

Miatlev: Politics, Poetry and Perversion

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Now she was an old woman, raven hair gone white, blue eyes clouded with a look of perpetual bewilderment. How had this happened? Who was this doll-like lady dressed in sad and sober black? What had become of the ravishing Princess who had once possessed the wealth and brilliance of a Byzantine empress, and what had become of her Empire? Childlike and clinging in her final years, and suffering from a weak heart, émigré Princess Zenaide Nikolaievna Yusupova, Countess Soumarokov-Elston, died in a Paris boarding house for the aged. The year was 1939. She was seventy-eight.

Shortly after her burial in Ste. Genevieve des Bois, her son, Prince Felix Felixovich, had the rueful duty of examining the papers she left behind. Obviously much of the family archive was abandoned when the Yusupovs fled Russia; however there remained correspondence. Journals and other memorabilia that the Princess kept with her for two decades.

Like all families, the Yusupovs had secrets, and when Felix went through his mother's papers he came upon a "poem written in an unknown hand." In his memoir, **En Exil**, he reproduces this poem without speculation, but with evident enough interest to publish it as a tribute to his mother. Written in French, **En Exil** is a keen observation of émigré life and the emergence of the Second World War, and a gossip column. The poem, written to Zenaide on the occasion of her sixtieth birthday in 1921, is a combination of French lyricism and Spartan Pushkinesque construction, part paean to an aging goddess and part lost love. Whether it was written first in Russian and translated by Felix for his book or whether it was written originally in French is not known nor is the whereabouts of the poem itself. Much of what Felix retained was lost in the collapse of outbuildings behind his home in Paris although speculation remains that a portion of this collection survived and has yet to be released. But who wrote the poem?

That Zenaide kept it among her personal papers bestows upon it a value beyond other correspondence that met a less glorious fate. When the Princess turned sixty, where was she and who might have celebrated the event with a poem similar in tone to Shakespeare's sonnets to his Dark Lady? Who would have taken such liberty with a noblewoman of unassailable virtue and of unquestioned fidelity to her husband?

Literary mysteries have puzzled historians for centuries. Scribes recorded the sensuous and often incestuous love poems of 19th Dynasty Egypt but failed to note their authors. The amorous adventures of gods and men are left to us by Homer. Or were the **Iliad** and **Odyssey** written by a group of poets, the Homeridae? Perhaps Homer himself was a myth. What 20th Century Russian bard immortalized the battles of Prince Igor and the great love of his nameless princess-wife? Was it Shakespeare who penned the exquisite Sonnets, or was it Sir Francis Bacon, Viscount St. Alban, who wrote them to Lady Penelope Rich, royal courtesan and cousin of the first Queen Elizabeth?

The delicate but polished poem so carefully preserved by Prince Felix and his mother may not have the clear artistic value of the Sonnets (although it reflects both their style and their emotion), but it was clearly written by a gentleman who knew Zenaide and who was a polished craftsman with a sophisticated and educated way with words and images. That Princess Yusupov was one of the great beauties of her day is undisputed. It is said that she could have chosen for a husband any of the princes of the ruling houses of Russia or Europe! And that after her marriage to Felix Felixovich, Count Sumarokov-Elston, in 1882, she lived harmoniously with him until his death in 1928. Her admirers were many including Sir

George Buchanan, the British Ambassador in St. Petersburg; an unknown but overly-ardent Horse Guards officer who, in a fit of unrequited love, rode through the great hall of Arkhangel'skoye while the Princess was entertaining; and Ambassador Count Guiseppi Greppi, aristocrat and Roman neighbor of Zenaide's who, however, had passed his one hundredth birthday when she celebrated her sixtieth. He is shown in a cozy picture (1), taken at the Villa Kvitka with Mme. Kvitka, Zenaide, Irina, Prince Roman Petrovich, and the inevitable hairy lapdog. Greppi was such an august relic of the ancien regime that Hemingway used him as his model for the smooth-mannered, atheist Count Greffi in **A Farewell to Arms** who warns that "love too is a religious feeling." (2)

Zenaide Yusupov around the age of thirty (author's collection)

The affection and admiration of Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich was also abundantly clear:

"Princess Zenaide Yusupov often joined us in our picnics and parties. Our friendship dated back to the later seventies in St. Petersburg when we used to go skating together each Sunday. A woman of rare beauty and culture, she bravely bore the burden of her stupendous wealth, giving millions to worthy charities and trying to satisfy each deserving plea. On 22 January 1903, 'all' St. Petersburg danced in the Winter Palace. I remember the date as it was to be the last spectacular ball in the history of the Empire.... The chief honors of the evening were disputed between Ella (Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna) and Princess Zenaide Yusupov. My heart ached a bit at the sight of these two 'mad devotions' of my early life. I danced every dance with Princess Yusupov, until it came to the famous 'Russkaya.' She did it better than any ballerina, but I limited my participation to hand-clapping and silent admiration." (3)



He was, however, married to Grand Duchess Xenia Alexandrovna, the Emperor's sister. His daughter Irina would marry Prince Felix. Had Alexander penned the tribute to Zenaide, surely either Felix or Irina would have recognized his handwriting. But Felix's penchant for intrigue and his obvious pleasure in this

anonymous homage to his mother were such powerful forces that the slight but deeply felt verse was imbedded in pages of pedestrian prose.

The French version is written in rhymed couplets; there are twenty-three lines and the author plays heavily on repetition and classical images. In the linear translations below there has been no attempt to reproduce the rhyme; however, other poetic devices are obvious. At the time, Zenaide was living in Rome "in a gloomy, ramshackle villa...with poorly furnished rooms."(4) The villa was located directly opposite the British Embassy and George Buchanan and his daughter Meriel saw her often. Both the Princes and her husband seemed suddenly old and fragile, Meriel writes. Zenaide's hands shook, her pale lips were compressed nervously. Prince Felix had suffered a stroke. It can be imagined with what emotion the aging Princess read these words:

You say that you are sixty today.
I had forgotten, and I thank you for telling me.
Your bright spirit and tender head
Could not, for long, leave me in error.
Ah, you are sixty years old,
And I know how glad you are not to be thirty!

For I would be amorous and you would be
 Displeased;
 I would not enjoy, in my half-bliss,
 Either your spirit or your heart.
 You are sixty now and all is open to you,
 Young lovers and old friends.
 You are sixty; this word means nothing sad
 When one is loved. Age is just a shadow,
 Nothing more, nothing less. What does it matter
 if the flower
 That keeps its fragrance has lost its color,
 And what matters that winter comes for a
 woman
 When she has youth's soul and springtime in her
 heart?
 With a young woman one must take things
 Lightly,
 But with you one can always laugh or cry.
 You know how to forgive for you understand.
 Reason that makes us strong, goodness that
 makes us tender
 Live together in your head.
 Ah! How dear you are to me with your sixty
 years!

Some fifty years later, as Russia struggled to “recover its memory,” the Zakharov Company in Moscow republished Felix's memoirs. In it the well-known poet Elena Kassirova translated Zenaide's poem from the French as she found it in the 1954 **En Exil**.

Prince Andrei Lobanov-Rostovsky, linguist and scholar, has given us this superb linear translation of the Kassirova rendition:

You say, Madame, that you are sixty!
 Indeed, I assure you, that had you not told me,
 I would have thought you were not yet thirty.
 And so, you say, you are sixty.
 For this confidence I am grateful.
 Had I still believed you to be thirty, I could not
 possibly fall in love
 With you! Having known you for such a short
 time
 I could not have enjoyed this love fully!
 And so, Madame, now you are sixty-and the
 Gentlemen around you, young and old, still
 cannot hide
 Their adoring eyes. A hundred years would be
 No obstacle. It is better to be past sixty, for the
 more
 Faded the petals, the stronger their perfume.
 When the soul is in full bloom, winter has no
 power over it,
 And its delights are forever irresistible. Young
 beauty is slow in understanding. With you,
 though,

there is conversation, full of sweetness and wisdom.*
You alone can understand and forgive, for
Wonderfully combined in you, like slender
filaments in one length
of silver thread, are sweetness and wisdom.
Indeed, dear lady, I am so glad that today you
are sixty!" (6)

*Literally, an old Russian expression: poignancy/sharpness and honey.

It is immediately apparent that there are differences between the French and Russian translations. Lines three and four that extol Zenaide's "bright spirit and tender head" do not exist in the Russian text, nor do the "gentlemen, young and old, with their adoring eyes" exist in the French. Read in Russian, the poem has a staccato voice, almost military, in contrast to its theme of romantic and unrequited love. Because the original poem, whether in French or Russian, has vanished, we are left to speculate how and why these changes occurred. Is it possible that, when Felix prepared the poem for inclusion in his memoir, he added a few extra words of praise to his mother? And excluded the rival gentlemen who continued to adore her in her early old age?

