

Miatlev: Politics, Poetry and Perversion

by Gretchen Haskin

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In the spring of 1890, with the Emperor and Empress and most of Petersburg society in attendance, the handsome reprobate Vladimir Petrovich Miatlev married Elizabeth Ottonovna Richter, eldest daughter of Otto Borisovich Richter, courtier extraordinary and confidante of both the reigning Emperor and of his father before him.

It was a brilliant affair at the Miatlev Palace, doubly noteworthy falling, as it did, on the birthday of Grand Duke Serge Alexandrovich. The bride and groom were both twenty-two, good to look at, and clever. Following the ceremony, sanctioned by petition to the Emperor, Russian Orthodox Vladimir and Lutheran Elizabeth boarded their private car and sped south to Gorokhova, the Miatlev estate in Kursk Province.

There is little doubt that among the guests at the wedding was Princess Zenaide Yusupov, then barely thirty years old, wife, and mother of two handsome boys, Nicholas and Felix. Photos of the Princess show a still-slender, impeccably but simply dressed woman whose face and figure had been gently softened by time and motherhood. Known for her grace and sensitive nature, Zenaide was a prominent figure in society moving in the same select circles as the Miatlevs and Richters, and being a Go-door-down neighbor to the Miatlevs' smaller but substantial house on the Moika Embankment.

If Zenaide, with her delicate sensibilities, was skittish of the poet-pornographer, she could not have avoided, figuratively, rubbing elbows with him. His new wife, Elizabeth, was Lady-in-Waiting to the Empress as was her mother. Her father was as close to the Emperor as was anyone outside his immediate family. Petersburg was a tight little society, and that Zenaide was, at least, aware of Miatlev is a given. That he, epicure of beautiful women, was unaware of this aristocratic young matron is unthinkable.

However, Miatlev and his bride departed on schedule for Kursk/Orel. Their wedding night may well have been spent aboard the smoky train, but like the private cars of other wealthy families, their car was luxurious and well supplied with amenities and servants. What happened on that landmark journey south or after their arrival at Kursk is not recorded. In the only surviving account, lovely Elizabeth discovered that her profligate husband was impotent. She, apparently more sophisticated than expected, laughed in his face.(1)

Humiliated, Miatlev fled and spent the next several days drunk and disgraced. When he returned to the estate, Elizabeth was gone. Presumably with enough gossip stuffed in her head to entertain her salon friends for weeks. The bride and groom never met again.

Elizabeth returned to her father's house, where her two sisters and brother still lived, while Miatlev divided his time between Gorokhova and the capital. He continued to churn out small volumes of poetry and pamphlets, occasionally under pseudonyms, as well as privately published sonnets addressed to women who caught his eyes and whose bed he would like to share. Rising to the rank of colonel, he remained an active member of his regiment, and fulfilled the other social and military obligations expected of a young man of his station.

In an afterward to *After the Revolution*, Miatlev describes his work:

“Throughout my life, especially before March 1917, I wrote many pamphlets that concern the political and overall state of affairs of that time. These caustic pamphlets, actually caricatures in verse, were filled with names and details and had the power to be used maliciously. They were privately published, and their wide distribution was against my will. I had intended to show them only to my closest friends; however, distorted copies were passed around society. Some writings that are described as mine I have never written. Perhaps gossip gave me some of the subjects for my work and gave a deeper understanding and different color—often tinged with sarcasm—that will give to future readers compassion for the Great Writer who knew the truth of ‘visible to the world through laughter and invisible to the world through tears’.” (2)



Miatlev's St Petersburg: the Nevsky and the Haymarket, centres of life and commerce with a ever-present whiff of sex and scandal



While Elizabeth found safe haven in father's commodious house and Miatlev found ample material in Petersburg's drawing rooms for his invective, Russia drifted toward an ominous sea change. In the fall of 1894, Emperor Alexander III died, leaving the ship of state in the pale, uncalloused hands of his son, Nicholas, who was both ill-equipped to govern and unhappy to do so. In the macrocosm, this was disaster. In the microcosm, and in the same year, Elizabeth Richter, now separated from her husband of three years, found that she was pregnant.

Quickly, the wheels turned. Fortunately for the young mother-to-be, her father still had the ear of the ailing Emperor. Paperwork flew.

