important feature of Gazdanov's works and we intend to devote this chapter to the study of its various aspects. As we have pointed out earlier, Gazdanov is an essentially lyrical writer; he has one central hero, himself and this character appears in most of his works (although not in all of them) as the *narrator* who tells us the story in the first person. This narrator is usually at the same time the most important *actor* in the action whose story we are primarily interested in and, moreover, he is almost always a *writer* himself. We use the italics

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not only to underline the threefold nature of this central hero but also to suggest its unifying function. The paramount psychological interest is in the narrator's character; the main actions of the plot center around the narrator-hero; and the narrator being a writer adds, besides the opportunity for meditations on the art of literature, a further dimension to the works also in terms of structure or composition in that often it is suggested that what we read is what the narrator-hero-writer wrote or was to write (although in this it is rarely as explicit as Gide's *Les Faux-monnayeurs* and many other works of twentieth-century fiction). The tendency starts very early; already a 1927 short story presents the narrator-hero as a "beginner writer" and it is perhaps most marked in Gazdanov's last completed novel, *Evelyne and Her Friends*, which is not only full of interesting and very characteristic meditations--and will, therefore, be one of our major sources for this chapter--but comes closest to the compositional idea of a novel being "about itself."

To forestall misunderstanding and pointless criticism we have to make it clear again that, much like in another contemporary French writer, Colette, the "I" of the narration in Gazdanov's works is always unmistakably and unquestionably Gazdanov himself (and not a fictional ego--which is precisely what makes him, formally as well as essentially, a "lyrical" writer) whereas the narrative itself can be, and often is, partly or entirely fictional.

His last, unfinished novel included, exactly half of Gazdanov's ten novels are in ego-form and in four of them the narrator-hero is a writer; in *The Specter of Alexander Wolf* and *Buddha's Return* this is more of a "fictional" feature and does not play a very important role whereas in *Night Roads* and *Evelyne and Her Friends* it is crucial in the composition and fully and openly autobiographical in the details. Of course, Volodja, the hero of *The History of a Journey* is Gazdanov the writer too and this novel indeed comes close again to "being written within itself" when, also at its end, we read about the book Volodja was working on and we realize that it is none other than the one we are about to finish reading.

Gazdanov's image of the narrator *qua* writer has two interesting features both supporting and explaining the claim that he is an

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autobiographical-lyrical writer. First, Gazdanov's narrator often feels himself to be a "registering machine," "mašina dlja zapečatlenija proizxodjaščego" ("The Third Life," p. 219), a man who cannot help seeing and feeling everything that surrounds him to the point that this becomes a burden, even a curse, especially when a merciless memory does not allow him relief: he has to know *and* remember everything. We have already seen that Volodja, in *The History of a Journey*, is like this. In *Evelyne and Her Friends* Gazdanov returns to this motif for the last time when Mervil, one of Gazdanov's *alter egos* in the novel notes ironically that the narrator-writer reminds him of a "machine registering all events from which then some kind of archives of recollections would come out" (vol. 98, p. 27). "Archives of recollections"--this ironic self-characterization of his works by Gazdanov is significant in that it clearly implies a view of his fiction as non-inventive in nature. Moreover, and this is his other trait, Gazdanov's narrator-writer is not only a "machine registering everything to recall later," he is in fact often literally a writer of memoirs, but always memoirs of someone else, never himself. From a 1928 short story ("The Transformation") where the narrator writes the memoirs of a certain Mr. Thompson, to *Evelyne and Her Friends* where the narrator-writer teaches the art of writing to Arthur who is commissioned to write the memoirs of a certain M. Langlois the motif recurs several times; yet "memoir" is of course only a metaphor for literature for what is literature if not writing the "memoirs," the life histories of our characters? And when we know human character cannot be invented (it must be "true to life") who can the characters in our fiction be if not reflections or composites of real people we knew, and, first of all, of ourselves?

Gazdanov often wrote about the creative process and we can reconstruct it with fairly high exactitude on the basis of the available information, much of it from the fiction itself. Gazdanov must have been one of those writers who carry their work within themselves for a long time before they "commit" it to paper; he is said to have walked (often at night, almost in a trance) and slept (in a heavy, deep sleep) a great deal when he was writing. Clearly,

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he "wrote" first in his mind, during these interminable walks and day-long sleeps; indirectly this is shown also by his manuscripts: when he sat down and wrote he must have had the text quite ready in his mind for his manuscripts are almost free of revisions--merely two or three corrections per page are not unusual and even though some novels have several versions in manuscript form, on the whole it must be said that he composed his works almost entirely mentally, without written drafts, schemes, or schedules--even though notations of this nature do appear occasionally, mostly in the form of suggestions as to the further development of the plot-line or an aspect of a character, interspersed in the texts, usually on the left-hand side of his notebooks which he normally left empty for corrections and additions.

It appears that newspapers were, as for so many other writers, including his most famous Russian contemporary, Vladimir Nabokov, an important source of material, although in his case mostly for secondary purposes: to fill in details, to add circumstantial background, to increase accuracy or verisimilitude or to bring out the atmosphere of the times or the milieu described (the *couleur locale* of the two worlds where most of his fiction is set: the Russian emigre society in Paris and the Parisian underworld of drunkards, prostitutes, unemployed and others). For his major plots and more important characters he needed no newspapers: in his personal life he had the fortune (or misfortune) to meet more people and experience more than enough for a lifetime of literature. But when he took to a subject matter that was not directly based on his personal experiences he studied his topic carefully and conscientiously: the plot of the novel *The Awakening*, among others, bears witness to this. As to philosophical problems introduced in his works, either in the form of a character's meditations or in the form of conversations, they too are based on extensive reading and research--a fact that has to be stressed because their natural, unpretentious and lucid exposition in a non-discursive narrative mode can have the deceptive appearance of superficiality. Also, from another angle, assuming a natural hierarchy of ideas in terms of their comprehensiveness Gazdanov's positions are among the most conclusive, which

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means that to arrive at them one has to go through--in one's imaginative intellectual experience--all the lower levels of the hierarchy and, by transcending them, to incorporate them in the higher, more comprehensive position. Thus, when for example Gazdanov criticizes Descartes in a very simple manner, with a few seemingly very simple arguments he is actually raising his point of view above any philosophy of the Cartesian mold and this, besides being of utmost importance for determining the ultimate perspective in which the world in his fiction is viewed, reflects not only the highly developed natural capacities of his mind but also his extensive reading and study of the philosophical literature. When in a short and compositionally not too important conversation there is a reference to St. Francis of Assisi or Bergson or metempsychosis or Plato or St. Augustine we can be sure that the seemingly occasional aside he has on them is based on thorough acquaintance with their works or the topic and represents (usually but not when given to a character who cannot stand for the author) the final conclusions he could draw from them. This is, of course, a biographical fact; whether his works produce such an impression in the reader is another--and more important--question. They usually did, as far as we are concerned. Naturally this is a significant part of our contention that Gazdanov is an important writer and we have presented in the preceding chapters a few selected themes in detail that we hoped would support our thesis.

