

BEGINNINGS, ENDINGS, AND ETERNAL RETURNS: VLADIMIR SHAROV, ANDREI PLATONOV AND THE LEGACY OF THE SOVIET AVANT-GARDE

Philip Ross Bullock, University of Oxford

A notable figure in the Russian literary landscape since the scandalous publication of his second novel, *Before and During* (*Do i vo vremia*) in the journal *Novyi mir* in 1993, Vladimir Sharov has recently become the focus of considerable critical attention. In particular, a growing body of scholarship has tended to revolve around two interconnected themes: his contribution to the evolution of the post-Soviet literary field; and the relationship between his fictional works and the writing (and re-writing) of Russian history. Mark Lipovetsky and Nina Kolesnikoff include Sharov as one of the key representatives of Russian literary postmodernism (Lipovetsky "Russian Literary Postmodernism in the 1990s"; Kolesnikoff). For Harry Walsh, Sharov is best understood as a writer of "allohistories," that is to say, "a sub-genre of science fiction" that specializes in "idiolectically distinctive alternate histories." According to Rosalind Marsh, Sharov's preferred genre is "the fantastic historical novel," one that is characterized by "a deliberate lack of verisimilitude in its evocation of the past" (274). Alexander Etkind sees Sharov as one of a group of authors interested in the genre of "magical historicism."

All of these assessments can be fully justified, and have been productively elaborated in existing scholarship. Certainly Sharov's training as a medieval historian, as well as the themes and characters explored in his novels, corroborate the impression of him as an author fascinated above all by the historical process, as well as how that historical process has been understood and represented by subsequent generations and in fictional form. Responding to Dmitrii Bykov's observation that his reputation was as "the father of Russian

I am grateful to Hélène Mélat, whose invitation to speak at a conference at the Centre d'études franco-russe en sciences humaines et sociales in Moscow in January 2015 became my first public paper on any aspect of recent Russian literature. Oliver Ready initially suggested the novels of Vladimir Sharov as a suitable topic and has been a patient and generous guide ever since. Subsequently, Caryl Emerson has become an equally inspiring reader and interlocutor. Finally, two anonymous readers made pertinent and helpful suggestions for revision.

alternative history,” Sharov proposed his own account of his literary method: “I don’t have anything to do with alternative history in the strict sense of the word. I have already said several times that the most interesting things about history are its dead ends, and not its highways. Side shoots that have not gone on to develop for some reason. I absorb myself in these side shoots, trying to understand why this or that thing didn’t come to pass.” Yet a recurrent emphasis on Sharov’s historicism has meant that other elements of his approach to the novel have gone unobserved. This is particularly the case when it comes to his relationship to and treatment of the specifically literary legacy of the past, as opposed to Russian history itself. In keeping with many Russian-language writers of the last few decades, Sharov proves to be particularly fascinated with both the literary process itself, and the complex ways in which the Russian literary tradition has been received. His intertextual dialogue with the literature of the past proves to be a crucial facet of his strategy for dealing with Soviet history.

This article explores Sharov’s sympathy for, debt to, interest in, and intertextual borrowings from the works of Andrei Platonov (1899–1951), arguing in particular that Sharov’s novel, *The Rehearsals* (*Repetitsii*), is motivated by a profound engagement with the legacy of the early Soviet avant-garde (and, indeed, Russian modernism more generally). Moreover, Sharov’s dialogue with Platonov does not simply reach back directly to the 1920s and early 1930s, the period of Platonov’s most celebrated and significant activity as a writer, but is instead mediated by the slow rediscovery—both official and unofficial—of Platonov’s oeuvre in the late- and post-Soviet periods. The influence of Platonov’s prose on much unofficial late Soviet writing, as well as more broadly on authors of the post-Soviet period, has become something of a critical commonplace in much memoiristic commentary on modern Russian letters (Rybal’chenko). What distinguishes Sharov within this general context is the fact that he has authored three substantial essays devoted to Platonov that illuminate his explicit debt to the earlier author. Indeed, he has unequivocally described Platonov as “the most important author for me in the Russian twentieth century,” an assessment fully borne out in his fictions (*Iskushenie revoliutsiei* 12). His essays on Platonov are—not unlike his novels—complex, polyphonic constructs that interweave elements of memoir, literary commentary, and meditations on history and historiography (Ashcheulova).