On April 8, 1894, Elizabeth petitioned (somewhat hypocritically) the Emperor, through Baron Budberg, head of the powerful Petitions Chancellery, for divorce on grounds of her husband's adultery. Four years earlier, she had petitioned for permission to marry. Her request for divorce came in the nick of time for four days later, Ioann Dimitrievich was born. Unhappily for Miatlev, divorce for such behavior was a police matter as well as a civil matter, and he was sentenced to perpetual celibacy, a punishment that it is hard to believe he took seriously.

Two weeks later, the new mother petitioned for a return to her maiden name stating in her appeal that bearing Miatlev's name caused her great mental and physical anguish, and within two more days her father, "the decent, educated, and cultured Chamberlain," appealed to the Emperor for adoption privileges for himself and his young wife-niece as well as for the granting of patronymic, Dimitrievich, and surname Richter to the infant. (3) These rather helter-skelter requests were quickly granted. However, the related files that should contain the boy's birth certificate and baptismal record are empty. These missing documents would have revealed the father's name, but all such information has been expunged, and remains in the realm of secrecy and imperial confidence. As BLITZ researcher and archivist Elena Tsvetkova states: "The fact of missing these documents in the National Russian Archives is unbelievable."

To Miatlev's mind there must have been no question. He was keenly aware that, after their separation, Elizabeth had engaged in an affair with his regimental commander, Prince Gagarin, and had become pregnant by him. As honor dictated, Miatlev, no stranger to seduction himself, challenged the Prince to an illegal duel, which he won without killing his adversary. Frustrated and humiliated, he fled to his Officers' Club, where drunk and dishonored, he called his wife a whore. (4) Strangely, he maintained his rank with the Life Guard Hussars until 1913, and his title as Court Chamberlain until 1916, although there is little doubt that he was not as welcome as he had been despite his wit and breeding. Elizabeth, on the other hand, lost her job as Lady-in-Waiting to the Empress and retired from her various court duties.

While all Petersburg buzzed over this delicious scandal, Ioann Dimitrievich grew into a strong, healthy boy. But from whom had he inherited his patronymic? His adopted father Otto Borisovich, could not have supplied it. Or could he? Commander of the Imperial Household, Richter had served as mentor to the male children of Emperor Alexander III. According to Court physician Nicholas Veliaminov, "in spite of the fact that everyone called him General Richter, the Emperor and the Grand Dukes always called him Dimitri Borisovich. Once I took the liberty of asking the Emperor why he called Richter in this way. The Emperor answered, 'Probably you know that Richter was my teacher. My brothers and I didn't like Germans too much, so we asked permission to call him Dimitri Borisovich. He agreed, so we brothers called him Dimitri from early childhood.'"(5) Is it possible that Otto used his imperial nickname as a patronymic for his adopted son, Ioann? Or could it indicate the true father of the little boy, one of the Gagarin princes?

The Gagarin Brothers

At the time of the Richter scandal, two Gagarin brothers were on the loose in Petersburg. Members of that old and noble family, comrades of Miatlev's Life Guard Hussar Regiment, Imperial Yacht Club, and the Hunt Club, both Alexander Petrovich and Dimitri Petrovich were active in Petersburg's social and military life. Born to Prince Peter Dimitrievich and Countess Anastasia Stenbock-Fermer, they were, in those years of Elizabeth's separation from Miatlev, both single.

Because Elizabeth's lover and Miatlev's cuckold is identified by nothing more than his last name, either Gagarin could have been Ioann's father.

The elder Gagarin was born August 16, 1857, graduating honorably from the Emperor Nicholas Cavalry School. During the following years he pursued his military career without interruption until, abruptly in late February of 1894, he requested and was granted four month's leave. Since there were no military operations at that time, Gagarin was probably quartered in the

Petersburg District, within a stone's throw of the very pregnant Elizabeth. During Summer maneuvers, Gagarin was gone, and it was at this time that Ioann was born, and the Richters plied the Emperor with petitions. The Prince returned to his regiment in the fall, but died nine years later at the age of forty-six, unmarried and without any recognized children.

