

# THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW ÉMIGRÉ SELF IN 20TH-CENTURY RUSSIAN PARIS IN SHORT STORIES BY NADEZHDA TEFFI<sup>1</sup>

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It is rarely a case in history that many prominent writers, artists, scientists, and intellectuals leave their motherland to go into exile en masse. However, it was the case of the Russian intelligentsia in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917: among those who left Russia were Ivan Bunin (1870-1953), Dmitry Merezhkovsky (1866-1941), and Aleksandr Kuprin (1870-1938), Russian writers who were well known in Russia before 1917. In the aftermath of the October Revolution of 1917 and the ensuing civil war, more than 45,000 Russians settled in and around Paris (Struve; Menegaldo; Klein-Gousseff; Johnston; Foshko; Raeff; Glad). Nadezhda Teffi (1872-1952) was also one of the writers who came to live in Paris. It was a difficult decision for Teffi, as she enjoyed immense popularity as a writer in prerevolutionary Russia: even Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924), the future leader of Bolshevik Russia, once praised Teffi's early verses (Teffi, *Moya letopis'* 257). Teffi was a sophisticated lady, a welcome visitor in most prestigious literary salons and Petersburg's beau-monde; in her reminiscences, she wrote about her encounters with Fyodor Sologub (1863-1927), Ilya Repin (1844-1930), Grigori Rasputin (1869-1916), the healer of Prince Alexei (1904-1918), who acquired an immense influence on Nicholas II's wife, Alexandra Feodorovna (1872-1918), most famous Russian writers and poets, and many other fine representatives of Saint Petersburg's society. Teffi needed to undertake a difficult and dangerous journey through Ukraine to Constantinople and then to Paris. In the City of Light, Teffi was one of the most active members of the Russian literary communities: her short stories and feuilletons appeared in the widely-read Russian newspapers *Poslednie izvestiia*, *Vozrozhdenie*, *Illustrirovannaia Rossiia* [*Latest News*, *Revival*, *Illustrated Russia*] and many others.

Emigration brought an immense trial for the Russian émigrés, especially for the Russian intelligentsia. Before 1917, the Russian writers enjoyed the world of sophis-

ticated intellectual discourse, a variety of literary and artistic events, wealth, fame, and success. With emigration, the reading audience for Russian works dramatically shrank. Emigration brought the world of poverty, even misery, an alien linguistic milieu, an uncertain future and, worst of all, the realization that there was no return to the past life, and that it was necessary to reinvent one's life, one's identity, and to find a new voice, and a new self. A new émigré self whimsically interwove a deep nostalgia for the lost motherland and Russian culture, memories of old Russia and pride in the Russian cultural heritage with efforts to be better integrated in the cultural life in France. Teffi especially highlighted the tragedy of Russian émigrées: many women lost their husbands, sons, and fathers during the First World War and the civil war and became single parents. In this article, I shall examine the process of the construction of a new émigrée identity in the works of Nadezhda Teffi (1872-1952) (Starostina, "On Nostalgia"; Starostina, "Nostalgia and the Myth"; Starostina, "One Just Wonders"; Neatrou; Haber).

- 82** This article's argument is inspired by cultural history and memory studies. Many recent studies analyze the construction of memory as a tool to legitimize the relations of power in society (Boym; Fritzsche; Golan; Halbwachs; Hutton; Lowenthal; Nora; Starostina, *Memory and Mythology*). In the 1920s, French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945) studied collective memory and ways the past is remembered (Halbwachs). He showed how society constantly redefines memories of the past in order to legitimize the relationships of power. According to Halbwachs, collective memories ensure the cohesion of a group and contribute to the preservation of its traditions. While highlighting the importance of representations of the past for defining national identity, French scholar Pierre Nora sets apart memory and history, two ways to remember and to represent bygone events (Nora). Emphasizing the selectiveness of memory and its tendency to forget events that do not fit into the dominant narrative, memory studies encourage historians to investigate nostalgia as a part of the construction of memory. Literary critic Svetlana Boym shows that a nostalgic discourse tends to reinvent the past, not as it was but as it might have been (Boym 301-03). In his work *Mythologies*, French philosopher Roland Barthes underscores how mythologies play an important role in defining modern identities: myths bring meaning to everyday existence (Barthes). Nostalgic reminiscences create the dangerous illusion that they faithfully represent the past (Starostina, *Memory and Mythology*). Despite this perception, nostalgic images distort the historical moment and conveniently leave out all its tensions and controversies. Nostalgia helps politicians to portray the past from the elite's perspective, a perspective that deliberately omits past and present social tensions. Renato Rosaldo also states that social groups that particularly responsible for the destruction of the cultures of the past are the ones who are more likely to use a nostalgic discourse to establish their innocence (Rosaldo 108).