Sharov’s first essay on Platonov—“Eto ia: ia prozhil zhizn” (“Here I am: I Have Lived Life”) appeared in 2000, followed by “Mezh dvukh revoliutsii: Andrei Platonov i russkaia istoriia” (“Between Two Revolutions: Andrei Platonov and Russian History”) in 2005, and “Oktiabr’ semnadsatogo i konets istorii” (“October 17 and the End of History”) in 2018. In part a response to, if not explicitly a review of, Platonov’s notebooks (*Zapisnye knizhki*), “Eto ia: ia prozhil zhizn” links Sharov’s initial discovery of Platonov in the late Soviet period with his subsequent awareness of post-Soviet scholarship. Sharov

reveals that he first encountered Platonov's *Kotlovan* (*The Foundation Pit*) in the late 1960s, at a time when only a limited selection of his most politically acceptable works were available in print: "I first came across Platonov in, I think, 1967. My father was given a carbon copy of *The Foundation Pit* for his birthday, and I, at the age of fifteen, read it and I can still remember the sensation that the work produced in me, especially as my sensation has not altered very much ever since" (199). Sharov's family circumstances meant that he had little faith in the Soviet system, something reinforced by his reading of dissident literature:

At that time, a good deal of various sorts of samizdat had passed through my hands. I had long become repelled by Soviet power, and yet this work seemed to me to be the ultimate, irrefutable sentence, of which Soviet power was itself so fond. I, like so many others, could never forgive Soviet power for various things both large and small, such as the millions of people were who shot and who perished in the camps, including two thirds of my own family, as well as the ubiquitous hypocrisy and lack of talent. As for all the rest, Soviet power was of so little interest to me that I simply could not understand what anybody might find in it to be curious about. It seemed to me to be surprisingly cold—characterless, featureless, emotionless. A certain sort of burden that constantly oppresses one. (199)

Significantly, however, Platonov struck Sharov not as a fellow anti-Soviet author, a common enough trope in much criticism particularly in the West (Geller), as well as in the Soviet underground. Rather, for Sharov, Platonov was a writer uniquely able to expose the intense and often tragic nature of deeply held political commitment:

And suddenly I read the work of a person for whom things were not at all like that, for whom everything about Soviet power was warm, everything inspired and touched one, forced one to suffer and aroused delight at its least success. A person who—and this was clear—believed in Soviet power for a very long time, tried to believe in it for longer still, and was always ready to work for it both day and night. That is to say, someone who was in every respect my opposite [...]. (199)

This sense of an affinity of opposites runs through Sharov's writings on Platonov, and allows him to enter into the spirit of a political system that had destroyed his family, and yet that he could now understand, as if at first hand, through the writings of one of its most ardent disciples:

I have long looked at the whole first half of the Russian twentieth century through Platonov, and understand it in the first instance thanks to Platonov. [...] It is Platonov who strikes me as being perhaps the only writer, or at least one of the few, who saw and knew and understood the revolution from within. And from within everything was different. (200)

Platonov, then, mediates Sharov's understanding of and engagement with the Russian Revolution, and forms—along with his own family history and his training as a historian—a third crucial element in his literary and political formation.