Equally interesting is Alexander's younger brother, Dimitri. Like Alexander, he owned considerable property, gold mines, and extensive real estate in Petersburg. He served his regiment loyally and well, but in May of 1889 requested the Emperor's permission to retire. His Medical Certificate No, 3775 cites a leg injury incurred when his horse kicked him. He listed St. Petersburg as his future residence but was not officially relieved of his duties until 1892, when he retired with the rank of colonel. He waived the military pension to which he was entitled and returned to civilian life.

How the unmarried eligible young aristocrat filled the following years is not known; he is next found in Ekaterinburg in 1895 tending family businesses. Why should he have left the capital, his intended residence, in favor of an unsophisticated mining town during the years of Elizabeth's pregnancy, a Miatlev-Gagarin duel, and Ioann's birth? Was this voluntary exile, or exile imposed by Imperial decree or suggestion?

Whatever the explanation, Dimitri's life in the Urals was not a long one, for he died at the age of thirty-five in September 1895. **Ekaterinburgskaya Nedelia**, No. 35, September 3, 10, and 17 report his death in detail but gives no cause. It was apparently an event of great importance for pages were devoted to descriptions of his coffin, funeral décor, church service, and cortege, in which "many common people" marched. At Ekaterinburg Station, the prince's body was transferred to a private car and taken slowly back to Petersburg for burial in the family plot.

With the available information and innuendo, we are left with these possibilities: Elizabeth Ottonovna Richter/Miatlev/Richter's son's patronymic was her father's legacy, a gift bestowed on the boy to conceal his biological father, Prince Alexander Petrovich, or it descends from Prince Dimitri Petrovich, dead a year after the boy's birth.

The enormous secrecy surrounding Ioann's parents continued into the next century when Otto Richter formally petitioned the new Emperor, Nicholas II, asking for the title of Baron which he had been granted, for his illegitimate son.

"1908

Your Imperial Majesty!

Your Majesty understands the mystery surrounding the birth of the child, Ioann, whose mother cannot be revealed because of the delicate family situation. Ioann is now in my care and in my wife's care. He was adopted by me through the Powerful and Supreme intervention of your deceased father, giving him my surname and the future right of hereditary nobility. Being attached to his child who is so close to me by blood, with all my heart and treating him as my own son, I ardently wish for him that his position would not differ from the position of all my children."

Baron von Richter, sick with heart failure, died shortly after his petition was granted by

an Emperor who knew him as “uncle,” and Ioann passed into the care of Baroness Elizabeth Konstantinovna with whom he remained until her death in 1916. Shadowy Ioann's fate after the Revolution is unknown, but his mother, never one to waste time, had remarried in 1899 Baltic nobleman Paul von Hanefeldt, thereby becoming Elizabeth Marie Euboria Sophia Richter/Miatleva/von Richter/von Hanefeldt. Together she and her husband



*The Baltic capital Riga,
Elizabeth's later home*

produced four more children and continued their lives in distant Riga until, unhappily, the busy Elizabeth was apprehended by the Bolsheviks in 1919 and shot to death. Why Elizabeth should have been singled out for execution while her husband and son were allowed safe passage to Germany may lie in one of her unfortunate last names: Richter. During the 1905 uprising, which was especially violent in the Baltic States, Lieutenant-colonel Christov Richter was condemned for “executing on his own authority and without trial non-resistant persons.” Appeals were made to Nicholas II to halt these excesses but the Emperor's written response was, “Ah, Richter! What a fine fellow!” (6) Certainly the family name Richter was not gold coin in Riga.

The only surviving mention of Elizabeth are letters from G. Lubentsova and I. Luttner mentioning her arrival in Petersburg for the funeral of her father, Otto, in 1908, in which she is described as lovely, kind, and sweet. Lubentsova assures the widow that she would be happy to receive Elizabeth and, according to researcher Tsvetkova, implies that “other families of high society would not receive her.” Elizabeth's two sisters married well and survived the Revolution: Marie Charlotte married Prince Nicholas Kropotkin and Nathalia wed Heinrich von Grote, a wealthy landowner.(7)

Perhaps more telling is a letter from Baroness Marie Budberg, wife of the Chancellor of Petitions to whom all previous requests had been made by the Richters, stating that both she and “the Gagarin” thank the widow for a telegram that presumably informed them of Richter's death.