Yet Gazdanov is not a "philosophical writer"; he is much more of a psychologist and in this respect, too, data on his creative method reveal a similar degree of attachment and "digestion." It is known, for example, that it took him on the average ten years to "digest" psychologically the events ("the movements of the soul") that he was going to describe. Not only had he to experience them personally but he preserved them in a dormant state, as it were, constantly trying, consciously or subconsciously, to overcome their impact; and it was only after this happened, many years later, that he was ready--having the necessary psychological distance--safely to control his "emotional material." The short stories of the late twenties and the first novel (1929) all deal with events that oc-

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curred prior to arrival in Paris (1923): childhood and adolescence, the Revolution, Civil War, refugee life in Constantinople. The second novel, *The History of a Journey* (1934-1935) describes, in a strongly fictionalized form, Gazdanov's arrival to Paris (1923). Both *The Specter of Alexander Wolf* and *Buddha's Return* (both written in the 1940's) are set around the end of the twenties or the beginning of the thirties. *Night Roads* was written between 1939 and 1941 by which time Gazdanov had been a taxi driver for about ten years. The first fictional references to the Second World War appear in the short stories of the fifties. And we know that both *The Awakening* and *Evelyne and Her Friends* were conceived in the beginning of the fifties, "dormant" in the writer for over a decade, until in the sixties he was psychologically ready to treat the theme of *The Awakening* and face the challenge of masklessness in *Evelyne and Her Friends*. And nearly all the "Sketches from the Writer's Notebook" written towards the end of his life return to the early "heroic" period of his life. It was for the same reason that he often reread his unpublished, discarded manuscripts, frequently taking some parts for use in the pieces he was working on at the time.

A certain psychological distance was necessary not only because the primary material of Gazdanov's art was personal and "lived through" but also because it facilitated conscious artistic manipulation. For however necessary inspiration and spontaneity may be they cannot replace the consciousness of craftsmanship, the "making" of the artifact. "Building up the story" meant adding poetic truth, by invented details, to the actual biographical event that formed its kernel, as he confessed in "Hawaiian Guitars" (p. 28). But the making of the artifact is more than inventing supporting details and building the story so as to achieve the intended effect. The most trying thing is the selection of details that will, all joined together, be suggestive precisely of what the writer wanted them to be and, also, the creation of context, of general atmosphere and perspective in which everything is in its own place and the unity of vision giving meaning and character to the work is achieved. Most characteristic and revealing is in this respect the answer of the narrator-hero-author of "Hannah" (p. 76) to his childhood love

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when, as adults meeting again in Paris much later, she asks him to write her biography. Gazdanov speaks of an "ingratiating style," and of seemingly "accidental and insignificant details which are, however, always carefully chosen" and presented in a "corresponding context" that is lyrical and creates a lyrical atmosphere--which is an accurate description, not only of the style of this story, but also of Gazdanov's style and creative method in general. Every word is significant here. The "context" is always lyrical, moreover lyrical in an "involuntary" (that is, entirely natural) and "irresistible" manner--if it is not irresistible, or entirely convincing, Gazdanov's art collapses as it apparently did for Xodasevič who missed precisely this lyrical subtext or context. Moreover, the lyrical context has to "correspond" to those details and vice versa: those details contribute to the creation of the lyrical atmosphere; here is precisely the principle for their "careful selection." And they all together have to "correspond" to the story and its actors (a point not emphasized here for "Hannah" is not built on plot) and finally everything has to be brought to life in the verbal medium by a corresponding style which, for that reason as well as for its own merits, "ingratiates" itself to the reader.

But however conscious Gazdanov may have been as a writer he was also addicted to and obsessed by, his involuntary passion for literature, which he ironically called his "graphomania." He often wrote about his "merciless memory" preserving everything including his own creations, his own "specters": not only could he not go away from them, he could not stop undergoing innumerable transformations, being everybody (all his characters), and not being himself. In this respect too we can observe a somewhat unusual dichotomy in Gazdanov's "literary character." On the one hand, call this "insanabile scribendi cacoethes" after Juvenal; on the other, the complaint about his merciless memory retaining all details is present in all his fiction from the beginning to the end--a complaint even though it would seem that without such memory Gazdanov's fiction in the form we have it could not have been written and it should therefore have been praised by its owner instead. Had Gazdanov been able to find a "harmonious view of the world" and a profession

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without necessary psychological metamorphoses he might have been lost to Russian literature but fortunately such an urge was only part of him, a less powerful drive than his "graphomania."

2. CHARACTER-DRAWING

Gazdanov was often criticized for his fictional characters. Critics charged that his heroes were alien to his readers and therefore his novels and short stories appeared irrelevant to the life and experience of the average Russian emigre. The meager foundation on which this charge stands is that fairly often Gazdanov's heroes are rich or at least well-to-do foreigners, Frenchmen or Englishmen and their materially carefree life and society is described with little reference to the exiles' experience. As must be obvious by now such a charge reflects a superficial reading and does not hold at all if carefully examined; moreover, it is not true even on its own superficial level, "quantitatively." If some of his "rich characters" are indeed foreigners, many others are Russians: Volodja's well-to-do brother in *The History of a Journey*, Sergej Sergeevič and his family in *The Flight*, Ščerbakov in *Buddha's Return*, the heroes of the short stories "The Liberation" and "Recollection" are all rich Russians, usually successful businessmen in the emigration. Nor is it true at all that even outwardly most of Gazdanov's works are set at a social level higher that that of the average emigre. At least three of the novels and the majority of the short stories are set in the Parisian Russian underworld. It is also a well-known fact that for psychological drama, for close, "microscopic" analysis of the psyche it is artistically advantageous to remove contingent circumstances so as to show the drama of emotions in their purity, uncontaminated and unconditioned by external contingencies, such as material poverty, for example. This is one of the reasons why kings and princes are the heroes of romance, and average people, of the realistic novel.

