

The racist culture Gorbachov is reviving

The poem printed opposite was written in 1918, by Aleksandr Blok, the leader of the Russian Symbolist movement, who embraced the Bolshevik Revolution. Although famous as a “fellow traveler” of the revolution, a misnomer given him and other writers by Trotsky and Soviet Russia’s first culture commissar, Anatoli Lunacharsky, Blok celebrated the essence of the revolution, its destruction of Western civilization. Blok was an idol of many of the authors being revived today, like Marina Tsvetayeva and Boris Pasternak. His own works were popular throughout the Soviet period, and were widely republished in recent decades.

became popular among former Left Social Revolutionaries, members of the terrorist party that was interwoven with the Czarist Okhrana—the faction bent on overthrowing the dynasty and transforming Russia. “According to the prophecy of our great teachers, Tolstoi and Dostoevsky, we are the Messiah people,” said the Scythian Petkevich.

A 1978 biography of Blok by Soviet literary historian Vladimir Orlov hails *The Scythians* as a “patriotic, revolution-inspired ode.” Orlov gushes: “It is the confrontation of two worlds. On the one hand, the avaricious and senile West which, although doomed, is still hammering swords, a world that has completely forgotten the meaning of love and is deaf to the voice of the elements. On the other, there is young, revolutionary Russia, bubbling with vitality and creative strength, a world that has risen in defense of humankind and humaneness and claims to be the rightful heir to everything of lasting value created by world culture. Like Dostoevsky, Blok asserts the all-embracing genius of Russia.”

Most translations of *The Scythians*, including the one very sparingly excerpted by V. Orlov, pretty it up. We present it rather literally, sacrificing Blok’s rhymes and much of his meter to render the imagery, unblunted.



The painting by Soviet artist Ilya Glazunov, “The Return of the Prodigal Son,” was featured in the February 1987 Soviet Life, the glossy magazine distributed in the United States, to illustrate how Soviet cultural policy is “unraveling the mysteries of the human soul.” The Soviet youth, clad in Western blue-jeans, is being received by a Russian priest-figure, backed by a host of figures from Russian history. Glazunov explained, “I used the well-known biblical theme of a son leaving his father’s house. . . . My painting is about being true to one’s roots.” Asked by Soviet Life, “Why is Dostoevsky your favorite writer?” Glazunov replied: “Dostoevsky . . . is our constant companion in our search for the meaning of life, our understanding of good and evil and our quest to reveal the mysteries of the human spirit.”

The Scythians

by Aleksandr Blok (1918)

Panmongolism! Although the name is wild,
It caresses my ear e'en so.

—Vladimir Solovyov

Millions of you. Of us—there're hordes and hordes and
hordes.

Fight with us, just try!

Yes, Scythians are we! Yes, Asiatics are we,
With slanted up and ever greedy eyes!

For you—an age, for us—a single hour.

We, like obedient forced bondsmen,
Held up a shield between two hostile races
Of Mongols and of Europe!

Ages, ages your ancient furnace burned,
And drowned out all the avalanche's thunder,

To you, just a wild story was the fall,
Of Lisbon, also of Messina!

Hundreds of years you gazed unto the East,
Mining and melting down our pearls,
And, jeering, you just reckoned on the time,
When you would aim your cannon barrels!

The time has come—behold. Woe beats its wings
And every day now multiplies th'offense,
The day will come, when there will be no thing
Left of your Paestums, just perchance!

Oh, old world! Now, before you've perished yet,
While still you languish on in torment sweet,
Stop, sagely as once ancient Oedipus did,
Before the Sphinx with its ancient riddle!

Russia's a Sphinx. Exulting, grieving both,
And with black blood inundating herself,
She gazes, gazes, gazes upon you,
Both with hatred, and with love!

Yes, so to love, as loves our blood,
No one of you has loved in a long time!
You have forgot, there's in the world such love,
Which both incinerates, and ruins!

For we love all—the heat of coldest sums,
As well, the gift of visions from above,
We heark to all—the sharpest Gallic wit,
And somber genius Germanic. . .

We have known all—the hell of Paris streets,
And cool Venetian breezes,
The distant scent of lemon groves,
And smokey hulk of Koeln. . .

And we love flesh—we love its taste, its color,
The suffocating, mortal smell of flesh.
Is it our fault, if your skeleton crunches,
In our heavy, tender paws?

We've grown accustomed, seizing by the bridle,
Horses spirited and frolicsome,
To break the heavy necks of horses,
And pacify as slaves the fractious ones. . .

Come unto us! From all the horrors of war,
Come now into our peaceful embraces!
Before'ts too late—old swords into the sheath,
Comrades! We shall be brothers!

And if not—well, we have naught to lose,
And we've not far to reach for perfidy!
Ages, ages—you will then be cursed
By your diseased posterity!

And wide across the thickets and the woods,
In front of comely Europe,
We'll fan out! And we will turn on you,
Our ugly Asiatic faces!

Go all, go now unto the Ural!
We clear the battlefield,
For steel machines, where breathes the integral,
With the wide Mongolian horde!

But we—henceforth for you, we are no shield,
Henceforth we enter combat for ourselves.
And we shall see, how boils the mortal fray,
With our narrow eyes.

We shall not budge, not when the fiercest Hunn
Will rummage in the pockets of the corpses,
Burn cities, drive his horse-herd into church,
And put flesh of white brothers on to boil!

For the last time—come to your senses, old world!
To the fraternal feast of toil and peace,
The last time, to the bright fraternal feast,
Summons the barbarian lyre!

Note: Lisbon and Messina were the scene of catastrophic earthquake and volcanic damage in the late 19th century. Paestum is an Italian town, known for its Greek and Roman ruins.