This tangled affair was the stuff of which Petersburg's social webs were spun, and one has only to read Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1876) to understand its impact on a complex and jaded society and on the careless individuals who were its perpetrators and its victims. If this author, who Nabokov deems the greatest prose writer in the Russian language, waxes too rhapsodic about Levin and the glories of the agricultural life, he nails Petersburg society to the wall as cleanly as Nabokov skewered his butterflies.

Impulsive, passionate Anna (Elizabeth) produces a son, for whom she cares little, out of wedlock. The father, Vronsky (Gagarin), nobleman and officer of his regiments, seems to have virtually no paternal instinct, and ultimately both children, little Anna and Ioann, are sent to live with others.

Anna's betrayed, acerbic husband, Alexei, is highly placed in society and in the Petitions Chancellery, positions held by Elizabeth's father, Otton. And Alexei, like Miatlev, is the target of humiliating gossip. Both men rely on strong women-Miatlev, his second wife Nina Sergeievna, and Alexei, the sanctimonious Countess Lydia-to support them after they are deserted.

The four year span of *Anna Karenina*, 1872-1876, is one in which Miatlev, Elizabeth, Gagarin, and the lovely Princess Yusupov all lived and were subject to the harsh realities of scandal and divorce. As Gary Adelman writes: "Divorce proceedings guaranteed scandal. There was no civil authority that could grant a divorce in Russia in 1917. One had to appeal to the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, which could dissolve marriages on grounds of adultery either by proof (detection of the fact. i.e., witnesses) or by confession of either partner." (8) Returning to the novel, Adelman says, "His (Karenin's) lawyer recommends that Alexei pretend to be the guilty party, thereby sparing Anna additional shame.

It is possible that such a bargain was struck when the pregnant Elizabeth Richter obtained a divorce on the grounds of Miatlev's adultery, but in any case such an agreement must have caused both men pain. As Karenin confesses to the hovering Countess Lydia, he felt "crushed, annihilated, no longer a man."

Thus, Miatlev, cuckold and seducer of other men's wives, became the butt of drawing room humor. Divorce was obtainable not only on grounds of adultery but also if the husband possessed "a physical defect"- impotence - condemning the Don Juan of the North to double ridicule.

However, neither Miatlev nor Elizabeth seemed deterred by canon or criminal law. Sentenced to a life of celibacy, he remarried but had no children. Elizabeth, who "having been cast into perdition" and condemned to the life of a single woman while her former husband was alive, not only remarried but produced four children, all of whom, by Orthodox law, were illegitimate.

Oddly, both Miatlev and Elizabeth followed, to some degree, the lives of their Tolstoy counterparts. Miatlev, following a move to his country estate, was elected member of the Provincial Marshals of the Nobility. To this meaningless body, its procedures and

members, Tolstoy devotes several chapters giving the patient reader a meticulous rendering of its archaic form and function. But one can easily envision the noble Miatlev's elected place among the verbose members.

And, finally, the impetuous young women, Anna and Elizabeth, who set these melodramas into motion, met violent deaths-Anna throwing herself under a train and Elizabeth falling under a hail of bullets.

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1908

For the von Richters, 1908 dawned with the death of the old baron and the passing of that title to his daughter's illegitimate son, Ioann. For Princess Zenaide Yusupov, the year may have opened with nothing more disturbing than the continued antics of her younger son, Felix, but by midsummer her seamless life ended with a duel that killed her elder son, Nicholas, who-had he lived- would have carried the title of Prince Yusupov. This horrendous event threatened to destroy Zenaide's physical and emotional health, and she retired to one or another of her villas, rarely appearing in public, her once serene-some might say smug-smile replaced by a look of ineffable sadness.

Miatlev, too, had stepped down from his role as court jester and political lampooner and, although he spent some months in the capital, he lived primarily at an estate south of Moscow. Around the turn of the century he had married Nina Sergeievna Shenig, the daughter of a provincial nobleman who was prominently listed in "The Alphabetical List of Nobles in Orel Province." Together they moved to her large home in Olgino, an estate that had belonged to the poet Nicholas Leskov and was a portion of Nina's marriage settlement.

