

Arctic narrative semantics in Soviet History, Fiction and Art of the 1930s

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Abstract

The paper traces the very different contours of Soviet discourses of Arctic in the Stalinists 1930s with their narrative transformation of Arctic space into integral part of national Soviet space. The goal is to see how the Arctic narrative developed and evolved throughout the last 30/40 years of the Soviet era. The research is based on analysis of 3000 literary texts, articles, memoirs and letters, published and archived. The results confirm the presence of ‘Arctic discourse’ in the Soviet society and is supported by various sources. The Arctic issue became permanent in cultural and political practices of the time in the late 1920s and had a series of climaxes in the 1930s–1940s. Its popularity peaked in the mid-1950s and then dropped dramatically. The cultural and literary background of such change is explored through the narrative definitions.

Keywords

Arctic space, Soviet Union, narrative strategy, cultural politics

Contacts

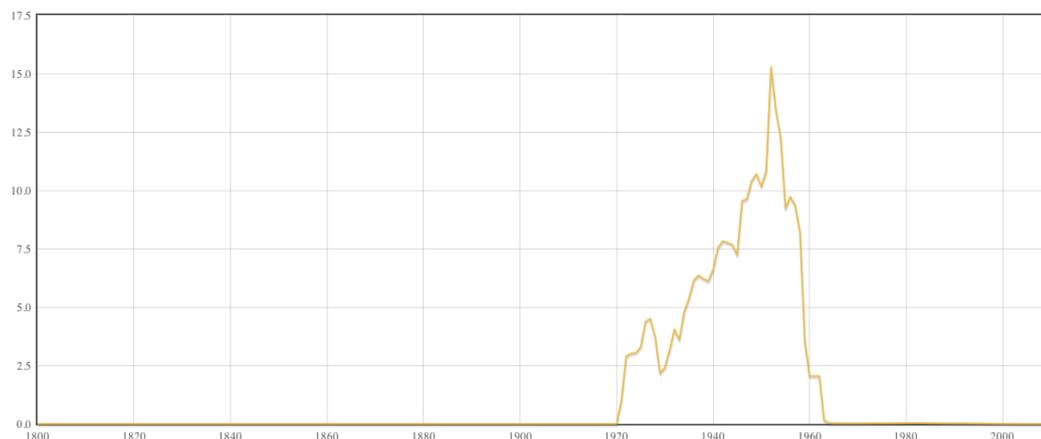
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I would like this research to be perceived in a dialogue with the essays published in the collective volume *Arctic Discourses* edited by Anka Ryall, Johan Schimanski and Henning Howlid Wærp.

In the chapter “The City of the Sun on Ice: The Soviet (Counter-) Discourse of the Arctic in the 1930s”, Susi K. Frank examines both non-fictional and literary representations of the Chelyuskin expedition under Otto Schmidt for their transformations of Arctic space, and contrasts Western-European conceptions of the lonesome Arctic explorer-hero – envisaged as a specifically capitalist explorer in the Soviet discourse – with the privileging of the collective aspects and social sides of expeditions. Thus, Susi Frank singles out three types of Arctic narrative, namely the geographical, the diachronic and the transformative. (Ryall, Schimanski and Wærp 17)

In my research I am investigating into minor narrative strategies, which occur on the periphery of those three mainstream types. Apart from the declared description methods, there are also alternative, incidental, unmanifested ones. (Kirschbaum) These have been showing through and changing since the postwar 1950s. Therefore, my goal is to see how the Arctic narrative developed and evolved throughout the last 30/40 years of the Soviet era. (Schwartz)

Analysis of 2,753 literary texts, articles, memoirs and letters, published and archived, has resulted in the picture described below, which reflects the presence of ‘Arctic talks’ in Soviet society and is supported by various sources. As we can see, the Arctic issue became permanent in cultural and political practices in the late 1920s and had a series of climaxes in the 1930s–1940s. Its popularity peaked in the mid-1950s and then dropped dramatically. Let’s analyze these ups and downs of the Arctic issue and its modifications.



The Arctic and the North are known to be regarded in a few coordinate systems in the Soviet Union. The first dimension has to do with history: ‘Retro Arctic’. The issue of the North was not only a geographical and social problem; it was also associated with political collisions, repressions and disastrous twists of history. Indeed, the northern part of Russia has been identified as a source of threats and troubles, as a place of exile and death since the 18th century. The Decembrist Revolt of 1825, as well as subsequent executions and exodus of the convicts to northern settlements and Siberia, enrooted repressive connotations in cultural and political traditions of Russia. These associations first came to the surface almost unnoticed in the 1920s–1930s and arose new interest in the late 1950s–1960s.

This can be proved by considering a new wave of attention towards historical novels describing events in the North. Ivan Lazhechnikov’s *The House of Ice* (1835), a novel set at the time of empress Anna Ioannovna’s reign and dealing with her reactionary regime, known as Bironovshchina, and the horrible Ice Palace symbolizing martyrdom and death suffered by protagonists, was republished 137 times between 1921 and 1932.

The year 1951 witnessed the publication of *Decembrists as Explorers of Siberia* by Lydia Chukovskaya (she had started writing the book before the war broke out). It should be pointed out that the author brought together three threads, namely those of Arctic discoveries made by Russian travelers, of the rich Siberian territories and of the rich new Russian literature. She saw the Decembrists’ role as one of global importance, since they made a breakthrough by pioneering Chukovskaya’s book.