Teffi included many facts of her biography in her short stories. During the Great War, Teffi volunteered to be a nurse: she made several references to her experience

in “Vania Shchegolek” [a personal name] and “Without Words” (Teffi 4: 263-267). In “Without Words”, Teffi describes wounded soldiers from Yakutia, a part of the Russian empire. A significant part of Yakutia lies above the Arctic circle; this region is populated by Yakuts and Russians, and before the 1917, the region was considered one of the symbols of cultural backwardness. During the war, some Yakuts were enlisted to dig trenches, and, being taken to different climates and hard working conditions, easily succumbed to scurvy and typhus. Teffi writes that they were difficult patients, did not take medicine, and did not allow doctors to touch them. However, one of the doctors managed to establish a contact with an especially hostile victim, Kolaï. As the sign of appreciation, this patient shows a photo from an illustrated magazine that features a Yakut, a sled, and a dog in harness. When the doctor is transferred to a different post, Kolaï even gives this page with the photo as a gift to the doctor, and, considering that Kolaï has absolutely nothing, this present is everything that he has. Even though the narrative is told through the voice of a doctor, a family friend, the end of the story appears as told by Teffi herself. Teffi often used the pronoun “we” to tell the story of Russian émigrés in France.

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One of her most famous pieces, “Ke faire?” (the French question “Que Faire?” in Russian transliteration), which became a true manifesto of the Russian émigré community in France, describes a Russian general who has just arrived in the City of Light (Teffi 3: 126-129). After he had taken a stroll in Paris and looked at the beauty of the Place de la Concorde, this general asks the rhetorical question, “Que faire?” Teffi learned this story from one of her compatriots and begged for permission to include it in her prose. Indeed, for many Russian émigrés, a feeling of being lost and useless was one of the greatest emotional shocks they experienced after arriving in Paris. In her short story “Raw Materials” [“Sÿr’ë”], Teffi describes the tragedy of the Russian intelligentsia who, as refugees and immigrants, had to agree to become factory workers, to work on all kinds of manual and low-paying jobs because of a linguistic barrier and the certain impenetrability of the French intellectual elite for outsiders (Teffi 3: 55-57). Teffi described one of such an émigré fate in her story “Our Lifestyle” [“Nash byt”] (Teffi 4: 268-273). Arosov, the protagonist of the story, lives in Paris. Teffi describes in many ways the typical biography of a Russian émigré:

And all years of his being a refuge Arosov not for a minute forgot the face of his mother, the face which he saw, when he turned back on the gangways of the steamboat, when he was leaving his native shore....He had very trying circumstances. He was not talented, adapted with difficulties, grasped at everything: worked in a factory, was a loader at a train station, waxed floors, smoked fish, served as a night watchman, fixed guitars, worked as a tutor, supervised children at walks, baked bagels, clipped dogs and sang in the church choir. And whatever pittance was he earning, everything he could he sent to his mother.... (Teffi 4: 268)

Arosov denies himself all the pleasures which a young man in Paris could enjoy and saves every centime to buy a ticket to Paris for his mother. He lies in his letters to her, telling her that he has a lifestyle of a carefree socialite and spends way too much

money on his entertainments and outfits. However, despite all possible sacrifice, Arosov is fired and, in addition, becomes the victim of a car accident. Contrary to his worst fears that his mother is starving, poor, and desperate in Russia, his mother enjoys a special status in a communal apartment in Russia. She comes to Paris, and Arosov's friend takes her to a hospital: Arosov's mother is shocked to see her son, "sharp nose, cheekbones as carved from black wood, black eye socket, and gray temples" (Teffi 4: 273). Arosov's mother does not feel any pity or sadness, and even does not recognize this "old stranger" (Teffi 4: 273). The end of the story shows not just the sad paradox of an émigré existence: living in the City of Light did not mean enjoying the pleasures which are usually associated with Paris. The story implies that becoming an émigré was, essentially, saying good-bye to one's old life. It is telling that the mother of this young man could not even recognize her son because his sorrows and the exhausting struggle for life aged him.

