

Life In-Between: Migration and Popular Culture in Late Imperial Russia

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When Semen Kanatchikov, a young peasant migrant, started work in a Moscow pattern shop in the mid-1890s, his worker-comrades let him know just what they thought of peasants. Peasants wore high boots and bowl-cut hair; they were cheap-skates, always looking for a free drink; they were tied to their homes and wives, big-bosomed women in red calico sarafans. Worse, they were inept pattern makers, as characterized in this joke that a worker told in mock-peasant dialect.

“Vaniukha, Vaniukha! Did you cut off a length of board?”

“Sure I cut it, but it came out too short!”

“By very much?”

“Just by a straw.”

“Well, that’s all right, it can be stretched with a nail.”

“It can’t be stretched.”

“How come?”

“Because I also cut the board it fits against, a straw too short.”¹

The guffaws of Kanatchikov’s comrades reinforced the lesson: there were peasants, and there were workers. The distinction made a deep impression; in fact, a major theme of Kanatchikov’s memoirs was his “coming to consciousness,” ceasing to be a peasant and becoming a worker. The distinction was not limited to workshop interactions; it fueled political rivalries up till and beyond the October Revolution.

Historians have kept the distinction alive by describing popular consciousness from either the worker or peasant perspective—examining the maintenance or breakdown of old peasant identities, and the creation of new working-class identities. Since culture is anchored in specific places and times, the opposition is productive and real. Evidence available to us encourages the bias; contemporary observers were based in either the city or the country, rarely both, and were inclined to record peasant and urban cultures as if they were hermetic, discrete phenomena, ignoring or condemning evidence of interpenetration.

Social categories were not so discrete, however. The old boundary between city

¹ Reginald E. Zelnik, ed. and trans., *A Radical Worker in Tsarist Russia: The Autobiography of Semen Ivanovich Kanatchikov* (Stanford, 1986), 22.

and country was crossed by urban migrants, bringing into contact cultures that had once led separate existences. In the city and the country, social barriers broke down and changed, and identities became unstable and transitional.² The social dimensions of these facts have been described, but their implications for popular culture have not been fully explored. Members of the lower classes often lived in between the peasantry and workers, the village and the city, belonging fully to neither. The question occupying them was not so much how to maintain old identities or to “come to consciousness” in a new identity; but how to negotiate the space in between.

History has been written in terms of identity, not lack of identity; we need to describe the in-between states and integrate them into history. Urban migration played a fundamental role in the development of lower-class culture and consciousness in late nineteenth-century Russia. This held true not only for migrants but also for villagers who stayed behind, and for permanent city dwellers. Migration threatened city order and eroded traditions in the village, and it was a theme central to post-Emancipation popular culture. How did this shape the ways people saw the world around them? Where did it tell them they belonged? How did this influence their allegiances and actions?

The purpose of this article is to examine popular culture for indications of how unsettled and contradictory lower-class consciousness and identities could be. The focus will be on an issue that was of particular historical import: perceptions of class relations. There has been a general, and not unfounded, assumption of lower-class resentment against the upper-classes; history has been written in reference to its explosion in 1905 and 1917. The resentment no doubt existed; but writing history with an eye to the future has obscured tendencies that made events unpredictable for contemporaries. Resentment against the upper classes in popular culture existed alongside, and was often dominated by, antipathy toward other groups within the lower classes. The urban tensions represented in popular entertainments were caused far more by the collision of lower-class cultures. The collisions were played out over the question of identity; and the terms of the conflict were moral, not social.

Popular entertainments, whose existence paralleled migratory patterns in post-Emancipation Russia, offer unique insights into popular life. They were products of the city (*lubki*, for instance, were a famous product of Moscow's Nikolsky Street), but also present in village life, where they were consumed, retold and interpreted.

² Recent social and culture historians have explored the porous relations. See Robert Johnson, *Peasant and Proletarian: The Working Class in Moscow in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New Brunswick, 1979); Barbara Alpern Engel, *Between the Fields and the City: Women, Work and Family in Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); idem, “Russian Peasant Views of City Life, 1861–1914,” *Slavic Review* 52 (Fall, 1993): 446–59; idem, “The Woman's Side: Male Outmigration and the Family Economy in Kostroma Province,” *Slavic Review* 45 (Summer 1986). See also Stephen P. Frank, “Confronting the Domestic Other: Rural Popular Culture and Its Enemies in Fin-de-Siècle Russia,” in *Cultures in Flux: Lower-Class Values, Practices and Resistance in Late Imperial Russia*, ed. Stephen P. Frank and Mark D. Steinberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 74–76; Frank, “‘Simple Folk, Savage Customs’? Youth, Sociability, and the Dynamics of Culture in Rural Russia, 1856–1914,” *Journal of Social History* 25 (Summer 1992); Joan Neuberger, *Hooliganism: Crime, Culture and Power in St. Petersburg, 1900–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); and Mark Steinberg, *Moral Communities: The Culture of Class Relations in the Russian Printing Industry, 1867–1907* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

Popular culture came into being with the advent of an urban industrial economy, which made possible the production and distribution of the literature, and created audiences for other entertainments. Consumers cut across the lower-middle range of Russian society, and could be found in most classes. Itinerant peddlars (*ofeni*) distributed *lubki* to most populated points of the vast empire, including some isolated villages.³ Though many educated Russians claimed that popular culture harmed the people, it offers much to historians. Organized by city people, popular presses and entertainments reflected broad ranges of popular opinion through an intimate knowledge of consumer tastes.⁴

Popular culture provides insight into the minds of its consumers, but we cannot assume that it coincides with popular consciousness. First, the notion of a popular reader or audience is problematic.⁵ Though educated contemporaries were wrong to deem *lubki*, *chastushki* and vaudevilles alien to the people, we cannot assume the opposite, a seamless relationship between consumer and creator. Popular entertainments were not objective reports of their audience; while they were shaped by popular perceptions, they also shaped them. Publishers, consumers and writers came from different classes and places; they had different life experiences; and their interests varied. The ability of different audiences to create their own interpretations further complicates any single, homogenous “popular reading.” Besides, popular texts were fictional, and fictional in a way that encouraged the stereotypical, even the fantastic. Statements that a historian might conveniently assign to social experience were often gestures to artistic convention. *Chastushki* were a quick mirror of cultural change, but they were also subject to conventions that encouraged impertinence over tradition. Their historic significance was no more in what they said than in the fact that, as a genre, they replaced traditional expressions.⁶ Catriona Kelly has suggested several other reasons not to trust direct interpretations of popular culture: the blurred depiction of social roles; contradictory messages within and between times; and the ability of creators and audiences to maintain an ironic distance from representations.⁷

Regardless of the complexity of reading these—or any—texts, it is clear that popular culture responded to, and was in dialogue with, many social changes in late

³ A. S. Prugavin, *Zaprosy naroda i obiazannosti intelligentsii v oblasti prosveshcheniia i vospitaniia*, 2d rev. ed (1890; St. Petersburg, 1895). See also Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature 1861–1917* (Princeton, 1985), 269–95.

⁴ Daniel Brower points to a keen consciousness of the reader in the market-driven press of the time (“The Penny Press and Its Readers,” in *Cultures in Flux*, 147–49).

⁵ Besides Prugavin, contemporary writers on the topic were V. N. Marakuev, *Chto chital i chitaet russkii narod: Publichnoe chtenie 9 marta, 1884 g., v Politekhničeskome muzei* (Moscow, 1886); E. Nekrasova, *Narodnye knigi dlia chteniia v ikh 25-letnei bor'be s lubochnymi izdaniiami* (Viatka, 1902); and S. A. An-skii [Rappaport], *Očerki narodnoi literatury* (St. Petersburg, 1894).