Tekhnika Molodyozhi and *Ogonyok* magazines regularly published texts related in a way or another to the Arctic from 1955 to 1959. These were mainly essays, reportages and commented documents. We can mention among others:

- Kryuchkov Y. “Za bortom — goluboy kontinent” [A Blue Continent Overboard]. *Tekhnika Molodezhi*, 1959;
- Morozov S.. “Russkoye serdtse” [The Russian Heart]. *Ogonyok* No. 2, 1959;
- Morozov S. “Sud’ba podviga” [The Fate of Heroic Deeds]. *Ogonyok*, No. 15, 1959;
- Cherevkov K. “Pochta kapitana Ponomaryova” [Captain Ponomaryov’s Mail]. *Ogonyok*, No. 2, 1956;
- Zlatogorov M. “Poyezdka na Pechenegu” [A Trip to Pechenegu]. *Ogonyok*, No. 50, 1956;

- Kolobkov N. “Vesna ozhidayetsya burnaya...” [It’s Going to Be a Turbulent Spring...]. *Ogonyok*, No. 15, 1956;
- “Dnevnik Ogon’ka” [Ogonyok Diary]. *Ogonyok*, No. 15, 1956;
- “Korabel’ny lager” [The Ship Camp]. *Ogonyok*, No. 34, 1956.

The latter article begins with a question and contains enciphered information:

Do you believe Dudinka that Norilsk is the world’s most northern railway? If so, you are wrong. A 70-kilometer railway was built (in fact, by prisoners using their spades and picks) in 1937 to connect the village of Nordvik in the Khara-Tumus peninsula bordering on the Khatanga Bay with the village of Kozhevnikovo on the bank of the eponymously-named bay until the early 1950s. During the war, people (again, prisoners) mined salt and coal, drilled boreholes, performed construction works, repaired ships and fueled Soviet and American steamboats delivering materials supplied under land-lease to Murmansk and Arkhangelsk by the Northern Sea Route.¹ (“Korabel’nyi” 21)

Arctic camps, some of the most dreadful ones, were also situated in the North, at 74o N latitude.

One of latest important research works on the Russian Arctic is the collection *Vragi naroda za polyarnym krugom* [‘Enemies of State’ Beyond the Polar Circle] by Fyodor Romanenko and Sergej Larkov. The collection consists of eleven essays under the common theme of the history of repressions against Soviet polar explorers and indigenous peoples of the North during the Bolshevik government. The central essay that lent its name to the collection is the first attempt to summarize the documented information about unjustified political repressions against Soviet polar explorers, providing data on more than 1,000 victims. The essay “Iz kamennogo veka - za kolyuchuyu provoloku” [From the Stone Age To Behind The Bars] summarizes materials about repressions against small indigenous peoples of the Soviet North. Archived materials discovered by Fyodor Romanenko allowed to reconstruct the history of the 1934 Nenets uprising. Some essays are devoted to repression against members of two famous Arctic expeditions: the rescue of the group under Italian General Umberto Nobile who flew to the North Pole in the airship *Italia* in May 1928, and the Soviet expedition led by Otto Schmidt, head of the Chief Directorate of the Northern Sea Route, on board of the *Chebyuskin*.

Nordviklag is one of the most severe Gulag blank spots, which are hardly known to the public. How many other camps like that were there in the Arctic?

Lazar Brontman mentioned those camps obliquely in his intimate diaries. His contemporaries called him ‘the king of Moscow journalists’. (Matsuyev 41)

Brontman lived and worked for about 25 years in the very thick of things, regularly supplying the Soviet readers with editorials under the pen name Lev Ognev. During the ‘boom of records’ in the 1930s, Brontman went just about everywhere. He joined Ushakov’s expedition to the Arctic organized to search for Sannikov and Gillis Lands, then he went to the North Pole and drifted on Papanin’s ice station (after taking part in the

¹ The translation of the Russian text into English, here as well as in subsequent quotations, are mine (nda).

rescue of Sedov's group). Brontman was named Head of Information Department at *Pravda* newspaper just before the war. He kept his diaries from 1932 to 1947.

We learn from his notes that as early as 1934 a special purpose camp was created in the Varnek Bay of Novaya Zemlya. Prisoners of the camp mined for polymetallic ores in a 100-meter deep mine. The diaries were not published until 2007.

Historical characters regained their popularity during the war. Polar explorers of the past take a special place among them. A specific genre of historical hagiography was born. Boris Genrikhovich Ostrovsky, author of historical sketches, was one of the renowned masters of the genre. His biographical cycle of works about vice-admiral Stepan Makarov was widely published in the late 1940s. A kids version could be found in *Murzilka* and *Pioner* children's magazines. A monograph about Makarov was published in 1951.

Another dimension, or coordinate system, is represented by a powerful bunch of literary works of various genres — science fiction novels and short stories, poems, novellas - written in the style of socialist realism. The key features are described in detail by Susi Frank and Tim Young. I am not resting upon these works here. They supported and developed the trends towards creating a new human hero integrated into the specific Soviet world, of which the conquered Arctic became a part.

Yet another dimension resonating with the two above is of the most interest to us. I would call it the 'everyday Arctic', the 'privatized Arctic', the 'domesticated Arctic'. Presence of the Arctic into Soviet everyday life appears to have been underestimated so far, as does the power of the 'Arctic enchantment'.

At that time, Soviet Russia was actively participating in the international invasion of the North Pole, developing its own plan to conquer the Arctic. It should be noted that this ambitious political project penetrated into a number of spheres of Soviet life, exerting a powerful conceptual and visual influence on them. Thus, the project is rather hard to localize. It literally brought education, healthcare, science and everyday life under its own control. We can even talk about the Arctic hypnosis witnessed in every corner of the country during 1930s–1950s.

