

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

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Philippine Studies vol. 20, no. 3 (1972): 459–520

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Fri June 30 13:30:20 2008

Special Report

Impressions in Winter: A Russian Notebook

LEONIDAS V. BENESA

Moscow

3 March 1970

WHO'S that?" I asked my young Russian guide, Victor Pogostine, as we finally reached a square or plaza around 7 p.m., and the driver was turning right. A tall bronze statue of a man with chin jutting out dominated the area.

"Mayakovsky," Victor said. And, a few seconds later, as the car came to a halt, Victor pointed to the building in front of us and added with a twinkle in his eye, "And this is your hotel. It's called Pekin."

"Not that city—"

"The same."

We both laughed. And so here I am in Moscow, Russia, on the seventh floor of the Pekin or Peking Hotel, right on Mayakovsky Square, named after one of Russia's great contemporary poets who is now undergoing a literary revival of sorts in Paris with the publication of his letters to Lou and others. Here I am recording the start of another unusual chapter in my way-faring existence, a visit to the Soviet Union.

"I shall be passing through Russia in the last throes of winter," I had written to a friend while I was still in Paris. And, sure enough, everything is ice and snow except for trees and towns and cities, a world and a wilderness of white.

To my great relief, thank God, I do not feel the cold at all. I'm glad I didn't buy that \$85 coat during the brief stop-over at Warsaw this afternoon. I have come to Russia in the dead of winter in an autumn coat which I bought at Macy's in New York in 1967.

"Are those crows flying up there?" I had asked Victor, as we finally came out of airport customs with my bags which had come ahead of me last Sunday. Earlier, at the airport in Warsaw, I had seen one such black bird scrounging for something edible on a drift of snow.

"Crows? No. They are known as grechi. They are the harbingers of spring."

I wish I could stay long enough to witness the reawakening of nature. But Victor says that spring comes to Russia usually in the first weeks of April, when the sun comes out and the birds return, and everywhere is running water because of the melting stuff: the Thaw.

"You must hate all this by now," I said, while we were going by car to the city 35 kilometers or so away, referring to the snowbanks on both sides of the road and to the woods all snowed under. And he said yes, they were getting tired of the monochrome of it all. But I said that to me, to whom snow is an experience bordering on the preternatural, every blessed thing was "beautiful," perfectly matching the winter we tropical Asians know through postcards, paintings of wintry landscapes by Brueghel for example, and white Christmases.

In fact, from Paris to Moscow, I had spent a great amount of time marvelling over and feasting on the abstractions of snow and mountain, field and human habitation, down down there across the breadth of Europe. I even saw snowbanks scalloped by the wind.

"The weather was awful yesterday," Victor said. "Windy and wet. It is better today."

I asked my welcomer where he had studied his English which he speaks very well and colloquially, and he said, "Right here in Moscow."

Victor Pogostine is a student of sociology (a euphemism for socialistic studies), and does translations on the side in that field. He has lived in India. I remember Mira Salganik saying to me in Manila on the subject of Russian types, "Leo, don't judge me or think of me as a symbol of a system, but simply as me."

Victor, whose last name means "cemetery," the first Russian I have met in Moscow or in the Soviet Union, is certainly not such a symbol or a type. Except probably that he is symbolic or typical of young men all over the world who want to have meaning in their lives. Victor could have been Herman, my Frankfurt guide in 1967, or Hennings, who took me in town in Berlin in the same year during a tour of West Germany.

On the way to the hotel, both Victor and I studiously avoided any mention of ideology, and perhaps even in Russia today there are people who are more concerned about its existential rather than philosophical aspects. In any case, I am merely a visitor here.

"I'm sorry I couldn't have come at a better time," I said, thinking of the season. "But if I had not come now, I don't think I'd have been able to see Russia in a thousand years. It is this matter of events conspiring together, you know."

Victor nodded in understanding.

Of course, after Paris and its glittering boutiques, what I have seen so far of Moscow on both sides of the avenue along which we had come to the hotel appear to be drab and grey and uninspiring, except for the snow, in the gloom of the winter evening. But then, even New York or San Francisco would suffer in comparison to Paris, queen of cities.

"How was your stay in Paris? Did you like it?"

"How would *you* like to stay in Paris for six months? Can you imagine staying in Paris for six months?"

"Yes, I can imagine," Victor beamed at the prospect, but his face quickly clouded over, "I can only imagine—"

I felt sorry for him at that moment, and somewhat guilty for being so peripatetic. But I am sure he will go places in more ways than one, if his mastery of the English language right here in his own city is any index. He also speaks Italian, although he has not been to Italy.

"I am to give you 100 rubles," Victor said before saying goodbye. "Will you sign for it, please?" He laughed when I asked him to tell me what a ruble meant, but he said I need not worry because the prices of the food items are written down on the menu cards. Instead of 100 rubles I counted 126, after he left the hotel.

A Filipino in Moscow, or Moscou, or Mockba as it is spelled in Russian. Indeed, while I was trying to get the Moscow route in Paris, the Air France people said that very rarely if at all is that route taken on one's way to Manila. And yet it is more direct: Paris-Moscow-Delhi-Bangkok-Manila.

There are, and have been, Filipinos living and studying here. But it is true that there is not much traffic because of passport limitations. I am extremely lucky to have obtained permission from our DFA in Manila, through the help of friends and the Paris embassy.

Earlier, in front of the Hotel Peking, I had asked Victor, "How do you say thank you in Russian?"

Victor said something which sounded like "spachiba."

"Spachiba," I said to the driver of the automobile, the official car for visitors like me. The man smiled widely, tickled by the foreigner's first attempt at a language, like a baby learning to talk by the live method.

Spachiba for everything, God bless the Russian people, and I hope they don't mind.

4 March 1970

USSR Writers Union, 52 Vorovsky Street. Offices housed in a small building. Statue of Leo Tolstoy outside in the courtyard: very serious-looking, seated figure, contemplating a lapful of snow.

"This is Andrei Voznesensky," Mira introduced a tall, grave-looking, boxer-type fellow in the corridor, and to her compatriot she said, "Remember the Philippine poet I was telling you about?"

But the man appeared to have other things in mind. From the way he was acting, one could easily imagine that he had done it again. It will be remembered that he created quite a splash in the international press after he failed to attend a writers conference in America because of unexpedited travel papers. My intuition was on target, as I found out from Mira later. In fact, Voznesensky was in a sort of hurry to get out of the premises.

Earlier, in one of the rooms, where I had been brought to arrange my itinerary, Youri Rumjantsev, who heads the Union's Afro-Asian Department, discussed and finalized the details of my Russian sojourn which includes out of town trips to Leningrad and Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. All his suggestions ended with the proviso, "if you are not against."

For my Moscow stay: a sightseeing tour of the old and the new, a performance of the visiting Philippine dancers (!), the Bolshoi, etc. And "of course" a speaking engagement or two, visits with some writers, museums, etc. Both Rumjantsev and Mira (she works at the Union) were in the Philippines last year in connection with the World Poets Conference in Manila. It was finally decided that I was to leave Russia for New Delhi and home on the 19th of March.

"Would you like to know the position of religion in the Soviet Union?"

The question came from Rumjantsev and caught me by surprise. I looked at him and then at Mira, who was seated

in front of me, and when I said, "Yes, insofar as it relates to art," they both smiled.

It was to this end that they had included Georgia in my itinerary apparently, not to mention the weather. The trans-Caucasian region is in a warmer zone. I learned from Mira later that they had thought of packing me off immediately to a southern republic ("res-publika") where the weather would be more clement. But they finally decided to leave the matter to me.

I had actually caught the Union unprepared to welcome me because of the short notice I had given them. The wire I had sent them indicating my arrival Sunday arrived Monday, so that the Union had a frantic time of it looking for me at the airport and the city's hotels. Apparently, the telex from Air France regarding my inability to get out of Orly Sunday because of police requirements (no visa de sortie) was not relayed.

But since there were not too many visitors in winter, they quickly arranged everything, for me. It would have been a mess if I had actually arrived Sunday. I could not have arrived at a better time than yesterday.

"The weather seems to be all right," I was telling Mira, and she said I should not depend on it, because it could just change at any time. I said that everywhere I go for the first time the sun comes out blazing, and that Moscow would be no exception. "It will be sunshine for the next few days while I am here."

Mira smiled at my childish faith and said something about my magical powers, while Rumjantsev merely said that he was glad for my decision.

Afternoon tour of city by car. Moscow river gelid. Comecon building by the bridge: probably the most modern and highest structure in this metropolis, although this lone skyscraper is a dwarf compared to those in New York or even Boston. But lots of space, so no need for vertical expansion at least for the time being. Skyline etched by what appear to be church facades with spires, but they are buildings for other

human uses, like the Ukraine Hotel, usually the way station for foreigners, with a huge, flamboyant bronze statue of the Ukrainian poet Shevchenko in front of the building.

"An architectural vogue twenty years ago," explained Victor with regard to the church-spire look, the Stalin gothic.

Moscow University, with its 20,000 students, also of this type of architecture, and an apartment building or two. But we just observed the university from the road and from a distance. Wings include student hostels. Along route, Lenin Library, supposed to be the biggest in the world with its 20 million volumes. The Bolshoi Theater. The Kremlin and its crenellated walls, and the familiar gilded onion or lotusbud spires glinting in the late afternoon sun.

At the Union Rumjantsev had asked me if I wanted to see the "Philippine dancers." Mira added that perhaps I might not want to be spending my time in Moscow just to see dances from the Philippines.

"Why not?" I said, thinking that the Filipinescas was on world tour this year, and this group could possibly be it. Also, I was thinking of the surprise on Leonor Orosa Goquingco's face were I suddenly to materialize like an apparition.

It was the Filipinescas. Victor was able to get me a ticket for the first row, so that I could easily get onstage after the show to meet my friends and compatriots. But, before the performance itself started, I espied Leonor coming towards me with a Russian interpreter companion.

"Hello, Leonor," I said, extending a hand, and she just stared at me for a few seconds, and even forgot my name as she tried to introduce me to her companion.

"Leo Benesa," I said to the Russian, shaking her hand.

"Leo, what on earth are you doing here? What happened to you?"

Leonor's second question had to do with my uncut hair of seven months. I told her what I was doing in Russia. I ex-

plained the long hair by my Paris sojourn and that it was ideal wear for winter. At intermission time she brought me backstage, where I met a number of Russian dance people who were choreographer types like Leonor, and some of the young dancers.

I was practically one of the last people to go back to my seat, and that was how Mira spotted me from the balcony in spite of a full house. And, as the musical instruments, mostly brass percussives, started doing their thing, a young bespectacled man approached me from the wings and spoke a few words to me in Spanish mentioning Mira's name and saying to kindly follow him and to join them. It was Leonid, my Russian namesake, who like Mira and Rumjantsev was in Manila last year.

Both Mira and Leonid must have seen a number of Philippine dances during their stay in the Philippines. Mira asked me what I thought of the first part, and I said I found it too stylized. But she was apparently referring to the balletic disciplines, as she remarked that she wished the troupe had concentrated more on the authentic folk movements rather than those of the international idiom.

Unfortunately, I was unable to get her and Leonor together. It would have been a very fruitful discussion both ways, as Mira is a critic. The second portion of the presentation, however, turned out to be exactly what Mira was wishing for, although the first part's interpretation of the Muslim *singkil* was in itself a justification of the whole first section, actually the blinding climax, and the spectators were understandably and visibly stunned.

Leonor's daughter Raquel, the star of the show, was completely luminous as the Muslim princess, and backstage during the intermission an English-speaking woman, a dance instructress I think, was cuddling her and saying, "My little daughter, my baby," as the real life mother was showing other people a gong and a jaw's harp, which one of the boys promptly played for the benefit of the instant audience.

