



## THE ORIGINALITY OF MODERN RUSSIAN ANTI-UTOPIA (ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE WORKS OF T. TOLSTOY AND A. GROMOV)

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**ABSTRACT:** - . This talk investigates the rhetorical and mythopoetic techniques deployed by ultranationalist journalist Aleksandr Prokhanov to transform geographical “space” into claims for Russianoccupied “place.” Prokhanov’s project is designed to support Putin’s drive for the incremental re-annexation of border areas with significant Russian population to the south and west of the Russian Federation. Documentation and discussion will include Prokhanov’s three main political projects: as chairperson of the Izborsk Club, Prokhanov’s physical building of “sacred mounds” in border areas and his rhetoric attached to these projects; the editorial bully pulpit in Prokhanov’s rightist newspaper, Zavtra, that support redrawing and expanding the existing western borders of the Russian Federation; Prokhanov’s ultranationalist novels, such as Gospodin Geksogen (2002) and Krym (2014) that script a reinvigorated Russian national identity. Although his writings have little to do with science fiction or even utopia per se—but seen in terms of speculative right-wing place-making rhetoric—Prokhanov’s pathos, vocabulary, and geographical imagination fit well with the themes and keywords of the 2017 Uppsala conference on “‘Russian World’ and Other Imaginary Places: (Geo) Political Themes in Post-Soviet Science Fiction and Utopias.” To start with, his writing embodies one prominent form of the contemporary Russian rightist political imagination. Many of his themes pair well with conference themes: of overcoming the trauma of territorial loss, creating an alternative historical narrative of re-membering imperial greatness; combining Russian Orthodoxy and the pagan occult to create new rituals of nationhood; and invoking the Ukrainian crisis (2014 - ) to build new fictions of Russian greatness.

**KEYWORDS:** Author, novel, times, literature.

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## INTRODUCTION

Edith W. Clowes holds the Brown-Forman Chair in the Humanities and teaches Russian language, literature, and culture and Czech literature in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Virginia (Charlottesville, USA). Her primary research and teaching interests span the interactions between literature, philosophy, religion, and utopian thought (Russian Experimental Fiction: Resisting Ideology after Utopia, 1993). Author or editor of 12 books, multi-authored books, and forums, Professor Clowes most recently edited a special number of the journal *Region*, titled “Centrifugal Forces? Russia’s Regional Identities and Initiatives” (5:2 (2016)), following a conference on that topic held at the University of Virginia in 2015. A multi-authored book, *Area Studies in the Global Age: Community, Place, Identity* appeared with Northern Illinois University Press in 2016. Professor Clowes’s recently published books include an interdisciplinary study on post-Soviet Russian identity, *Russia on the Edge: Imagined Geographies and Post-Soviet Identity* (Cornell, 2011) and a discursive history of Russian philosophy, *Fiction’s Overcoat: Russian Literary Culture and the Question of Philosophy* (Cornell, 2004). Professor Clowes is an associate editor of *Russian Review* and serves on a number of other editorial boards (*Losevskie chteniia*; *Region*; and *Heidelberger Beiträge zur Slavistischen Philologie*). Specifically, I would like to concentrate on ZhD’s deployment of space and time—what Mikhail Bakhtin would call “the chronotope” (the intrinsic connectedness of artistically expressed temporal and spatial relationships), and the Moscow-Tartu school of semiotics would refer to as spatial and temporal planes

in the structure of the artistic text. In a more contemporary critical parlance, the term “geopoetics” is applicable here— in W. J. T. Mitchell’s words, “the question of landscape, the poetics and iconology of space and place, and all their relations to social and political life, to experience, to history.” As Mitchell’s formulation explicitly articulates it, and as can be seen in Bakhtin, and more implicitly in the Moscow-Tartu writings, poetic and political meanings of space and time are linked. My objective, accordingly, is twofold: to open up a new interpretative channel by examining spatial-temporal parameters of ZhD; and, via the former, to contribute to the polemics surrounding ZhD’s political and historiographic vision. I will address the following issues: a) Bykov’s symbolic geography—the capital, the periphery, the heartland, and assorted real and fantastic locales; b) non-Euclidian spaces and warped timelines c) the chronotope of the road; d) the motifs of the railroad and the train; and e) traits of space- time and movement as they pertain to the problem of (un)freedom. As I will argue, of strategic importance to ZhD’s spatial-temporal poetics and, by extension, the novel at large is the problematic of personal and collective freedom and lack of it.

Various modern writers use the utopian/dystopian genre as a channel to express their visions and scenarios of the future that cannot be expressed in any other way. I define a utopia in terms of a new state structure, whereas anti-utopia concentrates on the tragedy of the individual forced to live under totalitarian pressures. Anti-utopia always includes a description of some utopian project but verifies this ‘happiness for everybody’ through the fate of the individual (usually a protagonist). The anti-utopias of the

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1990s and 2000s actually give a comprehensive account of life in the country where the action takes place. The actual state, in whatever form it exists at the time of writing, is an active participant in the anti-utopia, generally through its functionaries or ideological spokesmen. The goal of this paper is to show the anti-utopia is turning from a literary genre into a provocative political prognosis based on the clash of civilizations.

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