

BETWEEN GERMANY AND RUSSIA: LATVIA IN P. KRASNOV'S NOVEL "BEYOND THE THISTLE"

Zans Badins

Institute of the Humanities and Social Sciences, Daugavpils University, 13 Vienibas Street,
Daugavpils LV-5401, Latvia

Abstract

The collapse of the Russian Empire during the First World War led initially to the proclamation and then to the creation of new independent states. Alongside, the process of outflow of the Bolsheviks' ideological and political opponents from Soviet Russia began. As a result, millions of former citizens of the Russian Empire were in exile creating a new culture of Russian emigration. Of particular interest is the attitude of Russian Soviet culture and Russian emigrant culture to Latvia and other new countries of Europe.

The novel by Peter Krasnov is a rather rarely met genre of anti-utopia in the literature of Russian emigration. In the artistic world of the novel, Russia is opposed to Europe. 'How to return and how to equip Russia' is one of the cross-cutting themes in the literature of Russian emigration. In the fantastic world of P. Krasnov, history is inverted. In Europe socialist and communist ideas prevail, and Russia is miraculously protected by the thistle thickets from the social plague that brings death and destruction to European civilization. Latvia turns out to be a kind of intermediate link, preserving the features of both the German and Russian world, turning into specific borderland space. Due to its geographical proximity to Russia, the Latvian space gains special semantics. For Europe, Latvia reminds of the old, extinct Russia.

Keywords: *the establishment of the Republic of Latvia, Russian emigration, alternative history, national identity, patriotism*

1. INTRODUCTION

General Peter Nikolaevich Krasnov is one of the iconic figures in the history of Russia. He was not only a supporter of anti-Bolshevik movement, ataman of the Don Cossack Host, but also a political personality, writer, and publicist. The historian S. Zverev, author of a seven-volume book "General Krasnov. Monarchic Tragedy", has come to a conclusion that defeat of monarchists was not just their own personal, but global tragedy. In the modern-day Russia the disgraced general is accused of cooperation with Hitler and of "Cossack separatism". General Krasnov was a nobleman and monarchist, yet monarchy presupposes well deserved disparity [1]. In the West, Peter Krasnov is primarily known as a politician, one of the main participants of the Civil War [2, 3]. P. Krasnov is considerably less known as an author of belles-lettres. Due to ideological reasons, P. Krasnov's creative writing in the USSR was beyond the attention of literary scholars for many years to come. Among the works published in the West, the article in American Slavistics by L. Foster "The Revolution and the Civil War in Russian Emigre Novels" [4] deserves attention.

Krasnov was an extraordinary writer. Already before 1914, he obtained noticeable interest of the reading public. Nevertheless, he preferred journalism; he was regarded as the favourite military publicist of Emperor Nicholas II and was as highly valued also by military critics. His first literary works were also primarily read by militaries. After Krasnov happened to lead the White Movement, this raised interest towards him as a writer and rightly made him one of the most widely-read authors of the Russian emigration. In 1921—1943 Krasnov published 41 books: one-volume and multivolume novels, four collections of stories and two volumes of memoirs. In his books he reveals himself as a monarchist and steadfast anti-Semite, believing that Bolshevism and revolution – it is conspiracy of "international Jewry" [5]. In 1926, Krasnov was among the candidates to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature. His works were translated into more than ten world languages. Interest towards P. Krasnov's creative writing

was also observed in Latvia. Already in 1910, the novel “Ella Rullit” was translated into Latvian [6], a novel describing the faith of a Latvian girl and events of the Russian revolution of 1905-1907 in the territory of Vidzeme. In 1928, Edvards Rudzītis translated the novel “The Amazon of the Desert” [7] into Latvian. A year later the publishing house “Grāmatu draugs” published the novel “Beyond the Thistle”. Publishing of the Complete Works of P.Krasnov was undertaken in Russia in 2018 (currently seven volumes have been issued).