Gazdanov's romantic side is seen, first of all, in the almost constantly employed device of a "narrator-hero" who tells the story, primarily his own, but also that of others, and whose inner life

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(mostly by interior monologues) is the psychological substance of the work. Very often other characters, particularly when there is no narrator as in four of his nine novels, are projections of various aspects of the author's own personality and sometimes his idealism finds its outlet here, as in the French hero of *The Awakening* who is much like what Gazdanov wanted to be (and to that extent was). Besides the narrator-author and his more or less thinly veiled projections (the relationship here, we saw, is that of the poet and his "lyrical I") there are a number of secondary character types often found in Gazdanov's fiction. Such "character motifs" recurring in the works are the artist, usually a painter, whose statements on art are either Gazdanov's own or a springboard for Gazdanov's own reflections on them; the murderer, the tramp, the pimp, prostitutes, and other underworld figures; petty bourgeois characters either to make fun of or to show that their life is the average human destiny and as such deserves to be considered seriously and sympathetically; statesmen, politicians, almost without exception inept if not expressly stupid and wicked; soldiers and priests, particularly in the early fiction; and finally children or adolescents. To this list should be added, of course, the previously mentioned "rich," whether Russian or foreign. His central characters, when Russian, could be called "Russian Europeans" ("russkie evropejcy") for they not only live in Europe as expatriates, but are imbued with her culture, are "Westernizers," who do not try to artificially maintain a "Russian" lifestyle in circumstances where it would be entirely unnatural. It is this point, needless to say, that displeased many of Gazdanov's more "patriotic" readers and critics.

The fundamentally lyrical nature of Gazdanov's art is expressed also in his characters' features, concerns, traits, interests, the events of their lives--all these being mostly Gazdanov's own features, concerns, interests, the events of *his* life. His disinclination to invent prevented him from being an "epic" writer: he had to write about what he personally experienced or had seen to happen. He did not excel in that "titanic effort" he says is needed to truly understand other minds and other lives: there were ideas and

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passions that remained outside his comprehension.

The "sensuous and impetuous sensation of one's own existence" reflects his conception of man as an "aggregate of nerves and muscles" ("sovokupnost' nervov i muskulov") and it also explains, indirectly, why it is that usually there is one single feature that dominates his characters. Gazdanov believes that there is in everybody, at the core of one's being, one trait that is stronger and more important than any other and that this one feature determines man's character in an essential (and existential) way much as the "focal point" in one's life gives to it its final meaning. This may make his characters look somewhat schematic, especially in conjunction with the fact that Gazdanov is not interested in drawing traditional portraits (any more than he believes in the meaningfulness of traditional plot structure): he often neglects to fill in his characters with other, secondary, features that conventionally should be equally graphically evoked.

Gazdanov's concern is primarily with the emotional life of his characters in terms of their dominant traits much as on the plane of plot his concern is with the "focal point" itself with the preceding or following events seen only in its light. This kind of "vertical" characterization can also be complete and comprehensive although it requires (because it assumes) more empathy, more creative imagination and more life experience from the reader. The perspective is as if from the other end of the traditional one: the "essence" of a person is given first, whereas additional details only later, as the occasion (although never the need for there can be no need for details once we know the essentials) arises.

3. WHY WRITE? THE *RAISON D'ÊTRE* OF LITERATURE

But why write? Why undergo all these imaginative transformations and lose one's own identity? Why be a prisoner of these "imaginative movements" ("voobražaemye dviženija"), why draw and probe these "sequences of emotional landscapes without contours and design" ("smena duševnyx pejzažej bez konturov i risunka") and why wait for this "writer's nirvana" from which "life's soundless move-

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ment"--the fundamental theme of Gazdanov's art--becomes extraordinarily clear for a "contemplative perception?" What is the function, the goal, the *raison d'être* of art, and literature in particular? Gazdanov has several answers to the question, each on a different level and from a different angle of vision.

From the lowest (but which corresponds, by inverse analogy, to the highest) point of view the writer writes because he cannot help doing so, because this is his real nature, his destiny; he writes for the same reason that birds sing: he is born to do that. To this inexplicable urge, to these "blind motions of the soul that made me write short stories" ("The Third Life," p. 209) are added the "reasons of reason," curiosity, "the insatiable desire to learn about and to try to understand many foreign lives" (*Night Roads*, p. 5), a desire the genuine realization of which requires a "titanic effort of which most people are not capable." *Evelyne and Her Friends* offers again a concise summary of Gazdanov's views. In a conversation on whether people have a certain definite purpose or designation ("naznačenie") in life the conclusion is that *some* do, some are apparently born to do certain things because they cannot help doing so, and such is the narrator-Gazdanov himself in the ironical characterization of Evelyne: "he is created in order to be engaged in literature in whose value he does not believe, and in order to live, imaginatively, the lives of others and to draw of all that he can see and feel, conclusions that are usually erroneous" (vol. 99, p. 46).

The specific conclusions on certain subjects may be right or wrong; the problem is much deeper. What does literature as such express? What do entire works of art express? Why is there this urge for expression? If it is to express something that cannot be expressed otherwise, what is it and can it then really be expressed in art? In the first of a series of sketches entitled "The Waterfall" (1934) the narrator meditates on this: "I don't know; perhaps not to forget. With the desperate hope that someone somewhere will understand--beside words, content, subject matter and everything else that is essentially so irrelevant--at least a little of what you were tortured by all your life and what you will never be able

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to express or depict or tell" (p. 5). Literature is then a "musical journey towards the unknown" ("zvukovoe putešestvie v neizvestnost'," *Evelyne and Her Friends*, vol. 94, p. 46), a search by and through the verbal music of prose for an expression of the ineffable "beyond words, contents, plots." In *The History of a Journey*, revealing a striking similarity with Pasternak's philosophy of art in *Doktor Živago*, Gazdanov writes that all art is ultimately reduced to the expression of one single truth, yet even that truth *may* be illusory and death again remains the only certainty depriving art as well of all meaning.

From another point of view, for the average reader whose interest is not in the "ineffable" but in the widening of his limited experience, who needs education, primarily a sentimental education, art has another function, that of the teacher and also that of a substitute for real life experience, that of a substitute for his undeveloped imaginative and sentimental faculties. This view is expressed with great clarity in the late short story "Ivanov's Letters" (p. 12). Finally, Gazdanov ponders on several possibilities in an effort to solve the question: whence this urge, to write? First, he suggests that it is an effort in the writer to find himself, his own identity; next he wonders whether it is mere vanity, a desire for fame and glory. But none of these suggestions appear entirely satisfactory, "all-explaining." So the thirst for immortality that seemed to be the most egotistical, most inferior of reasons, seen there as individual vanity, turns out to be, by inverse analogy, the most spiritual: a victory over death and oblivion, a reassertion of meaning and purpose, an affirmation of the supremacy and immortality of the spirit. The following words with which the "book within the book" that the narrator-Gazdanov teaches Arthur to write in *Evelyne and Her Friends* (vol. 104, p. 45-6) ends are fully and profoundly autobiographical, or rather "confessional" and represent Gazdanov's own conclusions: "I want to return to the answer to the question about what made me write this book. The answer will perhaps appear unexpected to some readers but for me it is very clear now. It is, in essence, a special form of longing for immortality. But where would it come

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from? And why? The longing for immortality is just as inexplicable as life and death are. After a certain time I will cease to exist and wouldn't it be all the same to me what would happen fifteen or a hundred years from now? None of my contemporaries will be remembered but the book I wrote will remain. It will be like an open grave, a reminder of my existence. The question whether this is necessary does not, I think, have any meaning. But I will die knowing that to some extent I have succeeded in defeating death. My book is my struggle against oblivion to which I am doomed. And if many years after I am no more there will be someone to read these lines, this will mean that I have not lived my hard and sad life in vain."