According to contemporal poet V. M. Katanov, the newlyweds cut quite a figure in the quiet, rural town. Nina rode grandly through the streets distributing sweets to the children, and Miatlev, who was described as "very smart," was often seen strolling on the balcony of his new forty-eight-room house, gazing out at the gardens, lakes, and forests. They also maintained a fine stable, a carriage house, and a large barn for storing grain and machinery.(9)

The bucolic life, however, seemed not to quench Miatlev's need to write. Regularly he published, either through his agent in Petersburg or in private printings, volumes of poetry. Occasionally he was asked to write lyrics for musical theater, but his prose diatribes seem to have diminished in number and focus. His sexual appetite, extraordinary and depraved, continued under the indifferent eye of his wife with whom he seemed to have an understanding, and his poetry - once directed at habitués of Petersburg drawing rooms - took on a new and darker tone.(10)

What precisely Miatlev's sexual predilections were is unclear, but he, "a predator...seemed to have no trouble finding ladies to oblige him," and his work of this period hints darkly at adventures into sadomasochism.(11)

Dijkstra writes, in **Idols of Perversity**, male masochism involved “the concept of being an object of humiliation and subjugation involving the ultimate usurpation of power, for it forced women into the role of whipper, beater, or ‘cruel person.’ Ultimately the victim achieved sexual satisfaction through this powerful and malignant manipulation of women. If a man were impotent, he would achieve control and mastery of women through this dominance.” (12)

Among artists and intellectuals, masochism was commonly practiced and the work of Baron Leopold von Sacher-Masoch was “eagerly sought after” by such figures as Saint-saens, Strauss, Wilde, Berg, and Hindemith. The imagery in Miatlev's work at this time is rife, even in translation, with hints of an aberrant sexual life and of darkening depression. He is found groveling at the feet of demanding women and of having to kiss the hems of their gowns. In **Mirages** (1902) he writes: “By kissing the hem of your gown, I could live forever as a slave at your feet.” In **Nightmares** (1906-1909):

“Hang tight! Don't cry! Tears are useless.
“They will not cure the melancholy.
“Its unfulfilled dreams
“Pull strongly like a chain.
“Hang tight! No malice! Anger is in vain.
“These false voyages are all your fault.”

In the same volume:

“They are will love me
“They do not hesitate to be mine.
“But I am silent and somber
“Standing sadly on the side.
“I know them...they are charming
“They eyes burning with rays
“Their desires burning hot.
“They are becoming strange,
“Wild and terrifying.”

He speaks frequently of being encircled by something black, powerful, and greedy, of a desolation that chills his soul and sickens it, while spring has come and all around him nature is green and blossoming.

For the New Year of 1907, he transcends his own morbid thoughts to ponder the fate of his country:

“Will you bring peace
“To my homeland?
“Will you give to the Russian people
“For their centuries of hard labor
“Noble freedom

“And a rich harvest?”

Miatlev had not given up his prose attempts and, in 1910, he wrote **Portrait of a Marquis**, a thinly veiled account of the Marquis de Sade. He dedicated the work to Countess O. V. Bennigsen, and followed it in short order with a four-century history of French court life.

The titles of Miatlev's work during this period speak volumes not only of his sexual predilections but also of his state of mind. **Nightmares, Shattering, Mirages, The Damned Castle, Virago, Shipwreck, On the River Styx, and On Charon's Boat.** His lyrical letters to Petersburg ladies on pale blue paper seem to have disappeared from his heart and from his mind. **Moon Rays** (1902), an eerie love story of the beau monde, tells us that its hero, Count Charmyshev,

“...did not want to pay such a high price for the lies of her caress;

“Possession has its own reward.

“The rite of passion is painful;

“Higher than pride, his senses demand humility.”

The poet, whose work indicates a crumbling psyche, did return to his former preoccupation of needling prominent figures in Russian society, and it was then that he may have run afoul of Princess Zenaide Yusupov. In 1915, Moscow - a year into the Great War - was struck by violent anti-German riots. German stores were looted and burned, books were piled in the streets and set ablaze, German residents were hounded.

A. P. Martynov, a police officer, wrote that the situation went from demonstration to riot because of the indecisiveness of Moscow's two commanders, Mayor and Major-General Adrianov, and Governor-General Felix Felixovich Yusupov, who was also Chief of the Moscow Militia. Writes Martynov:

“The destruction was horrific. When I was going down Neglinnyi Prospekt my horse was forced to step on mountains of German books. It was not better on other streets....The crowd destroyed everything without meeting any resistance. I did not know what Commanding Prince Yusupov was doing. However, Miatlev, a well-known, clever fellow and an underground poet of that time, was very convincing in his verses. He tells us that the Prince was standing in his car doing essentially nothing.

