

tems have a similar effect. And urbanization forces these diverse groups into population centers, where they strive to dominate the workplace, media, and schools, which often results in the institution of quotas. More contact among ethnic groups does not necessarily increase their prospects for getting along. Modernity has not solved the old problems of keeping the peace in a multinational state; in many cases, it has only made them worse.

What can the Russian experience teach us? First, that we can only begin to deal with the reality of identity politics in multinational states by, as the Russians say, calling things by their right names. The Russian distinction between citizenship and nationality recognizes the reality of primary loyalties, cemented by the natural bonds of kinship, shared culture, and common experience. Only when we recognize that a Tatar is different from a Russian and that his loyalties will most likely remain centered on his own kind can we begin to recognize what civic membership—citizenship—can and cannot do. Thus, Russia recently tightened her requirements for acquiring citizenship and began making it difficult for aliens, especially those who are not proficient in the Russian language, to obtain residence cards. At the same time, Moscow is attempting to tighten control over Russia's borders and to work out a new relationship with the national republics.

The Russian experience teaches us that there are limits on the modern state's ability to assimilate ethnic groups: We may be able to create a common cultural space in which Cajuns and Swedes can become Americans, share in a common sense of civic identity, and yet retain many of their cultural distinctions. Absorbing millions of Third World immigrants, however, will strain the capacity of that space to accommodate mass populations who come from vastly different civilizations.

In the Old America, there were citizens who spoke German in Central Texas and Cajun in Southern Louisiana; Catholics who prospered within the common space of American Protestant culture; and patriotic Southern Americans who taught their own version of the War Between the States in local schools. If we are ever to recreate that place, for ourselves and our children, then curtailing Third World immigration is a necessary—but not sufficient—first step. For Middle Americans are being Sovietized in much the same way that the Russians were: A distorted, deracinated Americaniza-

tion—of Wal-Mart and McDonald's, of suburb-speak and microwaved meals, of de-Christianized "civic religion," and "national greatness conservatism"—is crippling our ability to fight the immigration battle, let alone recover our ethnic identities and reconstitute real communities. We cannot even understand the nature of such battles if our own sense of nationality has been distorted by Sovietization, which serves the ruling elite's political agenda of preserving its own power while destroying an authentic American identity. They, like Stalin, are most interested in Lenin's political question.

Wayne Allensworth is the author of *The Russian Question*.

Letter From London

by Andrei Navrozov

The Hole in the Heart



Morphine puts you to sleep, explains a pompous savant in Moliere, because it is a soporific. By this tautology is the great dead void at the core of Western civilization exposed, finally and, I dare say, mercilessly. What vitality, what resistivity, what transcendent stubbornness our spiritual truth once possessed ("Even if it were proven me that there is truth without Christ," wrote Dostoevsky, "I would still take Christ over truth"), they have been all but smothered by that kind of artless and airless scholasticism.

Catch adults in the act of explaining things to children. What an avalanche of arrogant verbosity do we see crashing about those innocent little heads! How shamelessly is the word *because* abused, whether the subject of instruction is volcanoes, onions, or angels! And note, incidentally, the ingenuous way the old have devised to educate the young in the sacred principles of causality: "Don't," they are ever warning them, "because . . ." Don't play with fire because you'll hurt yourself. Don't touch the vase because it'll fall and break. Don't go into the forest because it's easy to get lost there. And, when the child rummages in the hearth without getting burned, when the Chinese vase stands as before, or when a warm handful of wild strawberries is held up to

the skeptical snout, they just shrug. The statistics, they think, are on the side of the house.

Whenever *he* gets it wrong, the gambler has to pay. Not so with our culture, which seems to think it can be wrong as often as it likes, without ever having to pay a forfeit. Didn't you crucify your God? Lose Rome to the barbarians? Kill off half the adult population of Europe in a matter of decades? Ah, yes, well, but it all worked out in the end, because we aren't just individuals, you know. We're not some bunch of crazy gamblers. We are the institution, the corporation, the casino. We can lose without ever feeling the pain. There's always plenty of other suckers out there.

The Aristotelian *organon*, which has increasingly dominated our culture since the Renaissance and found its ultimate expression in the binary code of the computer, has had the effect of reducing Western thought to a game called "20 Rational Questions." Information, fragmented into bits fixed with A-or-not-A certitude, is used to describe the world with the pixel-pat cynicism of a television image. Yet the picture on the screen is but an artless, airless lie, a tendentious fiction, a mendacious tautology of cause and effect that leaves the substance of life almost totally unexplained. For can't a woman be ugly and alluring at the same time? Can't a tall, handsome grenadier behave as a vile coward, despite his manly moustache? Can't a saintly hermit plausibly seduce and then strangle a 12-year-old? Can't a dissident rabbi turn water into wine? Can't a rosy-cheeked Sicilian soprano, without a care in the world to speak of, embody human suffering in Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater*? Can't a person win big at roulette?

The practical applications of science—whence the philistine's concept of miracle is derived, just as his concept of pleasure, generally speaking, is derived from pornography—now have the world to themselves and are the gospels of the religion of rationalism. Which is not to say that the other, forgotten, losing religion, though based on the irrational premise of the transcendent miracle of life, was ever illogical. For instance, while it would be right to say that Abraham was given the Promised Land *because* he had come to believe in the promise, it would not be right to say that the Flood came *because* Noah had started building the Ark.