Thus, the Russian State Museum of Arctic and Antarctic was founded in 1930 as a special part of the Soviet Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute (Dukalskaya 54). After being overhauled, the Arctic and Antarctic Museum was opened to visitors in 1937. Meanwhile, the museum employees were developing the scientific concept, collecting and preparing exhibits, creating the static exhibition. Establishment of the museum was performed with active participation of Arctic scientists and explorers: Otto Schmidt, the first Head of the Chief Directorate of the Northern Sea Route, Rudolf Samoylovich, the first director of the AARI, Yuly Shokalsky, member of the Academy of Sciences, research scientists of the AARI Vladimir Wiese, Yakov Gakkel, Alexander Laktionov, Nikolay Pinegin, and others. From the opening day, scientists of the museum tried to react promptly to all important events in the Arctic. Thus, an exhibition devoted to the work at North Pole-1, the first manned drifting station (May 1937 — February 1938), was opened as soon as September 1938. The exhibition displayed the living tent of the North Pole-1 members, their possessions, equipment and tools.

Neighbored by a collection of realist paintings and graphic artworks, those exhibits represent unique artifacts confirming that the Arctic issue was privatized by art.

Starting from the 1930s, Vladimir Negovsky, famous emergency physician and member of the Academy of Sciences, investigated into anesthesiology using cold and freezing techniques. In his experiments related to recovering from coma and clinical death, he also used ice (Negovsky 34, 75-76, 92). Some memoirs of discussions with Negovsky can be found in the Brontman diaries mentioned above.

The Arctic became ubiquitous. The food industry started using deep freezing technologies. Satiation and abundance are symbolized in Soviet still life paintings showing beef carcasses hanged in butcher shops. There was a wide circulation of photos and graphic pictures of the Grocery Store No. 1 (Eliseevsky Gastronom) in Gorky Street and of the Mikoyanovsky Meat Processing Plant, the key food distributor for the whole country.

'Mishka Na Severe' (Bear in the North) chocolate sweets have been produced at Krupskaya Confectionery Factory since 1939. There used to be more sweets associated with obsession for the North and the Arctic. Alexei Ignatyev (1877–1954), writer and diplomat, recalls in his memoirs *Pyat'desyat let v stroyu* [Fifty Years of Service] the magic taste of 'Arktika' (The Arctic) candies that had been popular before the war (Livanov 56).

Конфеты съедались, но бумажки с надписью «Красный мак» или «Арктика» хранились на память в рабочих семьях как драгоценная святыня.² (Ignatyev 543)

Another fact also proves the expansion of the Arctic cold. The All-Union Scientific Research Institute of the Refrigerating Industry (AUSRIRI) was founded under the All-Union Organization for the Refrigerating Industry on 16 May 1930 by decision of the Narkomtorg USSR. The main subdivisions of the Institute were formed between November 1930 and December 1932. Food freezing techniques expanded to the south in 1933–1940, when branch institutes were opened in Odessa, Krasnodar and Tbilisi. The efforts of the AUSRIRI, the Leningrad Institute of the Refrigeration Industry and the Research and Development Institute for Meat and Fish Processing were streamlined to give birth to what in professor Mikhail Tuchsneid's book is called 'Kholodil'naya Tekhnologuiya' [The Refrigeration Technology], the first study ever to synthesize national and foreign practices of the time ("K 80-letiyu" 50).

The first generation of commercial refrigeration units and chiller display cabinets was developed in 1934–1935 to be produced by the Krasny Fakel Factory in Moscow; the first dry ice factory of the capital was commissioned in 1933. However, it was only in the 1950s that mass production of 'ZIS', 'Sever' and 'Saratov' refrigerators became possible.

Cold water dousing treatment became popular around the same time, in the 1930s. Polar bear clubs, all-union communities of ice swimmers also emerged in the 1930s, attracting a huge number of people.

Education. We should remember that the Soviet geography and cartography canon was elaborated between 1930s and 1950s and was often promoted in schools.

² Workers' families ate candies and preserved wrappings saying 'Krasny mak' (Red Poppy) or 'Arktika' (The Arctic) as precious relics.

The Joint resolution of the Council of People's Commissars of the Soviet Union and the Central Committee of the Communist Party 'On Teaching Geography in Primary and Secondary Schools' came into force on 17 May 1934. It was by far not the first concern of authorities about school geographical education, but the expert community defined it as a turning point in Soviet geography policy. Geography schoolbooks compiled in compliance with the Resolution survived over twenty republications and determined geography teaching canons in the Soviet Union for the following thirty years.

Officially, geography and cartography became issues of interest due to the successful rescue of the crew members of the steamship *Chelyuskin*. Covering the rescue operation became an unprecedented experience for the Soviet print media of the time. Over the space of three months, the symbolic event was described using cartographic, geographic and other special terms required to evaluate the importance of the event and the extent of Soviet heroism. Geography terminology was the authorities' official language throughout the rescue operation, while the map was supposed to serve as a media tool to consolidate the imaginary community.

Discursive effect of the *Chelyuskin* story is obvious: Soviet people's need for geographic learning increased as authorities explored (appropriated) new geography and cartography facts. (Orlova 58)

The Arctic invasion became one of the key subjects in the development of Soviet folklore. The *Chelyuskin* Expedition had an exceptional significance. On February 15, all major newspapers published Otto Schmidt's radio message relating the steamship crash and the government order to set up a commission for the rescue of the crew. From that day, several Soviet newspapers published regular updates about the Chelyuskinites and the measures taken to help them out (almost every day in major newspapers and weekly in regional ones). In May, the crew was coming back to Moscow by train across the whole country, and every city welcomed them in triumph. Korney Chukovsky cited a five-year-old boy's poem "Chelyuskinty-Doroginty" in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* on May 25.

The crew's return to the capital was covered in detail by major print media and was widely discussed in literature. On June 18, *Literaturnaya Gazeta* published welcoming words to Chelyuskinites from Alexei Tolstoy, Mikhail Gorky, Alexei Novikov-Priboy as well as Nikolay Ushakov's poem "Chelyuskinskoye", while Pravda magazine published Sergei Mikhalkov's poem "Kuryersky" about the train bringing the crew back to Moscow. Marina Tsvetaeva wrote a poem called "Chelyuskinty" in October 1934. The festive trip back home was covered extensively and provided for another giant folklore wave.