2. SYMBOLISM OF THISTLE

The theme of “how to equip Russia” is one of the cross-cutting themes not only in Krasnov’s creative writing, but also in the Russian literature in general. The novel “Beyond the Thistle” is one of the first works written in emigration. The greater part of it was written from July till November 1921, and the first Berlin issue dates back to 1922. The novel is set in the second half of the 20th century. A name of a plant – thistle (lat. *Cárduus*) – is used in the novel’s title, while in the very text of the novel, professor Kleist, while in Latvia and seeing this plant, names it *Onopórdum acánthium* – that is, cotton thistle, a plant of sunflower family, that is often confused with thistle. Quite often in the traditional rural Russian culture various plants with prickles are called thistle. Russian peasantry has known thistle since olden time. Thistle was given various names in different regions – cotton thistle, milk thistle, beggar’s-button. It is a biennial plant of the family Asteraceae with prickled 2-meter stem, with bright violet flowers in flower-heads. The Russian tradition considers thistle to be a protective charm plant due to its magical properties. It was believed that thistle scares away devilry, cures diseases, and protects cattle. Hunters used thistle to smoke weapons in order to shoot without a miss. In the folklore, thistle is identified with evil creatures, yet at the same time this plant could be used to chase these evil creatures away.

Travelers stored waxed cloth (cloth impregnated with wax) with boiled thistle in it for the journey. During Christmastide, thistle was in advance placed under pillow for seven days and nights. During the last, eighth night of the Christmastide, it was brought to a wisewoman. She boiled it to specific rites, together with wax and frankincense. Waxed cloth prepared in such a way was sewed up in an amulet. It was believed that the person wearing such an amulet was protected against intrigues of devilry during travel. With Christianity spreading, thistle began to be viewed as a symbol of sin, grief and God’s damnation during the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise. Images of martyrs were often framed by thistle tendrils [8]. Thistle is quite seldom mentioned in proverbs and sayings. One of the few examples – *thistle and sow-thistle make their way under fence from a neighbour to a neighbour* – states the important peculiarity of thistle to go beyond the set limits that proves to be of significance for the artistic world of the novel “Beyond the Thistle”.

3. OPPOSITION ‘US – THEM’ IN THE NOVEL “BEYOND THE THISTLE”

As it was written by Y.M. Lotman, every culture begins with the division of the world into the inner one (us) and outer one (them) that are portrayed correspondingly as universe and chaos. Besides, a person is a priori immersed into real space given to them by nature, yet it directly impacts the way how they model the world in their conscience [9]. In the course of grasping the surrounding space, the border line can be shifted; its setting is always linked with those who inhabit this space – “us” or “them”. Thus, the border appears as means to identify one’s own space, demarking not so much physical and geographical space, as societies in their broader sense. Also in our time, the border is far from being only a conventional line, but it is given a very significant meaning in cultural awareness, thus being the carrier and symbol of the most important public and personal meanings [10], and in this way it performs its cultural and psychological function.

From the outset the Russian emigrant culture opposed itself to the Soviet culture – culture of the new metropolis, highlighting the category of memory. The past of the Russian culture, especially in the creative works by emigrant writers of the first wave becomes a backbone element allowing to accept the catastrophic events of the present.

Krasnov's novel "Beyond the Thistle" raises interest in the way that it is not only focused on the past, but also on the future; this is also facilitated by the author's own definition of the genre – fantasy novel. The artistic world of the novel is characterised by retrofuturism. Nonetheless, it is also a kind of novel-sermon, a sermon about ideal Russia and ideal Europe that is seen by the author in the alliance of monarchic powers of Russia and Germany.

In the artistic world of the novel, Russia is opposed to the rest of the world due to its non-existentialism. For about half a century no-one has the slightest understanding about what happens beyond the tall thistles in the territory that once used to be the Russian Empire. The European political maps show a huge black blot and an inscription in ominous red letters "PLAGUE" in the place where the Russian Empire used to be. The thistle thickets serve as a kind of a reversed "iron curtain". *The thistle wall thus is a unique "charm" of the new Russia against the powers of the "European evil"* [11]. As seen by Krasnov, it is curious that the quality rebirth of Russia is possible only in case of Russia's self-isolation from the rest of the world and, first of all, from the Western Europe and the USA whose culture, art and, primarily, politics and world view are perceived as foreign to the future Russia.