“ ‘And even now it is not clear

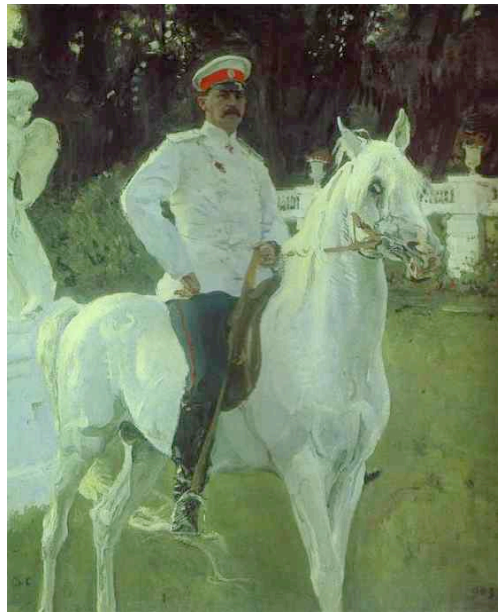
“ ‘What he meant by his fine gestures.

“ ‘Was he saying, Go away, brothers

“ ‘Or just talking?’”(13)

An investigation followed and the disgraced Yusupov asked to be released from his post. He met with the Emperor in June of 1915 at Stavka, apparently in a highly agitated state, where his request was granted.

Neither his resignation nor Miatlev's widely circulated account of the riots could have pleased Zenaide. Her family had suffered a number of assaults on its good name, and her husband's humiliation must have angered her. It certainly did not endear Miatlev to her or to Prince Felix Felixovich. The two retired to their country estates, both approaching middle age, the former brilliant light they shed slowly dimming. Zenaide, however, remained a strong willed woman, and it is unlikely that she forgot Miatlev's attack.



Felix Sumarakov-Elston, Prince Yusupov, painted by Serov

During the next four years, Miatlev continued his position as Provincial Marshal of the Nobility, and Zenaide continued to agitate against the influence of Rasputin and the dangerous power exerted by the Empress. Suddenly, none of this mattered, for in 1919 both the Yusupovs and the Dowager Empress and her suite left Russia's southern shores for safety abroad. In the same year, Vladimir Miatlev too embarked for France, leaving the bulk of his work behind. Possibly he also left his wife behind: no further mention of her exists.

When he arrived in Paris, he wore a fine quality suit with shirt, tie, raincoat, hat, and excellent English shoes. On his finger was a gold ring bearing the family crest, and he wore a gold pocket watch and chain, and religious medals around his neck. He carried his father's gold handled walking stick, about 150 gold rubles, 200 English pounds, and about 300 U. S. dollars. In his case were several notebooks, pens, pencils, and his signature, pale blue letter paper. Concealed on his person was a Browning automatic pistol.(14)

Along with hordes of Russian émigrés both Miatlev and the Yusupovs fled to France, the poet spending some time in Cannes where he began to reconstruct his narrative

poem, **Fon Braten**, originally written in 1899. This work would consume him for the next three years and was eventually republished in Berlin in 1922.

Berlin in the twenties is probably best described by fellow Russian expatriate Nina Berberova in her **The Italics are Mine**. Berberova, a fine poet and keen observer of the social and literary scene, was the core of a group of brilliant writers and politicians that included Nabokov, Bely, Bunin, Akhmatova, Gorky, Pasternak, Kerensky, and Baroness Marie Budberg. Of this group, she writes: “We were a strange collection of people who could have been bankers or generals in the Tsar’s army, but who could not accept what was being done in our homeland.” (15) Until the 1936 show trials, her friends kept their Russian passports with the hope that they would some day return. In exile, they tried to recreate the Petersburg from which they came decorating—when funds allowed—their apartments with chandeliers, pianos, and bright rugs hung on the wall, Russian style. As the poet Gippius put it, these émigrés with their sad hopes “had all fallen through a crack in history.” (16)

Miatlev, of course, had something to say about all this. In Berlin, 1922, he wrote a two-stanza verse expressing the concerns and longing of his fellow Russians:

“The news from the Motherland is confusing...
“We do not care whose hand
“Will return our money and our land
“And save us from the Cheka!