The first novinas about the Chelyuskinites were written as late as in 1937, three years after the crew came back. The heroic expedition was praised by M.S. Kryukova, narrator of folk tales from the Winter Coast of the White Sea in Arkhangelsk Oblast, and by Matvey Samylin, narrator of folk tales from Zaonezhsky District of the Karelian ASSR. Kryukova's novina was published in *Novyi Mir* in May 1937, while Samylin's novina appeared in *Studencheskiye Zapiski Filologicheskogo Fakulteta LGU* in the same year (Kozlova). Thus, domestic folklore attitudes arose from the 'backward expedition' that turned the Chelyuskin voyage into a triumphant celebration and created a nationwide euphoria over it.

Further investigation into the subject provides a few more additional aspects missed out by major dimensions.

It is in children's books that 'domestication' of the Arctic is shown, on the one hand, as having a heroic and instructive nature, while on the other as an ordinary everyday process.

This refers us to Lazar Lagin's novel *Starik Khottabych* [Old Man Hottabych]. The first version was written in 1938 and published in installments by *Pionerskaya Pravda* newspaper and *Pioner* magazine. Another edition was published in 1940 and was significantly extended by the author in 1955. (Lenobl 37)

Here are some excerpts from the book:

В средних числах июля, — читал Хоттабыч, — из Архангельска отправляется в **Арктику**³ зафрахтованный Центральным экскурсионным бюро ледокольный пароход «Ладога», на котором проведут свой отпуск шестьдесят восемь лучших производственников Москвы и Ленинграда.⁴ (Lagin 59)

В первые секунды Волька был так растроган этой необыкновенной встречей двух братьев среди льдов **Арктики** и настолько доволен за Хоттабыча, что совсем забыл про несчастного Женю. — Я понял, как это вы очутились в **Арктике**. — В Гольфстриме, в теплом течении, которое и принесло вас из южных морей сюда, в **Арктику**. Если Хоттабыч успел рассказать брату, что в **Арктике** солнце в это время светит круглые сутки, то все пропало. Во всяком случае, и родители и знакомые восприняли как должное факт отъезда ребят в **Арктику**, совершенно не задаваясь вопросом, какими таинственными путями они устроились на «Ладогу». Отлично пообедав, ребята долго рассказывали своим близким, почти не привирая, о различных своих приключениях в **Арктике**, но благоразумно не упоминали о Хоттабыче.⁵ (Lagin 75)

Если кто-нибудь из читателей этой глубоко правдивой повести, проходя в Москве по улице Разина, заглянет в приемную Главсевморпути, то среди многих десятков граждан, мечтающих о работе в **Арктике**, он увидит старичка в твердой соломенной шляпе канотье и вышитых золотом и серебром розовых туфлях.⁶ (Lagin 79)

³ Here and in subsequent quotations from texts, the bold format is mine.

⁴ 'In the middle of July,' Khottabych was reading, 'the ice-breaker *Ladoga*, chartered by the Central Excursion Bureau, will leave Arkhangelsk for **the Arctic**. Sixty-eight persons, the best workers of Moscow and Leningrad, will spend their vacations aboard it.'

⁵ At first, Volka was so touched by this unusual meeting of brothers in the midst of **the Arctic** icebergs, and so happy for Hottabych's sake, that he completely forgot about the unfortunate Zhenya. 'Now I know how you came to be in **the Arctic**.' 'The Gulf Stream, the warm current which brought you to **the Arctic** from the Southern Seas.' If Khottabych had had time to tell his brother that **the Arctic** Sun shone twenty-four hours a day at this time of the year, then all would be lost. At any rate, their relatives and friends accepted it as a matter of course that the children had been in **the Arctic**, without questioning how in the world they had ever booked berths on the *Ladoga*. After an excellent dinner, the children told their parents the story of their adventures in **the Arctic**, keeping almost true to the facts. They were wise enough to say nothing about Khottabych.

⁶ If any of the readers of this really truthful story are in Moscow on Razin Street and look in at the offices of the Chief Directorate of the Northern Sea Route, they will probably see among the dozens of people putting in applications for work in **the Arctic** an old man in a straw boater and pink slippers embroidered in silver and gold.

Уж один его внешний вид — длинная седая борода по пояс, а следовательно, и бесспорно почтенный возраст — является серьезным препятствием для посылки на работу в суровых условиях **Арктики**.⁷ (Lagin 87)

Но в том-то и дело, что старик твердо решил устроиться на работу в **Арктике** честно, без малейшего обмана.⁸ (Lagin 89)

However, the changes did not affect the story line where the protagonists go for an Arctic excursion on the *Ladoga* ship. There are some notable people, real heroes of labor of the Soviet Union on board. The trip is rather a tourist travel. The Arctic itself is toy-like and full of magic. At the end of the trip, the sailors find a bottle and let another genie out. He turns out to be Hottabych's brother. The story ends happily: everyone is back home, and none of their families wonders where they had been for so many days and why they actually had to go to the Arctic. The everyday nature of what is going on in the book is emphasized in the final part: Hottabych gets employment in the Arctic, and anyone can find him at the reception desk of the Glavsevmorput, the Moscow organization 'in charge' of the Arctic.

Around the same time, one year before the war broke out, Valentin Kataev wrote his fairytale *Rainbow Flower* about little girl Zhenya who found herself on the North Pole. (Kiziria)

Children's magazines *Murzilka*, *Pioner* and *Veselye Kartinki* published Arctic-related stories, poems, songs and pictures every year, starting from 1936.

There is one more aspect of domesticating the Arctic issue.

