

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: THE PERSISTENT *POGONI* AT THE VICTORY PARADE OF 1945: STALIN'S CHOICE TO COSTUME THE SOVIET PRESENT IN THE UNIFORMS OF THE IMPERIAL PAST

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The military uniform in which the Imperial Army of Tsar Nicholas II marched westwards toward its disastrous confrontation with that of his cousin Kaiser Wilhelm II was the culmination of three hundred years of dress reform on the part of the Romanovs. Each of the dynasty's emperors and empresses imparted their own particular stylistic mark on the uniform; it in turn was symbolic of that ruler's reign and communicated a complex package of political, cultural, and social messages. The uniform of 1914 was symbolic of the uneasy reign of Nicholas II and it was therefore a natural target for the Bolshevik revolutionaries who physically tore them apart. Yet when Stalin sent the Red Army west to meet Hitler's *Wehrmacht* his soldiers were dressed in a uniform nearly identical to that which had been ravaged and reviled over two decades prior. By 1941 Stalin transformed the uniform of Imperial Russia into that of Soviet Russia, even though the political and cultural life of these two periods stood in stark contrast to each other in many ways. This highly successful transformation will be examined through application of an adaptation of the theories of stage semiotics.

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UNIFORMS OF THE IMPERIAL PAST

by

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## Introduction

The military uniform in which the Imperial Army of Tsar Nicholas II marched westwards toward its disastrous confrontation with the Germans was the culmination of three hundred years of dress reform on the part of the Romanovs. Each of the dynasty's emperors and empresses imprinted a particular stylistic mark on the uniform; it in turn was symbolic of that ruler's reign and communicated a complex package of political, cultural, and social messages. The uniform of 1914 was symbolic of the uneasy reign of Nicholas II and it was therefore a natural target for the Bolshevik revolutionaries who physically tore it apart. Yet when Stalin sent the Red Army west to meet Hitler's *Wehrmacht* his soldiers were dressed in a uniform nearly identical to that which had been ravaged and reviled over two decades prior. By 1941 Stalin transformed the uniform of Imperial Russia into that of Soviet Russia, even though the political and cultural life of these two periods stood in stark contrast to each other in many ways. This transformation will be examined through application of an adaptation of the theories of stage semiotics.

Why a theatrical metaphor? In some ways there is no better way to examine Stalin's rule. Even those with rudimentary knowledge of Soviet history are probably aware of the "show trials" of the 1930s, for which Stalin composed elaborate scripts that were recited by his former comrades in order to discredit them and consolidate his own power. This is just one of many theatrical tools employed by Stalin to further his own ambition, and historian Lynn Mally is not alone when she suggests that this "emphasis on impressive forms of presentation led to the creation of what we might call a 'spectacle state' in the 1930s, a polity in which power was conveyed through visual means."<sup>1</sup> Mally's concept of "polity"—the audience of the "spectacle state"—complements Patrice Pavis' work on the semiotics of theatrical representation and reception. Pavis theorizes the relationship between an audience (in this case the body politic), and a spectacle (in this case the Soviet state), as the discourse of the mise-en-

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn Mally, *Revolutionary Acts: Amateur Theater and the Soviet State, 1917-1938* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 181.

scène, derived from the French theatrical term for the arrangement of objects on the stage.

The discourse of the *mise en scène* is the manner in which the *mise en scène* (the director's metatext, as we shall see) organizes, in space and time, the fiction conveyed by the text, making use of a series of enunciators: actors, decor, objects and all those indices of the way in which the text and fable are recounted on stage (verbally by the text, and, at the same time, visually by all the signs of performance).<sup>2</sup>

In the spectacle state of the Soviet Union during the 1920s and into the early 1940s Stalin is the *metteur-en-scène* (master artist) of the *mise-en-scène* that is Soviet government and society (if they can be separated). As Katerina Clark and Evgeny Dobrenko write, "From 1930 until his death in 1953 there was virtually not a single ideological (and therefore cultural) question before the Politburo in which the decision was not made by [Stalin], or was made without his knowledge (and therefore assent)."<sup>3</sup>