Mark Blokh, Moscow Honored Professor of Linguistics and of Literature, warns that any linear, prose translation is "poor and trivial." He adds, "As poetry, this verse is remarkable for its essential artistic value, although it is devoid of sophisticated wording or sub-text implications. Everything that is expressed here is direct and naively rational, challenging the classical rules of literary composition. What constitutes the unexpected merit of this poem, though, is its masterful rhyming which is excellently combined with a natural sequence of the most unpretentious ideas repeatedly pronounced with a clear touch of being purposefully antiquated." (7)

While analysis of the untitled poem says much about its style and structure, it fails to reveal who the author was. There are clues: apparently Zenaide not only had a current (1921-22) friendship with him but had known him in the past when, as a younger man, he had fallen in love with the thirty-year-old married Princess. He implies they are still friends and that he knows that she, who is both strong and kind, will "forgive" him for some unnamed crime or misbehavior. He is also revealed as an accomplished poet and most probably among the Russian literati who fled the revolution to settle in Paris, Rome, Berlin, or London. Who was he and why did Zenaide keep this little verse until the day she died?

St. Isaac's Square in Petersburg has always been prime real estate. Its vast, open space, often swept by rain and driving sheets of snow, is bordered by the granite and marble Cathedral for which it is named; by the indomitable Astoria Hotel; and by palaces so grand they occupy blocks. Dominating is the colossal Mariinskii, and facing the Cathedral, within sight of the War Ministry and the Lobanov-Rostovsky "Lion House,, at No. 9 St. Isaac's Square, is the neoclassical Miatlev Palace. Almost delicate compared with its massive neighbors, Miatlev's House, with its pastel walls and white sculptured medallions, its fluted columns and fragile portico balcony, seems a spring flower fluttered down into a rugged rock garden.



*The Miatlev house, St Isaac's Square
(Courtesy Dr Idris Traylor)*



It is the oldest private house on the Square, and in its 250 year history has embraced such guests as French encyclopedias Denis Diderot, and Russia's poet laureate, Alexander Pushkin. Built originally for Prince Naryshkin, but purchased by the Miatlev family before 1780, this Rinaldi masterpiece has poetry in its very timbers.

Among its first occupants was Ivan Mikhailovich Miatlev (1796-1844), a poet of gentle sensibilities and flagrant homosexual tendencies. It was his misfortune to have lived during the reign of the somewhat



unforgiving Emperor Nicholas I and although his poetry was admired, his behavior was not. The Miatlevs were, however, dedicated servants of the state, and Ivan did not meet the same fate as Decembrist nobility who were exiled or executed for their ill-timed 1825 revolt. A portrait of his cousin, Praskovaya Ivanovna, reveals a rather masculine middle-aged woman too abundantly decked out in ribbons, bows, lace, and facing the artist with a bit of a dimpled sneer.

The poet Ivan Miatlev

An older aristocratic family than the Romanovs, the Miatlevs claim their roots from the 13th century Radsha boyar, Gregory Miatel Ivanovich Sliznev, who left Germany to serve Alexander Nevskii. Richly rewarded, Sliznev settled in Russia, and eventually his great great-grandson shed much of the family name by simply calling himself Miatel. By 1630, Ivan Sergeiev (now Miatlev) was listed among the Nobles of Kostroma, and his son, Afansii Ivanov, served

the Crown and was granted an enormous fiefdom. Tradition of service to the throne prevailed, and over the years the Miatlevs amassed property and serfs not only in Petersburg and Moscow but in the countryside as well. One estate alone ranged over 13,000 acres in Kaluga Province; another 4,000, and yet a smaller but more sophisticated property near Peterhof was summer home to visiting artists, writers, and composers, including Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky, who allowed that those months were “not bad at all.” (8)

It was a large and educated family. Perhaps one of its most noteworthy members was Vladimir Ivanovich Miatlev (1830-1900), a landowner of great wealth, a Senator and skillful diplomat, and the owner of one of the largest and most elegant private libraries in Russia. He, too, was a respected poet (as his father, Ivan Petrovich, had been) and who moved in the highest circles of Petersburg society.