⁶ For *chastushki* see V. I. Simakov, ed., *Sbornik derevenskikh chastushek* (Iaroslavl', 1913); and E. N. Eleonskaia, ed., *Sbornik velikorusskikh chastushek* (Moscow, 1914). On these genres as reflectors of change see Anthony Netting, “Images and Ideas in Russian Peasant Life,” *Slavic Review* 35 (Spring 1976); and Frank, “Simple Folk.”

⁷ Catriona Kelly, “‘Better Halves’? Representations of Women in Russian Urban Popular Entertainments, 1870–1910,” in *Women and Society in Russia and the Soviet Union*, ed. Linda Edmondson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 9, 21.

nineteenth-century Russia. Migration inspired a broad range of themes, and these themes touched upon shifting social allegiances. The materials do not allow us to establish the opinions of migrants and peasants; but they do indicate popular criteria for interpreting experience. Contemporary politicians, activists and intellectuals had unique tools for analysing social experience, as do historians today. Unique habits of perception and analysis emerge from popular culture as well. They reveal much about the changing relationship between society and individuals, and defy many expectations about the role of class in personal identity. Cultural constructions of class seem to have been different from social constructions. Often they were parallel and similar, but frequently they were at odds. Since these categories were influential in the social evolution of late imperial Russia, they bear examination.

Migration and the transition to city life were momentous issues for popular audiences, appearing in a variety of genres, and subject to many interpretations. For migrants who became acculturated, gained an urban proletarian identity, and reached a stage of consciousness at which writing their memoirs seemed worthwhile, the village past was something to leave behind. The memoirists were usually worker-activists—so-called “proletarian writers”—marked by a militant working-class consciousness, who purposely stood apart from lower-class culture.⁸ Yet the tensions they felt in relation to their peasant past were mirrored in entertainments that lacked the activists’ clarity of purpose. Migrants of all sorts fascinated audiences from the 1860s up to the First World War. Pilgrims, wandering beggars and cripples were a source of great concern to social reformers, and their territories within cities were staple settings for popular literature.⁹ These types represented the threshold between city and country, decent and indecent society, social mobility and permanent poverty—the lines of anxiety for transitional urban classes. Transitional settings, which acted as theaters for dialogues on city and country life, allowed readers to act out the migratory experience—either in anticipation of the future, or as cleansing from the past.

Attitudes were particularly ambivalent when they concerned urban marketplaces. Markets, such as Moscow’s famed Khitrov Market, or Petersburg’s Haymarket, were often the first hostel for newcomers or the last refuge for the lost. They were also the urban sites most likely to gather members of many classes together with little regulation by authorities. For reformers and the writers of thick journals and hard-cover books, marketplaces were usually stages for the tragedy of the lower classes.¹⁰ From the 1864 publication of Vsevolod Krestovskii’s novel, *The Slums of*

⁸In addition to Kanatchikov’s memoirs see the memoirs collected in E. A. Korol’chuk, ed., *V nachale puti: Vospominaniia peterburgskikh rabochikh, 1872–1897 gg.* (Leningrad, 1975); and Victoria Bonnell, *The Russian Worker: Life and Labor under the Tsarist Regime* (Berkeley, 1983). See also Reginald E. Zelnik, “Russian Bebels,” *Russian Review* 35 (July 1976); and Mark D. Steinberg, “Worker-Authors and the Cult of the Person,” in *Cultures in Flux*.

⁹Studies on wandering pilgrims proliferated in the 1860s and 1870s. See Joseph Bradley, *Muzhik and Muscovite: Urbanization in Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley, 1985), 253–54.

¹⁰For a bibliography of contemporary journalism see *ibid.*, 273–81; and Daniel R. Brower, *The Russian City between Tradition and Modernity, 1850–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 80. For the Haymarket see Hubertus Jahn, “The End of St. Petersburg: The Haymarket Area and the

Petersburg, to the 1902 Moscow Arts production of Gorky's *Lower Depths*, educated audiences showed a keen interest in migrants' poverty, and a willingness to shed a tear for their misfortune. *Lubok* writers took an entirely different tack, less distanced, but because of that, often less sympathetic. Their market settings were usually dens of thieves; people lived there not because of poverty and misfortune, but because of their own vices. These were not the victims of society, but victimizers. The characters subject to this judgment cut across class lines, ranging from brazen clerks to inveterate robbers; almost universally, they exploited their less wary brethren. Their lives were the object of more revulsion than pity:

It was dark and gloomy in one of Khitrov Market's many dirty corners. A woman, and a young man with a drunken physiognomy. The air stank of sweat and rotten eggs, and was filled with the snoring of vagrants.

The young man woke.

"Marfushka, Marfushka," he said.

The woman next to him awoke. "What, anathema, why aren't you asleep?"

"Listen, cholera, are you going to leave Stepka Golopup or not?"

"Not on your life."

"Drop dead."¹¹

The characterization changed little over a fifty-year period; and it was unaffected by the political or social sympathies of the writer. Misha Evstigneev, an educated man who dominated the *lubok* market in the 1860s, described the local color of the flea market and Gostinnyi Dvor; Mikhail Zotov, who showed great sympathy for unskilled workers in his post-1905 *lubki*, described the hopeless drunkards and vicious thieves of Khitrov.¹² Representations of village life in popular and educated culture also differed.¹³ Popular representations avoided many of the polarizations that marked educated discussion. The village was not idealized, nor was it depicted as a source of ignorance. An issue of concern to educated readers, society's culpability for rural decline, seemed irrelevant. Rural decline and vice were certainly depicted, often with enthusiasm and in great detail, but the issue was framed in moral terms, rather than the social terms common to educated discourse. The ability of peasant characters to be evil remained constant from the 1880s up to the Revolution; their anger and resentment were explained by innate character flaws, often exacerbated by alcohol. Writers specializing in the theme were among those most aware of popular tastes. Pavel Bogatyrev, idol of lower-class Moscow vaudevilles in the 1870s and 1880s, sang songs of the urban low-life, in which he was known to indulge himself (he eventually

Myth of a Well-Ordered City" (Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Honolulu, Hawaii, 1993).

¹¹ Don Bocharo, *Van'ka Kain na Khitrovom rynke (istinnnye proisshestvie)* (Moscow, 1909), 3–4.

¹² A. Nesterov and M. Evstigneev, *Panorama tolkuchego rynka* (St. Petersburg, 1858); M. Zotov, *Geroi Moskovskikh trushchob Aleshka Proidi-svet i Nastia gor'kaia* (Moscow, 1908). A more complex treatment was M. Zotov, *Prikliuchenie s Azefom v peterburgskikh trushchobakh* (Moscow, 1909). The themes were a staple of vaudeville until the World War. See Graf Lapotochkin, *Sovremennye Ivany: Komicheskii sbornik narodnykh russkikh kupletov, duetov i pesen dlia peniia pod balalaiku* (Moscow, 1913).

¹³ For educated representations of the village and peasants see Cathy Frierson, *Peasant Icon: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

died a penniless alcoholic).¹⁴ He also wrote stories for the boulevard newspapers *Moskovskii listok* and *Moskovskaia gazeta*. His *Good-Hearted Mikolaich* described a peasant who drank himself into poverty, drank away his children's food money during a famine, prostituted his wife to the local tavern owner for more wine, then abandoned his family for the city, where he died. Another popular writer, Al. Aleksandrovskii (author of *The Wedding Night of a Father and Daughter*), described in his *How the Lasses Burned a Lad in the Stove: A Christmas Tale* a working bee of peasant girls who, from boredom, impale a local boy and toss him in the oven.¹⁵ The peasant-girl protagonist is so cold-blooded as to leave no doubt to the source of her evil: her own character.