4. THE "VALÉRY-COMPLEX"

> "...for at bottom, and just in the deepest and most important things, we are unutterably alone, and for one person to be able to advise or even to help another, a lot must happen, a lot must go well, a whole constellation of things must come right in order once to succeed."
> (Rilke)

The trap of vanity or the thirst for immortality, the passion of graphomania or the passion for glory, escape from the self or realization of the self, periodic atrophy of analytical faculties or the need to provide ersatz experience--whatever it is that makes a man write a fundamental problem remains, according to Gazdanov, for the real artist. The genuine writer feels that there exists in the world something inexpressible, ineffable--it is this feeling, this knowledge that, among others, makes him one--; this is his greatest challenge and also his greatest theoretical problem. To express the inexpressible becomes the only worthy task but, if it is inexpressible, how to do it? Is is then possible at all? Gazdanov's approach is again the same multi-leveled, many-angled one.

First, of course, there is the problem of plain meaning. As

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Mervil says in *Evelyne and Her Friends*, words have several "floors" or levels of meaning: there is a basement meaning, a first floor meaning, a second floor meaning and so on until a top level meaning is reached which, in the perspective of its connotations and associations, will comprise all the others and add its own, highest, point of view. Sometimes it is not a question of "floors" but of general usage stemming from the user's mental attitude to the subject in question which in turn derives from his general mental make-up (this has nothing to do with linguistic meaning). The example Mervil gives is the word "neprijatnosti" (inconvenience, nuisance) which to one person meant "conflicts of a sentimental character" while to another "imprisonment"... Finally, "the most important are the feelings that give the words their meaning"--Evelyne ends the conversation with these words--"I say: 'I love you.' But how different can be the meaning of these words that are always the same!" (vol. 101, p. 63). Oftentimes it is the intonation that carries this added emotional meaning without which, however, nothing would be left. This is how the conversations of two lovers, Arthur and Viktoria, are characterized in *The History of a Journey* (p. 141-2).

Yet, up to this point we were really concerned with the difficulties and subtleties of communication, not with its impossibility. Towards the end of this same "love story," that of Arthur and Viktoria, when he finds her again and nothing can block their happiness any more Arthur finds no words to express what he feels, and this is not just from being overwhelmed with emotion, it goes deeper for his emotions surpass the gamut of language and there he is suddenly faced with what we might call the "Valéry-complex," the impossibility of total expression, total communication. Gazdanov wrote this novel in 1934 or 1935. But the idea was with him from the beginning: in the 1928 short story "The Transformation" (p. 35) he talks about the tragic solitude we are condemned to. The invisible wall that surrounds us is the impossibility of totally opening up and sharing our whole being with others; all we can sometimes hear is the "muffled sound" of another life, another being. In 1931 Gazdanov adds that the more cultured, the more educated a man is

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the more he knows that his feelings will never find their expression ("The Great Musician," vol. 5/6, p. 402).

The impossibility of communication between people is transposed into the domain of art as well. In the first sketch of "The Waterfall" (p. 5) Gazdanov has a memorable visual metaphor for that immense stream of forms and changes which is life and which is so hopelessly incomprehensible and incommunicable in its totality, even with the power of art and imagination:

> How do you want me to write? asked one of my friends. You stop in front of a waterfall of enormous power that transcends human imagination. The water is pouring down, blending with the sun's rays; in the air floats a shining cloud. In your hands you are holding an ordinary teacup. Naturally, the water you can catch with the cup will be that of the waterfall. But will the person to whom you will bring and show this cup understand the waterfall? Literature is just such a fruitless attempt.

Yet we would not know about it if we did not know it. Both the writer and the good reader have a knowledge, however vague, of this "immense life" and if literature evokes this feeling, and to the extent it evokes it, it does, after all, what seems to Gazdanov so impossible. And as at least part of the critic's task is to evaluate, for our part we submit the contention that Gazdanov does create an atmosphere in his works in which the reader is brought close to this feeling or knowledge in spite of, and perhaps in some ways because of, the author's complaint to the contrary. And when he says in his self-critical and self-ironical last novel, *Evelyne and Her Friends*, that the only knowledge he derived from his earlier works was how *not* to write he was certainly unduly critical of himself. Whether or not the correspondence felt by the author between his work and his intention is approximate is irrelevant to the reader and therefore to art (and is only the writer's strictly personal experience); what matters is whether or not the work as it is appears to the reader possessing that correspondence--whatever the unknown intentions of the unknown author were. (The "author" the reader, and the history of literature, know *is* his works.) Although Gazdanov has been constantly addressing the problem and was, at least at first sight, mostly pessimistic about overcoming the barrier symbolized by the wall and about the possibility to suggest

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the waterfall with a teacup, nevertheless, he clearly thought art was the closest approximation.

Although many of Gazdanov's short stories are centered on grasping the essence of life, or of a life, on "separating the gold from the stone" and distilling a pure sentiment, a dominant emotion fundamental to a life or a character it is perhaps nowhere as clear as in "The Night Companion" (1939), which is openly and explicitly an effort to distill, express and communicate that most important and most fundamental something which made the love story, the outward subject matter of the short story, unique. It is beyond doubt that "The Night Companion" (as well as "Hannah" and several other stories) are in the final analysis but essays in just this, and the meaning of their "verbal music" is precisely here. We mention music deliberately for that is the art form which is, for Gazdanov, the most natural medium for expressing "pure feeling" ("separated gold") and the metaphysical bliss which is in those "most abstract, most radiant, most inaccessible perspectives" he speaks about in describing the effect of Hannah's singing. To turn prose into music, verbal and, if we can say so, sentimental (in the sense of emotional) music has always been Gazdanov's ideal to strive for. "Fruitlessly," says the young, twenty-six-year-old modest author in his first novel; yet if there is any value, literary or other, in Gazdanov it is to be found primarily in the realization of this ideal and in his triumph over the "Valéry-complex."

5. *DICHTUNG UND WAHRHEIT*: GAZDANOV ON IMAGINATION

> "What we see is imagination: imagination is sounds and music..."
> ("Hawaiian Guitars")

What is the relationship between art and reality, life and imagination? This fundamental problem of all poetics is treated in Gazdanov's works in a twofold manner: in the sphere of the personal and the psychological where it is to be solved by appropriate action which is artistic creation; or in the sphere of theory, where it is to be solved by reflection and meditation.