In the accounts of Teffi, loneliness is the essential characteristic of the experience of Russian émigrés. In her short story "The Sign of the Times" ["Znamenie vremeni"], Teffi writes about loneliness as the biggest scourge for contemporary times (Teffi 4: 213-217). Teffi writes:

'Loneliness! Loneliness!' An eternal cry of a human being. Where to go away from it? In social activity driven by progressive ideas? In family life? In love? Yet, social activity is obtainable for only a human being who is full of strength and faith in ideas. But precisely at the moment when he will scream about loneliness—he no longer has strength. A family? A family happens only in those years of his life when it is, perhaps, least necessary for him. In the concluding years of his life his family falls to pieces. (Teffi 4: 216-217)

In another short story, "Moonlight," Teffi tells of the difficult life of Anna Aleksandrovna Stoleshina. Anna Aleksandrovna is seventy-eight. She is a lonely Russian émigrée whose daughter Katerina Pavlovna pays the rent for her room in a Parisian apartment with other Russian émigrés. Teffi describes her painful solitude, as Anna Aleksandrovna talks to her ball of wool:

She talked to the ball as simply and as freely as one speaks to a human. As all people, who have lived a long life, she knew that, in essence, it does not matter with whom to talk: with a living person, with a ball of wool, with stars, or with a piece of ribbon—they listen with equal indifference. Ribbon, though, would not interrupt and would not start mumbling its own, unnecessary, tedious story. (Teffi 4: 40)

Even conversations with her daughter do not bring much joy to Anna Aleksandrovna's life. Her daughter is tired; because of hard work and losses her life aged her and made her distant from her mother. Teffi describes the daughter's face as "heavy, powdered, and rouged. By this face powder Katulia [Katerina Pavlovna] struggles against her old age, her loneliness and melancholia" (Teffi 4: 42). Anna Aleksandrovna spends most of her time alone in her room. Sometimes she listens to the voices of her landlord's family: these voices remind her she is still alive, although her landlords believe she is eavesdropping. At the end of the story, Anna comes to the conclusion that there

is nothing for her to cling to in her life and sees death as an escape from the misery, loneliness, and hopelessness of her life. The themes of solitude and death are interwoven in Teffi's short stories; solitude symbolizes social death and is so painful, so inconsolable, so endless, that death sometimes is the only escape from the unbearable burden of being absolutely alone in the big city. The same topics shape the tragic story "A Maybug", in which a former officer of the White Army desperately tries to find help in Paris (Teffi 3: 193-200). When this help is denied to him, he kills himself.

Teffi offered several pieces of advice for the Russian émigrés to deal with the overwhelming emotion of loneliness in Paris. The first piece of advice is to wear a mask and to pretend that one carelessly enjoys the pleasures of the City of Light. Many of her short stories explore a dramatic difference between one's appearance and one's feelings. Teffi suggested that being an émigré requires hiding emotions. In fact, Teffi argued that the French had to keep a smile constantly on, no matter how sad their lives were. In her short story "Café", she describes several visitors in a Parisian café (Teffi 4: 98-102). A Parisian café on grand boulevards is, in a way, a legendary place, and the author mentions such illustrious names as *Café Napolitain*, *Madrid*, or *Café de la Paix* in the beginning of the story. Her characters, "boulevardiers," appear to originate from the pages of a nineteenth-century novel. These personalities include a young coquette, an old gentleman who wears a cravat and seems to be related to the world of arts, an eccentric who plays checkers with himself, and two women who seem to have just spent their entire day shopping, judging by a big handbox right next to their table. Despite their picturesque appearance, in her analysis of her characters, Teffi unveils the poverty, hopeless loneliness, and drama. The coquette is mortally tired; she wants to sleep and to go home, and she is cold and hungry. However, she continues sitting in this café, for she must find a client and earn some money. An old man with a cravat had to have a difficult battle with his wife to obtain several francs to pay for his tiny shot of cognac; he is bored and hardly enjoys this moment of being at the Parisian café. The eccentric who plays checkers tries to escape from his miserable existence in his small room with no heat, for which he had not paid for two months (Teffi 4: 101). In the café, he enjoys his absinthe, and, more than anything, the fact that nobody is aware of his poverty and his solitude. The ladies who at first appear to have returned from a shopping spree, in reality, are two Russian émigrées: one of the ladies had received an order, spent a great deal of money on buying the most expensive fabric, and sewed all night, only to learn that her customers had left Paris for the USA and would not pay her for her work. The big handbox contains this outfit, and the émigrée is not able to hold her tears, for she has not earned the money to buy bread for herself and to send money to her relative in Moscow. In this short story, Teffi demonstrates the everyday drama in the lives of the Parisians; she compares these characters to extras playing the same spectacle on tours: "by will of the Incomprehensible [God] convened extras play their merry characters" (Teffi 4: 102).