That Platonov was a unique eyewitness not just to Soviet history, but also to what it was to believe painfully and unconditionally in the Revolution

itself is, of course, a notion that has been widely asserted. It is, perhaps most notably, a key element in Iosif Brodskii's famous preface to the edition of *The Foundation Pit* published by Ardis in the United States (Brodskii 1973). Yet what is perhaps more noteworthy about Sharov's interest in Platonov is that it is Platonov who exposes an ideological substratum to revolutionary thought that was itself to become central to Sharov's own thinking:

It seems to me that Platonov readily grasped the connection between the world view of the revolution and an eschatological tradition that is inherent to Christianity, as well as sects of all kinds, of which in the second half of the nineteenth century and the start of the twentieth there were, as is well known, a large number in Russia. From day to day, the members of these sects expected the end of the old world, they believed in it and sought to hasten and bring it about as best they could. [...]

Depending on the belief they espoused, sectarians mortified their flesh as best they could in order to gain in spirit, purity and sanctity, whilst lessening their flesh and those shackles that drag man into sin, the abyss and hell. And likewise, Platonov's heroes, whether in *Dzhan*, *Che-vengur* or *Kotlovan*, like all of Russia during the Revolution and the Civil War, follow the same path. (200)

Sharov refers here to the millenarian communities so common around the turn of the twentieth century, yet his training as a medieval historian would also have exposed him to earlier patterns of thinking in Russia's past and whose recurrence in the present constitutes a major feature of his own literary work. Moreover, Platonov's fiction does not merely expose a strain of popular millenarianism in *fin-de-siècle* Russian culture, but also facilitates the further rediscovery of a key figure in its intellectual manifestation, Nikolai Fedorov. Referring to the peculiarly Christian worldview of the time, Sharov suggests that:

It was elaborated most fully in Nikolai Fedorov's famous tract, *Philosophy of the Common Cause*. Let us observe that Fedorov was a great influence on those who considered themselves his disciples—Lev Tolstoi, Fedor Dostoevskii, Velimir Khlebnikov, Vladimir Maiakovskii, Nikolai Zabolotskii and Andrei Platonov—that is, on those who, according to a view that is still current, were either most acute in their presentiment of the revolution, or who grasped it best when it actually came to pass. (200)

Fedorov's work was certainly familiar to certain late- and post-Soviet Russian intellectuals (Marsh 287, 386–89), as reflected in the publication in 1990 of Svetlana Semenova's monograph on the philosopher, as well as Dmitrii Shlapentokh's analysis of Bolshevism as a "Fedorovian regime." At the same time, however, Fedorov's influence also was mediated, at least in part, through Platonov's prior reading and assimilation of his principal ideas (Teskey). Hence, Platonov represents not merely a writer who was of distinct and direct intellectual interest to Sharov, but equally a powerful summation of a key strain in Russian apocalyptic writing and a figure who became—in Lipovetsky's words—"the most important mediator" between Sharov and Fedorov (Lipovetskii, *Paralogii* 527).

Sharov returned to Platonov five years later in "Mezh dvukh revoliutsii:

Andrei Platonov i russkaia literatura.” Less analytical and more ruminative in focus than “Eto ia: ia prozhil zhizn’,” this second essay illustrates how Sharov’s longstanding engagement with Platonov’s literary and philosophical legacy was nourished and informed by a growing body of critical and archival scholarship, as well as the publication of a new scholarly edition of his works:

In September 2004, I took part in a conference dedicated to Andrei Platonov—principally the novel *Chevangur*. What I heard then, as well as what I read in a volume of the new collected works [...] and a volume in the ongoing series, *Strana filosofov*, combined with unexpected ease with ideas that had first began to stir in me some twenty or so years ago, when I was still a professional historian, ideas about supreme power in Russia, and about the interactions between Moscow and the provinces. (174)

Although much of the main body of this essay revolves around familiar themes of eschatology and violence, it also introduces a number of new ideas. The first is stylistic, or rather, extends Sharov’s reading of Platonov’s ideological world view to a discussion of his handling of the novel in ways that illuminate his own handling of the genre:

Turning to the fate of Andrei Platonov, let us make a couple of necessary remarks. I read *Kotlovan* when I was still at school, but both then and now, forty years later, I do not think that apart from that and *Chevangur*, any books have been written that make it clearer that communism, even in its purest, most childlike and naïve shell, leads one into evil. Soviet power understood this just as well as I did, and only in its last breath, once it had lost interest in living, did it sanction the publication of both works. Secondly. There is a classic account of the novel as “the epic of private life,” but I think that if this is true, then it is only in its initial, embryonic phase, perhaps in the first chapters. Thereafter, the characters, without any doubt at all, gain the right to a decisive voice. As soon as we try to dictate to them what they do not want to do or think, the text becomes irreparably false. Just as with children, where we strive and hope that they will grow up in such and such a way, but they head off in quite another direction, until we become sufficiently rational to understand that there is nothing else to be done, and that the main thing is simply to maintain contact. As a result, having accepted that they will go off on their own, one extends and extends the leash. (190)

Platonov’s works are interpreted here as a form of literary ethics, according to which the role of the writer is not to use his or her works to convey deeply held spiritual or ideological truths, but rather lies in the creation of a fictional world in which characters come to enjoy a kind of autonomy akin to the relationship between parent and child (with echoes, too, of Bakhtin’s handling of the Dostoevskian polyphonic novel and its subsequent quasi-Christological interpretation by a number of scholars (Coates)). Sharov’s final gesture is, in this light, a significant one, since it nuances the question of Platonov’s relationship to Soviet power by distinguishing between the revolution itself and what it was to become under Stalin:

Platonov, like many others, was a participant in one revolution, and the victim of another, but the transition between them was too impetuous, and most importantly, veiled with belief and enthusiasm. [...] But however much Platonov wanted to believe that everything was proceeding as it should, his conflict with Stalinist Russia was deep and hopeless. Born of the first revolution, he thus remained an outsider in this new, flattened and streamlined country. (192)

After a thirteen-year silence, Sharov—inspired by the hundredth anniversary of the October Revolution—returned to his consideration of Platonov’s continuing resonance in a third essay, “Oktiabr’ semnadsatogo i konets istorii.” Linking personal reminiscences about his family background, meditations on an apocalyptic strain in Russian history reaching back to at least the medieval period, evocations of the thought of Marx and Fedorov, and a number of extended citations from Platonov’s *Chevengur*, this essay attests to the centrality and constancy of Platonov in Sharov’s thinking. Moreover, when taken together, these three essays not only illustrate Sharov’s durable interest in Platonov’s literary legacy for its own sake, but also reveal how Platonov’s legacy is intimately bound up with Sharov’s deeply held historical interests. The widely noted historicism of Sharov’s novels reflects, of course, his academic training, but is also a product of his self-conscious intertextual dialogue with the Russian literary tradition and its own prior meditations on Russia’s political destiny. The legacy of the Soviet avant-garde and its first-hand experience of and involvement in the Revolution thus became a crucial element in the way that late- and post-Soviet writers have come to terms both with the events of the Revolution itself, and with their ambiguous transformation in the context first of the Brezhnev stagnation, then of Gorbachev’s perestroika and glasnost, and finally the collapse of the Soviet Union itself.