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In *An Evening with Claire* the young Gazdanov describes how he enjoyed recreating bygone events in their "presentness" (that is to say, without an accompanying awareness of what followed the events recalled) and how creating artificial situations and putting all the people he met in his life in them gradually became a habit of his fantasy (p. 27). But the habit of fantasy soon turns into an obsession, a sickness when the writer gradually loses his ability to distinguish it from reality, when the two can approach each other and even merge and become a form or source of madness, of "poetic furor." The loss of control over fantasy and its "gloomy landscapes" is clearly expressed in "Hannah" (p. 91) where the narrator's world is made up more of imagination's chimeras than of those of reality. About thirty years later Evelyne offers a kind of justification when, in answer to the narrator-Gazdanov who complains of being "burdened with quotations and recollections about foreign feelings" which so often prevented him from living his own life, she says that perhaps this was not so bad for in this way he saved his emotional powers and "lived an imaginative (but true) life in his books something not everybody could do" (vol. 104, p. 44).

Perhaps the only way to resolve the extraordinary complexity of the relationship between reality and imagination is to overcome their duality, to see the one in the other, to understand that each one is part of the other and that the two together constitute a higher reality to which none of them can claim exclusive rights. When *ars* becomes, as it used to be required, *scientia*, arbitrary inventions, light games of combination lose their ground: imagination is subject to the laws of that higher reality of which *ars* becomes a *scientia*. In "Hannah" the narrator genuinely suffers from "knowing that it is impossible to change anything even in this essentially almost transparent world whose imaginary destinies depended, it would seem, only on me" (p. 78). There is an organic and necessary interdependence between "Dichtung" and "Wahrheit"; the world the writer conjures up in his imagination is not his "victim" to which he can arbitrarily do anything but his partner, another of his "realities," more precisely one of the realities among which he, the writer himself, is only one. Which reality is

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more important depends entirely on the circumstances and the point of view; it is never pre-determined. This is also the theme of "The Night Companion." On the last page of that story we learn that the old statesman's Spanish lover has been constantly cheating on him; yet this truth, this reality (or what would be ordinarily so called) is here to be an "irrelevant reality." The "radiant delusion," the old statesman's firm belief in the woman's love and fidelity was for him a reality in comparison with whose beauty and quality the "real truth" appears indeed, as Gazdanov so poignantly puts it, "ideally unnecessary."

Some of the most explicit and telling passages on this subject can be found again in *Evelyne and Her Friends*, particularly in the conversations of the narrator-author and his friend-disciple, Arthur whom he helps write the memoirs of a certain M. Langlois. There is very little to this M. Langlois; what would make his life more interesting, his criminal background, is a taboo not to be touched upon. He is an emotionally and intellectually equally primitive man, so Arthur is faced with a problem. He cannot just write down what the old man tells him; what would result in a correspondingly primitive book. Moreover, this is not what M. Langlois himself wants; he wants his life to be told "nicely," with interesting, even if imaginary, episodes, attractive characters, profound ideas and great passions "as in those other books" of memoirs. Arthur is disturbed because he knows this would not be the life story of M. Langlois as he knows it and he feels he would be a "falsifier." A conversation between him and the narrator-Gazdanov ensues in which we learn that any expression of reality, if it wants to be more than an enumeration of facts, is by definition subjective. There can be no reality in literature other than the reality of "changing emotions, feelings and memories and of transitions from one vision to another" (vol. 102, p. 74).

6. HOW TO WRITE?

When rereading his earlier fiction perhaps Gazdanov indeed could see only how *not* to write. Yet all his works are interspersed with

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remarks on how to write, on style and these remarks are so perceptive and so revealing of his own verbal art that they deserve our closest attention. Again somewhat like Nabokov's his works contain many cryptic auto-references and hidden self-characterizations. Often they are not even hidden or cryptic, however, especially if the works are read with the understanding that the narrator-hero is usually the author himself and that very often other characters are also reflections of the author. Thus when the world of the fifteen-year-old André who dreams of becoming a writer in the short story "Happiness" is characterized as a "world of constantly moving thoughts, images and discoveries" ("mir postojanno dvižuščixsja myslej, obrazov i otkrytij") it is clear that André, at least insofar as he is a "writer," is given the inner world familiar to and characteristic of the young Gazdanov himself. Similarly, the features of Alexander Wolf *as* a writer are clearly those of Gazdanov even if as a narrator he says he found it difficult to imagine such a man as Wolf. The narrator of this novel is the author himself and when Elena Nikolaevna, his mistress, tells him that he lives in a "lyrical world" and feelings are the only things he truly understands and therefore "lyrical short stories" ("liričeskie rasskazy") should be his genre it is not merely a characterization of the narrator's literary talent but also, and more importantly, a self-characterization of Gazdanov himself.

Another important self-characterization relevant to both Gazdanov's "Valéry-complex" and the great theme of his art, the expression of the immense flow of life and, within it, of human sentiments, is in a remark of Elena Nikolaevna on the narrator: "you understand more than you could say and your intonations were more expressive than the words you spoke" (vol. 17, p. 56). In an early short story, "Black Swans" (1930), the protagonist is characterized by the narrator (Gazdanov) in such a way that we can have no doubt that he is another projection (at least in some respects) of the author himself. At the end of *Evelyne and Her Friends* Gazdanov returns to the question of how to write. In another conversation with Arthur on the art of letters he begins by reasserting again his contention that no one can determine how to write and here of course he is right for it is in principle not to be determined nor

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defined, yet at the end of the discussion he does offer an answer by pointing out *what* to do which "what" will automatically produce a "how" if supported by talent.

Thus in the final analysis (assuming formal competence) the "what" is more important, the "what" that is "expressed with titanic force" as opposed to mastery and perfection of execution taken by themselves. The "what" are psychological, biological and cosmic realities whose titanic forces over the human mind and human life when caught and expressed in art--as they are in a Michelangelo, Beethoven or Tolstoj--are what impressed Gazdanov the most and if his life work is a failure it is only in this sense that he did not have the talent or energy to become himself such a Baudelairean "pharos" and remained a writer with less of this elemental force, a writer of "chamber prose" (by analogy with chamber music) but one who has at least a few pages or passages in nearly all of his works where the "titanic force of expression" is present and these pages alone will be enough to justify his works and to secure them a permanent place in Russian literature. To use his own imagery we might say that these pages are "teacups" giving a taste, a sense of the "waterfall." His works, with most of their episodes, are like so many teacups; if he did not believe in somehow representing the entire waterfall and if all he gave was a series of partial glimpses instead of the total view (assuming such can be given) it is a measure of his literary failure; but if some of his pages are powerfully expressive, if they cut across the human experience "vertically" and, *pars prc toto*, suggest the whole through glimpses of its parts, they are a measure of his literary success.