Teffi wrote much about the difficult fate of intelligent Russian women in exile, and she emphasized that women especially needed to play exhausting, never-end-

ing roles. Russian émigrées needed to hide their fear of aging, of being abandoned by their lovers and husbands, and of being poor. In the story “Mara Demia”, Teffi describes the tragic existence of Mariia Nikolaevna Dem’ianova (Teffi 4: 74-78). Here is how Teffi describes a Russian émigrée pretending to be the successful and carefree singer Mara Demia:

The young woman had a scene name of Mara Demia. Of uncertain age depending on her mood, pretty, with an adorable voice. She had made a stop in this city on the way to Milan where she was invited to sing. She had made a stop in this city in order to meet with the tenor Vil’e, who loved her and who ought to refuse a five-year contract in order to go with her, her darling, to Milan, to eternity. The petite woman was Mariia Nikolaevna Dem’ianova, aged, lonely, exhausted, a singer losing her voice, once an amateur, now a professional, hysterically fallen in love with a handsome tenor who abandoned her and did not come to get her in this border city. (Teffi 4: 74-75)

86 The short story describes Mara Demia as a different character from Mariia Nikolaevna: Mara still cherishes her hopes of seeing her lover. Mara puts on make-up and goes to a train station three times a day to see her Vil’e arriving. At night, Mariia Nikolaevna is shaken under her blanket, realizing that her lover has abandoned her and knowing what Mara is too horrified to admit. Then a wire comes, and Mariia Nikolaevna learns that her lover is leaving for the USA and is not coming. She contemplates suicide and then in the backyard she sees a disabled woman, “a long-nosed hunchback” who sings to collect alms. The story compares the hunchback to “a squashed reptilian” (Teffi 4: 77). Teffi writes:

Mariia Nikolaevna closed her eyes. For one minute it seemed to her tortured soul that she has looked in a real well and saw her reflection in its water. And she cried, shuddering:  
‘I do not want!’ (Teffi 4: 77)

Mariia Nikolaevna realizes that she is still young, healthy, talented and that she has enough willpower to break this vicious circle. She leaves the city; yet, she is far from recovering from her trauma. The train takes “the pale half-corpse of Mariia Nikolaevna” (Teffi 4: 77). The short story ends on a paradoxical note: this hunchback who reminds her of “a reptilian” turns out to be much more successful and happy in her relationship than Mariia Nikolaevna. Franz, the lover of this hunchback, begs her to marry him and, in addition, is genuinely afraid that another suitor will be more successful with the heart of this street singer. The story shows an ongoing tension between two identities, two sets of experience and two attitudes to life: between the bitter and tragic experience of a Russian émigré who is already fatally tired and beaten by emigration, and that of a capricious and carefree singer. The short story also shows that happiness, paradoxically, does not depend on one’s beauty, age, and talent: it is irrational and inexplicable who is loved and happy and who is not.

The memories of the Russian Revolution penetrate the writings of Teffi in many ways. In her short story “At the Rock of Gadarene,” Teffi explains her decision to leave Russia:

Seen at a morning at the gates of the commissariat, the trickle of blood, a trickle slowly crawling across the pavement, cuts the path of life for good. One cannot walk over it. One must not go further. One can turn and run. And they run. By the trickle of blood, they are cut off forever, and there will be no return. (Teffi, *Na skale* 450-54)