The work by Sharov that best embodies his ongoing engagement with Platonov is the novel, *The Rehearsals* (*Repetitsii*). Summarizing Sharov’s novels is never easy, partly because of the complexity of their plots, but mostly because of the intricacy of their narrative construction, notably the use of framing devices and *mise-en-abyme*. The central “panel” of *The Rehearsals* relates details from the life of a seventeenth-century French actor, Jacques Sertan, who is captured by Russian troops in Livonia and brought to the court of Tsar Aleksei in Moscow. Here, Sertan is commissioned by Patriarch Nikon—who is feuding with the tsar—to stage the historical events of the passion narrative at Novyi Ierusalem, just outside Moscow. Sets are built and locals are cast in all the principal parts, with one exception—that of Christ, who is widely expected to return in the year 1666. This eschatological event, however, does not happen, and Sertan and his actors are exiled to Siberia, where they continue their rehearsals for the passion play. This process continues from generation to generation, right until the 1930s, when the descendants of the original actors are still to be found rehearsing the passion story, now in the Gulag. By this point, the actors have split into three separate groups—Romans, Jews, and Christians—with the Christians serving as the prison guards. The novel ends with the Christians shooting the Jews on the eve of the Second World War in 1939. This central plotline is framed by a narrative set in Siberia in the mid-1960s, which describes how a scholar at Tomsk University collects manuscripts relating to medieval Russian history, including a memoir written in Breton, which turns out to be a copy of Sertan’s memoirs. The person from

whom the narrator acquires this manuscript—Isai Trifonovich Kobylin—is, in fact, the only member of the millenarian community not to perish in the GULag. The two plot lines are therefore linked through the figure of Kobylin, who brings the conclusion of the novel full circle.

The novel takes, evidently enough, one of the most durable myths in Russian history, that of Russia as a chosen nation. It is a myth that has underpinned many moments in Russian history, yet it is symptomatic that Sharov has the actors *rehearse* the passion narrative over many centuries, even as the expected apocalyptic event does not in fact happen. History moves not in the unidirectional, teleological line demanded by both the Russian eschatological tradition and—in its secularized form—Bolshevism, but through a series of circles and repetitions (hence the punning title of the novel, which can be translated not just as *The Rehearsals* but also as *Repetitions*). The Second Coming, it would seem, is fated *not* to happen; it is a myth, or a performance, but certainly not the actual expected event itself. Its events and emotions are performed, staged, or imitated, yet they are never to be experienced at first hand. Here, we can surely perceive not just an echo of the atmosphere of the late Soviet period, but also an echo, or rather inversion of the apocalyptic mood of the first decades of the twentieth century, which found its fullest realization in the culture of the early Soviet avant-garde. And it is precisely this notion of inversion that is crucial, since for the early Soviet avant-garde, eschatological emotions were the product of a forward-looking, teleological sense of the impending end of time. By the 1970s and 1980s, however, eschatological expectation had been replaced by a sense of stagnation borne of looking backwards at the failure of the original revolutionary impulse and its descent into listless anomie.

Eschatological themes can be found in the work of any number of Russian novelists of the late-Soviet and post-Soviet period, bringing together as they do aspects of Soviet ideology and the lived experience of historical trauma and societal collapse. It is a theme explored in Sharov's own *Before and During*, which similarly explores ideas of the end of history and imminent destruction at a number of points in Russian history. Here, one of the most important plotlines deals with Madame de Staël and a number of her love affairs, most scandalously with Stalin, but also with the aforementioned Fedorov, and then with the composer Scriabin, whose late musical compositions similarly expressed a longing for the end of time, and a conviction that music could actually bring it about. But there is a more interesting element in Sharov's eschatology, which is his interest in *origins* as much as in *endings*. In *The Rehearsals*, it is symptomatic that Sertan is French, bringing with him elements of European culture to Orthodox, medieval Russia. In *Before and During*, it is Madame de Staël who comes to Russia, relocating her interest in European identity away from the classical past and then the romantic present, from Greece and Rome, and then from Germany, to modern-day Russia.

