

demonstration to prevent the sale of Baba Seva's apartment. Andrei's resulting political revelations are simple but potent: "Cute cafés were not the problem, but they were also not, as I'd once apparently thought, the opposite of the problem. Money was the problem....Private property, possessions, the fact that some people had to suffer so that others could live lives of leisure: that was the problem. And that there were intellectual arguments ardently justifying this—that was a bigger problem still."

Money is a problem, especially in Gessen's fiction. Reading it, you learn exactly how much any commodity costs at a particular moment, whether it's a car ride, a drink on a date, or a cup of coffee. This fixation with money is personal as well as political: Gessen has written openly about the financial challenges he faces as a writer, and in his reflections on teaching undergraduate fiction writers, he has noted, only half-jokingly, that some students fail to imagine how their characters could sur-

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vive financially. The members of October are also acutely aware of how much everything costs. They come from families who are "barely hanging on" in capitalist Russia. They are precariously employed and can't afford to live without roommates.

This doesn't mean their present lives are all struggle and disappointment. To the contrary, when Andrei begins dating Yulia, he discovers a new Moscow, one full of affordable cafés, bookstores, critical theory, and romantic intimacy. "It was the Moscow I had once hoped existed but couldn't find," he remarks. "Now here it was." Gessen's achievement is to show, with warmth and humor, how a person's political awakening expands his entire world.

THE SAD YOUNG literary men (and women) in *A Terrible Country* don't study Marx, or deliver lectures on neoliberalism, simply to show off for love interests or to earn fame. (That said, impressing women, or men, is not a bad reason to start organizing—many an activist biography begins with a crush.) They demonstrate true political commitment: several of the characters go to prison for resisting Putin's regime. Gessen also understands how personal affection sustains and informs this commitment. He portrays the relationships within October as of a piece with the group's organizing, rather than as peripheral to it. The novel assumes that political solidarity is, at its base, simply caring deeply for other people, those you know intimately and those you don't.

And so, all at once, Andrei falls in love with a woman, a country, and a political cause. But Gessen, unlike Andrei, is no naïf. No political revolution has ever come about easily, or without great personal sacrifice. Andrei makes a miscalculation at a protest that has drastic consequences for his friends. Shortly afterward, a job at Columbia University and a subsidized apartment in New York magically materialize. (The novel's representation of academic life occasionally beggars belief.) Now benefiting from the same job market that nearly destroyed him, he writes op-eds on behalf of Russia's political dissidents and delivers public lectures while his friends suffer in labor colonies.

One can hardly fault Andrei for choosing a comfortable life in New York over a difficult life in Moscow. And yet, like Andrei himself, one is left with admiration for uncompromising activists who live their politics and suffer as they do so. *A Terrible Country* is not exactly a hopeful book about political protest, but neither it is a fatalistic one. Instead, it suggests what resistance might mean, not as a slogan, but as a life. ▢

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Chapter & Verse

Correspondence on not-so-famous lost words

Sarah Jaquay recalls her parents joking about a quip made during the lengthy negotiations in Paris to end the Vietnam War. The delegates quibbled about everything from the shape of the table to the refreshments, and a humorist suggested that if the talks were being held in Akron (or some other Ohio city), the war would end quickly. ("Perhaps a savvy diplomat remembered this quote," she adds, "because the Dayton Accords—negotiated at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base—ended the war in Bosnia much more expeditiously.") She asks if anyone can identify the humorist (possibly Art Buchwald), and specify what was said.

Ken Agran seeks the source of "She burned too bright [or "brightly"] for this world." Online searches suggest Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*—the sentence, he reports, is sometimes linked to another, "She was a wild, wicked slip of a girl..." from that novel's fifth chapter—but a keyword search fails to find the

"burned too bright..." description anywhere in the full text.

Le Corbusier on "democracy" (May-June). Dan Rosenberg cites "Corbu," a Sky Line article by Brendan Gill in the May 9, 1988, *New Yorker*, that includes "an extremely (perhaps implausibly) long quotation" from the architect and occasional Corbusier collaborator Max Abramovitz ending: "In so many ways, Corbu was all but impossible to deal with, but at least he had a sense of humor. I remember his saying to me once, in French, 'Ah, yes, democracy is a fine thing as long as you have a dictator at the top!'" Rosenberg adds, "But we should keep in mind that in the segue from 'sense of humor,' Abramovitz was signaling that Corbusier might have said this at least partly tongue-in-cheek."

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