"I thought up a trick for Yashka," said Akulka, "we'll get rid of him forever." And she told the girls about her hellish plan. They all agreed to it. Then she brought in an armful of stakes and an axe. Work went fast under the strong hands of the healthy girl. She sharpened about ten stakes, and then opened the cellar trap near the front door. Work was completed in half an hour: the girls buried the stakes with the points up and shut the trap door.

The door opened and Yashka, crossing over the threshold, stepped forward out of the shadows.

"Eeek! Yi-i-ikes, I'm done for," the unfortunate moaned in a barely audible voice, and soon fell quiet.

Akulka quickly slammed the trap shut and lit the fire. Everyone was as pale as a ghost. Horror and the consciousness of an irreparable wrong bound their tongues.

"What're we going to do with him now?" one girl said timidly.

"Let's burn him up in the stove, and no one will be the wiser," answered Akulka, "we'll just need more wood. It's early yet though, so that nobody can guess. We'll stoke the fire near midnight, and then pile the wood high!"

Everyone raced outside and grabbed an armful of wood.¹⁶

Popular culture often showed a great awareness of urban-rural tensions, demonstrated by an early recognition that village culture had been penetrated by the city. The literary tradition of lower-class types ran back to the eighteenth-century sentimentalists, most prominently Karamzin, and was reworked in the 1840s in thick journals.¹⁷ Parallel themes could be met in popular culture, in a trickle from 1840, and then a flood by the late 1860s, when a growing readership created greater de-

¹⁴ On Bogatyrev see Ivan Belousov, *Ushedshaia Moskva: Zapiski po lichnym vospominaniiam s nachala 1870 godov* (Moscow, [1927]), 79; and the introduction to P. I. Bogatyrev, *Luchinushka: Rasskaz* (Moscow, 1892).

¹⁵ P. I. Bogatyrev, *Mikolaich, dobraia dusha: Rasskaz* (Moscow, 1888); Al. Aleksandrovskii, *Kak devki sozhgli parnia v pechke: Sviatochnyi rasskaz* (Moscow, 1911). For similar characters see Foma Balagurov, *Zhenushka-zolotoe donyshko: Razskaz iz narodnogo byta* (Moscow, 1910); Heine of Tiflis, *Nevinnaia devushka v kogtiakh razvrata, ili pod krasnym fonarem* (Moscow, 1910); and Prokholdimets, *Marfushka syshchik* (Moscow, 1909).

¹⁶ Aleksandrovskii, *Kak devki*, 8–9.

¹⁷ See Hans Rogger, *National Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (Cambridge, MA, 1960), 127–86. Important collections in the 1840s were *Fiziologiia Peterburga* (St. Petersburg, 1845); and *Peterburgskii sbornik* (St. Petersburg, 1846). For the tradition of physiological sketches see M. V. Otradin, ed., *Peterburg v russkom ocherke XIX veka* (Leningrad, 1984).

mand. Two characteristics were remarkable: how differently popular types were treated, particularly the type of the citified peasant; and how consciously popular literature marked itself off from high literature. A language of types was developed in the mid-1860s by popular writers such as Evstigneev and Nester Oko. They introduced urban slang, such as the verb *напистериться* (to become piter-ized), to describe the process of acculturation. Though educated literature might have seen village culture—which was frequently idealized—as a source of positive values, the attitude in popular literature was mostly negative: peasant culture was best left behind in the village. A vocabulary of contempt greeted migrants who did not; in fact, the deadliest insult among migrants was «деревенщина» (country hick), which entered *lubki* thirty years before Kanatchikov heard it. Well-adjusted city dwellers in *lubki* were often mistrustful, hard-edged, even insolent, such as this cook, who disdained her “more peasant” peers.

Stepanida held court one day in the five-and-ten store; she was a true virago (*boi-baba*), not at all like Maria [the peasant type cook]. She would only take work in the homes of submissive people, who gave her full freedom of action. True, she knew her job well, and she had nothing to learn from anyone, but then again she didn't mind drinking up anything she could scrimp from the shopping money; and she invited her friends over whether or not her masters minded. She could also be pretty cheeky and rude—so that she was often without a position.¹⁸

Another favorite type were cabbies, who specialized in fleecing newcomers.¹⁹

There was a clear assumption, borne out elsewhere in popular life, that city life changed peasants, often alienating them from the village.²⁰ The tension between city folk and their country cousins predated Emancipation, and it was not unique to Russia. A set piece in the print and stage entertainments of all urban classes was a debate between an incoming peasant and a cabbie or butler (city types) concerning the relative merits of city and country life.²¹ The factory (*fabrika*), where semi-industrial production attracted incoming peasants, was where the tension was most pronounced. Migrants underwent a rough transition: they were cut off from the close ties of family and village; forced into new patterns of work; subjected to a different economic and social hierarchy. Each aspect of the transition pushed migrants to learn a new and confusing culture of interaction. Often, they were punished for missteps, both by their employers and by fellow workers who delighted in tormenting new hands. Kanatchikov remembered when “the skilled workers looked down on me with

¹⁸ Nestor Oko, *Voina kukharki s barynei, ili nashla kosa na kamen'*: *Peterburgskaia istoriika*, 2d ed. (Moscow, 1866), 13.

¹⁹ See also M. Evstigneev, *Iskusstvo zhit' na chuzhoi shchet v Moskve* (Moscow, 1868). Cabbie stories were a specialty of the actor Ivan Gorbunov; for example, “Iamshchiki,” in *Novyi smekhotvor: Iumoristicheskii al'bom s karrikaturami. Vypusk pervyi* (St. Petersburg, 1876), 2.

²⁰ Engel, “Russian Peasant Views,” 449–53.

²¹ “O dvoretskom bol'shogo barina i muzhik,” in *Starichok vesel'chak razskazyvaiushchii davnies Moskovskie byli*, 3d ed. (1790; Moscow, 1837); Fedot Kuzmichev, “Moskovskie samogudy: Narodnaia byl', ili razgovor izvoshchika s muzhikom,” in *Sto dvadtsat' skazok i basen, fantasticheskikh, allegoricheskikh, volshebnykh, satiricheskikh, razskazov romanicheskikh, prichudy liudei i vsekh bogachei, v devyati chastiiakh* (Moscow, 1841).

scorn, pinched me by the ear, pulled me by the hair, called me a 'green country bumpkin' and other insulting names."²²

The migrant transition represented in popular culture was, in many ways, rougher than that experienced by most migrants. Many urban migrants in Russia found the transition eased by workers hailing from their villages or regions (*zemliaki*), who served as buffers.²³ This mitigating system was ignored in popular culture. There were occasional acknowledgments; for instance, the most successful migrants in *lubki* were Iaroslav peasants, whose real-life *zemliak* associations were highly developed.²⁴ Yet the process was as likely to be parodied, as in *How Workers from the Putilov Factory Taught the Devil Their Trade*, the tale of a demon adopted by Iaroslav *zemliaki*, who get him drunk, subject him to the worst sides of factory life, and abandon him to his fate in the city.²⁵ The migrant's arrival in the city was almost always depicted as a wrenching experience; conversely, the trip home to the village (though not the village itself) was idealized. A best-selling tale in post-Emancipation years was Fedor Shalaev's *Journey on the Bast Track*, concerning a moneyless migrant's walk back to the village for the winter.²⁶ In this story, the trip was a journey through an ideal society, in which the journeyers were fed, housed and employed along the road freely, without distrust or tension.