This analogy is useful for it allows the examination of cultural and political phenomena as performative events. Further, it suggests that these can be interpreted as the products of conscious decisions by the rulers of Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union. Pavis states that the discourse of the *mise-en-scène* is "the manner in which the *mise en scène*... organizes, in space and time, the fiction conveyed by the text, making use of a series of enunciators;" in this case the definition of the state's identity constitutes the text and one of these enunciators was the uniform of the Red Army. Taking my cues from Spencer Golub's excellent study of representational practices in the Stalin era, I seek to present a "theatrical narrative" constructed out of the "images and correspondences" of Imperial Russian, Bolshevik, and Stalinist

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<sup>2</sup> Patrice Pavis, *Languages of the Stage: Essays in the Semiology of Theatre* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 147.

<sup>3</sup> Katerina Clark, Evgeny Dobrenko, Andrei Artizov and Oleg Naumov, *Soviet Culture and Power: A History in Documents, 1917-1953*, trans. Marian Schwartz (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 140.

military uniforms as they are “deployed as the stage props of history.”<sup>4</sup> However, as Jim Carmody has written, “Although the basic theoretical foundations for the semiotic analysis of mise-en-scène were established many decades ago, actual examples of such analysis are remarkably rare,” and “there exists no general agreement among theater semioticians as to how such an analysis ought to proceed or even which kinds of semiotic analysis are likely to produce the most fruitful results.”<sup>5</sup> While Carmody specifically writes about a stage production, that the phenomena studied herein are not strictly theatre does not diminish the appropriateness of applying this theatrical methodology. Accordingly I will borrow from the model Carmody himself provides and center my analysis on a specific performance, in this case the Victory Parade of 1945, positioning this as a theatrical event, the rehearsals for which began immediately following the Russian revolution.

Corresponding to these eras of Imperial Russian, Bolshevik, and Stalinist uniforms, this paper is composed of three sections: “Source Material: Imperial Military Uniforms from Peter the Great to Nicholas II,” “Bolshevik Actor-Soldiers: Attacking Form and Reassessing Content,” and “Stalinist Simulacra: Everything Old is New Again.” The first section, which develops the idea that the design of uniforms is a means of communicating a state’s identity, draws examples of Imperial Russian military uniforms from Peter the Great to Nicholas II, whose reign marks the end of the Romanov dynasty. This in turn provides the background knowledge necessary to consider the ways in which subsequent Bolshevik and Stalinist uniforms draw upon and reject certain characteristics of imperial uniforms.

The second section addresses the sweeping changes in visual culture brought about by the Russian Revolution and considers how early Bolshevik reforms correspond to the desire of the new government to dismantle the symbols of Imperial power. The soldier’s uniform was an important target of reform. Only a new man could build a new society, and a new man could not wear the clothes of the past,

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<sup>4</sup> Spencer Golub, *The Recurrence of Fate: Theatre & Memory in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 1994), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Jim Carmody, “Alceste in Hollywood: A Semiotic Reading of *The Misanthrope*,” in *Critical Theory and Performance*, ed. Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), 37.