A familiar, everyday, 'home' Arctic can be found in Platonov's *Schastlivaya Moskva* [Happy Moscow] (1935), where 'Arctic talks' are referred to as a feature of the epoch, of the city life and of the communal apartments.

Там пили чай с семьей или гостями, прелестные девушки играли на роялях, из радиотруб раздавались оперы и танцы, спорили юноши по вопросам Арктики и стратосферы, матери купали своих детей, шептались двое-трое контрреволюционеров, поставив на стуле у двери гореть открытый примус, чтоб их слов не слышали соседи.⁹ (Platonov, *Schastlivaya* 34)

Platonov describes it even more sharply in his earlier story *Antiseksus* (1926) which mentions patented goods that are in demand both in Arctic and Antarctic.

⁷ His appearance alone, with the long grey beard reaching down to his waist, a sure sign of his undoubtedly advanced age, is a great hindrance in finding employment in the harsh conditions of **the Arctic**.

⁸ But the trouble is the old man has decided he wants to get a job in **the Arctic** honestly, without any fakery at all.

⁹ People were having tea with their families or friends, charming girls were playing piano, opera and dancing music could be heard from radios, young men were arguing about **the Arctic** and the stratosphere, mothers were bathing their children, and two or three counter-revolutionaries were whispering, having placed a burning Primus stove on a chair by the door to make their words undecipherable to the neighbors.

Однако, спрос на наши патентованные изделия имеется всюду — от **Арктики** до Антарктики, включая и эти последние, не исключая, однако, и диких стран меж тропиками Рака и Козерога.¹⁰ (Platonov, *Antiseksus* 79)

In Konstantin Vaginov's novel *Garbagoniana* (1934), Zhulonbin tries to seduce a girl by using Arctic-related terms in a nonsense way.

Между тем я был в свое время в Египте, и меня гробница этого новатора очень интересует. И **Арктикой** она совершенно не интересуется. — Вы были в Египте и на полюсе были? ¹¹ (Vaginov 67)

Taking off heroic excitement, Ilya Ilf and Yevgeni Petrov in their novel *Zolotoy tehyonok* [The Little Golden Calf] (1931) describe the biography of Sevryugov, the 'ice hero' who became famous by flying over the Arctic. Satiric inclusions of the Arctic subject are always present in the story.

Будь у Севрюгова слава хоть чуть поменьше той всемирной, которую он приобрел своими замечательными полетами над **Арктикой**, не увидел бы он никогда своей комнаты, засосала бы его центростремительная сила сутяжничества, и до самой своей смерти называл бы он себя не «отважным Севрюговым», не «ледовым героем», а «потерпевшей стороной». ¹² (Ilf and Petrov 341)

Finally, the unavoidable and inevitable Arctic as fate was referred to in Boris Pilnyak's short stories as early as in the 1920s. In 1925–1928, Pilnyak focused on the problem of reasonable iron will prevailing over human instincts and emotions. He proclaimed the cult of a strong personality that has suppressed biological instincts. This principle gave birth to *Zavolochye* (1925, a novel about professor Kremnev's Northern expedition) and *Delo smerti* [Deathwork] (about professor Pavlishchev freezing himself in the name of science):

Эти станции — за тысячу верст к северу от полярного круга, в штормах, во льдах, без пресной воды, в холоде — были единственной целью экспедиции в **Арктику** для биолога профессора Николая Кремнева, начальника Русской полярной экспедиции, — для того, чтобы через два года, вернувшись с холодов, в Москве, после суматошного дня, после ульев студенческих аудиторий, человеческих рек Тверской и лифтов Наркомпроса на Сретенском бульваре — пройти тихим двором старого здания Первого московского университета, войти в

¹⁰ The demand for our patented products exists everywhere from **the Arctic** to the Antarctic, not excluding the savage countries between the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn.

¹¹ 'In the meantime, I've been to Egypt and I am very intrigued by the tomb of this innovator. Neither is she interested in **the Arctic**.' 'Have you been to both Egypt and the North Pole?'

¹² Had Sevryugov had a fame less than the one he had earned with his remarkable flights over **the Arctic**, he would have never seen his room again, he would have got lost in a whirlpool of barratry and would have called himself the 'damaged party', instead of the 'brave Sevryugov' or the 'ice hero', till the end of his life.

зоологический университетский музей и там сесть в своем кабинете — к столу, к микроскопу, к колбам и банкам и к кипе бумаг.¹³ (Pilnyak 211)

Профессор Кремнев писал свою работу сразу на двух языках, это так: но море Баренца у Земли Франца-Иосифа и Карское море позади Новой Земли, куда раз в пять лет могут зайти суда, невероятную **Арктику**, тысячи верст за полярным кругом — он называл только северными морями, никак не Ледовитым Океаном, — точно так же, как, когда океан у восьмидесятого градуса бил волной и льдами, когда Кремнева било море и до судорог мучила тошнота и даже команда балдела от переутомления и моря, Кремнев говорил, не вылезая из своей каюты, не имея сил встать: — «как, разве плохая погода?»¹⁴ (Pilnyak 347)

«Слышать, как рождаются айсберги, — как рождаются вот те громадные голубые ледяные горы, которые идут, чтобы убивать и умирать по свинцовым водам и волнам **Арктики**: это слышать гордо!»¹⁵ (Pilnyak 354)

И я могу рассказать о том, что было в Европе, в России в начале Четвертичной эпохи, когда со Скандинавского полуострова ползли на Европу глетчеры, ледники, когда были только вода, небо, камень и льды, и холод, и страшные ветры, такие, которые снежинками носят камни с кулак и с голову человека: я это видел здесь в тысячах верст, — здесь в **Арктике** я видел страшные льды, льды, льды, тысячи ледяных верст, страшные ледяные просторы, — воду (вот ту, предательски-соленую, неделями плавая по которой, можно умереть от жажды, и такую прозрачную, почти пустую, сквозь которую на десяток саженей видно морское дно), — горы (огромные, скалами базальтов и холода, и ледников идущие из моря и изо льдов), — небо, вот такое, с которого в течение почти полугода не сходит солнце.¹⁶ (Pilnyak 412)