On 1 February 1868, another child entered this illustrious and talented family. To Peter Ivanovich and his wife Maria Ivanovna was born Vladimir Petrovich. Like many households of the nobility, theirs was a substantial one: Vladimir had two brothers and two sisters, both future ladies-in-waiting to the Empress. Attended by a host of servants, tutors, governesses, cooks, and footmen, the children were raised in the pink mansion on St. Isaac's Square five minutes from Prince Nicholas Yusupov's Moika Palace. His daughter, Zenaide, was a little girl of seven, already a beauty. Five minutes in the other direction was the baronial home of Courtier and General-Adjutant Otton Borisovich Richter, confidant of Emperor Alexander II and subsequently to the third Alexander and to Nicholas II. Richter, too, had a pretty daughter born in the same year as Vladimir, Elizabeth Ottonovna, whose young life would soon be inexorably intertwined with his.

From all accounts, Vladimir Petrovich's early years were unexceptional and predictable. Schooled at home, a Corps des Pages candidate, he was graduated from the prestigious Nikolaievskii Cavalry School at the age of twenty-two, and in 1890 entered, as Cornet, the Emperor's Hussar Regiment. In three years he had risen to the rank of Staff Captain, was appointed Chief of the Regiment's Telegraph Station, and awarded the Austrian Order of Emperor Franz Josef.

Like most aristocratic officers, Vladimir enjoyed a hectic and colorful social life. Much in demand at dinners, balls, cotillions, and theater evenings, he quickly developed a dangerous reputation when he began writing love letters in royal blue ink on pale blue paper to married women, occasional pornography, and social, historical, and political pamphlets often critical of the regime and its proponents. Able to command a drawing room with his presence and with his caustic, witty, and often cruel comments on those in public life, Miatlev was sought after by all Petersburg. Women who attracted or responded to him were spared the invective', they became objects of praise and seduction, married or unmarried.

Miatlev's Petersburg, the society he entered as a young and eligible Cadet, was the domain of Alexander III and Empress Marie Feodorovna. Although strict rules of etiquette governed the circles in which he moved, the secret lives of the city's elite were steeped in scandal and deceit. It was Bely's metaphorical “icy plain, roamed by wolves.” (9) Covered by swirling mists, sleet and snow for much of the year, the capital's denizens filled the long, dark days and nights with cruel badinage and innuendo. Kochan writes of the tattle that reigned from aristocratic salons to the Morskaya hairdressers' where noblemen “sat on blue and gold chairs and listened to the latest gossip.”(10) With the advent of the telephone, floodgates were opened, and women who rarely rose before noon were able to lie abed and casually attack the lives of the best and the worst among them. Such merciless chitchat provided “endless hours of amusement for the clucking tongues of the idle rich.” (11)

With the accession to the Throne of Empress Alexandra, as rigid and outwardly puritanical as her grandmother, Queen Victoria, the volume and viciousness of the prattle only increased. She herself

became the target of the scandalmongers. Duplicity and hypocrisy ran neck and neck in ballrooms, country estates, and opera boxes. One has only to read Tolstoy's **Anna Karenina** or the opening scenes of **War and Peace** to feel the full force of the destructive nature of this ruinous, pervasive pastime which showed no signs of abating until the very morning of the Revolution.

For a young man with Miatlev's verbal and literary virtuosity, this playground was an open field. He was well bred, handsome, rich, and an accepted member of the very society he attacked. There was the occasional dissenting voice. Alexandra Viktorovna Bogdanovich, married to a member of the Council of Ministers and the very paradigm of ruthless gossip, dismisses in her diary the Miatlevs as "quasi-aristocrats...and nothings," who should be entertained only in the tavern, not the drawing room.(12)

Extrapolating from what is known of Vladimir Miatlev's life, it is clear that his was a sly, rebellious nature, and that his perceptions of haute society and of governmental abuse drove him to reveal them despite the dangers inherent in political or social screech. Under the repressive politics of both Alexander III and his heir, Nicholas, the restless press no longer enjoyed the brief respite granted to it by the murdered Alexander II. More like the writers of the post-Decembrist era, those who took on the autocracy did so at great peril; they were the progenitors of the great Russian tradition of *samizdat* press.

The society into which Miatlev launched himself was only sixty years removed from the Great War of 1812 and fifty from the Officers' Revolt of 1825. Both events had created major shifts in attitude among the aristocracy. Those young officers returning from the war against the French did so with a new respect for western political and social freedom and with a new disdain for the emptiness of their own structured lives.