3.1. Germany

The beginning of the novel "Beyond the Thistle" is set in Germany in the second half of the 20th century. By that time Europeans perceived Russia as a vanished country, the Russian language was learnt just as one of the dead languages. Germany's world – it is a world of magnificent medieval churches with clocks clearly separating time for prayers from time for amusements and curfew. The main character is a sentimental and thoughtful artist who sees a ghost of a girl in Sanssouci Park, a ghost that represents Russia to Korenev. Korenev's beloved German girl Elsa tries to "cure" Korenev who is in deep melancholy in a traditional German way. It is curious that the author does not find their Russian counterparts thus including German words in the text: Wandern – travel on foot around Germany in a group, Ausflug – trip to the country, basket picnic. The medieval charm of ancient German towns with steep roofs, towers, massive churches and melodic chime of the evening bellringing only beneficially influenced Germans smoking cigars and knocking on tables with beer mugs. Elsa calls him in a German way – Peter, yet he hears as an unfamiliar ghost calls him in a Russian way – Piotr, as his mother used to call him. As a result, three Russian emigres, Korenev's beloved Elsa, professor Kleist from Berlin University and the representative of an American charity organization Miss Kreggs set out on an expedition to the mysterious Russia at one's own risk, each of them chasing their own particular goals. *Everyone had their own home in Berlin where they lived, loved, laughed, and sang. But Korenev, Baklanov and Dyatlov always felt that it was not their home. <...> We are going home, — and if there is nothing, — the three of us will create Russia from this "nothing"!* [12].

In order to get to Russia, protagonists must go from Germany and through Poland to Latvia. New borders between countries become no lesser obstacle than thistle wall along the Russian border. The Polish consulate in Berlin announces that they do not intend to issue any visas to Russians. Protagonists refer to their German and American citizenship, and only then the Polish consul agrees to issue visas, yet still upon condition that the travellers have visas of the following country – Latvia. The same story is repeated in the Latvian consulate: the consul agrees to issue visas in case visas of the next country are granted. But what country is it? In the artistic world of the novel, Estonia perished at the same time together with Russia, and the leftovers of Estonia joined Latvia. The next country, occupying a part of East Siberia, is Japan, yet the Japanese consul refuses to issue visas due to the fear of the plague that the travellers can bring back from Russia. However, the Europeans with almost lost hope are rescued by a "scam merchant" who is ready to provide them with the needed passports within three hours demanding 200 rubbles for each visa.

Europe is very often pictured grotesquely. In his anti-utopian novel, Krasnov projects to Europe, mainly to Germany, the Bolshevism horror that has overtaken the historical Russia. Germany is associated with dissemination of power, murders, robberies and thefts. Bribery has penetrated all the spheres of society, bringing speculators to the foreground. There was practically no difference between street fights and encounters in Parliament or various types of unions. Korenev's crisis coincides with the crisis of European democracy. *For already forty years our democracy has been running around in circles and wants to create the world in its own way, and it has provided nothing but decline. There are more poor*

people, people degrade, mortality rate is tremendous, birth rate is miserable, there is not enough bread, no freedom, a wakeful eye of polizei-presidium above all, ministers are replaced twice a year, all are disarmed and all walk with their tails between the legs [13]. The Western civilization, as seen by the writer, has gone off the road. Breaking away from Christian values has led to triumph of fake democracy, social disasters and collapse of creative personality that was expressed in modernist and avant-garde art. *Rotten West* – thus the modern German painting is described by Russian tsarevna Radost' Mikhailovna. Krasnov publicly stands against the mass culture built in the West, culture that becomes an exponent of Western ideas. *Competitions of football teams are inflated to world-scale events. Masons spin heads of the masses of people <...>. Our heroes?! Cinema artists, naked dancers, racing cyclers, champion motorists, winners of football and lawn tennis competitions. Our government people are obsessed with bridge and hockey, our youth — with dance and cinema... <...> We die out. We have created some sick democratic snobbery, and this snobbery has taken over the whole people* [14]. Krasnov's juxtaposition of Russia and Germany – it is juxtaposition of order and chaos, true and false values.