Much of what has been considered so far can be readily attributed to Sharov's training as a historian, and his sensitivity to the writing of the historical process, as well as the particular historical, political, and cultural context in which he was writing. Yet as has already been suggested, his works stage a dialogue with the Russian literary tradition, and Sharov's historicism may mask a number of intertextual borrowings from authors interested in similar questions. In addition to specific intertextual references and allusions in his works, Sharov's dialogue with the Russian literary tradition is also conditioned by the peculiar way in which that tradition was received in late- and post-Soviet Russia. The striking and rapid rehabilitation of large numbers of previously repressed authors in the Gorbachev era—itsself pre-saged by the circulation of many of these authors in *samizdat* throughout the 1960s and 1970s—did much to confuse the evolution of the literary process by bringing back a body of writing that had not been able to play its part fully at the time of its composition. In particular, the slow restoration of the legacy of the Soviet avant-garde (as well as a body of *fin-de-siècle* writers who had gone into emigration after the Revolution and Civil War) formed an uncanny *Doppelgänger* within the literary field of late socialism and the 1990s. The simultaneous search for new literary forms and the rediscovery of a key corpus of texts from the early twentieth century creates an impression of simultaneity within the literary process and lends a certain palimpsestic quality to much postmodern Russian fiction.

There are certainly plenty of intertextual borrowings in Sharov's works—the setting of *Before and During* in a psychiatric ward evokes Chekhov, Bulgakov, and Solzhenitsyn in various ways—but it is Platonov who offers the most productive and intimately felt range of references, both direct and indirect. It is telling, perhaps, that *The Rehearsals* was written between 1986 and 1988, a period that marks the first official Soviet publication of Platonov's most significant—and ideologically controversial—works, namely *The Foundation Pit* in 1987 and *Chevangur* in 1988. Although Sharov had previously encountered these works in *samizdat*, their appearance in the final years of the Soviet Union seems to have given a renewed impetus to his exploration of the Russian messianic tradition and its tragic unravelling in the years and decades following 1917. In particular, the eschatological theme of *The Rehearsals* seems to allude to both *Chevangur* and *The Foundation Pit*, although Sharov's reworkings of these novels are highly creative and idiosyncratic. As has long been argued, *Chevangur* represents a key text in the literary representation of Russian sectarianism (Betha 145–85; Evdokimov). A long and baggy work that resists ready summary, its central section deals with the attempt of a group of socialist revolutionaries to found a millenarian community deep in the Russian steppe at some point during the New Economic Policy of the 1920s. Although their beliefs are supposedly Marxist, they draw constantly on the language of religious belief and of a violent and intolerant eschatology that

seeks to destroy any form of opposition or dissent. It is a literalization of the metaphorical idea of the Second Coming, and the novel has characters who replicate the roles of Christ and his disciples. At the end of the novel, a detachment of military horsemen descend on the apocalyptic community and destroy it; the only person to survive is a child, who heads back in search of his origins at the end of the novel—it is a book that ends with the promise of a return to its very beginning. After *Chevengur*, Platonov turned to another novel, this time dealing with the immediate social and political context of industrialization and collectivization, yet similarly exploring some of the same religious themes as *Chevengur*, albeit in a more contemporary guise. *The Foundation Pit* is a bipartite novel that deals first with the attempt of a group of laborers to dig the foundations for a vast “All-Proletarian House” to accommodate the workers of the future. The action then shifts to a nearby collective farm, where a group of activists and ideologues seek out and destroy the rich peasants in the name of a young girl, Nastia. Most significantly, whilst dealing with Soviet actuality, *The Foundation Pit* also represents an ambitious attempt to write a Soviet version of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* in which the digging of the foundations represents the descent into hell; the destruction of the rich peasants is a literalization of the metaphor of purgatory, but in which the evocation of the promised heaven is never achieved (Kharitonov 76–86). It is a world in which the suffering of the present is never, in fact, expiated by the arrival of the radiant, socialist future.