"C'est comme la musique electronique!" exclaimed one of the women. Another woman praised Leonor's pacing. I myself pitied her, looking at her meager props and instruments. She had only one prop man, flitting about like a ghost between numbers. But what really mattered was the spirit, not the appurtenances of the troupers.

And sure enough, the *tinikling* (Leonor's version) as danced by her daughter, a rare bird truly, with its accelerating rhythm, brought the house down. To cap it all, the young girl went down to the audience, and picked out a man (I was told later that he was a Bolshoi dancer), while one of the boys got a girl with heavy boots on as a partner.

And, in a matter of seconds, the two guest dancers were doing the bamboo dance with their partners. As if this were not enough, a young man in barong tagalog stood before the microphone and sang a famous Russian song (a cavalry song, I think) whose refrain is sung by the whole audience, together with the boys and girls of the Philippine troupe. It was a highly flattering gesture and the Russians were overwhelmed.

"How's his Russian diction?" I asked Mira, indicating the singer. She said it was very good. In fact she and Leonid were reacting to the words, which meant that the singer knew what they were all about, and was putting the proper emotional emphases in the right places.

And so I came to Moscow, to see the Filipinescas for the first time. Another offshoot of the evening was my meeting with Joji Barbero, the daughter of one of our Philippine congressmen. She's studying in Moscow as a scholar, together with the daughter of General Lapuz.

Later, at dinner (Mira and Leonid ended up bringing me over to the hotel and having dinner with me, with Leonid picking up the tab) downstairs at the restaurant on first floor—from Mira I learned that Voznesensky was, to use her colorful British idiom, "in the soup again." He had written a play which was discontinued after two performances last month. The title of the play is "Saving Face." The circulation of the

printed copies was stopped. I asked if the other poet, Evgeny Evtushenko, was around.

"Yes, he's around, and not around. I saw him two days ago. He's been working on a 3,000-line poem, which is frightening him a bit. He's now writing the last 200 lines. He says he feels like a woman in labor."

"Jung," I said.

And my companion (Leonid had first gone home for a while to get me a winter coat to lend to me, bless him) who does not believe in Jung too much said smilingly that after all the feminine element in all artists is very strong. She mentioned neo-Freudianism or what she calls "Frommism" as a more reliable psychological tool.

"But don't get me wrong. I may sound as if I'm defending Freud. I'm not."

We both agreed, however, that beyond a point Freud's theories become useless. A discussion regarding the responsibility of the writer or artist to society ended up in nirvana because I suspect both of us were deliberately being vague....

5 March 1970

"Hello, Mira," I greeted her at the Palace of Congresses tonight during intermission. The building is inside the Kremlin, and it was the Bolshoi performing the opera based on the Don Quijote story. But I should really start this entry at the beginning, when I visited the offices of the weekly magazine "Ogonyok," which means "little fire." That was after lunch.

Anatoly Sofronov, the editor, was having a staff meeting, but it immediately broke up when Victor and I made our appearance. Rumjantsev was also present. Sofronov himself also went to the Philippines last year with the writers group, so that a considerable part of the conversation, and interview, was on Philippine tourist spots and the traditional Philippine hospitality. Both Rumjantsev and Sofronov are typical Russians, big and burly.

With Victor interpreting (Rumjantsev speaks English, but Sofronov "just a little"), we went through the usual amenities. But in the tradition of the inquisitive press, the questions were finally asked about the student demonstrations in Manila, and how President Marcos was taking it all. I told them I could only guess and could not give details, as I have been in Paris all this time.

Color photos were taken of me, and I was asked if I had any objections about the use of the photos in the magazine, and I said, I'd be happy. I found out later that my face was going to appear on the cover of the weekly magazine. They promised to send me copies.

There is an Afro-Asian writers conference in New Delhi this November, and both Sofronov and Rumjantsev expressed the hope that I would be able to attend, possibly with Amado Hernandez, whose book is already out in Russian translation.

"We'll try to attend as many conferences as we can," I said, "as long as we are invited." What I did not add was "and as long as we have the wherewithal."

Like a good guest I expressed the personal opinion that the establishment of relations between the Philippines and Russia was not too far off, and cracked the current joke among the intellectuals in Manila that "in the Philippines today, if one is a pessimist he studies Chinese, but if he is an optimist he studies Russian!"

They were tickled by that one, although Rumjantsev said that he first heard this joke from American writers.

Before Victor and I left the place, we were shown a collection of appreciative gifts from readers of the magazine (circulation, one million, one hundred thousand) from all over the Soviet Union. And one of the thank-you items must have come from a northern socialist republic (there are 15 in all, and Sofronov says that in all his long life he has only been to 13 of them) because the gift was a stuffed Great Auk.

"Where on earth did you get that fur cap?" Mira asked at the entrance of the Palace of Congresses after the Don Qui-

jote performance as we were going out. I told her that I bought it as a souvenir of my Russian visit. Victor, who had brought me to this tourist shop in the afternoon, was not with me at the Bolshoi performance. In fact, he had made his final good-byes at the same entrance before I went into the congress building. A new interpreter guide was going to replace him tomorrow, as Victor was too busy with his work to be able to accompany me to Leningrad and Tbilisi.

"And how are you going to go back to the hotel?" Mira had asked during intermission when I spotted her as I had just bade goodbye to Leonor and her Filipinescas people right in the midst of all those opera-loving citizens. I told her that I was going to walk along Gorky Avenue, which was at one end of Red Square, up to Mayakovsky Square. Victor had rehearsed the walk completely for me verbally, and I had assured him that after the concentric avenues and boulevards and rues of Paris, walking down or up Gorky Avenue as the grechi flies should be no problem.

"You'll do no such thing!" Mira said, visibly aghast at the image of me walking along a Moscow avenue in the middle of the night and with all that snow, not to mention the subzero temperature. So I found myself riding with her and two English-speaking friends of hers, a young woman and an elderly one.

"Leo has seen the film *Andrei Rublev*," Mira was saying to the older woman. "Remember I was telling you about him? He saw it in Paris." I had told her earlier that I had written a review of the movie for possible publication in the papers back home, and she said that the film director, whom she knew personally, would be happy to get a copy.

We discussed certain shots of the movie, disagreeing on the aptness of this or that scene, and agreeing on certain points. Both the woman and I agreed that it was an excellent film, and Mira promised to get me to meet the director, as well as a painter-writer who is a good friend of hers. Mira was fast becoming a general factotum of sorts.

"You seem to be around every time I need help. You're my guardian angel," I said, as the car headed for Mayakovsky Square.

She laughed, probably because such creatures as angels are no longer in vogue or invoked in the Soviet Union. But how was one to explain so many coincidences and synchronicities except in terms of the extra-ordinary?

My meeting with Leonor and her group here in Moscow, and even inside the Kremlin, belongs to this category of happening. Leo and Leonor discussing, during the *entr'-acte*, in a building inside the Kremlin in Moscow, the topic of her original choreography with certain hand movements, while the beautiful and disciplined dancers of Russian ballet were preparing for the second half of their show backstage: a situation as unreal as fiction.

"I invented these gestures, after much research into our folk or ethnic dances. Just like Isadora Duncan, I started something new. But everybody in the Philippines is using the same without acknowledging the source!"

"You could put out a dance magazine and document these things properly and formally, with dates and all that," I suggested, but at the next instant I knew I was talking nonsense because printing such a magazine requires certain resources. Leonor's world tour is obviously being made on a shoestring budget and with a skeleton troupe, no extras or understudies, not to mention a minimum of props, and no publicity person whatsoever.

Seeing the sumptuousness of the Russian dancers' costumes and sets, not to mention the superb orchestra, in a way must have been torture to Leonor and her boys and girls. But they have to make do with what they have, and besides Russian ballet is Russian ballet, and the Bolshoi the Bolshoi.

"How did you like it?" Mira had asked me in the aisles just after the Russian dancers' performance.

"Bellissima."

"Really."

"Well, I suppose you've seen better performances by the same people."

We bade one another goodbye in front of the Peking Hotel, ending our conversation on the film on the life of the icon master.

6 March 1970

Yekaterina Belashova is a formidable-looking battleaxe in her 70s, with lots of weight to throw around in more ways than one. She is the president of the USSR Artists Union, which is composed of 13,000 painters and sculptors, with 3,000 of them in Moscow alone. Membership requirements include two exhibitions at a "republic level." The other requirements are obvious in a country where socialistic goals are paramount.

Alexander Khmel'nitsky, my new guide, acted as the interpreter. And from the no-nonsense conversation, one gathered that the old woman, who is a sculptor, has not been made president for nothing. A certain sweet wine from Georgia was served, together with tiny but sweet apples and chocolate candy, as well as Soviet art, illustrated, showing scenes of the Revolution, an anniversary publication, about which the less said the better. The old gal will probably hate me later for this statement.

Mutual promises were made between Belashova and myself, and emphasized ("promises must be kept"), towards the exchange of literature and, hopefully, exhibitions of art works. The best would be an exchange of people, even merely on a transient basis. For the first, I sat down with A. Romanenko of the Union's international department, and tentatively outlined some sort of exchange with no undue stress on either side. An exchange of graphic art works appeared to be the most likely and practical....

"How could you possibly be head of the Department of Philippine Studies of the Union without having been in the Philippines?" I asked George Levinson, an elderly professor

probably in his 50s, at the Writers Union later in the day where we had this appointment arranged by the Union people.

Levinson looked embarrassed about it, but laughed just the same, saying that he hoped to get to the Philippines some day. In fact, negotiations, he said, have been going on to get him to lecture at the University of the Philippines. He speaks English without difficulty, and also some French.

The professor gave me a book of Philippine authors published in Russian translation, and showed me several others from his collection, rare items all. Two of the books, both hard-bound, were Rizal's two novels, the *Noli* and the *Fili*. Both editions, 100,000 copies each, have been sold out. I gasped at the numbers.

The professor enlightened me on the great traditional interest of the reading public in the literary and other works of other countries, developing nations included. I told him NVM Gonzalez would be flattered to know that his *Bamboo Dancers* is in Russian paperback, but that the author's *Season of Grace*, which describes a farming couple's struggle against nature to make a living in the jungle, is much better.

I was rather upset to find out that Nick Joaquin was not included among the names of authors published in the collections, "How could you possibly exclude Nick Joaquin? How could you possibly have an anthology of Philippine literature without Nick Joaquin?"

"That sounds like a threat," Mira said, catching the tail-end of the conversation (she was busy attending to some other visiting writer for a while). But, as usual, she was smiling in that sweet impish way of hers, so that it was difficult to say whether she was serious. I suggested that they invite Nick over to Russia and dared say that they would not regret it.

But not all was literary talk with Levinson. He asked me my "personal opinions" of the student demonstrations in Manila, of the administration in the Philippines, Senator Aquino, the movement known as MAN, and a number of other social phenomena in the Philippines. He appears to be very keenly

aware of the country, as he should be since he is a prime Philippines watcher.

But he was rather disappointed when I told him (personal opinion, of course) that labor has failed to be a force in national policy in spite of Ignacio Lacsina, that the student movement lacks cohesive force although the killing of some of them has been or could become a psychological weapon in favor of the students, that Lorenzo Tañada has "missed the bus" politically insofar as the presidency is concerned, that MAN was one of those things that start with a considerable amount of noise in the Philippines, but, and so on, and so forth. Also, that the KM appears to be Mao-oriented, as far as talk and the mass media went.

Levinson wondered whether it was true that Jose Maria Sison went to the hills three months ago, and I said I did not know as I had been in Paris all these months.