3.2. Latvia

The main characters arrive to Latvia by train, to Marienburg station (Alūksne). Krasnov views Marienburg as transitional space – it seems to already be Europe, yet still preserving memories about Russia. In the Latvian space Korenev searches for signs bonding him with the Russian history – those are remains of a Russian fortress, founded by Ivan III, and a statue of Peter I, as this is the exact place where the future Emperor *was lost in admiring a laundry girl doing the laundry, and made her his wife, found in her a faithful mate, loyal to him and Russia, — Empress Catherine I* [15]. Many artefacts linking Marienburg to Russia appear to be destroyed and abandoned, yet, *despite the fact that the Republic of Latvia has already existed for fifty years, but Russia was lost for the same number of years, the population spoke Russian. It was the border <...> People around spoke Russian, albeit not too well <...> Why haven't they forgotten the Russian language? Why? Why? So, it means they believed it was needed. So, it means they, simple folk, believe, know, feel, foreknow that Russia is alive. That it is not a fairy-tale, it is true story* [16], – contemplates Korenev.

At the dinner-table, an old pastor tells about events of the war when English and Latvian troops were stationed near Marienburg waiting for something dreadful to happen. Russia, as described in the pastor's tale, is equated with the land of death; an English officer who went there and who had fought near Ypres, could not stand the wave of memories about the horrors that could not be silenced either by spirits, morphine, or cocaine, and shot himself dead at the nearby pond. The tavern owner Kampars confesses that for a fee he helped some young people to find way into the territory of the dangerous country. *Many go there. No-one returns* [17], - he shares his experience. At the same time borderland residents are well-informed about major Russian events, that the Emperor has been changed, and Christian faith prevails.

Atheistic Europe (in the novel, in Europe Christianity is declared to be pernicious doctrine) is committed to Darwin's school of thought, yet people in Marienburg, on the border with Russia, unintentionally start feeling need in God. A professor who had arrived at the town from Derpt (Tartu) to give lectures on materialism was nearly beaten. The once closed church has once again opened its doors for parishioners.

In the novel, professor Kleist serves as an expresser of European ideology regarding Russia. In his reflections, he builds on the idea, expressed earlier in Germany, that *the Slavs – it is manure for the German race* [18]. He, while making his first steps on Russian soil, comes to a conclusion that *they have played the role of this manure. Fields are enriched with bloody casualties, soil has rested and become virgin fertile... It's time for German people to proceed with its cultivation* [19]. Kleist dreams about colonizing *this wonderful land*. However, his ideology is brought to the ground when encountering the post-Bolshevik Russian reality.

3.3. Russia

Rus', as seen by the main character of the novel, is double-faced, and this is its distinction from the West. *One Rus' is desperate and forlorn, that Rus' is useless, rotten, crumbly, today it can deny its faith, tomorrow it can follow no matter who, the day after it will leave its God. [...] But it is not Russia. Russia*

is gorgeous, strong, it is that other Rus' [20]. This second Rus' appears in the novel "Beyond the Thistle".

At the time when the main characters arrive to Saint-Petersburg, Russia already matures a plan of destroying the thistle wall and building new relations with Europe. For more than forty years Russia was cut off the peoples of Europe and left to itself. During this time Russia has miraculously managed to regain the ancient holiness and holy love to homeland.

His Majesty the Emperor turns Kleist's attention to the fact that the Russian people are not afraid anymore of either disbelief, deception, flaws, malevolence, or hate of the West. And the Russia's main support in the West – it is Germany and the German people, with whom Russian monarchy has ties of friendship since the times of Peter I and Catherine II. Preserved in the fire of the World War and reborn in isolation, Russia appears to be ready for a crusade: *Our armament is so advanced that not a single people of the world can resist us. In case the Majesty pleased, Europe would be conquered in less than a year* [21].

Professor Kleist takes notice of a map hanging in the office of the Russian governor Shuysky. Finland once again becomes the Grand Duchy of Finland, the territory of Latvia shows inscriptions: "Livonian Voivodship", with cities Kolyvan and Riga, and "Teutonic Voivodship". Poland's place shows capitalized inscription "Ukraine", yet in brackets — "Land of Little Russian Cossacks". Bukovina, Bessarabia, Batumi, Trebizond, Erzurum, Mongolia, and Manchuria are also coloured in Russian colours. And even the Gobi Desert has a fresh inscription: "Dalai-lama Voivodship". Shuysky also replies to Kleist with a quote, ascribed to Nickolas I: *"Where the Russian flag is raised once, it must never go down"*. The first task of the new Russia is to *"return the stolen"* [22], as Europe is declared guilty in destruction of the old Russian Empire and activities of Europeans are compared to behaviour of a thief during fire. Shuysky finishes his speech with the following thought: *"these pieces are not so much needed to the Russian people, as they themselves need to accustom to the great Christian faith, Russian culture"* [23].