particularly when they were corrupted by symbols of rank, power, and class privilege. In terms of real uniforms worn by real soldiers, the process of reimagining the body in terms of clothes was gradual; the theatre, however, implemented changes in visual culture more quickly. These two worlds – the military and the theatrical – were temporarily blended when soldiers were mobilized to perform in *agitiki* (agitation plays), plays intended to educate citizens in their new responsibilities, inform them of current events, and celebrate the achievements of the revolution. Design movements like Constructivism, in which designers boldly abstracted form and shape in costume in order to literally restructure the body and movement of actors (and people) on and off stage, participated in the reimagining of the human body. However, the soldiers' theatre and their uniforms were adapted to conform to Stalin's aesthetic and ideological demands. Following a brief period of artistic experimentation after the revolution, canonical plays and genres were revived and soon prevailed on stages in Moscow and Leningrad; nonetheless, even these had to be played in an ideologically acceptable manner. Stalin's changes to the uniform of the Red Army also reflect the increasingly urgent need to adapt to a rapidly evolving ideology. The differing fortunes of two popular plays on the Moscow stage during this period suggest the degree to which the past had begun to inflect the present. Mikhail Bulgakov's *Days of the Turbins* at the Moscow Art Theatre and Konstantin Trenyov's *Lyubov Yarovaya* at the Maly Theatre, both of which premiered in 1926, portrayed White Russian soldiers on stage, yet their differences in story and characterization led the White uniforms in the first to be sufficiently ideologically threatening to draw the unwanted attention of the censors.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, the way White uniforms were integrated into the second enhanced its ideological orthodoxy. Taken together, these examples – the radical redesign of the uniform, the rise and fall of army amateur theatricals, and the ideological issues that arose over the portrayal onstage of essentially Imperial Russian uniforms – suggest an identity crisis following the Revolution that not only affected the Red Army itself but also individual soldiers and civilians who struggled to renegotiate nostalgia about the past with conflicting images in the present.

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<sup>6</sup> While these plays opened before Stalin came to power, they both continued to play throughout the period addressed in this study.



The third section deals with Stalin's decision to replace the uniform developed in the immediate post-revolutionary period with one that bore a striking resemblance to the uniform of the Imperial army under Nicholas II. This brings us full circle to the question of why Stalin made that choice and what he intended to communicate about Soviet identity when he began to base it, at least in part, on an easily-recognizable uniform that communicated (and for some continues to do so) a distinctive facet of Imperial Russian identity.

## Source Material: Imperial Military Uniforms from Peter the Great to Nicholas II

It was gray in Moscow on the morning of June 24, 1945. Even though a light shower earlier had made the worn cobblestones in front of St. Basil's Cathedral slick nothing could dampen the spirit of the day. Generals in bright green uniforms, their chests, arms, shoulders and cuffs bound brightly with gold embroidery, colorful ribbons, and shining medals, made their way up the stairs of the reviewing platform to join the man who, like the almost mythical Alexander Nevskii or Dmitrii Donskoi before him, had prevailed against extraordinary odds and repelled a powerful invading army. Almost two hundred captured flags were pointed unceremoniously towards the ground, the bright folds of fabric heaped in piles on the wet stones. Hordes of Muscovites enthusiastically pressed against each other to get a clear view of these mighty men and the crowds of soldiers who mingled amiably as they drew themselves into broad, deep columns. When the clock on the majestic spire of the Spassky Tower struck ten o'clock a thunderous roar erupted from the audience as two Marshals, curved sabers at their sides, rode out into the middle of Red Square, one on a black horse and the other white, and presented themselves before the reviewing platform. As the soldiers collectively issued a deafening cheer one of the Marshals took the stage and delivered a rousing speech.

After the new national anthem was played a beautiful and intricately choreographed spectacle unfolded before the audience, dignitaries and commoners alike, beginning with seemingly endless lines and formations of soldiers marching across the ancient square. The infantrymen wore tunics with offset plackets at the throat, reminiscent of folk dress, with guns slung over their shoulders and medals proudly pinned to their chests. They followed officers in closely fitted jackets with colorful *pogoni*, or epaulettes, on their shoulders, some with curved swords at their sides and some with blades gleaming, unsheathed, in their hands. Each unit carried a standard trimmed in gold fringe, some designating them as elite guards units, a distinction often earned for heroism and sacrifice in the field. There were ranks of sailors, their white bonnets bright against the gray sky, black ribbons trailing behind them. There were also impressive rows of Cossacks in striking black kaftans with

bright red accents at the neck and cuff, the distinctive dress of these able and tenacious steppe cavalrymen.