To parents and older members of the Court they were unrecognizable, eschewing, as they did, the frivolous activities of the capital. Looking inward, they turned to study, to philosophy, and to writing that had previously been considered a hobby, not a profession, for the gentry. Along the Nevskii, bookstores blossomed, publishing houses turned out an astounding number of papers, journals, books, and pamphlets, and well-educated young men dove into the chilly waters of political criticism.

With the Decembrist Revolt, their numbers only grew. Members of their class had been executed and sent into pitiless exile by the Emperor, and despite the vigilance of his censors, the Golden Age of Russian literature exploded. Pushkin, Lermontov, and Saltykov-Shchedrin burst upon the scene with their passionate prose and verse. Quickly caught in the web of the Emperor's Third Section of the Imperial Chancellery, a cadre of secret agents, the last two men suffered exile and persecution, but their clear, fervent voices became embedded in the Russian psyche.

What these well-bred men of the 1812 War and later of the Decembrist Revolt also brought to the Petersburg scene was their enthusiastic plunge into "radical bohemianism." Polite society and its rigid code of manners was thrown over and replaced by a nouvelle etiquette, one of libertine behavior, sexual exploits, and limitless carousing which were happily designed to transgress the public code of decency but often ended in death by dueling pistol. The cynical pursuit of beautiful women - debutantes and other men's wives - was unrestrained and romanticized to the point of giddiness. From this random behavior, however, emerged Pushkin's great **Evgeny Onegin** (1831) and Lermontov's **A Hero of Our Time** (1840) with their Byronic heroes and ravishing women.

Into this bracing but dangerous atmosphere stepped Miatlev. He was an imposing man, immaculately groomed, with large, sharp features and deep-set, soulful eyes. It was said "for thirty years before the Revolution, he kept the drawing rooms of St. Petersburg amused with his caustic and often cruel but always funny portraits of...anyone at all who annoyed or interested him. Occasionally, these verbal portraits were complimentary particularly when the subject was a lady who attracted his fancy.... What he said at a ball on Thursday was repeated throughout the city on Friday." During these heady years, Miatlev also maintained his position in the Hussar Regiment. Rapidly promoted to the rank of Staff

Captain, appointed Chief of the Regimental Telegraph Station, and awarded the Austrian Order of Franz Josef, his service was termed “irreproachable,” and he was discharged in 1908 by an Imperial order that noted “long and meritorious service.” Following his release from the Hussars, Miatlev was elected Marshal of the Nobility in Orel Province, and later State Councilor and Court Chamberlain in the service of Emperor Nicholas II.



Vladimir Miatlev
(Author's collection)

Dividing his time among ballrooms, the Russian Literary Society, the Gun and Hunting Dog Association, and Field Maneuvers, Miatlev churned out more than thirty volumes of poetry. Although his complete archive is now privately held and not readily accessible, an examination of public holdings reveals that his first published work, a political pamphlet, is dated 1887. Pamphleteering, a form of expression then in vogue despite strict censorship, consumed much of Miatlev's time; undoubtedly he was aware of the great British and American tradition established by such works as Milton's **Areopagitica** in defense of a free press (1644) Boswell's 18th Century stream of often anonymous writings, and Thomas Paine's **Common Sense** (1775) which empowered the fledgling United States to declare its independence a short six months after its publication. Pamphleteering had become the “most effective means of persuasion and communication,” and formed a public sphere of popular social and political opinion.(13)

The importance Miatlev's pamphlets played in his otherwise frivolous and sexually driven life is clear in the afterward to his **After the Revolution, 1917-1922**, in which he takes pains to distance himself from work that was falsely and maliciously attributed to him and from any such pamphlets that “advocated change or liquidation of the traditional form of Government.”

The bulk of Miatlev's pamphlets, “two fat notebooks covering the period from 1887 to 1918,” he wrote, “were left in Russia and what happened to them is unknown to me.” He describes them as “powerful, caustic caricatures in verse, filled with both pseudonyms and proper names and details” which were, over his objections, often passed around. Despite his penchant for insult and gossip, the young man remained highly sought after by hostesses of the highest rank, and it was not long before other aspects of his complex personality emerged.

Like Boswell before him, Miatlev's sexual appetites were prodigious and compulsive. Pornography infiltrated his verse, all of it expunged before his papers were released; he was well known to Petersburg prostitutes and women of the demi-monde. However, in the licentious society through which he roamed, such behavior was tolerated, even admired, among the young officer class and, discreetly, by the women they courted. So long as his drawing room behavior was correct, his poetry polished, and his conversation witty, his sexual predilections, perverse or not, were winked at and ignored.