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A SHORT BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WORKS BY AND ABOUT GAJTO GAZDANOV

The bibliography is arranged according to the following system:

I. The Published Works of Gajto Gazdanov

1. Novels (nos. 1-10)
2. Short stories (nos. 11-48)
3. Criticism (nos. 49-92)
4. Other (nos. 93-95)

II. A Chronological List of Works about, related to, consulted or quoted in the present work in connection with, Gajto Gazdanov (nos. 96-258)

Every effort has been made to make this bibliography as accurate a checklist as possible. It is hoped that the list of Gazdanov's published works is virtually complete, with the possible exception of a few minor works printed in hard-to-get dailies between the two wars. The second section also attempts to be as complete a record of Gazdanov's critical reception as possible--but not, however, as a bibliography of secondary background material. Thus, all works known to us to contain a mention of Gazdanov's name or a reference to one of his works are listed whereas only such other books or articles related to Russian emigre literature are included as were quoted or referred to in the text of this study. For a checklist of Gazdanov's unpublished manuscripts see no. 257.

For ease of reference the entire bibliography has been consecutively numbered, within each group chronologically arranged, and fully cross-referenced, particularly for interrelated fiction and criticism. Each work has a number; translations, editions, excerpts are listed under the same number with a letter attached. All material broadcast under Gazdanov's pseudonym (Georgij Čerkasov) by Radio Liberty has been considered published and is included in the bibliography. If full name or date was impossible to establish,

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this has been indicated by a question mark. In general, no attempt has been made at full bibliographical description. In the list for Gazdanov's published works the notation MS. has been added if the full manuscript was extant. In every case (except for no. 10) all of these MSS. are now in The Houghton Library, Harvard University.

I. THE PUBLISHED WORKS OF GAJTO GAZDANOV

1. NOVELS

1a. *Večer u Klèr*. Paris, 1930 (1929). See also nos. 110-118, 152.
1b. *Večer u Klèr*. Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1979. Reprint. See also no. 254.
2a. *Istorija odnogo putešestvija. Sovremennye zapiski*, 56 (1934), 58-59 (1935). The first installment was printed under the title "Načalo". See also nos. 150, 151, 153, 154.
2b. *Istorija odnogo putešestvija*. Paris, 1938. MS. See also nos. 176-179.
3. *Polet. Russkie zapiski*, 18-21 (1939). Incomplete as published. The fourth, and last, installment remains unpublished. MS. See also nos. 182, 183, 185.
4a. *Nočnaja doroga. Sovremennye zapiski*, 67-70 (1939-1940). First version, publication interrupted by the war. See also no. 184.
4b. "Nočnye dorogi--otryvki iz romana". *Orion*, Paris, 1947. Excerpt from the novel.
4c. *Nočnye dorogi*. New York, 1952. MS. See also nos. 199-201.
5a. *Prizrak Aleksandra Vol'fa. Novyj žurnal*, 16-17 (1947), 18 (1948). MS. See also nos. 190, 191, 193, 194, 197, 198.
5b. "Matč. Otryvok iz romana". *Vstreča*, 1 (1945). Excerpt from the above.
5c. *The Specter of Alexander Wolf*. New York: E.P.Dutton and Co., 1950. Translated by Nicholas Wreden.
5d. *The Spectre of Alexander Wolf*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1950. Translated by Nicholas Wreden.
5e. *Le Spectre d'Alexandre Wolf*. Paris: Robert Laffont, 1951. Traduit du russe par Jean Sendy.
5f. *Contro il destino*. Milan: Mondadori, 1952. Italian translation of no. 5a in *Quattordicinale*, Periodici Mondadori, anno II, no. 25a, 18 May 1952.
5g. *El Espectro de Alejandro Wolf*. Barcelona: Luis de Cazalt, 1955. Spanish translation of no. 5e by Miguel A. Calzada.
5h. *The Specter of Alexander Wolff* [sic]. Television script adapted from no. 5c by Charles O'Neill, directed by John Peyser, produced for "Studio One" by Worthington Miner. U.S., early 1950's.
6a. *Vozvraščenie Buddy. Novyj žurnal*, 22 (1949), 23 (1950). MS. See also nos. 192, 195, 196.
6b. *Buddha's Return*. New York: E.P.Dutton and Co., 1951. Translated by Nicholas Wreden.
7a. *Piligrimy. Novyj žurnal*, 33-35 (1953), 36 (1954). MS.
7b. A short excerpt from the above broadcast by Radio Liberty on 19 July 1955. See also no. 207.
8. *Probuždenie. Novyj žurnal*, 78-81 (1965), 82 (1966). MS.
9a. *Èvelina i ee druz'ja. Novyj žurnal*, 92 (1968), 94-97 (1969), 98-101 (1970), 102, 104-105 (1971). The installment printed first in vol. 92 belongs between volumes 96 and 97. MS.

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9b. *Èvelina i ee druz'ja. Mosty*, 13-14 (1968). Same as the installment in volume 96 above.
10. *Perevorot. Novyj žurnal*, 107-109 (1972). Unfinished. MS.