How is the ideal Russian state presented in the novel "Beyond the Thistle"? Peter Krasnov refers to the ideologeme created already in the 19th century: "Autocracy – Religious Orthodoxy – National consciousness". The former white general does not see development possibilities for Russia outside of monarchy and empire. It is noteworthy that the new Russian Tsar appears before Russia just as Christ did in his time – as Messiah, he arrived to Jerusalem. The Tsar – a 15-year old youngster – descends to Russia on a white horse from the mountains of the far-away Tibet, puts his administration in towns, gives land to locals who are unable to deal with themselves, and forces them to plow – literally. As it was noted by critic Vladimir Amfiteatrov-Kadashev in the Berlin newspaper "Wheel", *with a well "made" and well-developed fable, "Beyond the Thistle" is deprived of living people <...> Characters <...> are not clear, uncertain and, above all, are too contemporary: P.N. Krasnov, while portraying our children and grandchildren (the action in the novel takes place in the second half of the current century), did not try to construct psychology of the future society (as it was done by Wells in "The Sleeper Awakes")*, he simply transfers modern emigres to an imaginary scene of the future [24].

If autocracy determines the form of the new Russian statehood, then Orthodoxy becomes its contents. Orthodoxy penetrates all the strata and all the spheres of life. Every stratum bears its own cross, i.e. experiences certain voluntary limitations. Tsars cannot arrange their private life: for the dynasty to persist, it is necessary to control the population by giving birth to only one heir – tsarevitch. The main female character of the novel – Emperor's daughter Radost' Mikhailovna – refuses love to Korenev, refuses possibility to build her personal happiness and devotes herself to public welfare only, as if justifying her name. Public authorities do not have property, but they live in great comfort on full social security. Peasants and other representatives of common people are owners and support a rather large bureaucratic apparatus.

At the same time everyone treats each other with Christlike love, there are no hungry people, unemployed people or "poor people. Everyone is taken. Some – to relatives, some – to parishes, others – to monasteries". Miss Kreggs's attempt to establish a charity to help those in need turns out to be a failure due to the actual absence of those in need.

Democracy is presented as a European invention, as an immoral and painful condition. Inhabitants of the new Russia are constantly astonished by the Europeans' behaviour who are ready to march in streets with red flags. Also, the personal appearance of strangers causes bewilderment – *There, moustache scraped, beards shaven, and lasses in so short skirts that you can see knees. It is not to our thinking. From Germany, eh?* [25].

The new school pursues upbringing of the Russian people in love towards homeland, obedience to the Tsar and Christian faith. *Being a Russian — it is all one can only dream about. Bringing Russian name into repute — it is the dream of any child* [26]. Krasnov always writes the word “Russian” with a capital letter, though it is normally not capitalized in Russian.

The new Russia is the place where science prospers because of it being Orthodox. Berendeev, chemist and Mendeleev's heir, cannot discover a new element because he did not pray well. Having prayed in the right way, with all the love to God — and the periodic table is updated with a new element. The German man could only come up with a monkey (obviously the English scientist Darwin's theory is meant), while the Orthodox Christian scientists have achieved tremendous success, it is due to their achievements that every hut now has a light-giver and far-speaker – equivalents of television, telephone and radio. Flying ships, devices allowing distance control over enemy battle ships, a train that flies above rails. But in the alternative universe of Peter Nikolaevich Krasnov, only few use high-speed trains. In the new Russia, no-one strives to travel, let alone abroad. Everyone feels well where they live. The only reason for travelling is a pilgrimage to Orthodox sanctuaries.