As was another of the young man's habits. Morphine, which had become widely available since a form that could be injected reached Russia in 1843, was the urban elite's drug of choice. Cheaper than triple distilled vodka and carrying with it a certain Asian exoticism popular at the time, morphine established a certain *élan* especially among the upper class; new drug laws did little to curb its use. Felix Yusupov, younger son of Princess Zenaide, beautiful Moika Palace matron, was no stranger to its charms nor were many of his confrères. Many were able to drift away from alcohol and enjoy other "ways to poison and abuse their bodies for pleasure—a sort of masochism that is perhaps inherent in all of us." (14)

In his early narrative poem (1890/1922) **Fon Braten**, Miatlev makes numerous references to the influence of morphine on his life and on his work. "I am dedicated to my love for morphine," he writes, and attributes his occasional snide and vicious remarks to the effects of the drug on his good sense and discipline as an artist.

But despite his increasingly aberrant sexual life and his fondness for morphine, Miatlev's star continued to rise. Not only was he the toast of society, but he attracted the attention of Western diplomats working in Russia. Robert Bruce Lockhart wrote some thirty years later: "My time was occupied in translating resolutions - today I still have scores of them among my private papers - and lampoons. At this time there was a salon poet called Miatlev, a cavalry officer with a knack for versification which he employed to attack the more unpopular members of the Government. I translated the resolutions into prose. I paraphrased Maitlev into English doggerel. I sent both prose and verse to the Embassy. In the end it must have been wearied by my wasted energy. The tragedy was that both the resolutions and the lampoons were written by men who had no thought of revolution in their hearts...and who today, if they were alive, would give their right hand to replace the Emperor, or, at least, *an* Emperor, on the Throne of Russia." (15)

More trenchantly, Vladimir Purishkevich observed Miatlev during a meeting of the United Nobility Council. His attention was drawn to a figure whose moral character "assumed its full, unprepossessing height before me. This was the figure of Miatlev: Marshal of the Nobility of Novo-Oskolsky in the Kursk District, and a brilliant contemporary poet-pamphleteer. Who, among those who live in Petersburg and attend fashionable salons and drawing rooms has not in his time copied out for himself one or another of Miatlev's popular poems, all of which treat maliciously and very wittily Russia's social and political defects, and not even sparing the Tsar? 'What! You haven't read Miatlev's latest poem?' you are usually asked with astonishment by X, Y, or Z, and immediately someone in the salon will take out of his notebook a tattered piece of paper with the poet's latest production, generally of a lampooning nature. 'There you are,' they say to you. 'Copy it out for yourself.' And there and then you copy out the poem which travels anonymously from hand to hand and, in a short time, spreads...to all of Russia. Miatlev's satire, cutting and spiteful, castigates everything he considers worthy of his attention, sometimes amusingly, and without sparing the Emperor himself. While those around me, on reading his work were saying, 'How cleverly he writes,' or 'He has really given it to them, the rascal- what a daredevil,' I thought Miatlev was a blunt, impudent fellow."

During Miatlev's speech to the Council of Nobles, Purishkevich wonders: "So that is what you are?' I kept asking myself in disgust. 'You consider it permissible, on the sly, anonymously, to make fun of the Tsar in

lampoons and to bandy his name about. But to raise your voice here does not suit you. Lackey! He trembles for his chamberlain's uniform and is afraid of losing his chamberlain's key!" (16)

Some eighty years after Purishkevich condemned Miatlev to lackey status, Archbishop Boris Stark, who conducted the poet's funeral services in 1946, remembered him as clearly if not as spitefully:

"This brilliant military officer was the center of attention in Petersburg because of his published poetry and pamphlets. His poems were about high society, and he also wrote about contemporary events. I don't know whether his poetry still exists somewhere, and only small pieces of his verse remain in my memory. For example, when French President Emile Loubet (1899-1906) paid an official visit to St. Petersburg, Miatlev wrote a long poem commemorating the visit and the receptions that were given in his honor. I remember only this small portion of it: 'And where is Grand Duke Paul Alexandrovich?' Loubet bowed and asked Eric von Pistol Kors. 'He ran off with my wife replied the captain.(17) Indeed, despite the Tsar's prohibition, his uncle Grand Duke Paul had run off with Olga, Pistol Kors' wife! Shortly before the War, the new French President, Raymond Poincaré, paid his official visit to Petersburg. Again, a new poem by Miatlev appears. I recall only this fragment:

"He guzzled like a dog,
"And tickled caviar with his knife.
"He ate sardines and drank Kuvaku [mineral water].
"This is how Poincaré was entertained!"