“Do tell us, with our backs to the wall
“And only half as smart as children
“What does this Fourth mean...
“The Fourth International?

“Ah, to put an end to these hardships!
“It is so simple, to tell you the truth:
“To call all people Proletariat
“And to take a lawful Tsar,
“But now the mix is boiling at the bottom
“The reaction is near, finally.
“And so, long live the Fourth,
“The Fourth International!”

Although Miatlev was at the very center of the monarchist-expatriate group in both Berlin and Paris, Berberova does not mention him nor does his work appear in the distinguished magazine, *Contemporary Annals*, which the émigré literati kept alive for over twenty years. Archives of the period list his work, which seems to have been fitful, but it was during those early years in Berlin that he continued his greatest project, a reconstruction of his novel in verse, **Fon Braten**. Always a player with words, Miatlev delighted in tweaking the noses of Petersburg society, even at such a distance in time and place, with this lyrical novel in verse. The title itself is parody. The actual target of the poem is Baltic-German Adjutant-General George von Rauch. (rauch: to smoke, as in cooking; braten: to roast as in cooking) whose family was well known in

both Petersburg and Prussia. General Friedrich von Rauch served devotedly under King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia and was instrumental in defeating a cabal that threatened the monarch. For this he was rewarded with an ambassadorship to Petersburg, and his lovely daughter Rosalie was given the hand of Crown Prince Friedrich. Quickly, Rosalie became Countess von Hohenau, produced two children and ultimately died in 1879 at the age of sixty.

Miatlev reinvents his own name, scrambling letters until it becomes Tiamlev. Others, he knew, were easily identifiable despite their aliases, but it was the dangerous game the poet loved to play. The work is dedicated to Princess MAT, “the glorious real-life princess who charms the world,” and who was, in fact, Princess Marie Alexandrovna Trubetskaya, a brilliant and beautiful member of Petersburg society. Princess Marie later fled to Novorossiysk with her husband Prince Pierre Petrovich and her son, where Pierre died of typhus. She, however, managed to travel on to Paris only to die five years later, still a young woman.

Many of Miatlev's aliases have become obscure with time, but the work remains a decent example of the predictable “romance novel in verse” that was popular at the time. More interesting are Miatlev’s prose asides that are indicative of his state of mind, not always his most reliable feature. In **Fon Braten**, Anton Egorovich fon Braten, a handsome lieutenant in the Hussar Guards, is a “steely-eyed” cad who flirts with twenty-year-old Countess Elena Gordetsova simply to draw her away from her more appropriate suitor Prince Stepin. This sinister romp continues through drawing rooms, boudoirs, and finally to a grand ball at Anichkov Palace where Empress Marie Feodorovna dances with the wily fon Braten. In the course of these adventures, delivered by Miatlev in 152 fourteen-line stanzas of varying quality, Elena learns that fon Braten has deceived her with an infamous member of her own set. She suffers the inevitable six week breakdown, but recovers to marry Stepin. Undaunted by the scandal that erupts, fon Braten smoothly re-enters his world of horses, regimental maneuvers, and meetings with old mistresses who are “covered with feathers and diamonds.” He is once again “climbing the ladder of fame.”

Episodically, Miatlev interrupts the rather banal narrative with comments about his feelings of isolation, his dependence on morphine, and his obvious infatuation with Princess Marie Alexandrovna. Writing in 1922, and perhaps aware that she had arrived in Europe, he writes:

“Perhaps sometime soon I will receive news that you have arrived and I can visit you, Princess Marie. And perhaps then, being overwhelmed with emotion, I will write another poem. Now I apologize for referring to you by name and for not having a proper beginning and end to this poem. And also for being a bad poet. Let your smile be my laurel wreath. “Berlin, 1922.”

During Miatlev's early years in Berlin, Princess Zenaide Yusupov lived in Rome. As has been previously described in Part One of this article she and her husband Prince Felix lived in a rather run-down villa near the Borghese Gardens.