Krasnov's juxtaposition of Russia and Europe is presented through the opposition “us – them”. Russia – it is order, standing against the chaos in Europe. Correct ideas are always found side by side with physical beauty, while the incorrect ones, inevitably, – with ugliness. In this respect, attitude towards art in Russia and Europe is prominent. In Europe, Napoleon, Frederick the Great, Bismarck, Shiller and Goethe are replaced by revolutionary masses – hordes of grey and rude people: in one of German paintings, marching clouds of proletariat trample portraits of “tyrants of power”, “tyrants of thought”, “tyrants of form” down into mud. Gradually all the classical Western art is placed under the ban. To Krasnov, contemporary Western art is faulty in its content and thus takes ugly forms – *There you now is striving away from nature, search for new ways, almost no-one paints there in colours <...> They glue paper scraps, egg shells, varied garbage on canvas* [27]. The new Russia is no place for sick songlets by Vertinsky, Blok's poems and Balmont's poetry, full of reticence, much less for Severyanin's, Mayakovsky's and Marienhof's ignorant vulgarities [28].

The only character who does not accept Russian reality throughout the whole novel – it is Democrat Dyatlov (‘Democrat’ is the character's name). Dyatlov refuses to attire in the traditional Russian caftan and shirt. He compares the Orthodox way of living to anesthetizing and maddening cocaine (allusion to the phrase *Religion is the opium of the people*). Dyatlov comes to a thought that all Rus' holds on the Tsar and God, but *you cannot throw down God thus at once. <...> You take the Tsar* [29]. Dyatlov nurtures a plan to murder the imperial family, and lets Korenev in on his plans, however, the latter kills Dyatlov by striking his head with a riffler.

Two years after the arrival of the main characters to Russia, its recovery takes place. The first country recognizing harmful impact of Western ideas is Poland. *Like a mellow fruit, Poland has fallen into Russia's arms. Two years after this event, the Finnish Rigsdag has made a decision during a ceremonial meeting about affiliation to Russia on old grounds. Russia has restored its borders of 1914, enlarged by important acquisitions in Central Asia* [30]. Not only the Tsar, but also almost any other Russian has a feeling of returning to Europe not as poor relatives, but as teachers. The return to Europe is motivated by two reasons: 1) Christian one – to save the Western culture from total collapse and decline, and it is worthy of note that the book “The Decline of the West” by Oswald Spengler was published just a couple of years before the Krasnov's novel; 2) practical, economic one – Krasnov sees the growth of Russia as an agricultural country that feeds the West and receives manufactured goods from Europe. The symbol of the new union between Russia and Germany is Korenev and Elsa's son — *<...> a wonderful, healthy child. <...> offspring of relations between a Russian man and a German woman. And the result of the relations between Russia and Germany must be as healthy* [31]. Noteworthy is the grandma's moral

instruction to Radost' Mikhailovna (Russia), heard in the very final of the novel: *Remember, you have nothing of your own. Everything that is foreign to you – is like your own* [32].

4. CONCLUSIONS

The author of the novel "Beyond the Thistle" undertakes an attempt to overcome historical and worldview conflicts between Russia and Europe that is embodied by Germany. The opposition of "us – them" that prevails in the first part of the novel in relations between Germany and Russia is replaced by a new vector. In the artistic world of the novel, Russia, while left in isolation, is the first of the world countries to overcome fascination with socialist ideas destroying the society's moral ways. *A Buddhist monastery in Lhasa serves as spiritual source for restitution of Russian monarchy* [33]. In Krasnov's utopian model, Russia overcomes its Asian underdevelopment, borrows all the best from the West, denies everything leading to destruction and decay, turns into Eurasia – *It was exactly Eurasia – that midpoint of two great ancient worlds where inquisitive philosophies of Tibetan and Chinese wisemen and denying mind of the far West have merged together in a strange harmony* [34]. This is the exact Russia in which a committed royalist P. Krasnov sees salvation for Europe. In his novel, the author speaks sarcastically about former Entente allies of the Russian Empire – France and especially England. Already in the early 1920s Krasnov foresees that the British Empire is going to lose all its colonies. The Divine Providence punished England for betraying the Russian White Movement. Oddly enough, but from all the European states the general Krasnov allocates the role of the ally to Germany, a country that he saw as a part of his future and an opportunity for renewed Europe. At the same time in the artistic world of the novel peoples and countries living between Germany and Russia appear to be deprived of an independent development vector and doomed to destruction. In his anti-communist utopia, Krasnov embodies the national myth, ascending to Slavofilism ideas, about ideal Russian past projected to future.

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