

Narodnost' (Russian) encompasses "spirit of the people," "national character" and "folk wisdom" and is an important concept in Russian intellectual history where it usually refers to the inherent qualities of the *narod*, or the people as opposed to the **intelligentsia** and westernized upper classes, a distinction which dates back to Peter the Great's reforms. Given the impossibility of translating it consistently into English I have elected to leave the word transliterated. The people [narod] and *narodnost'* [people's character] are probably the most stable concepts in the Russian world view.

What exactly is *narodnost'*, what is the "people" itself, from which this phrase crawls out with its persistent flight, and which has, like an aimless wanderer, entwined itself around the entire trunk of the new Russian history? "The people," means belonging to a certain nation: "The Russian people," "The Chinese people," etc. If it were only this, there would be no special charm or vitality in the word "people" and it would remain a pure Russian synonym for the international word 'nation' [natsija]. But Russian words differ from synonymous borrowings in that they irritate with their unspoken slyness. In the word 'people' there is something which allows one part of a nation, the greater and better part, to be separated from another, lesser and worse. The people is not the entire nation, but only its laboring part, which feeds itself and, moreover, preferably provides for itself by the simplest physical means. According to the definition of the Academy Dictionary, the 'people' is "the basic laboring mass of a country's population (in exploitative governments, oppressed by the ruling classes)." The office worker or scientist, police man or factory owner who works though barely provides for himself, does not belong to the people for he does not produce his daily bread, but all sorts of ceremonies, ideas, scraps of paper and fictions.

Thus the concept "people" is narrowed down to [zauzhivaet] the nodes of a fishing net which rakes out all of what is most worthy in the nation. But then, the concept of *narodnost'* expands these nodes. *Narodnost'* gives absolution to those who by birth and occupation do not belong to the people but have suffered and earned this right with an entirely politically conscious life. Pushkin, of course, was by birth far removed from the people but he became a genuine writer of the people, like Lermontov, Nekrasov, Tolstoj, not to mention the noblemen-revolutionaries, protectors burning with popular feeling [gorja narodnoro], who expressed the interests of the people even better than the people themselves.

(Mikhail Epstein, edited).

'Populism' was an aesthetics and poetics as well as a socio-philosophical trend in 19th century Russian culture which was appropriated by Soviet literary criticism as an ideologically accredited evaluation of Russian classical writers. "Narodnost'" appeared as a concept in 19th century Russian critical discourse in the wake of debates about the discrepancy between the "Russian people" and the "Russian intelligentsia" or *dvoryanstvo* (educated and landed middle class and upper class). This social disharmony was located in the imbalance between the European-educated Russian *dvoryanstvo*, felt since the reforms of Peter Great in the 17th century, and the common people or *narod*, who were mostly illiterate and bonded to the landed estates as serfs. The critique of the malaise of the upper class started with Petr Chaadayev's "Letters," and became a central theme of Russian 19th century literature and criticism through the topos of the "superfluous man" (lishnii chelovek), portrayed in Pushkin's novel in verse, "Eugene Onegin" and subsequent novels, from Gonchorav's "Oblomov" to the heroes of Turgenev's novels and stories. In "Eugene Onegin", Pushkin evoked the ideal of Russian *narodnost'* in the image of the

heroine, Tatiana, who was portrayed as the ethical compass of the Russian nation thanks to her adherence to 'folk' values, such as Russian folk customs, stories, the vernacular language and empathy with the Russian peasants, emblemized by her Nanny, based on Pushkin's real-life Nyanya. In Soviet times, narodnost' was apostatized into the highest aesthetic value of the socialist realist artistic production.

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