Teffi's description of the Revolution and civil war contains both tragic and ironic narratives. In her story "Funny in Sad" ["Smeshnoe v pechal'nom"], the writer says that the history of civil war is likely to produce the characteristics of a big, solemn narrative in which the dates of big events will be remembered, but small everyday events are likely to be forgotten (Teffi 3: 28-32). For instance, Teffi told the amazing story of how three people, General Schkuro, his orderly, and another man, managed to take control of an entire village. First, a Cossack came to the village and informed the villagers that the general was coming and that the peasants must be ready for his arrival. Schkuro and his orderly had arrived, occupied a room, and looked at maps; the general seemed to be immersed in military affairs. Pretending he was representing cavalry, artillery, and Cossacks units, the same Cossack approached the general. The general said that the troops were very angry and were likely to kill every single resident of the village, and that the only hope for the peasants was to give up all their weapons and ammunition voluntarily. Being completely horrified by the perspectives of angry soldiers marauding and destroying their community, the peasants rushed to surrender all their weapons. The next day they had learned that only three people, the general, his orderly, and a Cossack managed to conquer the entire village. Teffi also describes how in Kharkov, all Commissars were lured to have their photos taken: the advertisement promised a fifty per cent discount to people who would show their commissars' IDs. After the city was taken by the White Army, it was very easy to identify the Reds because their photos were taken.

Teffi's stories about the civil war are truly tragic. In the story "A Pilot" ["Letchik"], Teffi describes the tragic fate of a young Russian man, Grisha (Teffi 3: 33-36). Grisha volunteered to serve in the army when the Great War began. He had to overcome his fear and even requested to be transferred to the air force squad; his request was granted. Grisha's airplane was hit, and Grisha had almost completely lost his hearing. In the immediate aftermath of the Revolution, the author met Grisha in line for her-ring tails (a detail of the destitute conditions in these difficult years), and Grisha told her that, against his will, he was recruited by the Bolsheviks to bomb Kazan. Grisha emphasized that his mother, wife, and two sons were in Kazan, and he could not possibly participate in the military operation against the city. The Bolsheviks, however, threatened to execute his family if Grisha refused to collaborate. The story ends with the author meeting the family of Grisha in exile. They talked about the horrors of the attack on Kazan when its residents had to run to a river for water under an airplane's attack. The pilot was shot down, and his face was burnt to the point of becoming unrecognizable. Grisha's mother expressed her rage at the pilot: "a cur's death to a cur." Grisha's family in exile is expecting news from Grisha, and they believe that he, a disabled person who was shell shocked, could not possibly have been recruited by

the Bolsheviks. The horror of the story is that the narrator realizes that the burned pilot was Grisha and that his family still expects Grisha to be alive.

In the story “A Quiet Companion” [“Tikhii sputnik”], Teffi describes a piece of colored wax lying on her desk (Teffi 4: 88-91). This piece brought up all kinds of tragic memories. She writes that, in the fall of 1917, “frightening days” had come: Teffi depicts a truck with a machine gun under her windows (Teffi 4: 88-91). The gun “cracked by steel peas” and scared everybody (Teffi 4: 89). Teffi mentions how she needed to sell her personal belongings, including her beloved writing accessories, in order to get money to support her family. She briefly described her travel to Kiev and to Novorossiysk, and her conversations with fellow émigrés in Constantinople: “Maybe, should I sell something else? I am afraid we are going to hit rock bottom. [And a reply to it]—Ladies and Gentlemen, do not be afraid. For we all have already hit rock bottom. This is it, rock bottom. You see, how it is simple and not frightening at all. Let us break this bagel into four slices” (Teffi 4: 90). The story ends with the author’s sudden realization that this little ugly piece of colored wax was a great companion of hers throughout the months of uncertainty and wandering.

Teffi explores the importance of small artifacts for bringing memories of bygone Russia. In her story “A golden thimble” [“Zolotoi naperstok”], written in the first person, Teffi describes how she once noticed a small golden thimble in a window of a Parisian antiquarian shop (Teffi 4: 130-134). She admits she was worried sick when she entered the store because she hoped to find this golden thimble, a family relic that she received from her grandmother. This small item gave her all kinds of memories about her growing up in Russia: it gave her “sweet sorrow of unsteady memories, so uncertain...” (Teffi 4: 130-134). This thimble brought back the memories of the entire world of the estate. She remembered a family legend about a great-aunt whose parents were hiding her in a cellar during the Napoleonic invasion because her aunt, Zholisha [from the French word “jolie”], was so beautiful that Napoleon was likely to have a fancy for her. She remembered that the estate was able to produce a great deal of food and was entirely economically sufficient. Only sugar and tea were bought; everything else was produced by serfs. Teffi also remembered that, during the summers, her family traveled to a different estate located in another province. On this trip, the entire family was invited to stay in a big estate, and immediately, the two families discovered common relatives in their pedigree. A beautiful ball followed, opened by a lovely dance, a polonaise. Serfs were playing music: in addition to being trained as a tailor, a smith and a saddler, several serfs also performed music for such occasions. The family spent several days there. Next summer the host’s family was visiting Teffi’s family.