The tension between city and country cousins, according to the conventions of popular culture, was most often resolved unhappily. Models for successful integration seemed rare. Success stories were unchanged throughout the second half of the century, almost always warning migrants to remember their roots or beware. The words of this dying father to his son in a 1852 tale were echoed for the next forty years:

Let me give you this advice,
Don't set foot in Peter[sburg],
Everyone knows that in the capital
There's enough folk without you;
Furthermore, you are a fool,

²² Zelnik, *A Radical Worker*, 8. See also Belousov, *Ushedshaia Moskva*, 14–17; Steinberg, *Moral Communities*, 68–72; and Bradley, *Muzhik and Muscovite*, 117–18.

²³ Johnson, *Peasant and Proletarian*, 67–80; Charters Wynn, *Workers, Strikes and Pogroms: The Donbass-Dnepr Bend in Late-Imperial Russia, 1870–1905* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 48–52; Bonnell, *Russian Worker*, 81; Brower, *Russian City*, 80–81; Jeffrey Burds, "The Social Control of Peasant Labor in Russia: The Response of Village Communities to Labor Migration in the Central Industrial Region, 1861–1905," in *Peasant Economy, Culture and Politics of European Russia, 1800–1921*, ed. E. Kingston-Mann and T. Mixter (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 87–94.

²⁴ A. Bakhtiariev, *Briukho Peterburga: Obshchestvenno-fiziologicheskie ocherki* (St. Petersburg, 1888), 192–94. For Iaroslavites in *lubok* literature see M. Evstigneev, *Iaroslavka v stolitse: Veselyi rasskaz* (Moscow, 1871); Kuz'ma Fedor Ivanich, *Ai, da iaroslavtsy! Vot tak narodets! Pravdivyi razskaz o tom, kak odin iaroslavets prishel peshkom v Piter, nadul cherta, odurachil nemtsa, sdelsia bufetchikom i zhenilsia na starostikhinoi dochke i Pokhozheniia iaroslavskogo goriuna Proidokhi*, 3d ed. (St. Petersburg, 1868) [thanks to Jeffrey Brooks for this story]. Catriona Kelly, *Petrushka: The Russian Carnival Puppet Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 94, points out that the puppet Petrushka (Punch) was by origin from Iaroslav.

²⁵ M. Zotov, *Kak masterovoi Putilovskogo i Mytishchenskogo zavoda obuchal cherta na tokarnom stanke* (Moscow, 1910).

²⁶ F. K. Shalaev, *Novoe puteshestvie na lipovoi mashine s odnim rublem za 1000 verst*, 4th ed. (St. Petersburg, 1874). The book went through at least seventeen reprints from 1870 to 1903. On a similar theme see M. Zotov, *V Moskvu iz Pitera po shpalam: Rasskaz iz zhizni bezrabotnykh* (Moscow, 1911).

And you'll get into quite a scrape.
 Stay behind here in our hut,
 And stay away from evil people . . .
 Don't forget your father's words,
 If you go to Peter[sburg],
 You will perish . . . ²⁷

As Jeffrey Brooks has noted, the theme evoked particular ambivalence when it touched on the question of ambition, which often alienated migrants decisively from their village community.²⁸ The story of *Vasiutka the Orphan Boy* illustrates a common moral. Vasiutka, who lives unappreciated and abused by his foster parents, finally abandons the village and goes to the city to seek his fortune. In the factory he holds aloof from the worker rabble who prey on him, educates himself, and rises through the ranks. But Vasiutka is a goody-two-shoes who ends up badly when he tries to go beyond his station. He falls in love with the foreman's daughter, a vain city girl who prefers the attentions of a vapid clerk, and ends up hanging himself when he is spurned.²⁹

Changes undergone in the city were central to popular culture in the late nineteenth century. *Chastushki* offered a variety of attitudes held by city folk about the country, and by country folk about the city. Attitudes could be both positive and negative, as seen below:

All those blasted sorts of vodka	Back home they want to marry me off,
Taught me how to drink liquor.	And make me live in the village.
And that far, unfamiliar place	I'll remain a bachelor,
Taught me life can be so bad.	And not say goodbye to Moscow. ³⁰

For all the attention given the topic, the most striking tendency was to depict the changes in moral, not social terms. Storytelling, particularly in linear narratives such as the *lubki*, requires some sort of explanation for the development of a character. The overwhelming—but not absolute—tendency in *lubki* was to describe the progress or decline of a character in terms of its internal, moral character; and to find explanations for the change in innate qualities. City life, an inherently corrupting influence, was not the ultimate cause, but it gave flawed characters every opportunity to realize their worst potential.

Here was some crossover between popular culture, journalism and high liter-

²⁷ P. Tatarinov, *Fomushka v Pitere, ili glupomu synu ne v pomoshch' bogatstvo: Skazka pokhozhaia na byl'* (St. Petersburg, 1852), 8–9. See also P. S. Kuklin, peasant, *Blagorazumnyi i trudoliubivyi syn tekushchikh vremen ostavshiisia sirotai v mladenchestve: Razskaz iz krest'ianskogo byta s prisovokupleniem raznykh stikhotvorenii* (Moscow, 1883); and Foma Balagur, *Petia trubochist, soboi cheren, dushoi chist: Razskaz* (Moscow, 1904). On the same tension as it played out in court cases see Engel, "Russian Peasant Views," 449–53.

²⁸ Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read*, 269–94.

²⁹ *Bobyli'-Vasiutka, povest' iz fabrichnogo byta* (Moscow, 1874). See parallel themes in *Kukel': Fabrichnaia krasavitsa. Razskaz* (Moscow, 1897).

³⁰ Simakov, *Sbornik derevenskikh chastushek*, 549–53. The editors classified *chastushki* dealing with migrant peasants under the rubric of "hooliganism."

ature.³¹ Educated attitudes could reach popular audiences, as in the plays of Nikolai Polushin, a Tolstoyan populist who enjoyed long runs in popular theaters run by municipal authorities. He saw the city as a den of turpitude alien to the unspoiled peasant. In plays like *Whirlpool, or Rode into the City, But Carried Out Home*, or his *Search Not in the Village, But in Yourself*, he depicted peasants who had fallen into sin in the city. The men drank and played cards; the women bought fancy clothes and gallivanted with men.³² Educated writers such as Tolstoy and Gorky also had a solid popular readership; Nekrasov attained popularity when his poems were put to music, and a respectable range of other opinions (more often the conservative than the liberal) reached popular readers through the newspapers.

Popular culture did not have the vocabulary of social analysis that could be found in educated literature, yet the questions raised there were very similar. Urban transition was almost always discussed in connection with criminality, and it was in crime narratives that attitudes toward migration became most apparent. Crime stories were a staple of popular literature from the 1880s forward, in *lubki* and in the boulevard press.³³ Crime narrative rested on assumptions about guilt and personal responsibility for one's actions. By default, these stories helped define a pathology of crime: its causes and consequences for the "social organism," and the identity and motivations of its perpetrators. The general assumption was that crime was the result of individual moral decline. City life was a powerful factor in the decline, not because of poverty or class oppression, but because of the corruptive influence of its culture.