2. SHORT STORIES

11. "Gostinica grjaduščego." *Svoimi putjami*, 12/13 (1926). See also no. 102.
12. "Povest' o trex neudačax." *Volja Rossii*, 2 (1927). See also no. 102.
13. "Rasskazy o svobodnom vremeni." *Volja Rossii*, 8/9 (1927).
14. "Obščestvo vos'merki pik." *Volja Rossii*, 11/12 (1927).
15. "Tovarišč Brak." *Volja Rossii*, 2 (1928).
16. "Prevraščenie." *Volja Rossii*, 10/11 (1928).
17. "Martyn Raskolinos." *Volja Rossii*, 8/9 (1929).
18. "Gavajskie gitary." *Volja Rossii*, 1 (1930). MS.
19. "Černye lebedi." *Volja Rossii*, 9 (1930). MS.
20a. "Vodjanaja tjur'ma." *Čisla*, 1 (1930). MS. See also nos. 122-126.
20b. "A Watery Prison." Translation by T. Pachmuss in no. 256.
21. "Plennik." *Mir i iskusstvo*, 13 (1930). Not seen.
22. "Metr Raj." *Čisla*, 5 (1931). See also no. 137.
23. "Fonari." *Novaja gazeta*, 1 April 1931. MS.
24a. "Velikij muzykant." *Volja Rossii*, 3/4, 5/6 (1931).
24b. "Velikij muzykant." Paris, 1931. Separate offprint, without name of publisher.
25. "Isčeznovenie Rikardi." *Sovremennye zapiski*, 45 (1931). MS. See also nos. 132, 136.
26. "Na ostrove." *Poslednie novosti*, 3 April 1932.
27. "Sčast'e." *Sovremennye zapiski*, 49 (1932). MS. See also nos. 141, 142.
28. "Tret'ja žizn'." *Sovremennye zapiski*, 50 (1932). MS. See also no. 143.
29. "Železnyj lord." *Sovremennye zapiski*, 54 (1934). MS. See also nos. 146, 147
30. "Vodopad." *Vstreči*, 1 (1934). See also no. 148.
31. "Osvoboždenie." *Sovremennye zapiski*, 60 (1936). See also nos. 155, 158.
32. "Smert' gospodina Bernara." *Sovremennye zapiski*, 62 (1936). See also nos. 167, 168.
33. "Vospominanie." *Sovremennye zapiski*, 64 (1937). MS. See also nos. 169, 170.
34. "Bombej." *Russkie zapiski*, 6 (1938). MS. See also nos. 171, 172.
35. "Ošibka." *Sovremennye zapiski*, 67 (1938). See also nos. 173, 174.
36. "Xana." *Russkie zapiski*, 11 (1938). MS. See also no. 175.
37a. "Večernij sputnik." *Russkie zapiski*, 16 (1939). MS. See also no. 180.
37b. "Večernij sputnik." *Mosty*, 3 (1959). Reprint.
37c. "Večernij sputnik." *Russkaja mysl'*, 3, 10, 17, 24 and 31 December 1981.
38. "Šram." *Novyj žurnal*, 21 (1949). MS.
39. "Knjažna Mèri." *Opyty*, 2 (1953). See also no. 212.
40. "Sud'ba Salomei." *Novyj žurnal*, 58 (1959). MS.
41. "Panixida." *Novyj žurnal*, 59 (1960). See also no. 214.
42. "Intellektual'nyj trest." *Russkaja mysl'*, 1 July 1961.
43. "Iz bloknota." *Novyj žurnal*, 68 (1962).
44. "Niščij." *Mosty*, 9 (1962). MS. See also no. 218.
45. "Pis'ma Ivanova." *Novyj žurnal*, 73 (1963). MS.
46a. "Iz zapisnyx knižek." *Mosty*, 11 (1965), 12 (1966).
46b. "Nelepyj čelovek. Iz vospominanij." *Russkaja mysl'*, 24 April 1965. First part of no. 46a published in *Mosty*, 11 (1965).
46c. "Nabroski." *Russkaja mysl'*, 30 October and 6 November 1980. Reprint of the second part of no. 46a published in *Mosty*, 12 (1966).

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47. [Untitled.] Two short pieces of fiction broadcast by Radio Liberty on 25 and 26 September 1971; read by the author himself.
48. "Avantjurist." *Ghozis*, 5/6 (1979). MS. See also no. 251.

3. CRITICISM

49. "Zametki o Edgare Po, Gogole i Mopassane." *Volja Rossii*, 5/6 (1929).
50. Review of *Otec* by V. Kataev. *Čisla*, 2/3 (1930). MS.
51. Review of *Zakaz na vdoxnovenie* by S. Pakentrejger. *Čisla*, 2/3 (1930). MS.
52. Review of *Brityj čelovek* by A. Mariengof. *Volja Rossii*, 5/6 (1930). MS.
53. "Mysli o literature." *Novaja gazeta*, 15 April 1931.
54. "Literaturnye priznanija." *Vstreči*, 6 (1934).
55. "O Poplavskom." *Sovremennye zapiski*, 59 (1935). MS. For an abridged English translation see no. 231.
56. "O molodoj èmigrantskoj literature." *Sovremennye zapiski*, 60 (1936). See also nos. 156-165, 186, 210.
57. Review of *Snežnyj čas* by B. Poplavskij. *Sovremennye zapiski*, 61 (1936).
58. Review of *Zemlja Kolumba. Sbornik literatury i iskusstva pod. red. B. Mikloševskogo. Sovremennye zapiski*, 61 (1936).
59. Review of *Bel'vederskij tors* by M. Aldanov. *Russkie zapiski*, 10 (1938). MS.
60. Review of *Zerkalo* by I. Odoevceva. *Russkie zapiski*, 15 (1939). MS.
61. "Vystuplenie Gazdanova posveščennoe pamjati Remizova." Broadcast on 30 November 1957.
62. "O poèzii Pasternaka." Broadcast on 15 November 1958.
63a. "O Gogole." *Mosty*, 5 (1960). MS.
63b. "O Gogole." Broadcast in nearly identical form on 25/26 September, 2/3 October and 9/10 October 1970.
63c. "O Gogole." *Russkaja mysl'*, 29 October and 5 November 1981. Reprint.
64. [Untitled.] (On the 161 Goncourt Prize Winner.) Broadcast on 7 December 1961.
65a. "O Čexove." *Novyj žurnal*, 76 (1964). MS.
65b. "O Čexove." Broadcast in three parts on 26/27 February, 5/6 and 12/13 March 1971.
66. "M.A. Aldanov i M. Osorgin (Special'naja peredača)." Gazdanov's interview with B. Zajcev about these writers, broadcast on 8/9 April 1964.
67. "O knigax i avtorax. No. 1." Gazdanov's introduction to this new series, broadcast on 28/29 November 1964.
68. "Madam de Stal'." Broadcast in the series "O knigax i avtorax", 67, 10/11 August 1966.
69. "Andrea Kaffi." Broadcast on 14/15 December 1966. MS.
70. "Pamjati A. Gingera." *Novyj žurnal*, 82 (1966). MS.
71. "Zagadka Aldanova." *Russkaja mysl'*, 15 April 1967. MS.
72. "On Russian Nobel Prize Winners." Broadcast in the "Round Table Talk" (RTT) series, ? February 1966.
73. "On Mrożek." Broadcast in the RTT series, 21 April 1966.
74. "On Aldanov." Broadcast in the RTT series, ? April 1967.
75. "Literary Criticism in Russia and in the USSR." Broadcast in the RTT series, 30/31 July 1970.
76. "Fedor Stepun." Broadcast on 24/25 February 1970.
77. Review of *Vivre à Moscou* by Georges Bortoli. Broadcast in the series "O knigax i avtorax", 228, 29/30 May 1970.
78. "O celiteljax i magax." Broadcast in the series "Sovremennoe obščestvo", 239, 21/22 March 1970.