I gave him the title of Henri Turot's fin-de-siecle book on Emilio Aguinaldo, in which the French writer who spent some time in the Philippines during the Philippine-American War claimed that the revolution was a "socialist" one, to the surprise of Teodoro Agoncillo (this from Pacifico Castro of the Philippine embassy in Paris), author of the *Revolt of the Masses*, which has the same thesis, the difference being that Agoncillo had Bonifacio as the hero, and Turot had Marcelo H. del Pilar in mind. Agoncillo, who is a corresponding friend of Levinson's, had not read Turot's book at all until it was translated by Castro.

Levinson keeps himself closely posted on Philippine events through Manila papers and publications, the "Graphic" in particular which has what he calls a "decidedly progressive" orientation. He narrated to me with amusement how Teodosio Lansang was recently investigated and his professor's effects at a Philippine college ransacked for "subversive" literature. He also showed me some pamphlets in Russian written by "Santos," one of the pen names of Teodosio while he was still in Russia. The other is "M. Cruz," who co-authored the Tagalog-Russian

dictionary in cooperation with one of his Russian students who studied Tagalog under him.

Mira thinks that Santos' piece on the Philippines, whatever it was she was referring to, is "awfully unreliable," i.e., dated. She can afford to say that, having been in the Philippines lately. The meeting with Levinson ended at three in the afternoon, and Alexander brought me back to the Peking Hotel where we had lunch together, before a visit to the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts.

"You'll see some Picassos of the Blue Period there, especially the Beggar and the Boy," Mira had said. I was thinking how anti-climactic it would be after coming from Paris, to come to Moscow to see Picassos and some Impressionist works by Renoir. But I am glad I did go, because I saw a half dozen or so Gauguins of the Tahitian period whose reproductions I have not seen in books. Indeed, it was a delightful shock coming suddenly face to face with them.

There was also a Murillo or two, a small Goya, a number of Poussins, Rembrandts, and some icon art.

"Are you Catholic?" Alexander suddenly asked me in one of the salas.

I said yes, and he said that most Asians he knew coming around were not interested in religious art. He must have seen me gazing with rapture at one of Murillo's angels or the Russian madonnas.

At the small lobby of the museum, Alexander spotted some records of Western classical music, like Handel, on sale, and in a way betrayed himself and the kind of Russian youth he represents today. Looking longingly at the records, he said, "My heart is bleeding."

Sasha (short for Alexander) is an M.A. in sociology, has studied and lived in India, and seen a great deal of Hindi art.

He brought me back to the Hotel Peking, which used to be staffed with Chinese personnel and chefs at the "peak of our friendship," by subway, which as in Paris is called the

Metro. One went deep into the bowels of the earth by escalator to board. And of all the subways that I have ever seen Moscow's appears to be the best. But for atmosphere I'll take Paris anytime, and I am not even thinking of the newly opened station of La Defense, complete with movies, supermarket, book-ing offices, everything.

Cleaning women, acting as janitors, were very much in evidence in the Moscow subway, gathering every bit of scrap paper or wiping every square inch of the tiled floor, so that one had this antiseptic feeling about the whole place. Tile art decorated the ceilings, but the works were not particularly impressive insofar as the artistic sensibility was concerned. Somehow I missed the ticket-littered subways of Paris with their lived-in look, not to mention the fashion-conscious if bourgeois *jeunes-filles* of Paris, *les girls*.

7 March 1970

"This is called the Annunciation," Alexander continued my art education by means of the Russian icon. The place was the Androniev Monastery located in a Moscow suburb, built in the 15th century. The buildings still stand, this morning looking as historic as possible in a surrounding lonely with banks of snow so white one gets sunspots looking at them too long.

We had come to see some of the works of the Monk Andrei Rublev, the central character in the Russian film I saw in Paris. But only a section of the museum was open.

"Take your hats off," the woman (establishments everywhere have these rather stern-looking women types acting like guardians or concierges) told us in a voice which said we should show more respect for the place. The works were mostly from the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries, from the town of Twer, which is not far from Moscow. When one was not looking at the works, one stared at the picturesque iron grills, and imagined the holy men of an earlier age seeking enlightenment in the confines of the monastery.

The central building itself, which was the church proper, was typically Orthodox, with leaf forms repeating themselves on the exterior architecture. It was, however, in a state of disrepair, as it was no longer serving its original purpose, and therefore was at the mercy of the elements.

The same could not be said of the next church building, a chapel actually, to which Sasha next brought me. The exterior was painted and maintained, and was a fetching sight from the nearest street corner. It was in fact in the midst of modern buildings, which only enhanced its picturesqueness.

The building was the former Church of the Trinity, in the Nikitniki. Alexander informed me, not without a smile, that the building right next to it was the headquarters of the Communist Party.

The icons and frescoes, especially the first, were fabulous. And even the smallest of them would cost a fortune. In fact, they are priceless treasures. They were painted mostly by the 17th century master, Simon Ushakov. On the way back to the hotel, we passed along a route which showed the Kremlin and its gilded cupolas to best advantage, and the long queue of Muscovites we had espied earlier was still as long as ever. They were lining up to pay homage to their leader, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, at the Tomb....

"This play is a satire on Hollywood, from the producer to the directors and the actors and actresses," my guide tried to explain the puppet show that we were about to attend this evening at the small theater on one side of Mayakovsky Square.

The playhouse itself is a small, cozy place, and the audience consisted of what Alexander described as the "more sophisticated" stratum of Moscow theatergoers. The show was one of a series of presentations during a season. And, as all parodies go, the plot or storyline (the casting couch theme for aspiring starlets) was both true and false, with telltale characters like Miss Lay, Mr. Mouse, and Miss Happy Blonde, with these names in English.

And of course — and this is unfortunate — thinking of the American people solely in terms of Hollywood, especially its materialistic, cynical aspects, is always a risky business.

It was a pity I was unable to appreciate the devastating asides and comments which had the audience's sophisticated funnybone reacting very often. For the Moscow theatergoer these must have constituted the meat of the performance, not to mention the mimicry and the mime movements of the dolls themselves, that is to say, the actors and actresses who, at the end of the show, appeared on stage in their working over-alls to receive a well-deserved applause after all the hard work of pulling strings.

8 March 1970

During an exhibition of art in Moscow some years back, Nikita Krushchev, then in power, gave his opinions on modern art which made the world press. Krushchev especially singled out for abuse the semi-abstract portrait of a youth, painted in earth or redclay colors, as a striking example of what he considered to be the decadence of abstract art. Not satisfied with that, he described the painting in question as the work of a "pederast."

The painter of the portrait was Boris Zhutovsky, now 38, and recently become, three months ago, a member of the Artists Union. We finally got to his studio today, after he had spent yesterday in the street "washing his neck" for Mira and myself in vain: crossed signals. This time, he was there at the assigned street corner, washing his neck successfully this time. And in a moment his guests, composed of Raghuvir Sahay, the acting editor of the Dismal Times of India, his young interpreter, Mira, Sasha and myself, were at his studio.

The meeting was the result of a parabolic process, a motion of the long arm of coincidence, which started when I took Mira up to the room of David Medalla and John Dugger at the Indios Bravos Cafe in Manila last August, 1969, during which Mira saw Medalla's bubble machines in operation, and more.

"It was the oddest collection of characters I had ever seen!" Mira reminisced over that part of her Manila sojourn, referring to David and John in their Hindu garb and with their trinkets on, the unwashed look of both, the presence of Henri the French painter and his Philippine wife, and of course to the highpowered and exotic conversation, during which Medalla, who once ran the avant-garde gallery *Exploding Galaxy* in London, mentioned his familiarity with the works of two Russian contemporary artists.

To Mira's incredulity and delight, one of the artists mentioned was Boris Zhutovsky, a very good friend of hers. And so here I was in Boris' studio in Moscow. After the usual preliminary probes, during which both parties sniffed each other as it were, Boris started lining up his paintings and sketches against the wall and furniture and on the floor, displaying through them an amazing virtuosity with line and an involvement in the works that he was doing privately in his studio on the tenth floor of this building, in his attempt to escape the realities of his profession and calling, as he has to do illustrative art to make a living in his kind of society.

"He did them with his eyes closed," Mira explained, indicating a folio of line drawings of male and female figures. He did this kind of thing as an experiment, "to escape the tyranny of the eye," as he put it. And the results are strange, almost dreamlike figurations reminiscent of the line drawings of Matisse, and Picasso, with the difference that Zhutovsky's are charged with a certain emotional intensity.

For they were not merely lyrical exercises, but movements of the artistic spirit executed "In Memory of the Suicide of a Friend's Wife," which is the title of the sketches in one folder. As a second step to the sketches, he added, this time with eyes open, textures with feathery effects. Three paintings in full color genetically started from this sightless "blind approach," a sort of painting in the dark.

His large works, with which his studio was practically cluttered, are drip paintings, with the paint deliberately made to crack like dried mud in the heat of summer. In fact, like

his famous "Tolka's Portrait," which Khrushchev failed to appreciate, many of his works are of the color of the earth, the soil, with touches of gold and silver and other metallic hues that all in all give one a sense of artistic continuity in the Russian tradition, recalling the icons of the past centuries.

By the time he had laid out his series of black-and-white drip figures, and his sketches combining his freeforming drip technique and geometric-lyric linearism, my excitement was showing. The black-and-white drip figures, so tightly controlled in spite of the medium, were entitled "Homage to Toulouse Lautrec" originally, and they were so recent the paint was still fresh, although already solid to the touch.

Mira thinks that the Lautrec series was a result of the closed-eye experience, and she herself, who had seen the works earlier, was beaming. Thinking of Manila, or even Paris or New York, and how museum and private collectors would snap up his works, I said, and Sahay agreed with me, "It's a pity these things aren't seen outside this country."

"It's a crime," Mira said.

Meanwhile the ever-moving Boris had prepared small glasses and slices of spam-type meat and of lemon. The lemon pieces were for the vodka, of which there was more than a half bottleful. For those who were not taking the stuff, there was a bottle of sweet wine. It was past noon and none of us had had lunch yet, so that there was some wariness with regard to the "grain" drink of the Russians.

"The best vodka is supposed to be tasteless and without smell," the young writer companion of Sahay was saying. But Mira added that you would feel it the next morning. Only Boris and I were taking the stuff, and as he filled the small glass for me he said in English, "One, two, three," pointing to the alcohol, the lemon, and the meat in that order. I finished off the first toast as instructed, and I immediately proposed other toasts. Boris had no choice and we quickly emptied the bottle together that way, while the rest of the party stared incredulously.

Much later, the artist escorted Alexander and me to the lift and, in goodbye, we gave each other a warm hug, and Alex and I went back to the Peking Hotel where we had lunch.

In my room later, the telephone rang. It was Sahay calling and asking me to have dinner with him and with a visiting Indian poet, Vajpeji Kailash of Delhi. At the "buffet" on 3rd floor, Sahay wondered what happened after the visit to the studio of the young artist. And I said I had lunch.

"It was a good thing you were able to take something immediately," he said, apparently referring to the vodka which did not seem to work on me because of the subzero temperature. Also I had just come from France, where wine flows like water.

And while Kailash was busy narrating a near romance with an airline stewardess (he is a dark and handsome fellow and could easily become a killer type), two young, pink-cheeked Russians decided to fraternize in spite of the language barrier, bringing with them their cognac and champagne bottles.

They knew a little German, so that took care of the language problem, and they promptly offered to share their drinks with us. We ourselves were taking beer, and I balked somehow at the thought of mixing beer, cognac and champagne, not to mention the vodka in the afternoon. But one could not just tell our young friends to go away, to the consternation of my Indian friends.

Just the same, we all finished off the champagne quickly, just before Sasha arrived and put an end to Sahay's and Kailash's miseries. Alexander, who could have been a diplomat or a psychologist, played it cool and collected, the young Russians consulted each other in whispers noticing the new presence, and then quietly and respectfully made their goodbyes.