Social consciousness in crime literature could have been indicated by sympathy for criminals, who were usually from the lower classes, or by focusing on the social circumstances that turned them to crime. Yet *lubok* literature mostly identified with the victim, and often assumed the omniscient voice of ordered society. Criminals like the eighteenth-century thief Vanka Kain, later thieves such as Vasily Churkin, or the fictional thief Iashka, attracted a large popular readership, yet were not allowed social motivations. Their characters, not their social circumstances, led them on the path of evil. In an early nineteenth-century rewrite of the story, Vanka Kain,

growing weary of the services he owed his lord, fled, absconding with a not insignificant sum of money; and upon exiting the gates he nailed to the gate

³¹ For popular journalism see Louise McReynolds, "V. M. Doroshevich: The Newspaper Journalist and the Development of Public Opinion," in *Between Tsar and People: Educated Society and the Quest for Public Identity in Late Imperial Russia*, ed. Edith W. Clowes, Samuel D. Kassow and James L. West (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). A classic example would be the work of Vladimir Mikhnevich, for example, *Kartinki petersburgskoi zhizni (Brodiachii Peterburg. Sviatochnye rasskazy: Dva iumoristicheskikh romana)* (St. Petersburg, 1884). On the shift of attitudes in a similar context see Neuberger, *Hooliganism*, 239–47.

³² N. A. Polushin, *Omut, ili "V gorod na chaloche, a iz goroda na palochke": Razskaz v litsakh iz derevenskoi zhizni (dlia narodnogo teatra)* (Moscow, 1889) [the work went through many editions]; N. A. Polushin, *Ne ishchi v sele, ishchi v sebe: Narodnye stseny v 3-x deistviakh (dlia narodnogo teatra)* (Moscow, 1897). See also the frequently staged E. P. Karpov, *Rabochaia slobodka* (Moscow, 1907) [originally 1891]. Brooks also notes the different attitudes in high and low literature (*When Russia Learned to Read*, 269).

³³ Louise McReynolds, *The News under Russia's Old Regime: The Development of a Mass-Circulation Press* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 60–62; Neuberger, *Hooliganism*, 28.

a specially prepared broadside on which the following was written: Drink water like a goose, eat bread like a pig, but let the devil work, not me.³⁴

Churkin too had no excuse; he was born evil and willful.

From earliest childhood Churkin exhibited his stubborn and evil character, so much so that his father truly did not know what measures to take to discipline his son. The future bandit did not fear the birchrod, the leather strap, or the lash; he was afraid of nothing. Sometimes his father would grab this delinquent by the hair and begin lashing him with a strap for some brash shenanigan; he would beat and beat until he was exhausted, but Vaska would sit there like a corpse, not uttering a sound, as if he had not been flogged.³⁵

Another famous thief, Sonya “The Lightfingered” Bliumshtein, was born poor, but embarked on her greatest crime spree only after she had married into a wealthy family.³⁶ Many of these tales went through numerous rewrites which, judging by the simplified language, shorter format and less expensive binding, were aimed at a lower and less-educated audience than the originals. As a rule, any sympathy shown by the original authors, Matvei Komarov for Vanka Kain, and Nikolai Pastukhov for Churkin, was weakened in subsequent versions.³⁷

The assumptions of crime narratives were also present in tales of migrant debasement. Personality was rarely overshadowed by environment; grinding poverty and its overwhelming influence on personality, which figured so prominently in literature for the educated, remained in the background. While there were inherent flaws in city life, which were often highlighted, there were also flaws in the peasant character. Responsibility for moral decline was attributed to these flaws. Peasants arrived in the city guileless, and underwent a rough apprenticeship in city ways. Poverty was not an unknown topic, particularly after 1905—the popular writer Zotov wrote on the topic for years³⁸—but it was more commonly shown to be the result of moral decline (depravity, alcoholism) than moral decline the result of poverty.

Moral decline in the city was not a new theme in post-Emancipation Russia. It

³⁴ *Istoriia Van'ki Kaina, so vsemi ego syskami, rozyskami i sumazbrodnoi u svad'boiu* (St. Petersburg, 1815), 2.

³⁵ *Strashnyi razboinik Churkin: Priklucheniia ego v ostroge, na katorge, v rudnikakh, ego begstvo iz Sibiri, zhizn' ego v gorodakh i strashnyi konets ego uzhasnoi zhizni* (Moscow, 1885), 2 (manuscript, translated by Louise McReynolds).

³⁶ M. D. Klefortov, *Son'ka “Zolotaia ruchka”: Pokhzhdeniia znamenitoi vorovki-ubiitsy i eia prebyvanie na Sakhaline* (Odessa, 1903).

³⁷ Versions include M[atvei] K[omarov], *Obstoiatel'noe i verное opisaniie dobrykh i zlykh del rossiiskogo moshennika i vora, razboinika i byvshego Moskovskogo syshchika Van'ki Kaina, vse ego zhizni i strannykh pokhzhdenii* (1775; St. Petersburg, 1779); *Istoriia Van'ki Kaina . . .* (1815); and *Istoriia Van'ki Kaina, so vsemi ego syskami, rozyskami i sumazbrodnoi u svad'boiu* (St. Petersburg, 1830). The original Churkin story was serialized in *Moskovskii listok*; other versions quickly followed, for example, N. S. K-v, *Razboinik Churkin: Narodnoe skazanie* (Moscow, 1884); and *Strashnyi razboinik Churkin: Priklucheniia ego v ostroge, na katorge, v rudnikakh, ego begstvo iz Sibiri, zhizn' ego v gorodakh i strashnyi konets ego uzhasnoi zhizni* (Moscow, 1885). On the relationship of authors' attitudes to reality see Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read*, 177–80.

³⁸ M. Zotov, *Rabotnichii—bozhii narod* (Moscow, 1909); idem, *Geroi Moskovskikh trushchob*; idem, *Padshaia: Novyi razskaz* (Moscow, 1911); idem, *Priezd deputata Vas'ki Levogo v derevniu* (Moscow, 1910); idem, *Prikluchenie s Azeform*; idem, *V Moskvu iz Pitera*.

had a long genealogy in many European literatures, both popular and elite, and in Russia it dated to before the Emancipation. The victims of these early stories were usually well-off peasant sons succumbing to city freedom. Instigators of the fall were either alcohol, friends who hung on until the money disappeared, or a combination of both. The fault lay with the sons who, like Scatter-Brain Andrei in this very popular tale, ignored their parents' warnings:

He'd make friends with anyone
Who would come to visit,
And he'd invite them, as a guest,
To go out on a binge.
His mother and father scolded him,
And called him scatter-brained . . .
Hold on to your kopeks,
And don't drink booze.
You'll go through your money soon,
And then where will you go?³⁹

The protagonists of such stories were as likely to be the sons of provincial merchants as they were to be peasants.⁴⁰

The decline of popular *morés* was most often attributed to the influence of peers, a tendency more noticeable for men than women. When the protagonists were female peasants, the predictable plot was an upper-class predator luring an innocent girl into libertinism or prostitution, where she soon perished. The convention was, of course, not new, a prime source being Karamzin's *Poor Liza*.⁴¹ The story underwent little change over the course of a century, but conventions that were being refreshed reflected a diminishing consciousness of upper-class exploitation. There were still victims and predators, but in later tales class resentments were more complicated. The "bandit" tales of the 1880s are again of particular interest. Bandits represented a long tradition in Russian folklore that was read onto the migrant theme in post-Emancipation years. By then, bandits were frequently villagers who found work in an industrial settlement, picked up city ways, and returned to prey on once-fellow peasants. These criminals, such as the irredeemable Yashka the Thief, were usually presented as negative examples.⁴² The most famous migrant criminal was Churkin, again. In many versions of the tale, as in life, he was a worker (*fabrichnyi*) who turned

³⁹ N. Vladimirov, *Andrei Rotozei, ili dash' sebe voliu, spustish' v otsovskuiu doliiu: Narodnyi rasskaz v stikakh, s pribavleniem skazok: Vot tak Panfil, molodchina! i pro Seniur durachka, i pro kolduna starichka*, 8th ed. (1863; St. Petersburg, 1892), 3–4. See also Tatarinov, *Fomushka v Pitere*.