¹³ Those stations, a thousand miles north of the Polar Circle, frozen, covered with ice, lost in storms, deprived of drinking water, were the only target of **the Arctic** expedition for professor of biology Nikolay Kremnev, head of the Russian Polar Expedition, just to get back to Moscow two years later, escape from the lecture halls teeming with students, from the flooded Tverskaya Street and Narkompros lifts in Sretensky Boulevard after a hectic day, cross a quiet yard of the old First Moscow University building, enter the university zoological museum and settle in his office, behind his desk, with his microscope, flasks, glass cans, and the huge pile of documents.

¹⁴ Indeed, professor Kremnev was writing his work in two languages. However, he never called the Barents Sea washing the Franz Josef Land and the hardly ever navigated Kara Sea behind Novaya Zemlya, **the** unbelievable **Arctic** and the thousands of miles north of the Polar Circle — he never called them the Arctic Ocean, always using the term ‘northern seas’ instead. Likewise, when the ocean was crashing waves and ice at the 80th parallel, when Kremnev was convulsing with nausea, and even the crew felt completely exhausted by the sea, Kremnev would say, lying weakened in his cabin, ‘How come, is that a bad weather?’

¹⁵ ‘It’s a pride to hear icebergs emerging, those giant blue ice mountains that are coming to kill and to die in the dark waters and waves of **the Arctic**!’

¹⁶ ‘And I can tell about the things that were happening in Europe and in Russia in the early Quaternary Period, when glaciers were crawling over Europe from the Scandinavian Peninsula, when there was nothing but water, sky, stone, ice, cold, and terrible winds — the ones that carry fist- or head-size stones like snowflakes — I’ve seen it all here over thousands of miles: here, in **the Arctic**, I’ve seen horrible ice, ice, ice, thousands of ice miles, a dreadful ice vastitude, — water (that deceptive, salty water; after sailing in it for some weeks, you can easily die from thirst; that lucid, almost empty water showing the sea bottom twenty meters below), — mountains (enormous, growing with cold basalt an

Физик профессор Шеметов, метеоролог Саговский, врач Андреев и художник Борис Лачинов ездили осматривать Холмогоры и Денисовку, где возник Ломоносов, ездили на взморье к Северо-Двинской крепости, построенной Петром I, там в рыбацьем поселке заходили к ссыльным (это случайное обстоятельство надо очень запомнить, ибо оно чрезвычайно важно для повести), — дни стояли пустые, призрачные, солнечные, тихие, — радио приносило вести, что **Арктика** покойна.¹⁷ (Pilnyak 434)

Вы знаете, если установить причины циклонов и анти-циклонов, которые возникают в **Арктике**, — тогда можно сказать, что вопрос о предсказании погоды почти решен.¹⁸ (Pilnyak 451)

— Тогда, там, в географической точке, которая зовется Москвой, за три дня до отъезда в Архангельск, он узнал об экспедиции, и в три дня собрался, чтобы ехать, — чтобы идти в **Арктику**, — чтобы сразу разрубить все те узлы, что путали его жизнь, очень сложную и очень мучительную, потому что и по суше ходят штормы и многие волны былинками гонят человека, и очень мучительно человеку терять свою волю.¹⁹ (Pilnyak 463)

Домик прилепился к горе ласточкиным гнездом; вверх уходили горы, горы были под ним, и там было море, и там на том берегу залива были горы, — там, в **Арктике**, свои законы перспективы, светила луна и казалось, что горы за заливом — не горы, а кусок луны, сошедшей на землю: это ощущение, что кругом не земля, а луна, провожало Лачинова весь этот год.²⁰ (Pilnyak 469)

— Но жизнь есть жизнь, и вот, в ноябре, в декабре, январями, когда на Шпицбергене ночь, в эти дни-ночи там в **Арктике** — на Грин-гарбурге, в Адвен-бае, в Коаль-сити — в северном сиянии и ночи, круглые сутки, посменно роятся

d glacier rocks from the sea and the ice), — the sky, the one the sun never comes from for almost six months..

¹⁷ Professor of physics Shemetov, meteorologist Sagovsky, physician Andreyev, and artist Boris Lachinov went to see Kholmogory and Denisovka, where the village of Lomonosov was born; they went to the seaside, to the Northern Dvina Fortress built by Peter the Great, they called on people exiled in that fisherman's village (this accidental circumstance is to be remembered as it plays an extremely important role in the narration), — those were clear, dreamy, sunny, and quiet days, — the radio kept saying **the Arctic** was all peaceful.

¹⁸ You know, if we find the reasons for cyclones and anticyclones that emerge in **the Arctic**, the problem of weather forecasts will almost be solved.

¹⁹ At that time, in that geographical location called Moscow, three days before going to Arkhangelsk, he learned about the expedition and got prepared for the trip in three days — to go to **the Arctic**, to cut at once all the knots that had been tangling his life, a very stressful and painful life because storms sweep over the dry land, too, and the man is blown by the waves as a straw, suffering from losing his will.

²⁰ The house was hanging on the rock like a swallow's nest; mountains were above and beneath, and the sea, and even more mountains on the opposite side of the bay — **the Arctic** had its own laws of perspective: the moon was shining down and the mountains on the other side looked like a piece of the Moon that descended to the Earth. This feeling of the Moon around instead of the land didn't leave Lachinov for the whole year.