While waiting to leave (midnight train for Leningrad), Alexander and I spent the remaining time in Sahay's room. Kailash was also around, but he was more interested in day-dreaming over the romance that could have been (the pilot

intervened) with this Russian stewardess, although one suspected that he garnished the facts a bit, being a poet.

I was an interested listener, however, as the India Times editor engaged Sasha, who has been in India as a student of social structures, in an abstruse discussion of geo-political ideas, with special emphases on the problems affecting India and Pakistan, Sinkiang, and of course Russia, in relation to all these areas. The Indian and journalist in Sahay also wanted to know the answers to certain questions, some of them rather delicate, and Alexander's candor in answering them was a refreshing experience, and a revelation.

Leningrad

9 March 1970

Leningrad: 8 past, a.m. Met at train station by a woman from the Writers Union who brought Sasha and me to our hotel, Hotel Europe.

Tour of the city, with Intourist guide, a girl by the name of Noona, in morning. Square: St. Isaac's Cathedral, seen from the outside merely. The Hotel Astoria, where Hitler had planned, with invitations sent and all that, to celebrate the fall of the city. Neva River. Fort Peter and Paul across, in the old downtown. Bridge with its lighthouse columns, decorated with ships' prows in the form of maidens.

Admiralty building, with a boat cut-out, like a weather-vane, crowning its gilded spire.

Petersburg. Petrograd. Now Leningrad. Grada, Gorod: City. Winter Palace, Catherine and her sons. Rococo and "classic" architecture. Hermitage complex of building: brief history.

"I shall tell you a few words about it," Noona would start her Intourist taperecord of a voice, and I would feel Alexander's eyes studying my reactions very closely, as Noona's "few words" would come pouring out like a flood.

Decembrists. Field of Mars, with its commemorative eternal flame burning for the "progressive revolutionaries." Palace

Square, with its obelisk of granite weighing more than 60 tons and standing by itself without any support. A sort of Arc de Triomphe towards one side of the Square, with chariots and warriors on top of it.

Lenin finally leading the successful revolution, with only 100 or so cadets defending the palace. The "Kreuzer Aurore," now a tourist attraction moored permanently on one side of the Neva (Finnish word for "new"), its main cannon which fired the shot bearing a plaque.

"Leningrad is a very beautiful city, next to Moscow in population, so many islands, so many bridges, the 'Window to Europe.' Seat of the true revolution. Old capital of Russia. Named after Peter originally. So many museums, theaters, science academies...."

Afternoon at the Russian Museum of Art, from the ikons or icons of the 10th, 11th, 12th and so on centuries to the latest academic realist works of the painters just before the Revolution.

"Could I buy you a gift?" Alexander asked just before Noonan gave me a guided tour of the museum. I told my companion that I'd just be too happy, and so he bought me a book on Russian folk art at the museum, the art of the *lubok*.

"Most tourists who take the sleeper train from Moscow are tired," Noonan was saying as we were getting out of the museum. I wanted to tell her and Sasha that with all that snow around it was impossible to feel tired. The sun was shining brightly by this time, although it had been cloudy in the early part of the day.

"You're very lucky the sun is out," Noonan said, and Alexander and I exchanged glances, remembering my wish projections for Leningrad and Tbilisi, and how the sun came out blazing in Moscow, the ice started to melt on the rooftops.

"If you are going to the theater tonight, I don't envy you," Noonan smiled, thinking of our hectic schedule for the day. Before the museum visit, we had a fine time chatting about li-

terature after she found out from Sasha that I might not be too interested in socialist upheavals and the like, being something of a poet.

Noona herself turned out to be an English literature major (all Intourist guides are college graduates, meaning that they have the equivalent of our M.A.), and her paper was on Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, which she studied from a "philological" point of view, although I would not be surprised if the term has a social orientation.

"A Taste of Cherry," the play which Alexander and I saw this evening, was a substitute. Somebody in the cast of the play scheduled had got sick. The substitute piece was written by a Polish playwright, and employs only two characters, a man and a woman. Both tried valiantly, but Sasha was strict in his appraisal as he called them "mediocre players" both. I was more inclined to put the blame on the plot.

During the intermission, Alexander gave me a short talk on Intourist guides in general. Sasha's not only been to India, but even to West Germany.

"The trouble with many of our young people today," he was saying, as if he did not belong to that age group himself, "is that they believe everything they read in books, which are written by the same people, who are citing the same sources..."

10 March 1970

During yesterday's sightseeing tour of the city, Noona said that the corridors and halls of the Hermitage put together equal fifteen miles. But our actual tour of the famous museum lasted only two hours almost, from 11:15 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Noona gave me a walking commentary on the origins of the museum, the history of each hall and building, as well as a lecture on some of the two million works that comprise the entire collection of the museum.

"It is supposed to be one of the two largest museums in the world," she said, the other being the Louvre in Paris. Indeed, one could not help thinking of the Palais-Royal of the

French capital, for in many ways both establishments were alike in that they had court origins and were built under royal auspices, the one in Leningrad under the auspices of the Russian czars.

The Hermitage treasures two small Da Vincis, which were surrounded by swarms of local and foreign art lovers today. Italian, Flemish, Spanish and French periods of painting were displayed consecutively, that is to say, chronologically. Alexander hovered nearby most of the time, apparently not wanting to cramp Noona's style. But at one point, he intervened and saw to it that I got into one obscure hall where German art was ably represented by a number of Cranachs.

The Impressionists and Post-Impressionists were also well represented among the works actually on display (as in any big museum, the entire collection could not possibly be shown). Two large Matisse's, one known as the "Red Painting," dominated the Matisse Room, while Gauguin and Picasso, as in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow, had a room or whole section to themselves each. Cezanne was also well displayed. Two of his landscapes with trees in the foreground and in the pictorial center attracted my attention because of their unusual composition in terms of the other Cezannes that I have seen elsewhere.

By the time we finished the quickie tour of the paintings, together with the gilded halls and columns and chandeliers and floorings and ceilings, Noona and Sasha had silently gotten on each other's nerves. Another girl, a friend of Noona's and an Intourist guide like herself, accompanied Sasha and me to the Gold Room, while Noona rested her "tired legs."

In the Gold Room, exquisite gold trinkets and other paraphernalia of the leaders of ancient peoples like the Scythians were on exhibit, practically all of them behind or under glass. There were other items: jewelboxes, snuffboxes and other objects used in days gone by by queens and princesses, kings and princes, and even priestesses, encrusted or inlaid with pearls, diamonds, sapphires, and other precious stones. And one wondered, not without a feeling of unreality, how much the ob-

jects on display would be worth...indeed they were priceless and invaluable.

"You're the first tourist I've met who did it in half an hour!" Noona said. She had expected us to tarry longer in the room in question. Indeed, the two gold pendants alone with their delicately wrought miniature chariots would have taken up one whole day of looking. A goldsmith and wrought-metal worker tried to imitate the objects, I was told, but the workmanship and craft were simply impossible to duplicate, much less imitate or approach. The technique was simply lost in the intervening centuries.

On the way back to the hotel, I tried to entertain my Intourist guide by repeating practically all the information she had passed on to me the day before during the sightseeing, to her great delight.

"I can see that you were very attentive!"

And I returned the compliment by saying that I had a good teacher.

"If you'll ever need a job in the future," Sasha observed, "you could easily apply as a tourist guide in Leningrad."

I made my final goodbyes to Noona, as she was not going to accompany us to the war memorial and cemetery in the outskirts, "Sasha will be with you. He speaks much better English than I do."

Actually, both Alexander and this young Intourist woman speak the King's English so well that, under different circumstances, they could have been graduate students at Harvard, Radcliffe, or the Sorbonne.

A vast and icebound place: the war memorial and cemetery for the fallen Leningraders who went under in the siege of Leningrad during 1941, 1942 and 1943, when Hitler's armies battered at the gates of the city with mailed fists. A strong wind was blowing as Sasha and I walked the whole length of the place, just the two of us in all that desolation, to the huge

bronze statue of a woman representing Mother Russia, and back.

I saw a similar war memorial in East Berlin in 1967. But that was in autumn and there were still some flowers blooming; here in the outskirts of Leningrad it was all ice and wind.

At the small photo exhibit in a building near the entrance, Sasha pointed out the facsimiles of the simple and touching diary of the young girl Tanya, recording the deaths of those who were close to her during the great siege: brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, father, mother, neighbors, and so on, until she alone was the only survivor, before the grip of the enemy was finally broken by the armies under Zhukov.

The graves were covered with wooden boxes for protection against the weather, and the boxes themselves were overlaid with ice a foot or so thick. Amazed, one noticed tiny flowers, little balls of fuzzy bloom, probably a kind of daisy, pushing their way up through cracks in the thick ice. The eternal flame was burning for the thousands and thousands of the courageous dead lying under their icy blankets and awaiting the final spring.

And sparrows were chirping disconsolately in the bleak afternoon, their feathered bodies decorating the leafless thickets beside a frozen lake or pond. And as we walked to our Intourist car parked one block away, in the teeth of an icy wind coming down from the Gulf of Finland and the *taigas* beyond, one thought of little Tanya shuffling her cards of death like a seeress, a sybil in the bud, and one wondered whether she was still alive, and if for her the siege has really been lifted. . . .

"Those were the dark days," Veronika Spasskaya was saying beside me at the opera house tonight, which presented one of the attempts at secession against Peter the Great, who appeared only in one great flashing and electrifying moment in the show. Veronika and I were having our little conversation during one of the intermissions at the glittering play house of the former czars and czarinas, whose double-headed eagle

emblem of royalty was now changed into the workers' emblem of the hammer and sickle over the erstwhile royal box.

Veronika, who had met us at the train station upon our arrival, belongs to the Leningrad Writers Union and does translations of Spanish literary works. She has just done some of Julio Cortazar's stories. Slightly over five feet, Veronika is unusually small for a Russian woman, and tonight in her black dress she looked very trim. She has been to Cuba.

She had decided to join us for the opera presentation tonight. The piece was Musorgski's, and I was wondering aloud to Sasha if it was the same Mussorgsky who did the *Plantes*, although I might have gotten my centuries and names mixed up, since I knew nothing about Russian opera, except that it is associated with the great Chaliapin of Boris Godunov fame.

"You'll at least learn more about Russian history," said Veronika referring to the opera, whose acts and scenes were being summarized for me by Sasha. She spoke to me mostly in English. We tried conversing in Spanish, but my spoken Castilian was so limited that the conversation became completely Veronikan after a while.

Veronika is familiar with Jose Rizal's "Ultimo Adios," which was translated into Russian by the poet Dormatovsky, who was with Mira's Manila group last year. The opera ended towards midnight, capping a packed and very fruitful day.

11 March 1970

The Smolny Institute was formerly a finishing school for highborn young women before 1917. The desolate church building in blue and white and the other building beside it are mute reminders of another age, the gilded times of the czars who once ruled Russia from the city by the Neva which connects with the Gulf of Finland.

But the Smolny means other things today. By special arrangement, the homely, bespectacled girl in charge of the small museum in one of the rooms (which used to be a kitchen and laundry chamber) gave Sasha and me a guided tour of the

documents in photocopies or in pictures, as well as copies of the historic newspapers and other materials circulated during the first days of the October Revolution.

A picture of Lenin's wife Nadezhda was part of the documentation, as well as a small original painting with Lenin's own signature on it. The work was done by a contemporary (1917) painter. On one side of the chamber was another painting, a large one, showing Lenin seated on a sofa writing something historic. And, in the next moment, the girl guide led us into an adjoining room to show us the original furniture in the painting, with all the other *meubles* located as they were, untouched since those fateful days except for cleaning, including a teacher's writing desk, a pen, a telephone, etc.

Divided by a screen, the room includes two beds, one of which was used by Lenin, the other by the wife.