Old Russia was also the land of the inexplicable. In “A Golden Thimble,” Teffi describes how her aunt, Nadine, died very young (Teffi 4: 130-134). She went to a church, saw a coffin, and had immediately come to the conclusion that she was going to die. Indeed, she went to bed, did not eat anything, did not talk, and died several days later. It was from her aunt that Teffi inherited this golden thimble which, as

an émigrée, she hoped to find in this Parisian shop. The short story ends with a sad description to remind a writer of how many memories were irretrievably lost in exile:

Who owns it [the thimble] there [in Bolshevik Russia]? Who needs it, so tiny? And what do they see in it? Only a small piece of gold. But how many of our emanations are on it. The hands of four generations touched it. This wonderful Zholisha, who was hidden from the monster Napoleon... Surely her hand smelled of patchouli... And children-like hands of grandmother, strictly washed by egg soap, and the hands of tender enigmatic Nadine, which surely smelled of mignonette. And Guerlain fragrance—the last breath of my St. Petersburg’s lace and ribbon... The warmth of our hands and breath, and the radiation of our eyes, and a light push on the eye of the needle, when we diligently counted crosses on canvas.... (Teffi 4: 133-134)

Her collection of stories, *The Book of June* (*Kniga Iiun'*, 1931), begins with the description of a big estate house in old Russia (Teffi 4: 14-21). A young girl, Katia, has just arrived at her aunt’s country house. She is bored and lonely in this house, and compares it unfavorably to her house in Saint Petersburg. On the eve of Ivan’s Day when, according to old Russian fairy tales, the “devilish forces” are on the rise, a maid tickles her to a point that Katia believes that the maid is going to torment her to death. A student saves her, but the story ends on an intriguing note: it is not clear whether the maid, indeed, had bad intentions. The world of folk beliefs is explored in her collection of stories, *A Witch*.

Teffi analyzed the ways in which Russian émigrés remembered their motherland. Some of these memories were bittersweet. In her stories, Teffi often contrasted her memories of old Russia with her impressions of living in Paris as an émigrée. She associated old Russia with the world of the large estate: in her memories, the estate was associated with celebrating festivities, with a large crowd, with summer, and the pleasant sounds of people’s bustling activities. Even when Teffi portrayed these gatherings ironically, her narrative is full of warmth and nostalgia. The story “The Spring of Spring” [“Vesna vesny”] describes Liza, a young girl who is traveling with her aunt to a country estate (Teffi 4: 164-69). During this rail trip, Liza meets a student; he writes a note with a verse for her. During this innocent flirtation, the student repeats clichés. He describes Liza as “a panther with green eyes” who “does not know how to love, but loves to torment” and promises to find her wherever she will be (Teffi 4: 167-68). His verse and his confession that he is in love with Liza deeply impress her. Liza is mesmerized by this passionate conversation in a train and keeps repeating the verse which the student wrote in her honor. Teffi writes:

Summer began. It was bustling, prosaic, in a big landlord family, with brothers, the students of gymnasium, with spiteful adult [female] cousins, with governesses, arguments, bathing, and *botvin'ia* [“beet borscht”]. (Teffi 4: 169)

Liza’s cousin tells her that the verse which Liza assumes is inspired by the meeting between her and the student is, in reality, an old romance written ten years ago. Liza understands that her love is an illusion, and it is wiser to enjoy simple prosaic pleasures such as, for instance, tea and fresh strawberries served in a dining room.

Teffi was fascinated with how the Russians often reinvented their identities. In the short story “It was spring...” [“Byla vesna...”], Teffi provides a description of a short encounter between two young Russians in the years before the Revolution (Teffi 4: 113-117). Both characters are rather poor urban residents: one of these characters, Marel’nikov, is a supervising member of a zemstvo prison. Four years before, while on duty at the prison, he met the merchant Prostov who was behind bars for twelve days for rowdiness. Prostov came to like Marel’nikov, and ever since, for Easter, Prostov loans Marel’nikov his very simple carriage, called by the interesting term “jalopy” [“taratachka”]. For this one day, Marel’nikov feels himself a landowner. Teffi writes:

And there was nothing surprising in it. There were and are a lot of people in Russia who are not just such dreamers, but essentially are living by another life and occasionally so intensely and in reality that even one does not know which existence is to acknowledge behind such a person, that of an aid to the pharmacist, or that of the re-organizer of the Russian Navy. (Teffi 4: 114)