в земле, в шахтах и штольнях; рабочие рвут каменноугольные пласты, толкают вагонетки, разбирают сор шахт и подземелий.²¹ (Pilyak 473)

Домики были открыты, в домиках — были винтовка, порох, пища и уголь, — чтоб человеку бороться за жизнь и не умереть: так делают люди в **Арктике**.²² (Pilyak 489)

Summarizing this short overview, we can say that thirty years of active Arctic intervention into cultural and political spheres of the Soviet life resulted in a convergence of Arctic genres, in a conflict, or even a competition, between the ‘micro-Arctic’ and the ‘macro-Arctic’, which provided for turbulence and split the holistic Arctic narrative. Component parts of the latter were scattered around the social and cultural map of the 1930s–1950s as mosaic pieces, creating a polymorphic and colorful picture that combined extremely different hues, from absurd and parody to detective investigations. We can now say with confidence that the Arctic issue is becoming relevant again.

***Obyknovennaya arktika* [Everyday Arctic]: An Addendum.**

Obyknovennaya arktika [Everyday Arctic] is a collection of novels (1940) created short before the outbreak of World War II by Soviet writer Boris Gorbatov (1908–1946). Gorbatov was a household name in the post-war and early post-Stalinist years, but virtually vanished into oblivion in the period of Khrushchev Thaw. Gorbatov’s name has resurfaced recently due to the political situation in the Ukraine and to the ambition to bring back to light the names of Soviet writers with distinct Ukrainian origins.

Boris Gorbatov’s life story was typical of the young generation who had a meteoric rise in literary career in the 1930s. He was born on 15th July 1908 in Petromaryevskiy mining camp, which is now the city of Pervomaisk, Luhansk Oblast, Ukraine. His family later moved to Bakhmut (now Artemivsk, Donetsk Oblast). He formed the first Ukrainian pioneer group at the age of 12, joined Komsomol at 14, and became a Bolshevik at 19.

Gorbatov’s first essay, *Sytye i golodnye* [The Full and the Hungry], appeared in May 1922 in the pages of *Kochegarka*, Donetsk workers’ newspaper. Later on, he published his early articles and essays about everyday life of young miners in this newspaper, first as a worker correspondent, and then as a journalist.

Boris Gorbatov was one of the founders and active members of the Donbas Union of Proletarian Writers *Zaboi* established in October 1924.

Gorbatov moved to Moscow in 1925 after being selected as Secretary of the Managing Board of the All-Russian Association of Proletarian Writers. In Moscow, he met Vladimir Mayakovski and Alexander Serafimovich.

In 1926, he returned to Donbas and had his novella *Yacheyka* [The Cell] on young Donbas communists published in 1928.

²¹ ‘But life is life; so, every November, December and January, when the night covered Spitzbergen, workers dig the ground, sweat in shafts and adits in shifts, day by day, in darkness or under aurora light; in **the Arctic** — at Green Harburg, in Advenbay, in Koal City — they rip carboniferous coal beds, pull trolleys, and remove waste from the shafts and the catacombs.’

²² The cabins were never closed, inside there were rifles, gunpowder, food and coal, so that people could fight for their lives and survive — that’s how they do in **the Arctic**.

As a special correspondent of *Pravda* newspaper, Boris Gorbatoev went to the Dixon Island with polar aviator Molokov and spent the winter of 1935 there. Next year, he went to the Arctic again to fly over the Northern Sea Route. Life in the North provided the writer with material for his book of novels *Obyknovennaya arktika* (1940).

The year 1950 witnessed publication of the playscript *Donetskiye shakhtyory* [Donetsk Miners] in co-authorship with Alexeyev, and in 1951 this work was awarded the State Stalin Prize.

In the very beginning of World War II, Gorbatoev worked as a correspondent of *Pravda* and a frontline journalist.

Gorbatoev was one of the first to write about liberation of Donbas from fascist occupation in his novella *Nepokoryonnye* [The Unbroken]. The novella was first published in May–September 1943 in *Pravda* and was awarded the State Stalin Prize in 1946. The text was broadcasted on the radio and republished in *Komsomolskaya pravda* again and again. This oeuvre became part of the pool of myths about war produced by Soviet literature. The book also served the basis for Kabalevsky's opera *Semya Tarasa* [Taras Family].

Gorbatoev's works were published 200 times (including more than 100 times abroad).

The *Obyknovennaya arktika* collection of novels became one of the iconic oeuvres of the Soviet mythological pantheon. *Obyknovennaya arktika* is a collection of non-romantic stories about human life in most severe and unbelievable conditions.

The book contains dozens of novels about people who happened to be in the Arctic for different reasons. For example, the novel *Sud nad Stepanom Grokhotom* [The Trial of Stepan Grokhot] is about building a port in severe Arctic conditions. Instructions are given by the ruling party and performed by ordinary people who each made their own way to the Arctic, each with their own intricate background. The construction is managed by Stepan Grokhot. He is disorganizing the whole work, stealing alcohol and money allocated for the construction, and egging on starving workers who live in cold unsanitary barracks and drink alcohol, too. But workers look at him as one of them, as he is a grassroot leader and people depend on him and obey him. Meanwhile, another construction manager comes from Moscow. An intelligent engineer, he is strict and adhering to principles. But he is a stranger. Here begins the confrontation between the existing foreman and the newcomer. The former hatches a plot with the workers, makes a chaos and uses every means to disrupt orders of the new foreman and to make people disobey the instructions. He even plans a murder but it is prevented on time. The newcomer uses every means to mobilize people and to free them from the poisonous influence of the old leader. He sees his only mission in accomplishing the task he was assigned to in Moscow—to build the port. He puts an end to anarchy, brings cast-iron discipline, reduces the number of days off, and makes people come to work despite the awful snowstorm. He dives into ice-cold water himself to test the installed structure and prove its defectiveness and lack of compliance with the construction standards, which may lead to a disaster and severe damage in the future. In the end, he wins over the elements, both natural and human. The old chief loses the battle and is defeated in front of everybody. Even his best friend who has always supported him takes the side of the new chief and tells the old one to go. Stepan packs, saddles up the sled dogs and goes away forever. That's how the trial of Stepan Grokhot ends.