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79. "L. Rževskij. *Pročtenie tvorčeskogo slova*; N. Struve. *Antologija russkoj poèzii*." Broadcast in the series "O knigax i avtorax", 247, 11/12 December 1970.
80. "O Borise Zajceve." Broadcast on 14/15 February 1971.
81. "Pol' Valeri." Broadcast in the series "V mire knig" on 15/16 November 1971.
82. "Literatura i žurnalizm." Broadcast in the "Diary of the Writer" (DW) series, 120, 30/31 October 1970. See also nos. 63b and 65b as parts of this series.
83. "Propaganda i literatura." Broadcast in the DW series, 124, 27/28 November 1970.
84. "Ocenka tvorčestva i ispytanie vremeni." Broadcast in the DW series, 126, 18/19 December 1970.
85. "Tendencioznost' v literature: Grem Grin, Fransua Moriak." Broadcast in the DW series, 129, 8/9 January 1971.
86. "Svjaz' pisatelja s narodom." Broadcast in the DW series, 133, 5/6 February 1971.
87. "Ob Aldanove." Broadcast in the DW series, 140, 26/27 March 1971.
88. "Èmigrantskaja literatura." Broadcast in the DW series, 141, 2/3 April 1971.
89. "Pretvorenie dejstvitel'nosti." Broadcast in the DW series, 145, 14/15 May 1971.
90. "O Remizove." Broadcast in the DW series, 147, 4/5 June 1971.
91. "Po povodu Sartra." Broadcast in the DW series, 157, 10/11 September 1971.
92. "Dostoevskij i Prust." Broadcast in the DW series, 160, 8/9 October 1971.

4. OTHER

93. *Je m'engage à défendre*. Paris: Défense de la France. Ombres et Lumières. 1946. French translation of the unpublished documentary novel *Na francuzskoj zemle*. Russian MS. extant. See also nos. 187-189.
94. There are approximately fifty titles in the catalogue of Radio Liberty listed for very short, one or two minute long, talks given by Gazdanov on various topics, mostly political or social, in the 1950's. Not related to literature, they are not listed here.
95. Letters. For published letters by Gazdanov, see no. 247. Gazdanov's unpublished letters are in various private hands and have never been catalogued.

II. A CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF WORKS ABOUT, RELATED TO, CONSULTED OR QUOTED IN CONNECTION WITH, GAJTO GAZDANOV

96. *Obzor russkogo učebnogo dela i svedenija o russkix učebnyx zavedenijax v Bolgarii*. Sophia, 1923.
97. Baumgarten, V.F. *Russkie v Gallipoli: sbornik statej*. Berlin, 1923.
98. *Zarubežnaja russkaja škola, 1920-1924*. Paris, 1924.
99. *The Rescue and Education of Russian Children and Youth in Exile, 1915-1925*. Boston, 1925.
100. Bumgardner, Eugenia S. *Undaunted Exiles*. Staunton, Va., 1925. (On the life of Russian refugees in Constantinople.)

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101. [anon.] "Volja Rossii. 1927. Kniga II." *Zveno*, 27 March 1927. (This appears to be the first mention of Gazdanov's name in Russian literary criticism.)
102. Postnikov, S. "O molodoj èmigrantskoj literature." *Volja Rossii*, 5/6 (1927). (Gazdanov's first two short stories, nos. 11 and 12, mentioned in enumerations of recent fiction.)
103. Postnikov, S. *Russkie v Prage, 1918-1928.* Prague, 1928. See pp. 201-204 on *Volja Rossii.*
104. Adamovič, G. "Literaturnye besedy...Zarubežnye prozaiki." *Zveno*, 1 May 1928.
105. [anon.] "Kočev'e." *Volja Rossii*, 1 (1929). (On the group's activity from its formation in the spring of 1928 until January 1929.) See also no. 139.
106. [anon.] "Večera 'Kočev'ja." *Volja Rossii*, 2 (1929). See also no. 139.
107. [anon.] "Večera 'Kočev'ja." *Volja Rossii*, 4 (1929). See also no. 139.
108. [anon.] "Kočev'e." *Volja Rossii*, 8/9 (1929). See also no. 139.
109. Slonim, M. "Literaturnyj dnevnik. Molodye pisateli za rubežom." *Volja Rossii*, 10/11 (1929). (The first important article analyzing Gazdanov's early fiction.)
110. Ocup, Nikolaj. "Gajto Gazdanov. Večer u Klèr. Izd-vo Ja.E. Povolockij i Ko. Pariž. 1930." *Čisla*, 1 (1930).
111. Os., Mix. [Osorgin, Mixail] "Večer u Klèr." *Poslednie novosti*, 6 February 1930.
112. Adamovič, G. "Literaturnaja nedelja. Molodye romanisty..." *Illjustrirovannaja Rossija*, 22 February 1930. (On no. 1.)
113. Adamovič, G. "Literaturnaja nedelja. 'Večer u Klèr' G. Gazdanova..." *Illjustrirovannaja Rossija*, 8 March 1930.
114. Zajcev, B. "'Večer u Klèr' Gajto Gazdanova." *Rossija i Slavjanstvo*, 22 March 1930.
115. Gorlin, M. "Poxval'noe slovo Gajdo [sic] Gazdanovu." *Rul'*, 30 March 1930. (On no. 1.)
116. Sav., A. [Savel'ev, A.] "G. Gazdanov. Večer u Klèr." *Rul'*, 2 April 1930.
117. Slonim, M. "Literaturnyj dnevnik. Dva Majakovskix.--Roman Gazdanova." *Volja Rossii*, 5/6 (1930). (On no. 1.)
118. Xoxlov, German [pseud. of Al. Novik] "Gajto Gazdanov. 'Večer u Klèr'." *Russkij magazin*, 1 (1930).
119. Vejdle, Vladimir. "Russkaja literatura v èmigracii. Novaja proza." *Vozroždenie*, 19 June 1930. (On no. 1.)
120. Remizov, A.M. "Russkie pisateli v Pariže v izobraženii A.M. Remizova." *Russkij magazin*, 1 (1930). (Four drawings by Remizov. One of the portraits is of Gazdanov.)
121. Ivanov, Georgij. "V. Sirin, 'Mašen'ka'..." *Čisla*, 1 (1930). (Gazdanov is included at the end of this infamous personal attack on Nabokov.)
122. Slonim, M. "Novyj èmigrantskij žurnal. ('Čisla'. No. 1, Pariž, 1930.)" *Volja Rossii*, 3 (1930).
123. Osorgin, Mix. "Kniga Čisel." *Poslednie novosti*, 20 March 1930.
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Gajto Gazdanov and his mother, ca. 1905.

Gazdanov at the time of graduation from the gymnasium at Šumen, Bulgaria, August 1923.

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In Paris, circa 1933–1934.

In Munich, with Boris Zaicev and the director of Radio Liberty, ca. 1964.

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The writer and his wife in Munich, ca. 1962.

Munich, circa 1968

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