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Marel’nikov pays a visit to a young woman, Lizaveta Andreevna, who works as a cashier in a zemstvo cooperative. Marel’nikov finds Lizaveta Andreevna irresistibly charming and hints that he wants to marry her. His marriage proposal is indirect: “Tell, would you agree to be the wife of a landowner?” (Teffi 4: 116). Lizaveta Andreevna herself lives in the world of fantasies. Two years before, a small troupe where her classmate—with a telling name, Klusha, meaning “broody”—played in a show in their city. Lizaveta Andreevna had one chance to go to the stage and to play the small part of a maid. On the day Marel’nikov proposes to her, Lizaveta Andreeva has just received news that her classmate herself quit the stage and would not be able to find her a theatrical character in this troupe. Nonetheless, of rather modest future prospects, Lizaveta Andreeva declines this marriage proposal. The way she justifies her refusal shows that she herself lives in the world of dreams.

To bury myself in a village forever? To give up a dream for good? I know—the life of an actress is hard. Intrigues. Backstage squabbles. However, a person who has dedicated oneself to arts must be above of that. And one must in the first place be free. (Teffi 4: 116)

This short story shows that these invented identities are more important than reality for these two characters.

In the story “Memories are stately...” [“Vospominaniya velichavy”], Teffi highlights the gap between the ways the Russian émigrés remembered the past and what life in Old Russia was (Teffi, *Zigzag* 226-33). In this story, Teffi describes two Russian émigrés who take a stroll in Paris during Easter. Lozhkin shares with his friend his sentimental memory of growing up in his parents’ luxurious estate and how many wonderful memories Easter brings to him. His narrative is nostalgic and quite predictable: he mentions his darling grandmother and an Easter feast that featured all sorts of delicious dishes. Lozhkin characterizes himself as the favorite grandson who

was getting all the love and attention. In reality, however, his childhood was nothing like the story he shared with his friend. Once, he, a teenager, and his father were invited to their landlady's house for Easter. They were put in the corner; Lozhkin was not even given a fork. Lozhkin broke an egg to eat it; the egg turned out to be soft-boiled, and its contents leaked on to the tablecloth. Lozhkin was harshly reprimanded and humiliated. This story does not just show how émigrés would embellish the stories of their life in Russia. The story also demonstrates how émigrés would subdue their own memories in order to reproduce dominant discourses and to feel themselves a part of a larger social group. The story also shows how Teffi's nostalgia was reflective, and how much the writer was aware of a gap between people's memories of Old Russia and the complex realities of Russian pre-revolutionary history.

In conclusion, in her works Teffi addresses the process of the creation of an émigré identity. Teffi highlights how, being apart from their motherland, many émigrés suffered from loneliness. Their solitude sometimes was unbearable. Moreover, despite the tragedy of emigration, many had chosen to pretend that there were doing just fine. There was an ongoing tension between their true feelings—desperation, fear, anxieties—and how they represented themselves to the world. Teffi provided insights into women's personal experience of emigration and highlighted the gender dimensions of emigration. At the same time, the memories of bygone Russia helped the Russian émigrés to escape from the loneliness of their existence in Paris. Reminiscences of Russia were filled with nostalgia: Teffi often associated this lost world with a large estate, with summer, a large loving family, an abundance of food, and entertainment. Nonetheless, Teffi was aware of the fact that her sentimental memories of old Russia and the narratives of many Russian émigrés portrayed Russia as it might have been, but not how it was.

## NOTES

1. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. I-Chun Wang for inviting me to contribute my paper to this fine volume. I am also thankful to Drs. Lee March, Keith DeFoor, Gary Myers, and Cathy Cox (Young Harris College) for their support. I am grateful for the guidance of Kathryn Amdur (Emory University) and Lewis Siegelbaum (Michigan State University). The librarians at Young Harris College, especially Blair Stapleton and Debra March, helped obtain rare copies of necessary materials. Also deeply appreciated are the support and encouragement of Matthew Matteson, and the author's family, Tatiana, Anatoliy, and Elena Troubitsyny.
2. The narrative is ironic: the title of the play, *They Moved in, Become Entangled, and Become Dispersed*, reveals its trivial and simply silly nature. In addition, the only measure of her good performance was that her boss had not recognized her on stage.

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