While Miatlev's poetry continued to spatter down on a thirsty public, his pursuit of Petersburg women never faltered. His seductive, unsolicited entreaties arrived at many doorsteps. It had one feathery message: "I want you in my bed." How many of these entreaties were successful is not known; however, if the poem found among Princess Zenaide's papers is any indication of his former fascination for the beautiful matron of thirty, it might indicate a serious but rebuffed attempt by a nobleman several years her junior. The likelihood of a favorable response from this paragon of virtue and social *élan* was nil.

It may also be tempting to read too much into Miatlev's verse. Or is it? In 1889, when Miatlev was twenty-one, he wrote a brief, illustrated greeting in pencil to "Her Excellency Varvara Mikhailovna Bibikova" who was then eleven. Varvara later married a Chamberlain of the Court, Boris Alexeievich Tatishchev:

"From the uncle of my nice little doll
"Though she has gone away.
"Old men are always well pleased
-with youth-" (19)

Whether Miatlev was Varvara's blood "uncle" begs the question. One has only to read Nabokov to wonder at the more sinister implications of this grimy little verse from "uncle" to his "little doll."

Several years before the death of Alexander III, Vladimir Miatlev set his sights on a pretty, nubile neighbor, Elizabeth Ottonovna Richter. His same age, and the eldest of four children born to German-Baltic-Lutheran nobleman Otton Borisovich and his wife Elizabeth Konstantinovna who was herself the daughter of Otton's brother, young Elizabeth was followed in due course by twins, Otton and Maria in 1871, and Natalia in 1877. Their father's marriage to his niece was in strict contravention to both Church and Civil Law, and it must be supposed that Otton Borisovich, then a Major-General in the Imperial Suite, was forced to apply to the Emperor for permission to marry a woman in first-degree blood lines.

Beyond his own family, Alexander III had no closer friend and confidant than Richter. During the second Alexander's reign, Richter, then a young military man, fought with great distinction in the Crimean War; was rapidly promoted to Colonel; and became sought after in Court affairs and society. Clearly, the Emperor thought so highly of him that he sent him as Adjutant to his elder son, Nicholas, during the 1860 **Polar Star** tour of Germany, Holland, Sweden, and, finally, Denmark, where he applied for the hand of Princess Dagmar. "With the support of his Aide-do-camp (sic), Colonel Richter, he (Nicholas) made his first tentative inquiry, through Crown Prince Frederick. Might Dagmar return his feelings?" (20) With the death of Nicholas, Princess Dagmar was passed on to his younger brother, Alexander, and to the Russian nation whose Empress, then Dowager Empress, she was for thirty-four years.

Richter had direct and unquestioned access to the Emperor without reservation or prejudice. He attended all functions in full military regalia; his wife and children all served at Court. Present for the Majority Ceremonies of both Alexander II and III, he was an old man "in whom (Nicholas) had the greatest confidence" was granted the honorary title of "uncle" by that unfortunate monarch. (21) At the time of his death in 1908, Otton Borisovich had also headed the enormously important Petitions Chancellery (to which Zenaide appealed in a successful attempt to exempt her son Felix Felixovich from military service; had been a ranking member of the Council of State, and had, in 1905, been a signatory to the Petition of Seven (also signed by Count Serge Witte and Prince George Lvov) which resulted in the October Manifesto limiting the autocratic powers of the Emperor, and granting a fuller measure of civil liberties to Russian citizens. A man of the privileged class, he saw clearly the importance of a severe change of course away from autocracy and toward a constitutional monarchy and civil liberties for all citizens of the vast and unruly country. It must not have come easily.

Adjutant-General Richter's civic duties are also remembered. A strong believer in homeopathy, he advocated the use of cyanide for the treatment of diphtheria, and along with Prince Golitsyn endowed the first homeopathic hospitals in Russia. His wife Elizabeth, as her station in society dictated, worked at charitable causes, most notably Petersburg orphanages and schools. Upon Otton's death, Elizabeth was named Baroness, entitled to all the privileges and benefits of that rank. His son was schooled at the Corps des Pages: and his daughters served as ladies-in-waiting to the Empress.