Apart from being undoubtedly evil—undoubtedly, at least, for those who know

whither the road paved with good intentions—Enlightenment ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity are, above all, rational ideals. Hope, faith, and charity are not. In fact, I would venture to argue that *nothing* in Christianity, beyond what is already contained in the salutary commandments of the Old Testament, is rational in this sense. How did it come to pass, then, that our professedly Christian, Western culture lost its intuitive moorings to become what it now is, a monstrous double of the pompous know-it-all in Moliere, an adding machine ever crunching meaningless numbers, a travesty-voiced robot spouting syllogistic banalities until the battery runs out and the eternal night of totalitarianism descends?

I'm not saying that we must all turn to Eastern mysticism, or try walking on water after a heavy lunch, or even be portrayed by Francis Bacon in attitudes expressive of inner torment. But come on, live a little! Let the careless child burn his fingers playing with matches. Let the faithful adoring wife go on worshipping her husband, the idler in a spotted cravat who is secretly taking all her jewelry to the pawnbrokers. Let the clueless dreamer have a go at saving the fallen woman, who is using his driver's license to rent the getaway car for a bank heist. Let the frustrated poet take the stretch limousine to the Pieria of green baize, where he may or may not lose his shirt of cambric linen.

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, judge for yourselves. If our civilization has so botched the job of saving itself collectively, if our culture has proved itself so unfit to defend itself rationally, who is to say that the individual child, woman, or man will not be luckier beyond the confines of reason? For life, in the only form in which it is worth living, is as spontaneous, unpredictable, and complex as the components of the sacred flame in which Christianity incinerated its heretics, in contrast to the chemically pure Zyklon gas later used by the rational West to affirm its total power over the divine play of chance and the unknowable that is the human spirit.

The Russian emigré biographer of Dostoevsky, Mark Slonim, had this to say of the writer's "gambling madness":

Roulette fascinated him as a door to the irrational, as a way of communing with the accidental; fortune and misfortune at the wheel did not obey the laws of reason and were akin to those unknowable pri-

mordial beginnings of the universe when there existed neither morality nor the limits of Euclidean space. It also gave him the chance to correct the injustices of birth, of position, of poverty, and of circumstances by a single spectacular stroke of luck, a singular challenge to fate. And was not the whole process of gambling a challenge to the oppressive inevitable, an escape into the delicious lawlessness of free action and untrammelled chance?

"Lucky at the tables," they say, "unlucky in love," and there is great wisdom in this observation, essentially a paraphrase of Matthew 6:21: "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Like roulette, love is the thirst for manifest miracle, yet of the old-fashioned, gospel kind; no flat-screen TVs and vaccines for AIDS, please. Logically (and, as I said, we gamblers have our own logic even as the prophets have theirs), it happened that no sooner did the 46-year-old Dostoevsky marry his stenographer—*because* he needed her collaboration to meet publishers' deadlines for both *The Gambler* and *Crime and Punishment* simultaneously, *because* he needed the cash for gambling, *because* she was then only 20—than he fell in love with her, desperately, tenderly, and absolutely.

But once chance starts smiling, laughing, giving, there is soon no room on the table or in the pockets, as the skies open and the miracles come like a rainstorm in midsummer, absurdly generous, profligate even, reviving the parched, cracked earth and turning the hot stone of the air to fragrant wine of the Bekaa:

I quietly whisper: *I thank thee,
Thou givest far more than is asked.*

They lived happily ever after—at least for 14 years, those of *The Possessed* and *The Idiot*—until the writer's death in 1881. Anna Snitkina became, according to Slonim, the last great love of Dostoevsky's life and the only lucky one. Soon after their first child was born, he played roulette, at Wiesbaden, for the last time. "After his death," Slonim writes,

Anna Grigoryevna [Dostoevskaya] remained faithful to her husband. In the year he died she was just 35, but believed her life as a woman completed and dedicated herself to

serving his name. She produced his complete works, in 1906 compiled a 5000-item bibliography of his writings, organized the Moscow Historical Museum department of manuscripts, memoirs, and portraits, founded the Dostoevsky School at Staraya Russa, collected his notes and letters, encouraged his friends to write his biography, and published her own recollections.

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, what is your rational verdict? Is this winning *big* at roulette, or what?

Andrei Navrozov is *Chronicles' European correspondent.*

Letter From Belgrade

by Srdja Trifkovic

Privatization in Serbia



In articles dealing with the 2002 presidential election in Serbia, I have made passing references to Zoran Djindjic as "Serbia's kleptocratic prime minister" and to his "corrupt establishment" that "controls the economy and the media more stringently than Milosevic had ever done." While such designations would be considered unremarkable by most of Serbia's impoverished and disheartened people, they raised an eyebrow or two among some foreign Yugoslavia-watchers who still believe that Mr. Djindjic is a "pro-Western, reformist" politician whose program of privatization may prove painful at first but will eventually lead Serbia to prosperity and a free-market system.

That is wishful thinking. Mr. Djindjic, his privatization minister Aleksandar Vlahovic, and about a dozen members of their inner coterie are in the process of turning Serbia's state industries into their own private assets by means that would be considered criminal in most Western countries. Take the announcement by Mr. Vlahovic last October that the Zastava car factory in Kragujevac would be sold to an American buyer. According to Reuters,

Zastava became well-known as pro-