"You will notice the tiny mirror which she used," the guide said in Russian which Sasha translated, the unsaid part of her statement being only too obvious as one recalled the glittering opulence of the Malachite and other Rooms of the Winter Palace not too far away from the Smolny.

The woman informed us that Lenin stayed 90 days in the Smolny ("120 days" — Noona), as we walked along an 800-meter corridor to the other end of the building. With a key, she opened a big door and ushered us into the hall where the proclamation of Soviet power ending the rule of the Czars was made.

On the way to the flat of the writer Uuri Rytkeu, Alexander enlightened me on a number of topics, like anti-semiticism in the Soviet Union, the declining and alarming birth rate, tenement and cooperative housing, and so on. We cruised about for some time, knocking off some minutes deliberately, before finally stopping at 12 noon in front of the gray apartment building in which the fiction writer lives with his wife and three children.

"I was told you're a good man, so I decided to invite you to my place instead of meeting you at the Writers Union, which

would have been an insult," Uuri said, as he prepared to welcome me properly in his book-littered living room. I myself had been informed beforehand that the writer, who is an Asian Russian from a place near Alaska and who writes both in his native tongue and in Russian, was a "jolly fellow."

Uuri speaks some English, but with Sasha doing the amenities the conversation quickly went into high gear, especially when the wife, a lively type herself, joined us with a tray of sliced sausages and of lemon, cheese, apples, and the tiny glasses for the vodka, which Uuri started pouring from a newly opened bottle of the export variety.

Our host has written some twenty books, and a story of his has been published in the "Atlantic Monthly" in English translation. He has had a novel published in Canada, where he spent a month once at the time of the Expo in Montreal.

As in Boris Zhutovsky's studio, I overdid the vodka bit, and then took some more, also on an empty stomach. But it was well worth it, as the guards were let down mutually.

At one point, one of the two teenage sons came in from an adjoining room and disappeared as quickly. He intends to take up painting as a career. Later Uuri said, "I'd like to introduce my daughter."

And she came into the living room right on cue, a very lovely and delicate-featured girl, probably 16, who is taking up French as a foreign language. I asked her in that language what she had been reading lately, and she said, "Simenon."

She stayed behind, but remained quiet, like a longstemmed lily in a still pond, a Boticelli portrait in the flesh.

Uuri was not drinking, saying, probably as a joke, that his government discourages writers from drinking. Also, he said, it was a habit of his not to touch any alcohol while working on something.

As a parting gift, he gave me a wooden bottle container, made to look like a doll, and painted likewise. I promptly

asked for the unfinished bottle of vodka to place inside it, thus saving myself from further punishment.

Some time later, during lunch, I was still feeling all right, but I could feel Sasha's eyes studying me closely for certain signs. We even went to an academic (social-realist) painting show late in the afternoon, and decided upon coming back to have dinner together at 9:30 p.m. since "we had a late lunch anyway."

At the exact time the phone rang. It was Sasha's voice asking me calmly, "How are you feeling?"

"Okay. I'll be at the restaurant in a minute."

What I did not tell him was that I had had to take several glasses of cold water and a two-hour nap to shake off the effects of this famous Russian drink. But it was not a hang-over as I know it, with a rhythmic aching in the center of the brain. You just feel you're burning all over inside, and that you're drying up. There was no trace of it by the time we were having our dinner.

I must mention that as a last gesture, our Intourist driver, who is an admirer of Deneka, the painter whose works we had seen earlier, had suggested after the show to bring us to the highest point overlooking the city. A sports stadium is being built there on the top of a hill.

From this promontory, one saw a magnificent sunset over the frozen Gulf, the bright disc blazing a golden swath of light across the expanse of ice where through the pines one or two tiny figures were seen walking along. The city itself was somewhere to the left. In other seasons, one could easily imagine the whole area as a tourist paradise, as well as a painter's.

12 March 1970

A visit to Leningrad for writer types like me would not be complete without a pilgrimage to Pushkin's house. So Sasha took me to the place, which is now a museum, in the tradition of many of the houses of famous men.

Among the sketches on the wall was that of Pushkin's wife Natalya. Alexander Pushkin died at age 37 of a gunshot wound in the belly, inflicted on him in a duel. I was told that Nicholas I, who was allegedly having an affair with the wife, was the instigator of the duel. A death mask of the famous Russian poet, who was partly Ethiopian by blood, was part of the exhibit.

Later, with Veronika, we drove to the log cabin in which Peter the Great first lived (it was built for him overnight) on the banks of the Neva while the whole area was practically a wilderness inhabited and protected by the Swedes whom Peter eventually drove out in battle.

A marker showed the height of this great king and indefatigable man. He must have been almost seven feet tall, a veritable Viking himself. A boat he personally built for crossing the Neva was also on display. The cabin, reminding one of the pioneers of the American West, has been enclosed by a brick building, and the whole area is now a museum. Not far away a tall many-storeyed building now stands, decorated by the colorful ceramic work of one of Leningrad's younger painters.

The last stop in my guided tour of the old Petersburg or Petrograd, Petersville, Petercity, now Leningrad, was the St. Isaac's Basilica in the heart of the city. One of the most opulently decorated church buildings in the world, the cathedral is now merely a museum, a monument (as the Intourist people would say) to the greatness of the workers who spent eight years building it for the czars and the Orthodox Church.

The large Risen Christ was there behind the altar area. But somehow He looked completely out of place in an establishment where the services were no longer being observed. Indeed, without the pews and the atmosphere of worship, the whole place could have been a glorified train station, in spite of the malachite columns, its saints both in the round and in ceramic tilework and paint, and its massive dome from which a pendulum has been suspended, looking and behaving like a

work of kinetic art which groups of tourists were staring at with mesmeric fascination.

It was a relief finally to get out of the place into the cold and bracing air, and a few minutes later, at a restaurant named after a legendary character, Veronika and I (Sasha abstained, as usual) finished off a bottle of red wine together with our entrecotes. But I did not share a large bowl of salad which my companions attacked with great relish.

"In Leningrad in the winter, green salad and sunshine are rare items," Veronika said.

The latter commodity has been very much in evidence during my entire Leningrad stay, and people could be seen across the Neva hugging the walls of the Peter and Paul Fort and soaking in the unexpected bonus from the sun. And indeed there were tiny signs of thaw all over, as we drove out of town to the airport, past modern complexes near the future Leningrad University, in great contrast to the generally grey and drab-looking apartment buildings in the city itself.

"Don't look so sad," Veronika placed a hand over mine, while Sasha was taking care of our tickets at the airport waiting room. "You try to come back in the summer, and you will see a different place. And you could visit other places around, with hundreds of fountains, and parks and gardens."

But if I was looking and feeling sad, it was not for myself, but for them. A roving spirit, I find it difficult to understand why they may never see Paris, which is not too far away, in their lifetimes. All right, that is their problem, and it is none of my bloody business. Just the same, I could not help looking exactly as I felt beside Veronika, the two of us seated there like a pair of forlorn lovers at that moment, her hand on mine.

"*Hasta la vista!*" Veronika and I said in parting at the foot of the plane. But what we really meant was "*Adios.*"

Sasha and I hardly exchanged a word during the 3-hour flight by jet to Tbilisi. In fact, I am writing this right here in my room on the second floor of the Hotel Tbilisi.

"It will be sunshine in Leningrad," I was telling Mira back in Moscow, "but I'm afraid that when we get to Tbilisi it will be snowing there!"

We all had a big laugh over that one because the Georgian capital is a summer resort near the Black Sea, where people go for sunshine and pleasant weather during the winter. But, as the plane landed in the evening, one could see portions of the airfield blanketed with white. And on the way to town by car (one of the local writers was there at the airport to welcome us), it was like Christmas all over again for me, with leafy trees and pines covered with veils of the stuff.

"It has been snowing here for the last three days," Sasha was saying, getting the weather report from the Georgian writer with us, "which is very unusual."

After Moscow and Leningrad, I was hardly prepared to see a Russian city like Tbilisi, or should I say, a Georgian city. One sensed immediately that Georgians are a fun-loving people, that they like to eat and drink and dance and be happy. They are also very large people, from what I observed from my co-passengers on the plane. From the brief glimpses of the city on the way to the hotel, along an avenue with prosperous looking shops and grocery stores, Tbilisi could be something like Munich in liveliness and *joie-de-vivre*, as well as *Gemütlichkeit*. We shall see if my intuitions are correct.

Tbilisi

13 March 1970

Georgian art was the order of the day, in spite of a fine mist that covered the whole city and its hills like a delicate Persian veil. I was first shown some Western-style paintings, by artists who had imbibed their ideas from Western Europe apparently, and the works of their own Primitive painter, as well as copies of frescoes from old Georgian monasteries (Christianity came to Georgia in the 4th century), some of which we may be able to see tomorrow during an out-of-town drive.

"St. George must be the patron saint of Georgia, don't you think?" I asked Sasha, as we stood in front of a large representation of the fabled saint spearing a dragon.

Sasha didn't know, but Shalva Todua, the Georgian writer who had met us at the airport last night, confirmed it. At least he was the patron saint in the old days, but after 1917 the patron saints have been the heroes of the entire CCCP, which actually reads SSSR in Russian script, the first letter standing for "Soyuz." The biggest hero of them all is of course Lenin, whose centenary is being celebrated this year, and before whose Tomb in the Kremlin thousands line up on the appointed days.

The Museum of Georgian Art's most prized collections of art works is not of its paintings, but its old ikons of beat silver and gold, or rather of chased metal, adorned with precious and semiprecious stones offered up by the faithful in the old days. Although the influence is decidedly Byzantine, the school is definitely Georgian.

Some of the works combine delicately tinted enamel and gold, a technique which has been completely lost. The woman in charge of showing us around and explaining the backgrounds of the works spoke at length on the history of a particular madonna ikon studded all over with precious stones.

Only the face, and partially, and the hands have been reconstructed within the picture area. The rest of the Image are elsewhere in the world. I was told that the pieces in the possession of a rich American collector have been put together and even exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

Before we left the museum, I told my guides about a dream of mine (Leningrad, March 10), in which I saw a sculpted work with the Virgin as subject. But what was puzzling was that the work was faceless in the round or in relief. Instead it was painted on paper. Now, several of the religious images of the Virgin and the Christ in the museum we visited this morning have had their metal faces and heads cut out and substituted with painted replicas of the same, thus combining sculpture and painting in the same works.

The woman was interested in my kind of talk and spoke to her companions about it later, but Sasha was smiling skeptically and I said I could show him my dream notes. What I failed to tell them was that the Virgin was not a mere icon image, but a "ritually" crucified figure in a robe of blue and white, like a priest's.

"Do you want to see our rare manuscripts?" asked the lady director of the Institute of Manuscripts of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, our next stop after the museum.

And so, for the next half hour, the woman head of the department of philology, a linguistics scholar who spoke very good English, treated us to a wealth of illuminated manuscripts made by Georgian monks centuries ago, in old Georgian script. One parchment, with delicate and lively red marks over the lines denoting musical instructions, is the current object of study by scholars.

"We sometimes hear with great sadness of old Georgian manuscripts being sold page by page at fabulous prices in the streets of Paris," the lady said. Indeed, the illuminated pages she was showing to me were each of them individualized works of art. The miniature paintings used to illustrate the testaments and other religious writings were done in powdered gold with garlic juice. It was inspiring to see the lady philologist lovingly and reverently handling the illuminated pages, as if she knew each of them by heart.

Madame Mzekala Shanidze, I was to be told later during the day by Shalva, is one of the world's leading philologists.

Our next visit was to the offices of the Writers Union of Georgia, where I was officially welcomed by its president, Mr. Abashidze, who was with the writers group that visited the Philippines. From the Union, I found myself transported into another world in the home and studio of Lado Goudjashvili, a painter in his 70s who knew Matisse, Chagall, Derain, Fukita, Modigliani and others in the 1920s in Paris where he lived for some years.