Boris Gorbatoev was keeping notes during his trip. His archives include *Arkticheskiye tetradi* [Arctic Copybooks]. These notes look totally different from what is described in the book. He wrote a lot of stories about how people were dying, how newcomers deceived indigenous people and ruined their lives, how people had to eat or other people at

hungry times. Events that served the basis for the *Stepan Gorkbot* novel in fact were unfolding in a totally different way. In reality, Stepan, the old leader, won the battle, got the workers drunk, and they killed the new chief in a drunken haze and started killing each other. A month later, military men and representatives of punitive authorities arrived to find human remains and the few remaining members of the crew. Everyone who was left was put to death by firing squad. The construction works were suspended. Six months later, new people were brought to the site to start it all over again.

The events took place in 1935. Gorbatov was writing the book when he was going to be proscribed as his brother was under trial.

It was the Stalinist era, six years before the outbreak of World War II.

The era of collectivization, mass-scale socialist construction, forced labor camps, trials, repressions and indiscriminate killings of the wrongfully convicted, the so called public enemies, by punitive authorities.

Gorbatov cited lots of horrifying documents and facts. It would be interesting to publish those notes today and compare them with the romantic interpretations he created. A comparison like that would illustrate clearly how the Soviet Arctic myth was developed and maintained.

That was the only myth that was authorized.

These texts were very mythogenic, providing material for other types of art. Thus, Gorbatov and Tatyana Okunevskaya, popular Soviet movie star, wrote a script for the play that was staged in the Theater on Malaya Bronnaya in the second half of the 1940s–1950s and had numerous radio broadcasts. It was a great success, as the play was perfectly in tune with that time.

Leonid Agranovich is known to have created a script called *Zdes' budut shumet' goroda* [Cities Will Be Roaring Here] (*My yedem na sever* [We Are Heading North]) based on Boris Gorbatov's book *Obyknovennaya arktika*. The director discussed the script with the author shortly before the latter's death. The play has never been staged. One of the reasons was that Agranovich didn't succeed in retouching the Arctic events and emphasized cruelty in the novels, despite the romantic title and the optimist style.

A fictional movie was filmed based on *Obyknovennaya arktika* in 1976.

The film was prohibited and gathered dust for a long time. Polar explorers had never been filmed with such harshness, criticism, eccentricity and cynicism before. The film affirmed and destroyed the Arctic myth at the same time, in certain ways. The premiere was postponed but enjoyed an overwhelming success in the second half of the 1980s. There had been a lot of preparatory work, and the effect was intensified by starring legendary Soviet actors who were still alive and admired.

The film was directed by Alexei Simonov, a famous writer and human rights activist, son of Konstantin Simonov, a Soviet writer, poet and journalist, who became popular in the years of war, 1941–1945. Simonov, Sr. was a friend of Gorbatov. They were both literary servants in the 1940s, when Anna Akhmatova and Mikhail Zoshchenko were charged with anti-Soviet propaganda and denied the opportunity of publishing their works.

Konstantin Simonov infected his son with the idea of filming *Obyknovennaya arktika*. His novel about Gorbatov was used as a prologue to the film, although it didn't prevent the film from being prohibited.

The movie featured great actors, iconic for the Soviet viewer of the 1960–1970s: Oleg Dal and Roland Bykov. Their participation was a guarantee of success.

Viewers were especially impressed by the scene of accouchement broadcasted on the radio. This was one of the crucial scenes in the book. The novel is called *Rody na ogurechnoy zemle* [Delivery on Cucumber Land]. It was one of the few novels that were taken from Gorbатов's diary with almost no modifications. Based on real events, the scene is a climax of the film.

A radio operator provides communication between the Arctic and the mainland. He's been by the receiving set day and night. Suddenly, he receives a message saying that a woman has started delivering a baby 450 km away, on the Cucumber Land, a remote region with polar explorers. The labour is being very hard, the woman has been in pain for a long time. She and her baby are going to die. There is no obstetrician to assist her, only her helpless husband and an inexperienced feldsher. Here, in the radio house, they have a doctor, who is no gynecologist and has never assisted in childbirth. The situation seems hopeless. At first, the doctor refuses to try, but he actually has no choice. He has to look up the medical books he brought to the Arctic and recollect what he studied long ago. He dictates to the radio operator who transmits the signal 450 km away. A lot of time passes before the radio operator receives a message saying that the doctor's words were heard, his instructions were followed consistently, and the woman has finally delivered the baby. They are both safe at last.

This scene is very powerful and emotional. The viewer sees all the people gathering in the room, sees their faces streaked with sweat and tears... They forgot about themselves, stopped what they were doing and just keep waiting, united in their emotional turmoil. The happy ending is that life wins.

The 2010s witnessed a new page of the film's history. It was actively watched on the Internet and discussed on forums. The film also regained interest as it coincided with the resurrection of the Arctic myth and the nostalgia for Soviet times, which can be seen from the reviews on movie websites and forums. The Arctic myth fits into the freshly reconstructed legend. Discussions all revolve around the following: «An honest and natural movie! Everything is strikingly simple in this movie. People work in the Arctic, live together and coexist in a common closed space. They see it as a usual life, no bravery or heroic deeds. But the toughest Arctic conditions expose all of their hidden strengths and weaknesses in a blatant way... This is probably why the movie captivates you and makes you watch it holding your breath. That's what the everyday Arctic is like, with no 'makeup' or styling.. »

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