In *The Rehearsals*, Sharov borrows a number of themes and plot elements from both Platonov’s *Chevengur* and *The Foundation Pit*, as well as many of its individual details of plot and character. *The Rehearsals* ends with an account of the destruction of a religious community and the almost miraculous survival of an infant witness, both of which allude to key elements in the plot of *Chevengur*. Similarly, the description of the actors’ increasingly violent existence in the GULag evokes similar scenes from the second half of *The Foundation Pit*, set on a collective farm. The only difference, of course, is that Platonov was writing at the beginning of the Soviet experience and hence could look forward, however ambiguously, to the imminent realization of utopia on earth in the form of the Soviet experiment; Sharov, by contrast, was writing at the very end of the Soviet period, and witnessed how the eschatological aspirations of the early Soviet avant-garde had been transformed into stagnation and decay. Thus the historicism of Sharov’s novel is dictated not just by immediate historical events, but by a dialogue with a body of Russian literary texts from the past that had suddenly been rediscovered in the 1970s and 1980s and that struck late Soviet writers as strangely prophetic of their own situation.

The rediscovery of the Soviet avant-garde—along with Western modernist and postmodernist writing—had had an undeniable influence on late Soviet and post-Soviet writers, and for all their historical content, Sharov’s novels

are stylistically innovative too. And once again, the debt is primarily to Platonov, who whilst seeking to build a career as a Soviet writer and to find himself a voice within the context of 1930s Socialist Realism, somehow always managed to write in a manner that meant he was always unpublished and, indeed, unpublishable. The language of Platonov's works is painfully abject and often describes shockingly frank scenes linked to bodily phenomena (Livers; Naiman). Not only is there an abundance of revolutionary violence, but there are also long drawn-out scenes of death and suffering, frank evocations of sex and desire, scenes of childbirth and strangely Freudian depictions of sleeping and dreaming. The rediscovery of his literary legacy—albeit in the Soviet underground of the 1970s and 1980s—offered a later generation of writers a powerful alternative to the officially promoted optimism of Socialist Realism and allowed them to depict the mood of late socialism not through the prism of objective descriptions of their own contemporary experience, but through a return to the language of early Soviet modernism and a style of writing that had not been allowed to flourish in its own lifetime and was, indeed, actively stifled by Socialist Realism from the 1930s. Indeed, with time, Sharov seems to have become more and more attentive not just to Platonov's themes, but to his linguistic innovations. In his final essay on Platonov (published the year after the centenary of the October Revolution was marked), he even suggests that his language is increasingly perceived as a hindrance to his contemporary reception (rather than the admirable quality typical of earlier criticism):

Platonov has long been considered a classic, yet there are a good number of people whose attitude to him is still extremely hostile. The accusations that are made against him are of various types and categories, even including political ones. But probably the main one is that Platonov's prose is written in new-speak, its metaphors and imagery have distorted the Russian language. Of late I have been more and more inclined to think that this dislike of Platonov and the language of his prose has become, in this country, a euphemism expressing not so much a dislike of the revolution, but a hope and attempt to construct life as if the revolution had never even happened. (Sharov, "Oktiabr' semnadsatogo i konets istorii" 155)

Thus, to read, appreciate, and allude to Platonov's works is to keep the revolution in full view at a time when its historical and cultural legacy is an increasingly inconvenient theme in contemporary political, cultural, and social discourse.

Sharov's engagement with Platonov—whether in his novels, or through his critical writing—is, then, both a creative act and a political statement that reaches beyond the merely intertextual. One final element in Sharov's dialogue with Platonov reveals his willingness to embrace complex and controversial elements in the Russian eschatological imaginary; Christian-Jewish relations. The opening of *The Rehearsals* tackles this question directly:

In 1939, Isaiah Trifonovich Kobylin ceased to be a Jew, and the Jewish nation, of which he was the last, ended with him. For two thousand years Kobylin's "stiff-necked" people, as the Lord

had called them, did not want to repent and turn to the true faith, for two thousand years, indulging the impious, they obstructed the Second Coming of the Savior for whom all believers were paying and waiting, and now, when the life of the Jews on earth had ended, the time was at hand. Time for Him to appear in His glory. (19)

Later in the novel, as Sertan begins to rehearse the passion narrative with his actors, a major question is raised about who will play the Jewish characters, given that they will be held responsible for the crucifixion, and hence both guilty of murdering Christ, whilst also bringing about the conditions necessary for the Second Coming. There is also the unresolved question of whether individuals playing Jewish characters in fact, through the act of performance, become themselves Jewish. Although this is a crucial theological distinction in the sections of the novel dealing with the medieval period, the issue becomes most acute in the GULag sections of the novel, where the split between Jewish and Christian characters leads to the violent destruction of the Jews at the hands of the Christians (who have, by this time, become the camp guards).