At one point of our visit, he uncovered two drawings which Modigliani had given to him. The old Georgian master said that even ordinary light affects the drawing paper and therefore he has the drawings covered all the time. Also, they are treasures sought after by museum collectors.

Goudjashvili's earlier works, especially his large oils, invariably show this amply endowed dancing woman with bare breasts which were not only painted in sensuous and seductive colors and textures, but depicted in such a way that they protrude sideways instead of to the front.

The Woman is the central theme of his paintings as a whole, and it is interesting to speculate on the allegorical intent, for the painter has apparently been working out a Metaphor in his works all these years. The antelope, gazelle or horse is often used as a resonator for the Maiden, whether in sinuous motion or at rest.

It is of interest to note that in the last few years, the sensuous Woman has metamorphosed into a classic figure of a linear elegance that is almost Chinese (Persian would probably be closer), and that the earthy colors have become pastel-pale. It is tempting to fall back on the linearism and lyricism of Matisse to explain this, but Goudjashvili has an acidity that his French contemporary did not have.

During a small tea at which we drank the usual toasts, the old man, his French coming back in spurts by the second, became somewhat sad when I asked him if he knew Chagall, whom he strikingly resembles in looks with his crown of white hair. He regretted the fact that he had not set his eyes, not even in pictures, on the paintings that Chagall did for the ceiling of the opera house in Paris.

Also constituting an interesting body of works is a series of etchings depicting theriomorphic beings desecrating culture. One work shows monkeys carting museum masterpieces away. Done during the last war, the works illustrate a message or theme about which the artist felt so strongly he had had it etched in acid.

As a parting gift, Goudjashvili gave me an autographed copy of a book on his art published in Moscow in 1968, and finally said goodbye to all of us at the top of the stairs with flying kisses.

"Would you like to eat Georgian food?" asked Shalva, who finally began to speak English. And so I was introduced to *kinkaly*, the national dish of the Georgians, at this restaurant near the church right across the street near my hotel. Shalva set a giant metal tray of the steaming food for the four of us, the fourth man being a translator, from Georgian into Russian, who had joined us at a street corner.

Kinkaly is something like the Chinese *siopao*, except that it is juicier, and shaped like a lily pad. One held the thing like a baggy flower and ate the petals as it were, being careful to suck the juice in before it spilled out. The coat which Leonid lent me is going to smell of kinkaly sauce for some time after this initiation.

All the time that we were having our lunch standing around a double-decked table, I was the object of curiosity in the eyes of the other people. One old woman waitress said I was Austrian. I felt the eyes of two young men in particular staring at my long hair.

In the meantime, the translator who had remarked in Russian, with Sasha translating between bites of kinkaly, that I had a very "expressive" face, engaged me in a discussion of which was more important, self-expression or communication. I said the first was, and found myself under heavy attack immediately.

"We believe in the opposite here!" the translator said somewhat fiercely, as if I cared one way or the other. I promptly defused the debate by saying that we believed in the same thing insofar as our aims went, that it was just a matter of words, of understanding what we meant, that was all.

"I express myself in order to communicate," I said in effect, and added that the whole process was one and the same thing.

Shalva then said that he had read some of Rizal's works, probably the two novels and the farewell poem in translation. He also said, "I've read some novels on your national liberation movement."

"What national liberation are you talking about?" I nearly blurted out, but I simply said, "Who wrote those novels, Filipinos?"

Shalva said yes. It could be the American William Pomeroy's book, but then it is not a novel, although it was written to sound like one.

An old woman came in, approached us, said some words, and was immediately told not to bother us because there was a foreigner present. I pretended not to notice what was going on, although I did not see why my companions should not want me to know that there are beggars in the Soyuz, as elsewhere.

Then one of the young men came forward, introduced himself to the others first, and finally reached me, in spite of Shalva and the translator running interference. Sasha, as usual, was as cool as the proverbial cucumber.

I asked him how old he was, and he said 20. And he asked me to write my name and address down, which I did on a paper napkin. He was told I was a Filipino, a *Filipinski*, and that ended the speculation among the young men and the elderly women waitresses, one of whom had thought I was from Vienna. Finally, the boy said goodbye in the Russian way, an embrace and a kiss on the cheek.

"I love you," he said, using the only English words he knew, and left the restaurant with his companion. And I understood by his words the longing that is in the hearts of young men everywhere, probably more so in this country than anywhere else, for I stood as a symbol of the wayfarer, the free spirit, free to grow my hair long or short, as I liked, et cetera.

I looked at the imperturbable Alexander and said, "He is the future of your country, the youth." It was a platitude, but under certain circumstances platitudes could be very telling.

At a tavern in the evening, Shalva treated Sasha and me to pork shashliks, while the men of Georgia spontaneously sang their folk songs at various tables, as the spirit moved them, in deep-throated, wine-drenched (Goudjashvili says that Georgia has some 5,000 wines), polyphonic voices. The wine served, a rosé, was in clay tumblers or jarlets, each probably containing a liter of the liquid. As Alexander was not really drinking (he has been nursing a cold since Leningrad), Shalva and I practically had the two jugs of wine to ourselves.

14 March 1970

Up in the mountains outside Tbilisi, my travelling companions, especially Reso Tabukashvili, regretted that the scenic views of the republic could not be seen in a better light, especially that of summer. But I told him as we drove along in the Intourist car that, in spite of the light mist, I liked the landscapes just the same, just as they were, a patchwork of snowy white, green grass and trees, and brown earth. After all, I told them that the same scenes in sunlight could not be as impressive and memorable to me who came from the tropics.

Our destination was the Monastery of the Cross overlooking the Kvary River from a high promontory. And, as we went along, we could see the silhouette of this 5th century building aquatinted against the sky. I was thinking why my hosts should be bringing me to churches and monasteries inhabited by sheep and deserted by human beings. But that was their decision, and I was there only for the ride, as it were.

Reso is a playwright, probably in his 50s, and has represented his country abroad in France, Switzerland, Holland, the U.S., England, Egypt, Argentina, etc. He is also in film production. He is leaving for Holland soon to do research on an uprising of prisoners against the Nazis on the island of Axel. More than 500 Georgians were reputedly killed in this insurrection.

By the roadside restaurant where we had something like Mexican chili con carne and corn bread, with the ubiquitous

Georgian wine in clay jars, there is a memorial drinking fountain, with its water coming from a mountain spring, at which Pushkin once drank, as the plaque says. Pushkin did wonders with the Russian language through his poetic genius, a veritable hero therefore.

Picking our way finally across a field of snow, we got into the ruins of the old monastery, parts of whose friezes have withstood the ravages of time and of man, and are now precious archaeological monuments to the Christian past of Georgia. No art of any kind, however, could be seen within the building itself. Reso, Sasha and I walked over to a small balcony on the other side, and from there looked down on the river, and on the town of Mtskheta, the ancient capital of Georgia.

I scooped up some snow with a hand, pressed it into a little projectile, and in a ritual gesture sent it down towards Mtskheta, which was of course several kilometers down there from us.

"We'll be down there in half an hour," Reso announced. Somewhere along the road after coming down the mountain, we came upon an accident, so new that we saw the driver of the car just emerging. The vehicle had swerved into a ditch, but two of its wheels were still on the road. If we had been travelling two or three seconds faster, we would have run smack onto the careening car, which had been hit on the side by a construction truck coming out of a yard on the right.

In a moment, Reso, Sasha, and everybody around (I even found myself grasping a part of the vehicle in token help) got together and in the true collective spirit lifted the ditched half of the car back onto the road. One side door was a mass of twisted metal. The shaken driver was unhurt except for a tiny cut on his temple. I had no idea how one were to determine which of the drivers was at fault, as the rules of the game might be different around here, as shown by the fact that the car had been moved before the investigation, if there was going to be any.

To continue my education on the religious past of Georgia, I was shown the old cathedral which is being restored in part

right now. Two large murals with Byzantine or Persian influence have just been uncovered by experts in restoration. But the whole building itself looked more like a tomb rather than a church, although I was assured that it was still "functioning," whatever that meant.

Indeed, before we entered through the gate decorated by two bulls' heads of pre-Christian origin, I saw two women, peasant types, emerging and crossing themselves before leaving the premises. So far I've seen only old women, apparently rustic and therefore unlearned types, haunting churches and lighting candles, in this cathedral in Mtskheta for example.

A weather-beaten man, who was in charge of the physical restoration of some parts of the building, gave us a rather complete history of the place, as we stood on the tombstones of rulers of Georgia, including the czar who founded Tbilisi, who had won 200 battles before the last one in which he was betrayed. The cathedral is rumored to have 300 secret rooms, some of them built for the caching of precious things during the several invasions that the area suffered in the past, with their orgies of pillaging, burning, etc.

An unexpected twist to the Mtskheta trip was a visit to the hothouse garden of Mikhail Msmolashvili, a famous horticulturist, now 95 years of age, who once lived in France.

The old botanist specializes in rock or stone gardening, and miniature flowerbeds may be seen reposing in seemingly haphazard arrangements of pieces of shale and of wood. According to a daughter, an old woman of 75, who was busy in one of the greenhouses where cyclamens and other flowers were blooming as if in springtime, the old man was not feeling well today, probably because of the unusual snowfall.

After Mtskheta, Reso took us to the Georgian Archaeological Museum back in Tbilisi. And in less than an hour, with the help of one of the staff, we breezed through the paleolithic, neolithic, and bronze ages of Man as he lived in Georgia, as well as the centuries before and after the coming of Christianity.

Then I was brought to the church right beside the hotel. And while I was eagerly inspecting the silver and gold ikons

with painted-on faces, after taking in Goudjashvili's dome painting of the Virgin in his own style, Reso and Sasha disappeared from the premises, preferring to wait for me outside.

Tiny wax candles were burning, offered up by the faithful, who generally were old women, peasant types as I have said earlier, with frantic expressions. And one such type was narrating something to a group of other women, probably a miracle that she had just experienced. This she was doing in a corner of the church, which must have been the baptistry in the old days. There were no young types around, so that I understood Reso's and Sasha's eagerness to vacate the premises. Besides, there were a couple of other city spots to visit of a more contemporary and "progressive" character.

"It is like the Sacré Coeur in Paris," Reso said as we looked down on the city from the highest hill in the area. Below us was a slope of pine and other trees, and one imagined the people coming up and going down in the funicular or cable car to be set up there soon. But Reso was mistaken. It was not quite like the Sacré Coeur in Montmartre, because there was no cathedral on the top of the hill behind us, but a restaurant which was being built, to be owned and run by the government. Besides, the memorial churches of Tbilisi with their ecumenical spires denoting several faiths existing side by side in the past cannot quite compare with the grand silhouettes of the cathedrals and spires of Paris.

"What's that big statue over there?" I asked, pointing at the object standing at another elevation. And so Reso drove us down our Sacred Heart Hill and up the other one along a winding road, and in a moment we were looking up at the giant statue of riveted metal: a woman with a sword in one hand and a cluster of metal grapes (Georgia is wine land) in the other.

The work is called "Mother Georgia" and it not only recalls other massive maternal symbols denoting Russia in general, but also the fact that women in Georgia can reputedly drink as much and as well as the men (Goudjashvili's early works are full of this busty, amazonian but, as the painter

claims, still graceful type of female), and that the country was once ruled by a woman, the Czarina Tamara. The statue itself is mediocre, like most "official" art.

The evening was an unforgettable aesthetic experience at the sports palace, however—various interpretations of the different national folk dances (Georgian, Ukrainian, Moldavian, Russian, etc.), spiced by skits here and there, and presented in a blinding array of color and movement and sound, and with consummate pacing. Once in a while, the melody or music played suddenly became that of a famous waltz or love song which one knew in English lyrics and never thought was originally Russian (or Georgian or Ukrainian, as the case may be).