The year might have been 1709 and it could have been Peter I reviewing his troops after the resounding victory over the Swedes at the Battle of Poltava; it might also have been Alexander I celebrating the decimation of Napoleon's Grand Armée in 1812, or in 1815 after pushing the French all the way back to Paris after the Battle of Waterloo. Indeed up to this point it may have been a parade held in honor of any of the great victories achieved during the three hundred years of Romanov rule until one saw the columns of troops give way to convoys of olive green jeeps, trucks with spotlights and loudspeakers or rails hung with clusters of rockets, rumbling tracked vehicles drawing heavy artillery and rows upon rows of tanks that passed before the enormous portraits of Lenin and Marx adorning the long arcades of GUM, the state department store located in what had been an elegant pre-Revolutionary shopping arcade. Surveying it all from his vantage point on the reviewing stand atop Lenin's



**Figure 1. Marshals Zhukhov and Rokossovskii ride onto Red Square to begin the Victory Parade, June 24, 1945.**

Tomb were the Marshals, Georgii Zhukhov and Konstantin

Rokossovskii, heroes of Leningrad and Stalingrad respectively, flanking the man to whom all of the captured flags were bowed, to whom all the salutes were aimed, and at whom all praise was directed: Josef Stalin.<sup>7</sup>

Stalin's parade, an explicit recreation of Romanov pageantry, was designed to position him as equal to Peter the Great, Alexander I, and other autocrats of Imperial Russia. To be the *de facto* successor to the Romanov line would, for Stalin,

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<sup>7</sup> My description is drawn from the extant film footage recorded by the state broadcasting company (*Parad Pobedy*, directed by N. D. Mel'nikov, produced by the Central Order of the Red Banner Documentary Film Studios, 1945). Not only is this one of the first films shot entirely on color film in the Soviet Union, it has been suggested that it may have been the first full-color television broadcast in the USSR.

legitimize not only his absolute rule over the citizens of the Soviet Union, but also his desire to consolidate his power over those countries that were once part of the Russian Empire, such as Poland and Ukraine. Further, he needed to foster a common identity to draw upon in opposition to Hitler's invading army of 1941.

Perhaps the most immediately apparent element of these pageants is costuming, and in this case the soldiers of the Red Army were dressed similarly to those Nicholas II reviewed nearly thirty years earlier as they marched to the Eastern Front during the First World War. This is remarkable because the first acts of the Soviet Government were to pull down the Imperial Eagles, abolish the nobility, and distance themselves as far as possible from their Imperial forebears. Additionally the uniforms of the Red Army were specifically designed to make a clean break with the Imperial Army, stripping away all ranks, and literally stripping off elements of the uniform like the *pogoni*, or shoulder boards, that distinguished aristocratic officers from common men. Yet by the time of the Victory parade in 1945 all of these reforms had been reversed and the Red Army had turned itself into a simulacrum of the Imperial Army from which it had fought so hard to distance itself a generation before.<sup>8</sup>

These identity issues are not solely those of the Soviet Union; from the double-headed eagle appropriated by Ivan III from Byzantium to the Romanov court's persistent preference for the French language over its own, the Russian state has, throughout its many incarnations, approached national identity formation through a combination of native and foreign signs. This has invariably led to cycles of identity crisis on a national scale, notably on the eve of Napoleon's invasion in 1812 and Hitler's invasion in 1941. This is evident in many aspects of Soviet culture, official and unofficial, as in the dissolution and subsequent reinstatement of the Russian Orthodox Church and Gorky's exhortation to bring Russian dramatic literature "back to Ostrovskii." Simply put, although the Bolsheviks were committed to destroying the hierarchically exploitative nature of an army once led by an

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<sup>8</sup> In this case "simulacrum" is invoked in its denotative sense of being an imitative form without the accompanying content, though to pursue this transformation through the theories advanced by Jean Baudrillard would certainly provide an avenue for further research.

aristocratic officer corps, by the time of the German invasion in the summer of 1941 the imperial military as an institution had for all intents and purposes been revived and the Soviet soldier that marched in a column before Stalin in the Victory Day parade on 1945 was dressed in essentially the same uniform as the Russian soldier who filed past Nicholas II on their way to meet the Kaiser's soldiers in 1914.<sup>9</sup>

Military uniforms are like theatrical costumes in the sense that both are designed to project specific character traits through use of a symbolic language. The power of these garments is not simply their ability to clothe the actor or soldier, but to construct a metatext that can be laid over the dramatic text or parade choreography itself, allowing the character (individual or collective) to "speak" more lines than are actually written. This is particularly useful during any sort of mass rally or parade when spoken lines are not the most efficient way to communicate a message to a large audience. The importance of the costume is in, as Barthes writes, "dramatizing the state of the body."<sup>10</sup> One can "dress the part" or "dress for success"; dress indicates who we are, who we want to be, and even, presumably, what we want.