The question of Sharov's handling of this topic in *The Rehearsals* is beyond the scope of this article (and might be analyzed from a number of points of view, such as Solzhenitsyn's controversial disquisitions on Russian-Jewish relations in *Dvesti let vmeste* (2001–2002) or his treatment of the origins of the October Revolution in *Avgust chetyrnadtsatogo* (1971), or the rise of a nationalist historiography from the 1970s onwards that was often characterized by markedly anti-Semitic language (Brudny)). Nonetheless, it may be worth observing that in *Chevengur*, Platonov had already teased out elements in the relationship between Christianity and Judaism that map, in part, onto his eschatological reading of Marxism (Bullock). In the central part of the novel, two of the novel's heroes are mistakenly, but revealingly, viewed as Jewish by the unwitting peasants:

There were two muzhiks standing guard at the edge of the village. One carried a pruning hook, the other a fence post.

"What are you folks?" they asked in a business-like way as Dvanov and Kopenkin rode up.

Kopenkin reined in his horse, with difficulty pondering the meaning of a military post like that.

"We're internationalists!" Kopenkin said, recalling Rosa Luxemburg's profession, international revolutionary.

The sentries thought for a bit.

"Jews, you mean?"

Kopenkin coolly bared his sword, so slowly that the sentry-muzhiks did not believe it was a threat.

"I ought to cut you down right here on the spot, for saying something like that," Kopenkin said. "You know who I am? Here, here's our documents..." (121)

This "internationalist" interpretation of the Russian revolution is, significantly, a major theme in Sharov's last essay on Platonov, which widens the frame of references from his earlier emphasis on the Russian apocalyptic tradition to include discussion of the Münster Rebellion of 1534, Karl Marx and

Rosa Luxemburg (a key figure in *Chevengur*, of course). Yet already in *The Rehearsals*, Sharov's fascination with the roots of eschatological thinking and their sudden expression in the October revolution means that he seems to have been especially sensitive to Platonov's prior treatment of a similar set of questions.

There is, then, a strange paradox about Sharov's fictions and their engagement with the repressed legacy of the Soviet avant-garde. Although *The Rehearsals* dates from a time in which faith in the future was low and the optimism of the revolutionary project had been transformed into late Soviet stagnation, Sharov's novel nonetheless attests to the potential for the literature of the past to be reborn, often in unexpected contexts and for audiences quite unlike those dreamt of by the original authors. The political optimism of the Soviet avant-garde is something that few late-Soviet or post-Soviet writers seem to share, but their faith in the power of language and the creative imagination does seem to be the one feature that can be resurrected from the social carnage wrought by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the long-deferred end of the utopian dream.

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Тезисы

Филипп Росс Буллок

Начало, окончание, и вечное возвращение: Владимир Шаров, Андрей
Платонов и наследие советского авангарда

В данной статье рассматривается интерес Владимира Шарова к творчеству Андрея Платонова, как одного из ведущих представителей эстетических и идеологических принципов советского авангарда. Приводятся цитаты из трех статей, написанных Шаровым с 2000 года по 2018 год и излагающих основы его толкования литературного наследия Платонова. Затем следует опыт прочтения романа "Репетиции", в котором устанавливается целый ряд интертекстуальных реминисценций из разных произведений Платонова. Хотя Шарову была чужда вера Платонова в коммунизм, его произведения служат ему своего рода комментариями к русской истории.