Why Otton Borisovich chose to give his first-born daughter in marriage to the roué Miatlev is a mystery. By 1890, Vladimir had established a firm reputation as a seducer, as a writer frequently at contretemps with virtually every political figure and cause, a morally bankrupt young man—the *bête noire* of Petersburg society. We have no indication that Elizabeth was poor, ugly, pregnant, or any other embarrassment to her family, although she would become the latter later.

No Russian Orthodox wed during Lent. But, on 29 April 1890, the marriage register of St. Isaac's Cathedral records the marriage of "Miatlev, Vladimir Petrovich, Cornet of the Life-Guard Hussar Regiment of His Majesty, Orthodox, twenty-two-years old, to Richter, Elizabeth Ottonovna, Lady-in-Waiting to Her Majesty, Lutheran, twenty-two-years old."

The ceremony was performed by Archbishop Alexander Ispolatov and Sexton Semyon Nikolskii at the Miatlev Palace at three o'clock in the afternoon. All Petersburg papers reported the event. What follows is a compilation of their work:

At 1:30AM, the Imperial Family arrived in St. Petersburg from their residence at Gatchina to celebrate the birthday of Grand Duke Serge Alexandrovich. Upon their arrival members of the Emperor's family came to the Palace, where Her Majesty Queen Olga of the Hellenes awaited them. After the church service, Grand Duke Serge Alexandrovich accepted congratulations from all members of high society, including Otton Borisovich Richter. A grand lunch followed at the Palace. A splendid cortège then proceeded a short distance to Miatlev's Palace where, at 3:00PM, Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress, the Heir

Tsesarevich, and the Grand Dukes attended the marriage of the Cornet Miatlev and the Lady-in-Waiting to Her Majesty Elizabeth Ottonovna Richter, daughter of Commander of the Emperor's Headquarters, General-Adjutant O. B. Richter. The ceremonies took place in the Palace Chapel of State Councilor Miatlev. Among those who attended were: I. I. Vorontzov-Dashkov, I. N. Durnovo, General-Adjutants Cherevin, Voikov, Prince S. N. Trubetskoi, and many others. (One can hardly doubt that Princess Zenaide Yusupov was present. It would be a new century before she crossed swords with the happy groom.) Following the wedding, champagne, fruit, and sweets were served in the Grand Hall adjacent to the Chapel. At 5:30 the Emperor and Empress returned to Gatchina on the Warsaw Railway. The newly married couple traveled to the Miatlev estate in Kaluga on the Nikolskii Railway.

So, on an auspicious day, in a shower of spring sun and glittering jewels, Vladimir Miatlev began his shod-lived marriage. In the fifteen years that followed, the social and political landscape of Russia would change. Alexander II's violent death and his successor's premature one, the horrendous events of 1905, the assassination of Grand Duke Serge Alexandrovich, and the relentless disease that pursued Tsesarevich Alexei Nikolaievich, the young Heir to the Throne, all provided a crumbling, insidious framework for the disintegrating inner life of Vladimir Miatlev, Court poet and dangerous jester.

To be continued.....

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A Note on Sources

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Additional references are drawn from the Russian State Historic Archives, St. Petersburg, as follows:

F. 19, Op. 125, D. 1 109.

F. 400, Op. 2, D. 9347.

F. 688, Op. 6, D. 3.

F. 1 102, Op. 12, D. 1352.

F. 1162, Op. 6, D. 457.

F. 1343, Op. 28 & 36, D. 20988.

F. 1405, Op. 95, D. 12208.

F. 141 2, Op. 1 6, D. 16, 348, 1 352.

F. 1542, Op. 157, D. 1 .

F. 1577, Op. 382, D. 1 .
F. 1620, Op. 1 , D. 259, 262-63.

Source Notes

1. Ferrand, 241.
2. See Hemingway.
3. Alexander Mikhailovich, 172.
4. Buchanan, 188.
5. Yusupov.
6. Kassirova.
7. Professor Mark Blokh to author.
8. Davidov.
9. Bely, 11.
10. Kochan, 42.
11. King, 65.
12. Bogdanovich.
13. Raymond.
14. Plank.
15. Lockhart, 129.
16. Purishkevich, 21.
17. Stark.
18. Ibid.
19. In the Russian State Historic Archives, St. Petersburg, F. 1577, Op. 382, D. 1 .
20. Zeervat, 32.
21. Salisbury, 328.

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