There is only one word I can think of right now which can adequately describe how I felt after the performance, and that is: *blitzed*. I was blitzed by the dancers of the Moseyev, for it was this world-famous dance group no less which I saw here in Tbilisi tonight.

15 March 1970

Shalva took us this morning on a drive around a very large lake up in the hills. On one side is a new subdivision made up of the typical many-floored apartment houses constructed from prefabricated materials. The rolling hills about the lake are reforestation areas, with young pine trees growing on the contoured slopes. I noticed during the drive that our Intourist driver had brought along a hardback novel which he apparently had been reading when not busy at the wheel.

Lunch was at a newly constructed restaurant, built to simulate a complex of old Georgian huts, but decorated with ceramic, metal, and wood work. From the restaurant, one had a beautiful view of the lake and the surrounding areas.

Our driver finally joined us in the drinking and even offered his own toasts to the coming of more types like me, and he meant it too. I was afraid he might not be as careful in his driving back to the city, but was assured that to Geor-

gians wine was like lemonade. In fact, the driver turned out to be more careful than usual after the "lemonade."

"I was quite hurt when she said it," Abashidze was saying later in the evening at dinner at his place. "She" was Gemma Cruz Araneta, international beauty queen, who came to Tbilisi once and stayed for a day or two. Last year, when she met the head of the Georgian Writers Union in Manila and was told that he was from Georgia, Gemma allegedly remarked, "Oh yes, Georgians, the people who drink too much."

"In Georgia, we like to drink. But there is not a single alcoholic in the whole republic. Our wine is natural, and we don't like people who get drunk."

Abashidze meant by "natural" that the wine comes from grape, not grain. The pink quality stuff was being poured all around from a large carafe, and the company included Reso, another poet like the host (the Union's secretary), Abashidze's son Chino, and of course Mrs. Abashidze herself. Later we were joined by a painter and his pretty wife who is a well-known printmaker, and by Tolya, the hosts' teenage daughter who plays the piano and whose name means "Seagull."

Actually, the host is crazy about the Philippines and, according to the wife who speaks some English and French, he has not stopped raving over his visit to the country in front of his friends, overwhelmed as he was with the variety of scenery and the people's hospitality. He wrote a series of articles on his visit, and I expressed the wish that they may see translation some day, as they were written in Georgian.

Still on the subject of drink, the secretary and our host started reminiscing over the visits of foreign writers to their capital. Sartre got soused up three times in Tbilisi. Simone de Beauvoir was the quiet type. John Updike wrote a poem in Lado Goudjashvili's guest book (I wrote a longish paragraph myself). Steinbeck came to Tbilisi, but not Hemingway. The wife Mary did after his death.

Priestley would be quietly doodling and sketching all the time, declining to speak on his literary works, but getting ex-

cited when the subject was his attempts at painting or drawing. I was told that I was the first Philippine writer to visit their country. I told them that Gemma had written *Hanoi Diary*. Other famous names were mentioned as guests and recipients of their union's hospitality.

"I feel so small with all those big names," I told them.

But they were quick to assure me that my coming to Georgia and to Russia (one must always remember that Georgians are Georgians—there is a theory for instance that the Basques are of Georgian ancestry—and that Russians are Russians) was not only a unique thing but a big stride towards relations between the Philippines and the USSR. After all, that was the party line on both sides, and we played it up with the proper toasts, spiced with the platitudes of international amity, etc.

"You are the first swallow," I was told.

And, improvising in the spirit of the metaphor I said, looking at the dark-eyed daughter smiling quietly, "You don't need a swallow, you already have your seagull."

"That is entirely different," the mother said beaming at my illogic. And the gathering laughed when Reso, the playwright and the translator of Shakespeare's sonnets into classical Georgian verse, remarked, "With your long black hair, you do look like a swallow!"

Reso being also a film writer, a segment of the evening's conversation was devoted to certain films. I was asked if I had seen Antonioni's film on the American youth, and I said no. I told them about Fellini's *Satyricon* and Pasolini's *Médée* which I had seen in Paris. I was told that Medea was a Georgian queen, and that the fabled Rock of Prometheus was somewhere in Georgia.

"I also saw the film *Andrei Rublev*," I added, but none of the Georgian writers and artists at table (which featured a delicious roast chicken with rice) had seen this prize-winning Russian film which has not been released for showing to the public because of its scenes of Tartar cruelty.

Earlier in the evening, the secretary of the Georgian union had tried to impress upon me the need of developing our own national tongue for literary purposes. And I finally said in answer to him that although I believed in the development of an autochthonous literary language, it was no problem of mine because "I even dream in English."

"Besides," I added, "English to me is not the language of Americans and Englishmen, but of the world, to which I belong."

The artists wanted to know which painters I admired and I rattled off a few names. They said they wished I could visit their studios. And in a way I was glad I did not have enough time because all the people I have met have been very generous with souvenir gifts, and excess baggage shall be a problem when I leave the country.

"If you could only stay longer, we would not let you go without a wife," Madame Abashidze had said earlier in the evening. A Georgian wife would certainly be a great amount of personal effects, because Georgian women are extra large, a typical example of which I suppose would be Stalin's daughter Svetlana, who is of course Georgian like her father.

I think it was Jung who said that when a foreigner comes to a place for the first time, what is more apparent are the similarities instead of the differences in the looks of the people. For the first few days, therefore, every Georgian man and woman I saw had this uncanny resemblance either to Svetlana or her father whose memory in the public mind has been taboo since Khrushchev made that famous denunciation speech.

Meeting with Georgians at closer range, like Abashidze and Reso and Shalva, I could see the differences gradually asserting themselves, especially after drinking a few toasts and finally shedding off the masks, as it were, revealing the individual human beings underneath the social disguises.

Finally, it was time to go, and Reso exhibited his mastery of the English idiom by saying, "One for the road!"

We all drank that one up. But the really last one was that which the union's head in Georgia and I drank together with drinking arms hooked together. We then hugged each other and kissed each other wetly on the cheek while the women beamed and the men grinned.

Reso drove us back to the hotel in his grand-prix style of driving, but parked his car just a few feet away from the front of the Tbilisi Hotel. He then hurriedly went into a building, a theater, and came out with an old man and a pretty woman of slight, un-Georgian build. The old man, probably in his 60s, was introduced as Georgia's top actor.

"Is she also in the acting business?" I asked, unaware that I was committing a faux-pas.

"Yes, she's an actress and, incidentally, my wife," Reso Tabukashvili said.

An autographed picture of hers had been shown to me earlier by Madame Abashidze. From the picture and from my own mental stereotype of Georgian women, I had thought that Juliet Tabukashvili was a big woman. She is a famous actress and a very lovely person.

"I didn't recognize her," I said to Sasha later. "She looks different from her photograph."

"After all," Sasha said, "they also grow old, you know."

I should mention that without Sasha, the evening would not have been as sparkling. A gatling-gun interpreter, Sasha earned the unqualified admiration of his compatriots. The young man Chino also spoke English, but he deferred to his elders during the conversation, preferring to watch a football game quietly on television after dinner. The Abashidze household was what one would describe as typically middleclass in another society.

16 March 1970

With the handtooled bracelet ("for your future wife") that Reso gave me as a goodbye gift together with an ashtray show-

ing Rustaveli's *Man in the Panther's Skin*, I peered at landmarks of the city for the last time as we drove out, including its founding czar cast in bronze mounted on a horse on a hill where the rulers used to live, framing all these scenes within the oval of the bracelet.

I should mention that Shota Rustaveli was born in the 8th century and is Georgia's greatest epic poet. Lady Marjory Wardrop's translation of the poet's famous work has it as "panther's skin," but the Georgian writers say that the animal in question is a tiger: the old problem of the lady or the tiger, in another guise.

Dolsvidanya Tbilisi, goodbye Georgia, whose decorative motif is the Vine. But Georgia is not just famous for its vineyards and the appreciation of the fruits thereof, among many other things. Georgians, for instance, are the only people I have seen who drink champagne for breakfast. And Sasha himself took note of the fact this morning at the hotel restaurant.

The Georgians are also more enterprising than most other peoples in the Soviet Union. One cannot help noticing, for example, that they are better dressed, wearing scarves and sweaters and coats that are not available in the local market.

Since spring comes earlier to their region, they take advantage of it by bringing tons and tons of flowers to Moscow and other cities to sell. That is how they make more money, according to Sasha, and flowers are not their only means of augmenting their incomes. Their sense of entrepreneurship, if it can be called that, at least their feel for profit-making, is somewhat of a necessity, given their zest for life. Georgia is a border republic, on the Caspian and Black Seas.

"As you can see," Sasha said, "they like to live well."

Thanks to Reso's hell-for-leather driving, we made it just on time to get on the Aeroflot Ilyushin, and as I climbed abroad, I turned around before entering the door and raised what I was holding (a Pan-Am bag) in farewell.

During the flight to Moscow, I noticed a number of pretty and medium-built girls, whose apparels and bearing were dif-

ferent. One of them was even wearing those long boots popular with French women. No, they were not foreigners. They were the Moseyev group. One of the male dancers had twisted an ankle during the other night's acrobatic dancing, and his foot was all bandaged up.

"Horrible weather," my companion was griping, as we got out of the plane after two hours of flying. Fine snow pelted our faces like thrown rice, as we walked to the airport building and to the taxi stand beyond.

There was no sense telling Alexander, who had been suffering from a cold, that the weather was just perfect ("Slush," he would say). And all along the highway to the city, I was treated to a visual feast of snowbanks and trees mantled over, with organic forms and shapes all over the landscape. It was something like the beginning of things all over again. To me snow now has a very special meaning, and I cannot help it. Snow, and moon, and stars: behind all this the lineaments of the Eternal Woman....

Moscow

17 March 1970

Still snowing beautifully ("Awful weather" — Sasha). We took in the Tetryakov Museum in record time, 40 to 50 minutes. There were other appointments pending for the afternoon, so we just went straight for the big game which was the icon section featuring Russia's greatest icon master, Andrei Rublov or Rublev.

But before Rublev and the other icon painters, Sasha gave me a lightning tour of the Russian periods of Western art, pointing out certain historic works, among which were the paintings of the post-Impressionist group, "Jack of Diamonds."

A painting of a mother and child with a contemporary setting was being highly admired by visitors. It was painted in 1920 by Petrov-Vodkin. I asked if it was a contemporary version of the Madonna and Child, and I was told that it is actually known as the "Russian Madonna." From this ma-

donna to the storied icons of the Universal Mother was merely a few steps away.

Rublev's paintings of the Trinity (depicted as three seated Angels) and of the Christ flanked by Saints were reproduced in color in the film of the same name as the monk painter's. His sense of organic form is what differentiates his art from the other icon painters, as he translates his vision into paint not only exquisitely but monumentally. The huge panel paintings with the teaching Christ in the middle are as tall as his own pair of panels in Leningrad depicting two saints, probably Peter and Paul.

Another equally admired and esteemed iconist is Dionysei (Dionisi?), whose small graceful Christ on the Cross suggests the grace and beauty of the Godhead. And then, before we left the icon section, I came upon "it" — the icon of the Blessed Virgin and Child, with the mother extending her hands like a priest saying, "God be with you."

"So the painting is here at the Tetryakov," I told Sasha. "I dreamed about it, you know."

Sasha's smile told me that I had gone too far in this business as far as he was concerned, but he was helpful when I asked him for the title of the work, "It's known as the Madonna of the Panagea, which is a Greek word."

At the offices of the monthly, "Literatura Sovietica," where I met the staff over tea, I promised Valentina Jacque, the editor of the English version, to review one of their issues of this year. They also wanted to find out how they could distribute their magazine in the Philippines in English and Spanish translations. They were surprised to learn that Soviet and other types of socialist literature are on sale openly in at least two Manila bookstores, and that Russian prints have been selling in the Philippines, as well as posters.