When the Princess turned sixty, in 1921, the large Russian community undoubtedly celebrated the event with as much élan as they could muster. Despite their relative poverty, many of the former nobility traveled. One can trace them from Cannes, to Paris, to London, to Berlin, and to Rome,

meeting each other for funerals and births, marriages and religious holidays. Although no written record exists, the birthday of the aging Princess would have attracted expatriates from the major capitals of Europe, even those she might not have received in Petersburg. It is common for a bond to develop among nationals forced to live away from their Motherland; old sins are forgiven, old wrongs forgotten. That Miatlev attended the festivities in honor of his old compatriot and neighbor is not only possible, it is probable.

And he was still writing. When one examines the poem, “in an unknown hand” that her son Felix found among her papers, one finds many links to the busy poet. (The entire poem translated from French and from Russian can be found in Part One of Miatlev: Poetry, Politics, and Perversion)

The womanizing author alludes to Zenaide's “bright spirit and tender heart” and to his previous “amorous” feelings for her that put him into a state of “half-bliss.” He assures her that age is just a shadow, and that she may still enjoy the pleasure of young lovers and old friends. As he was fond of doing, Miatlev compares her with a flower that may have lost its color but retains its fragrance and the freshness of springtime. Zenaide’s legendary graciousness also catches his fancy:

“With young women one must take things lightly
“But with you one can laugh or cry
“You know how to forgive for you understand.
“Reason and goodness live together in your
heart.”

Delicate references to former friendship, to the Princess’s beauty and kindness, to amorous feelings, and to an act that had been forgiven, indicate the author may well have been Miatlev. Also compelling is the poetic form, which is reminiscent of Miatlev's construction, of his use of a direct, somewhat antiquated voice, emphatic repetition, and abundant floral symbolism. While Zenaide had many admirers, we know of none who was an accomplished poet and confessed admirer of beautiful women.

The next years were not kind either to Miatlev or to Zenaide. In 1924, Prince Felix Yusupov suffered a severe stroke, and the couple was taken in by Princess Marie Rose Radziwill. Until Felix's death in 1928, they continued to live at the elegant Villa Radziwill; in 1929, Zenaide joined her son, Felix, and his wife, Irina, in Paris, where she remained until her death ten years later.

Vladimir Petrovich Miatlev moved on to Paris as well where he became well known among the “ladies of the night.” Both his health and creative powers faltered. Father Boris Stark, a priest who read burial services for the many Russian émigrés in France writes that Miatlev's verses were still recited from memory as late as 1953 by men as august as Patriarch Alexei. Stark recalls all of high society found bitter reflection in his work. No-one was exempt from his sharp pen, not even the adulterous relationship of the Grand Duke Paul Alexandrovich and Olga, the wife of Baron Pistolkors.

Miatlev’s life ended in the Russian Home for the Aged in Ste Genevieve des Bois in 1946. Ironically, Princess Zenaide spent her last days here, but carefully tended by adoring son, Felix. Of Miatlev’s death, Stark says that he had lost his mind and could not recognize anyone. He behaved

lie and animal. His room was filthy; the door had to be kept closed to prevent the odor from seeping into the hallway. Often he was naked.

“There was nothing left of this brilliant officer and poet. His death was a relief for everyone.” (17)

Both Miatlev and Zenaide lie buried beneath the birches and pines of Ste Genevieve, linked ephemerally by a poem written on pale blue paper in an unknown hand.

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Miatlev translation by Alesya Guastella

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Source notes

1. Private information to author.
2. V. P.Miatlev, **After the revolution**. Berlin, 1922
3. Dzhunkovsky, 267
4. Private information to author.
5. Mossolov, 248-0
6. Trotsky, 1:266
7. **Gotha Genealogisches**, part B, 211-212
8. Adleman, 74, 78
9. Katanov, 242-5
10. Private information to author.
11. *ibid.*
12. Dijkstra, 471-73
13. Martynov, 272
14. Private information to author.
15. Berberova, 283.
16. *Ibid.*, 290.
17. Stark, 637-38.

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Miatlev, Vladimir Petrovich: Miatlev published more than thirty volumes of poetry, lyrics, and satires. It is impossible to list them all. Many did not survive; some are in private hands. The following universities and libraries are among those who hold some of his work: Amherst; British Museum Library; Brown; Cambridge University; Cornell; Glasgow University; Library of Congress; University of Chicago; University of North Carolina; Texas Tech University; Hoover Institution, Stanford; Yale; Harvard; University of Michigan; New York Public Library; Ohio State University; Syracuse; University of Illinois; University of Kansas;

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