⁴⁰ Foma Balagurov, *Zhenushka-zolotoe donyshko: Razskaz iz narodnogo byta* (Moscow, 1910); Heine of Tiflis, *Nevinnaia devushka v kogniakh razvrata, ili pod krasnym fonarem* (Moscow, 1910); Prokhodimets, *Marfushka syshchik* (Moscow, 1909); A. F., *Moskovskii shin'on, ili iaroslavets v peterburgskikh kogniakh (veselen'kii rasskaz): Nashi izvoshchiki v mirovom sude (smeshnaia stsenska s natyry)* (St. Petersburg, 1871).

⁴¹ For *lubok* versions see Misha Evstigneev, *Beloshveika s kuznetskogo (gor'kaia dolia)* (Moscow, 1872); *Pit' do dna, ne vidat' dobra (epizod iz zhizni golodnykh)* (Moscow, 1873); Valentin Volgin, *Utoplennitsa: Povesť* (Moscow, 1887); and *Utoplennitsa Nadia: Razkaz iz krest'ianskogo byta*, 2 pts. (Moscow, 1881).

⁴² M. Evstigneev, *Vor Iashka, mednaia priazhka: Narodnyi shutochnyi razskaz* (Moscow, 1887); *Vor Iashka. Russkaia narodnaia skazka* (Moscow, 1886). By this time, both versions were in the sixth edition.

to crime in the factory, and who preyed predominantly on peasants and factory workers.

This and other works created for popular audiences reflected little solidarity among the urban lower classes. Migratory transition, according to popular literature, was made difficult and dangerous not so much by the privileged classes as by other migrants who were more experienced and looking for easy prey. As one fictional letter home to the village—written by a journalist—complained:

Lisa, my friend, life has changed so much
From what I'm used to, living with you in peace,
Petersburg life is much worse than it was,
I don't dare take a step or open my mouth,
Look out, drop your guard an instant,
And you'll be poisoned, robbed or killed!⁴³

The sentiment was common enough to suggest a resonance with lower-class readers. Migrant experience was often personified by a peasant who made his way to the city, was conned by the first person he met, and victimized mercilessly by his fellow factory workers who were of similar origins. The advice of an older worker to Vasiutka, the orphan-hero of one story who has migrated to Moscow, would have passed for all: "Factory workers snare you village hicks whenever they can. Factory folk are rogues."⁴⁴

Migrants were also alerted to their city status by jokes. Incoming bumpkins were a target of post-Emancipation derision, which they could hear in a variety of ways and places, bridging many levels of the culture. Cabbies enjoyed telling peasant stories; and similar tales could be heard in the Aleksandrinskii Theater.⁴⁵ The mockery of city wags was repeated from the vaudeville stage, reprinted in joke collections and, if contemporary accounts can be believed, retold by cabbies and tavern denizens for a tip or glass of vodka. A migrant would be hard-pressed not to hear.

Hick jokes were not an invention of the 1860s, surely, but new forms of mockery developed with the arrival of peasants that were inspired by and directed at them. The influx of migrants seems to have sparked a wholesale shift in humor that occurred on a number of levels. There were not only new topics, but a change in awareness of estate and class, and beyond that, an entire shift in genre and narrative stance. Anecdotal humor prior to the Emancipation was, it seems, a prerogative of educated people. The only published collections of humorous anecdotes were aimed at the upper classes (judging by a titled subscription list), and most other anecdotes were anecdotes in the classical sense, short examples of exemplary behavior drawn from

⁴³ Leonid Nespartanskii, "Pis'mo provintsiala, prozhivaiushchego v Peterburge, k svoei zhene v derevniu," in *Nevskii prospekt, ego proshloe i nastoiashchee*, ed. N. Inei (St. Petersburg, 1882), 7 [originally from the *Peterburgskii listok*; thanks to Joan Neuberger for this piece].

⁴⁴ *Boby!'-Vasiutka*, 34. The original Russian is: «Здесь вашего брата деревенщину на каждом шагу ловят. Здесь фабричные—народ разбойник.»

⁴⁵ Ivan Gorbunov, an actor there, was famous for his peasant stories, which spawned many imitations. See I. F. Gorbunov, *Sseny iz narodnogo byta*, 5th rev. ed. (St. Petersburg, 1874). For a collection of imitations see *Zhidok vesel' chak i shunik razskashchik: Sbornik smeshnykh ssen i kupletov iz narodnoi i evreiskoi zhizni i byta* (Moscow, 1879).

the past.⁴⁶ Popular humor was not at all anecdotal. Village humor most often assumed story form, as in the countless tales of bawdy priests to be found in Afanasiev's folk-tale collection; urban humor revolved around wordplay—the salty curses or clever turns of phrase heard from cab drivers or fairground barkers (*balagury*).⁴⁷

City humor treated peasants kindly, if condescendingly, before Emancipation. They were usually represented, if at all, as endearingly quaint storytellers. A popular collection entitled the *Merry Old Fellow*, first published in 1790, was republished frequently for the next forty years, and the collection was still common in flea-market booksellers till the late nineteenth century.⁴⁸ Peasants were infrequent butts of jokes. The attitude changed little even as the genre of anecdote evolved. Once supplying examples of virtuous behavior, the genre expanded to imply something funny or ridiculous, and to reach a lower audience.⁴⁹ Still, mocking peasants was not in high fashion.

There were exceptions, particularly in the theater. A popular vaudeville was *Filatka and Miroshka*, which debuted in the Aleksandrinskii Theater in 1833, starring the author, a character actor named Pavel Grigoriev, Jr.⁵⁰ Vaudeville audiences at the Aleksandrinskii often belonged to the rising service class, middle bureaucrats and clerks from the nearby Gostinny Dvor and Apraksin Dvor. The play mocked peasants for their unsophisticated ways and dialect, as in the following speech by Filatka:

Ma paw got his dander up; he tells me: Filatka! don't be tossin' them knucklebones, git yourself over and make up to your sweetheart. And how ya gonna make up to her? Id'da moseyed over there yesterday, and had a notion to give her a cuff: but her eyes bugged out so you'd a thought that hell froze over!⁵¹

Other classes came in for abuse as well. The undistinguished play showed considerable durability, running in imperial theaters up through the mid-1840s. Grigoriev followed his success with other *Filatka* and *Miroshka* plays, all of which mocked peasant backwardness and enjoyed success.⁵² The greatest and most curious success

⁴⁶ For example, *Al'manakh anekdotov*, 1830 (St. Petersburg, 1830).

⁴⁷ One of the earliest humor collections to match the later concept of humor was in fact entitled *Al'bom balagura: Sbranie zabavnykh povestei, razskazov, satiricheskikh ocherkov, komicheskikh stsen, anekdotov, pufov i raznykh kur'eznostei*, ed. G. K. (St. Petersburg, 1851).