What message did an audience of Soviet citizens receive when their soldiers dressed like those of the tsars? The answer may lie in the chaos of the formative years of the Soviet Union. In the years immediately following the Revolution of 1918 the Bolsheviks, who were determined to make a clean break with the vestiges of the former regime, destroyed the symbols of tsarist Russia. Two of the most prominent social institutions of the tsarist era were the clergy and the army; consequently the neutralization of their power required a concurrent erasure of the signifying systems that perpetuated their authority. As I have noted, the revolutionary government immediately eradicated the *pogoni* of the officers – as potent a symbol of authority in the costume of the military as the crucifix is to the clergy.

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<sup>9</sup> Hitler's soldiers were also dressed in much the same uniforms as those of the Kaiser, for many of the same reasons as the Russian soldiers, but an adequate analysis of that particular set of circumstances is not possible within the space of a footnote. This is, however, something I wish to pursue in the future.

<sup>10</sup> Susan Sontag, ed., *A Barthes Reader*, with a foreword by Susan Sontag (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 182.

Although I might be accused of overstating the potential military uniforms to convey cultural codes, I would argue that they offer particularly fertile soil in which to cultivate a national persona. Regina Bendix has suggested that folk dress, the kind thought to trace its pedigree to some “true” original national “essence,” has long been manipulated by governments to serve as national markers, or perhaps more appropriately as “demarkers,” a combination of that former word with “demarcation” implying national boundaries and territorial distinction. The marking of “us” in opposition to “them” is the fundamental principle of folk dress, making them a kind of civil uniform that complements the military uniform. Yet while it may seem that the former is more “authentic” than the other, Bendix argues that both are as easily revised to serve a state’s agenda.<sup>11</sup> Thomas Abler further suggests that ethnic costume is quite often the inspiration for national military uniforms and in turn can affect the folk dress that provided its original inspiration.<sup>12</sup> In the case of Russia, military uniforms can be understood as a form of folk dress because they were both derived from the clothing of the peasantry and also worn by the ruling class, many of whom were educated in military academies and spent their lives in military service.

From the codification of military uniforms in the middle of the seventeenth century each nation has expressed something of its imagined character through the wardrobe of its warriors.<sup>13</sup> The soldier, by wearing a national uniform, physically “acts” the political ideology of his or her state. But if the elaborate costumes

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<sup>11</sup> See Regina Bendix, “Moral Integrity in Costumed Identity: Negotiating “National Costume” in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Bavaria,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 111, 440 (Spring 1998) : 133-145.

<sup>12</sup> Abler suggests that an example of this may be seen in contemporary “traditional” Scottish Highland dress, which in its current form is based upon the military adaptation of elements from earlier folk costume.

Thomas S. Abler, *Hinterland Warriors and Military Dress: European Empires and Exotic Uniforms*, series: Dress, Body and Culture (Oxford, Berg, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> "It eventually became apparent that in order to prevent battlefield error (the danger of 'friendly fire') it was advantageous for some uniformity of dress to be extended beyond individual battalions to the army or national level. As state control increased over what had been originally a capitalist enterprise, central bureaucracies began to regulate dress and provide uniforms."

Abler, *Hinterland Warriors and Military Dress*, 13.

arranged on the field of battle are primarily theatrical and not designed for the realities of combat, what is their purpose?