Emphasis was laid on the desirability of more exchanges between the two countries. I wanted to say, "culture yes, ideology no thank you." During the exchange of ideas, there were

some oblique references to "social content," but the issue was not forced.

At dinner today, Sasha suddenly said, "I hope you don't repeat what we have been saying to you."

"What do you mean, Sasha?" I simply said, although I was hurt by his words and would have wanted to know what they have said that I may not repeat. After all, inviting writers from other countries always carry certain risks. Also, my guide and travelling companion has been very circumspect, to the point of reticence.

And so he told me of a visiting Asian journalist, who was interviewed recently on radio, and who at the end of his talk came up with this valedictory, to the great embarrassment of his hosts, "And, finally, I do hope that one of these days the writers in the Soviet Union enjoy the freedom of expression guaranteed to them by the Constitution of the Soviet Union."

"One would think that we had been discussing the subject with him," Sasha said. "Now, it is perfectly all right for him to express his opinions in his own country. But not here. Here, it is none of his bloody business!"

Later, at the Kremlin's Palace of Congresses where the Bolshoi was doing *Romeo and Juliet*, Sasha asked my opinion of the prima ballerina Strushkova.

"She's okay," I ventured to say.

"She's horrible," Sasha said, probably with Ulanova's performances in mind.

It had been snowing before the performance, but as we stepped out into the open air after the ballet, the sky was clear.

"The stars are out!" I said to Sasha excitedly, and pointed to one of them. But Sasha did not appear to share my enthusiasm, and I realized why immediately. The tiny silver thing I was pointing at was right behind the giant Red Star over the Kremlin.

"I don't mean that Red Star," I said stupidly, and promptly pointed out another one in an unhampered lavender sky.

"It's a plane," Sasha said, getting into the spirit.

"How about that one," I pointed to one low over the horizon. "And certainly that must be the moon up there."

"No, that's a sputnik. Did you know that the Americans are constructing a satellite that will reflect the sun's light over Southeast Asia so that it will always be daylight in Vietnam?"

"Where ever did you hear that one," I said, as we crossed the bridgelike structure leading towards Red Square, in the company of thousands of ballet-loving Russians, and a sprinkling of Americans, under a starlit sky.

18 March 1970

Moscow took advantage of today's sunshiny weather to clear sidewalks of ice and slush. And not a few workmen were up on the roofs dislodging the stuff and sending the pieces hurtling down and crashing onto parts of the pavements which had been roped off for the protection of pedestrians. Just the same, Sasha and I nearly walked into one such area on our way to the folk arts emporium along one of the city's busiest avenues.

Established mainly for the export trade, the emporium is the clearing house for all kinds of folk crafts from the fifteen socialist republics of the Union. Each area has a distinct ethnic specialty along the lines of wood and bone work, wovens, metal and glass craft, pottery and ceramics, and so on. The emporium also acts as an outlet for prints and paintings which cater to the tastes of the dollar-carrying tourist.

The "Literary Gazette" (*Literaturnaya Gazeta*) is a 16-page newspaper which comes out weekly on Wednesdays, with a circulation of more than a million copies. Although it is devoted to literary news, it is half-political. Oleg Prudkov, the editor of the foreign news section, welcomed me in his office. They had asked for an interview, and that was the reason for the visit.

The interview itself took place in another room, and was conducted by one of Prudkov's women assistants who spoke English. The room had a large color photo of Robert Kennedy, probably a cut-out from a magazine.

The questions directed at me by the lady were mostly on how I write poetry, and so I spoke on the dance and movement of words, the interplay of idea and image for lyrical and other effects, the delicate tension between word and idea, and my theory about artistic creativity in the essential, that it is somehow connected with a subliminal state of consciousness, and so on.

Somehow, the talk got into modern art, and as I told my interested interviewer about the latest kinetic and other art doings in Paris, Prudkov, who also understands English, finally intervened and ended the interview by saying that we were straying from the topic which was literature.

At the Writers Union, I was again interviewed, this time by a woman publisher who wanted to have backgrounders on the Philippine publishing scene. Since Russia is not a signatory to the International Copyright Law, its publishers may publish any foreign book, without the author's permission, much less knowledge. Royalties in this case may not be remitted outside Russia, but they may be enjoyed and spent by visiting writers inside the country.

Dostojevsky's *Crime and Punishment* was this evening's cultural fare. Billed as *Petersburg's Dreams*, and presented with a stagecraft that was maximized for visual and emotional impact, the play carried through forcefully even to one who hardly understood a word of Russian.

My guide told me that the interest in this play, especially among the intelligentsia, is very keen. The play dramatizes the crisis of conscience of a young man who kills a rich and selfish woman for the good of society, that is to say, he uses the money later to help the unfortunate: the old problem of the end justifying the means.

The fascination of this play is probably understandable in the light of the Great Purges under Josef Stalin. According to Sasha, the intelligentsia (and this term includes doctrinaire circles) feels no guilt complex as it was unaware of the magnitude of the purges until after Stalin was safely underground, and people in the know started to talk.

The very fact that this play continues to draw a full house, however, indicates the possibility that the intelligentsia does have feelings of guilt, not intellectually (they did not know), but in another way, psychologically (they did know what was going on in a dark sort of way). And once a Russian starts brooding in this fashion, as we know from Dostojevsky, Chekov and Pasternak, he can become masochistic about it.

Just before the end of the play, the stage was darkened. And then, gradually, the biggest crucifix I have ever seen in all my life appeared like a mental projection of some sort. And, in the hush, the words of the Christ hanging on the Cross were heard. Looking on, I found myself wondering whether I was in Moscow or not. But I said nothing to my companion, who also kept his thoughts to himself until we were out in the open air.

"That was a very daring thing to do here," Sasha said, reading my mind, "because it might be misinterpreted as propaganda for the church. But then the director is the best in his field in this country. Also, it was very Dostojevsky."

Earlier at the Writers Union cafeteria, where we had gone for tea, Mira had introduced me to an actor and a stage director, and somehow the conversation piece was the axe that the tortured young man in Dostojevsky's play was going to search for among the seats in the audience, in the best tradition of spectator participation.

"Be careful. He might find the axe under your seat."

"Really," I had said.

But the director appeared to be in no mood for repartee. Later, I learned from Mira that he had just been sacked, "given the axe," in another idiom.

In the play itself tonight, the axe was indeed hidden in one of the seats near a ramp which extended out of the proscenium. And it was Innocence, personified in the woman who happened to drop in at the time of the crime, which was given the axe. The blood of the innocent, who went under during the purges, cries out for the Punishment of the Crime, but who is the guilty party? Dostojevsky's play must be a very contemporary and absorbing subject among some Russians.

19 March 1970

At the Writers Union, I told Mira about last night's stage effects, and she suddenly asked. "Leo, what's the meaning of the Cross to you?"

I hedged, "It's more than just a symbol of suffering to me—"

"The reason I asked is because you're a Christian. From what I have read, Christ must have been a very lonely man."

We then talked about how symbols affect us differently. The ubiquitous Red Star over a peaked roof, for example, kept reminding me of Bethlehem and Christmas because of the star and fir tree motif. To my friends, the Red Star meant other things, and they were immensely amused at my naive way of looking at the same.

Had it not been a delicate matter, I would have wanted to ask my companions how it is possible for them to look upon the religious images that are now being exhibited in museums merely in terms of the socialist aesthetic. Besides, I have noticed that whenever the talk, whether on literature or art, began to border on socialist interpretation and appreciation, my listeners tended to feel that I was being ironic about it.

Actually, I have noticed nothing overtly socialistic about the cultural performances I have been seeing here in Russia. The Bolshoi's *Romeo and Juliet* was untampered with, and the operas likewise could have been shown anywhere without hurting "bourgeois" sensibilities. Culturally and intellectually, Ehrenberg's Thaw has certainly been going on if quietly, but

there is always the fear that the Stalinists might stage a comeback and put a stop to the liberalization movement, or what the Chinese call the process of revisionism.

This evening's cultural fare was the comedy *Turandot*. The star, who is a People's Actress of the highest rank,, played in the Russian film version of Dostojevsky's *Idiot*. A dramatic actress, here she was trying her best to titilate the audience. But she ended up merely in a supporting role for the advisers of the king, who clowned their way throughout with sparkling remarks, asides, and an entire repertory of joke and gesture that had the spectators rolling in the aisles from beginning to end.

20 March 1970

My last day in the Soviet Union: light snow in the late morning, during which Sasha and I visited the Tetryakov for the second time. But this time, it was not to the public show-rooms but to the stock rooms of the museum itself, where the works of "decadent" Russian artists, among them Malevitch, Kandinsky and Chagall, are stored.

The visit to this part of the museum was arranged by the Artists Union in a gesture of good will. I had actually not asked to see such works, as I was familiar with Malevitch, Kandinsky and Chagall. I could not understand why my hosts wanted me so much to visit the stock rooms until I heard Sasha saying that in all his life he had seen only one Chagall work, a small one, in an out-of-town exhibition, and the organizers did not even know it was a Chagall.

Some half dozen works of the Russian suprematist were there. Kandinsky was represented by the largest canvas I have ever seen of his works. And only one Chagall, the work "Over the Town," was hanging from a wall. The rest of the museum's collection were either elsewhere in the museum or on loan to Paris for the Chagall retrospectives that have been taking place there lately through Malraux.

But if these three giants of modern art were old hat to me, many of the other Russians were not. Tatlin, whose most im-

portant "construction" is the piece-de-resistance at a museum in the Hague, was represented by sketches. Other suprematists whose works were there in the stock rooms were Udaltsova and Tyshler.

Two works by Shternberg, "Cake" and "Sour Cream," antedate the pop art of Rauschenberg and Warhol by several years.

The "Jack of Diamonds" (Falk, Goncharova, Mashkov, *et al.*), who now enjoy official recognition in spite of their Post-Impressionist orientation, also had some works distributed all over in the store rooms whose ceilings still carry paintings indicating that once upon a time the Tetryakov was a religious establishment, either a monastery or a convent.

Later, before lunch with Mira, Sasha and Rumjantsev at the Writers Union, I reopened the subject of the meaning of Christianity to me in terms of the Cross as a sign of the Plus (+), in terms of negative and positive Christianity. And Mira said that she had just read a book with exactly that same thesis, namely, Christianity in terms of plus and minus.

Later in the evening, in my hotel room, I gave Sasha an envelope containing my unspent rubles, "as my contribution to your collection of 18th century music," as I wrote on the envelope with the express instruction that it was not to be opened (Alexander is a proud one) until after I had left the country.

To Boris Zhutovsky, who had also come to see me off with a going-away present of two bottles of vodka and two sketches (one set of both to be given to David Medalla), I left an art book I had picked up at Gallimard's back in Paris. To Mira, I left a Bollingen book on modern psychology in which I had been doing some research on the hero myth. And, to the Russian people, as we drove out of the city towards the airport, I left my best wishes.

At the airport, I left Leonid's coat in the car, regretting that he should have caught pneumonia while I was out of town. Boris ordered some cold salmon and drinks for us while we

waited for the passenger call, and we spent the rest of the time discussing the universal unconscious affecting all artists living in the same time zone wherever they may be. Finally, the loud-speaker announced the impending departure of the Aeroflot's midnight flight to New Delhi.

"Boris is fatalistic, he says," Mira translated. "He doesn't think we'll meet again."

"You wanna bet," I said without conviction, pitying Boris. "I'm sure we'll meet again in five years' time."

Boris Zhutovsky gave me a long hug, Mira Salganik kissed me goodbye, I shook Alexander Khmelnitsky's hand, stared at the three of them for a few seconds, and quickly walked away, leaving behind me a great country and a great people locked in the sleep of a long winter.