⁴⁸ *Starichok vesel'chak razskazyvaiushchii davnie Moskovskie byli*, 3d ed. (1790; Moscow, 1837). See also *Derevenskaia zabavnaia starushka po vecheram razskazyvaiushchaia prostonarodnye veselye skazochki i raznye starinnye nebylitsy* (1863; Moscow, 1865). For the description of a flea-marketeer selling the book see A. Golitsynskii, *Ulichnye tipy* (Moscow, 1860), 47–48.

⁴⁹ See, for instance, *Anekdoty i deianiia velikikh i slavykh muzheï tak zhe otlichivshikhsia khrabrost'iu i neustrashimost'iu vo vremia proshedsikh kompanii rossiiskikh geroev* (St. Petersburg, 1809); K. S. V., comp., *Anekdoty vsekh vekov i narodov, izvlechennye iz vsekh sobranii etogo roda, dosele izdannyykh: Cherty muzhestva, dobrodushii, velichiia, uma, gluposti, naivnosti i pr., ostroty, kalamby, rezkie otvety, sarkazmy, lakonizmy, epigrammy, epitafii, zagadki i pr., i pr.* (St. Petersburg, 1846).

⁵⁰ P. Grigor'ev, *Filatka i Miroshka soperniki, ili chetyre zhenikha i odna nevesta: Vodevil' v odnom deistvii* (St. Petersburg, 1833).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵² *Istoriia russkogo dramaticheskogo teatra* (Moscow, 1978), 3:69, 328.

of his play was in Siberia, where it was performed by criminal prisoners to a roaring crowd of peers, witnessed by a political prisoner, Fedor Dostoevskii.⁵³

Pre-Emancipation peasants and migrants had little reason to feel picked on. The quintessential bumpkins of the era, Poshekhonians, were not peasants but townsmen, as described in this passage, whose descendants would most likely be found in Gogol's stories.

When circumstances (forced by gossip and unjust calumnies) caused the state's sheriff Vziatkoliub to be replaced by another, named Shchuk, the world-wise folk considered it their duty to pay their respects to the new magistrate. As a consequence of which they assembled in a secluded locality, more precisely under the livestock shed, that they might not be interrupted and think their wise thoughts as to how to do this the better. For they wished not, as is said, to flop face first in the mud at first try. At the end of lengthy counsel, disputation and some slight scrimmage, they finally resolved to dispatch several deputies to wish him welcome because they held his years, intellect, experience and knowledge of worldly discourse in most respect.⁵⁴

Poshekhonians had been the butt of jokes from at least the time of Peter, and remained so to the end of the nineteenth century, standing as an emblem of provincial buffoonery.⁵⁵ The first publication of Poshekhonian anecdotes, by the noble enlightener, Vasilii Berezaiskii, came out in 1798, and parts of it were being reprinted in popular joke collections almost a century later. Poshekhonian jokes were still kicking around the vaudeville stage into the twentieth century, but by then they had lost the local specifics that gave birth to them.⁵⁶

Peasants did not become the butt of popular jokes until the 1870s, when they had already clogged the cities. Assigning audiences and meanings to these jokes can be difficult because there are so many possibilities. Judging the audience of any given piece of popular culture is difficult, but it is clear that many of the crudest peasant jokes reached migrants and village residents. While surely the increase of such jokes reflected the arrival of uncouth peasants in the city, the presence of migrants themselves in the audience makes the meaning unclear. Were these jokes to be laughed at by condescending nobles, by clerks and shopkeepers, by class-climbing workers? Or were they aimed at migrants wishing to distance themselves from their peasant past? Being laughed at was part of the transitional culture for newcomers; laughing at newer migrants might have consummated the process.

This joke, one of many involving peasants, illustrates some of the complexities,

⁵³ F. M. Dostoevskii, "Zapiski iz mertvogo doma," in his *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 30-i tomakh* (Leningrad, 1972), 4:116–30.

⁵⁴ Vasilii Berezaiskii, *Anekdoty drevnykh poshekhontsev* (St. Petersburg, 1798), 4.

⁵⁵ D. Rovinskii, ed., *Russkie narodnye kartinki* (St. Petersburg, 1881), 4:144; A. Pel'tser, *Proiskhozhdenie anekdota v russkoi narodnoi slovesnosti* (Kharkov, 1898); Dm. Moldavskii, *Tovarishch smekh* (Leningrad, 1981), 121–24; An-skii, *Ocherki narodnoi literatury*, 37–38.

⁵⁶ The originals were recycled in *Poshekhontsy, ili veselye razskazy ob ikh mednom lbe i zamyslovatom razume: Predanie, peredannoe nianiutkami i mamutkami* (Moscow, 1883), as well as in M. Evstigneev, *Kha! Kha! Kha! Sbranie iumoristicheskikh anekdotov* (Moscow, 1876), 32–33. For a vaudeville act see N. K. K[rasovskii], comp., *Vse v Moskve u nas soidet: Repertuar dlia stseny ispolniaemyi liubimtsami moskovskoi publiki, zlobodnevnymi artistami* (Moscow, 1906).

as well as common peasant types. The peasant is put into the anecdote to represent uncouth ignorance, yet several audiences might have found the anecdote funny in different ways. In fact, the joke was recycled over a century later, with little change, to ridicule Mikhail Gorbachev.

A wealthy landowner kept two orangutans, which he dressed up to go to balls. They were standing by the entrance when a peasant from a neighboring estate brought a basket of peaches and pears.

The fruit-loving animals threw themselves at the peasant's basket when he reached the porch and gobbled up the fruit.

The peasant, who was seeing such animals for the first time in his life and took them for people, respectfully doffed his cap, put the basket on the steps, and watched them indifferently, as if this was how things were done.

When the monkeys had eaten their fill, the peasant picked up the empty basket and went into the owner's room to give him a note from the neighbor.

"Where is the fruit, my fellow," asked the landowner.

"Your children were pleased to eat it, sir," was the answer.⁵⁷

There is no reason to insist that the jokes had an exclusive meaning or audience: clerks and peasants could laugh at the same joke for different reasons; and for that matter, listeners could easily laugh at characters of their own social standing. Two facts can be established that are of greater importance: the rise of peasant jokes was connected with the post-Emancipation influx of peasants into the cities; and the jokes were part of a transitional literature that helped migrants move away from peasant culture. The humor evolved from decade to decade in close parallel to migration. The 1860s, when migrant problems were only first appearing, humor was still gentle, even sympathetic. For instance, a frequent theme was the booming business done by city wizards and sorceresses who preyed on migrants.⁵⁸ Peasant jokes bloomed in the 1870s, when humor collections seemed almost obliged to include a few. The genre was new, and anecdotes, as with the following example, were often old gags that were simply retargeted at the new humorous type.

Tit [a peasant "type"] is famous for his farm,
He's never let a cent slip by.
He eats, and drinks, and always says
That the treat's his buddy's.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Evstigneev, *Kha! Kha! Kha!*, 5–6.

⁵⁸ Nester Oko, *Tainy i smert' kolduna (s natury)* (St. Petersburg, 1868); *Peterburgskie kolduny i koldun'i* (Moscow, 1871). A later treatment of the theme was *Koldun, znakhar' i charodei: Chernaia koshka* (Moscow, 1899).

⁵⁹ *Vesel'chak: Novyi iumoristicheskii al'bom s mnogimi karrikaturami* (St. Petersburg, 1876), 13. See also Aleksandr Nevskii, *Poteschnik: Iumoristicheskii al'bom* (St. Petersburg, 1876); Aleksandr Nevskii, ed., *Nashi zuboskaly: Razskazy, stseny iz russkogo, evreiskogo, armianskogo i drug. bytov, kuplety, epigrammy, eksprompty, kalambury, ostroty, mysli, izrecheniia, shutki v stikhakh i proze, anekdoty, zametki, gluposti, kur'ezy, karikatury i t.p.-vsego okolo 100 stateek, ne schitaia karrikatur* (St. Petersburg, 1879); and A. F-n and S. B-skikh, *Smekhotvor: Perly smekha. Iumoristicheskii al'manakh*, 2d rev. ed. (St. Petersburg, 1877).

Few specifically peasant “types” were found in the humor. The newer anecdotes began to develop such types, who could be peasants who became drunkards in the city, or were too stupid to cope with city slickers. Standard peasant names in the repertory were taken from older sources: Foma and Erema or Pantiusha, Fediusha and Mitriukha, Filatka and Miroshka, Kiriukha and Vaniukha, eighteenth-century traditions taken from *lubki*, songs and plays. Within a decade, however, peasant types had become the embodiment of coarseness and stupidity, without redeeming features, as in this common dialogue between a peasant and a migrant.⁶⁰

“Hey Ivan, you coming from the city?”	—А, Иван, ты из города?
“Yup.”	—Из города.
“Ya ride back?”	—Приехал?
“Nope.”	—Нет.
“Walk?”	—Так пришел?
“Nope, didn’t walk either.”	—Нет, и не пришел.
“Then how’d ya git here?”	—Так как-же?
“Brought ma cow back.”	—А привел назад корову. ⁶¹

There is evidence that migrants wanted to distance themselves from their peasant pasts, not only in the memoirs of workers like Kanatchikov but also in the booming business done in rewrites of folk culture for city tastes. The simpleton known from Afanasiev’s folk tales provides a good example. The narrator in new versions identified the simpleton explicitly as a peasant; and where the folktale simpleton often triumphed in the end, in the citified version the simpleton was just plain stupid, without any redeeming qualities. In one version the fool makes a long series of transactions that he begins with a bar of silver and finishes with a grindstone. He ends up dropping it in the river by mistake. But the happy fool thinks, to the merriment of readers:

Wonderful, I’m rid of that awful weight that was bothering me. Now I’m carefree and happy. Nobody in the world is happier than I am.⁶²

The connection of urban popular humor and migration was most clearly illustrated by a popular gag that ran for almost forty years after the Emancipation. Peasants flooding into the city were associated with “third-class” rail transport, the crowded and dirty cars that gave migrants a cheap way to cover the long distances to the city.⁶³ A symbol of great social change, the railroad infiltrated popular culture as a setting for the bemused confrontation of classes, which was quickly reflected in an entire genre of jokes.⁶⁴ Most variants involved inebriated peasants or workers

⁶⁰ A. V. Bolshakov, comp., “Tovarish,” in *Novyi polnyi sbornik dlia divertismentov, literaturnykh i muzykal’nykh vecherov* (Moscow, 1903); Graf Lapotochkin, *Sovremennye Ivany*.

⁶¹ Nevskii, *Nashi zuboskaly*, 6.

⁶² *Tri skazki: I. Filat-durachok II. Nevstke na otmestku III. Machikha volshebznitsa* (Moscow, 1879). The Publichnaia biblioteka in Petersburg has an entire subject drawer in the card catalog for *lubok* rewrites of folk stories.

⁶³ Brower, *Russian City*, 50–54.

⁶⁴ M. Evstigneev, *Konduktor zheleznykh dorog: Zabavnye razskazy i stseny na poezde* (Moscow, 1869); idem, *Vagon tret’ego klassa: Veselye stsenki* (Moscow, 1868). Bolshakov, “Tovarishch.”

(Filatka, Mikitka, Erema, Foma, or another peasant-type name) and a lady of somewhat refined manners. The peasants pester the lady, and their rough manners offend her sensibilities. For example:

Two tipsy workers enter the third-class coach; one has a brand new accordion. They both sit down across from a lady (*barynia*) with a plaster on her toothache.

“Hey, Mikitka, wadda say we wet our whistle some more.”

“And why not?”

“I drank my tea down with some crackers,
And got home with a couple shiners . . .”

The fellow sings these *chastushki* to the accompaniment of his accordion.

“Gentlemen, would you be so kind not to play! I beg of you, I have a toothache, and my nerves are bad!”

“Huh? Mikita, ya hear, da lady’s got maneuvers!” . . . ⁶⁵

The sketch showed surprisingly durability, and it was a standard piece in vaudeville acts long beyond the turn of the century.⁶⁶ For all its clichés, it touched upon most of the major conflicts that arose from peasant transition to the urban environment, and the cultural antagonisms it inspired. It was a sketch that could play to a great variety of audiences, each of which could interpret to its own tastes and purposes.

The importance of transitional themes to popular culture in late imperial Russia suggests the role of migration in popular consciousness, particularly in the big cities and their outlying regions. Migration shaped popular experience on a variety of levels. Culturally, it stranded many migrants in between two conditions, uneasy about their social identity. Rather than possessing a clear sense of self anchored in a class (worker or peasant) and a place (factory or village), many were suspended between these categories. Their stresses permeated popular culture, even influencing the consciousness of nonmigrants. While “peasant” and “worker” were meaningful categories to popular readers and writers, who recognized them and exploited them for drama and humor, the humor had bite only because they were a source of friction.

Historians of late imperial Russian interested in the view from below have relied on worker and peasant perspectives. This approach takes for granted boundaries that were subject to considerable strain. Members of the lower classes underwent a variety of pressures brought about by city life, not all of which tugged them in the same direction. In some circumstances class played an overwhelming role in their sense of self, often when it involved feelings of resentment. At other times class was only one of several factors. Behavior and allegiance could sometimes be explained by social position, as they most strikingly were in the upheavals of 1905. Yet considerations of morality and identity were as frequently at work, and could upset expectations. To grant social circumstances primacy is to ignore unpredictable historical patterns.

The absence of identity, as well as its presence, should be considered. We need ways to describe it and to integrate it into our historical understanding. Late imperial

⁶⁵ Bolshakov, “Tovarishch,” 59.

⁶⁶ Sound recordings have survived from the turn of the century; for example, B. S. Borisov and V. A. Kriger, “*Stsena v vagone III-go klassa*” [between 1900 and 1905], Beka Recording 56837; and Borisov and Kriger, “*Kiriushka i Gavriushka*” [n.d.], Beka Recording 56803.

Russian history has often been written backward through the prisms of 1905 and 1917, moments of resentment that focused lower-class identities. Treating identities as entities determined by social position can explain explosions of revolutionary resentment, but it is less descriptive for moments of ambivalence and contrariness. Many such tendencies were apparent to contemporaries, who were confronted with reactionary workers, worker-peasant antagonism, lower-class violence against other members of the lower classes, just to mention a few. Though such tendencies weighed heavily in how people understood their lives, they have often been ignored in history.⁶⁷

Life in between, the life of migrants and other lower-class members, suggests new ways that we can look at the late nineteenth century. They not only illuminate the nonrevolutionary parts of Russian history but also can shed light on the impulses and outcomes of revolution. Culture and behavior are not easily reducible. They change, not always in concord with social circumstances. Workers and peasants, not to mention radicals and reformers, were frustrated and torn by lower-class culture. They often dealt with it by reducing it to understandable categories. Yet doing so strips that time of its richness, unpredictability, and human dimension.

⁶⁷ Exceptions would be the works of Neuberger, Frank, Wynn and Steinberg cited above, as well as Hubertus Jahn, "Patriotic Culture in Russia during World War I" (Cornell, 1995).