At this point it is helpful to further develop the semiotic significance of military costume, and in this endeavor the work of Roland Barthes is particularly useful. In his essay "Myth Today," Barthes makes the following observations on the photographic cover of an issue of the magazine *Paris Match*

On the cover, a young Negro in a French uniform is saluting, with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolor. All this is the *meaning* of the picture. But, whether naïvely or not, I see very well what it signifies to me: that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any color discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors.<sup>14</sup>

The magazine in question is the *Paris Match* for the week of June 25, 1955.<sup>15</sup> On the cover is not a soldier, as many readers assume, but a young boy who is a member of a scouting organization in the Federation of French West Africa.<sup>16</sup> He is not dressed as a Tirailleur, a soldier in one of the African units that served with the French army, but as a member of the French scouting movement in a green shirt under a wool jacket with epaulettes, topped with a black wool beret. Nothing short of a fur coat could be less appropriate to the heat of the A.O.F countries, and yet the children in these scout troops were still dressed like their counterparts in France. At a point in colonial history when African nations were increasingly vocal in their calls for independence, the French government relied upon the uniform to pacify African unrest by convincing them at a young age that they were no different than their European comrades and there was no need to change to status quo. The role of the uniform was to foster unity among the colonized with their colonizers, and while this tactic failed among Africans who ultimately gained independence, it successfully

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<sup>14</sup> Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," in Sontag, *A Barthes Reader*, 101.

<sup>15</sup> *Paris Match* No. 326, 25 Juin - 2 Juil 1955. "Le petit Diouf venu de Ouagadougou avec ses camarades, enfants de troupes d'A.O.F., pour ouvrir le fantastique spectacle que l'Armée française présente au Palais des Sports cette semaine."

<sup>16</sup> Afrique Occidentale Française, or A.O.F.

assuaged the “natives are restless” unease felt by the French themselves. As Tony Chafer writes, "The image of the 'loyal African' became a powerful myth that helped shape French attitudes to empire in post-war France."<sup>17</sup>

Even before Stalin the Bolsheviks clearly understood that dressing children in uniforms (Soviet youth donned the red scarf of the Young Pioneers soon after the revolution) was ideologically efficacious. The scarf itself was the uniform, and maintained its proletarian simplicity and unmistakable socialist symbolism long after Soviet military uniforms had regressed to their Pre-Revolutionary forms.<sup>18</sup>

Uniforming youth for political indoctrination is what led John Mollo to argue that the Boy Scout uniform, based on the khaki campaign dress of British soldiers in Africa at the turn of the twentieth century, was the primary inspiration for the brown shirts of the Nazi party. He suggests that

uniforms are primarily the “weapon of the propagandist. The dress of the Boy Scouts, which was deliberately intended to suggest healthy adventure, with undertones of moral education, was soon added to and adapted to promote a more

sinister ideology.”<sup>19</sup> The “healthy” and “moral” costume of the Boy

Scouts resonated with the advocates of an aggressive health culture in the Weimar Republic.



**Figure 2. Young Pioneers mourn Stalin's death.**

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<sup>17</sup> Tony Chafer. *The End of Empire in French West Africa: France's Successful Decolonization?* (New York: Berg Publishers, 2002), 47.

<sup>18</sup> Perhaps this may be due to the relative absence of Scouting and its accompanying uniform in Imperial Russia, the movement having started in 1907 by Sir Robert Baden-Powell subsequent to the publication of his book *Scouting for Boys*, and had not had time to permeate Imperial Russian society before the Revolution.

<sup>19</sup> John Mollo, *Military Fashion: A Comparative History of the Uniforms of the Great Armies from the 17th Century to the First World War* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1972), 232.



There is a message in the simple red scarf of a Young Pioneer, one that was as clearly communicated to Soviets as the picture of the young African boy on the cover of *Paris Match* would have been to the French. The French uniform confers upon the wearer the identity of France, even though the body may not be European or endowed with any rights of citizenship, and in their various incarnations the Imperial Russian and Soviet uniforms accomplished the same goal. Through examination of changes in military uniform during the formative years of the Soviet Union one can follow the struggle of the state to construct a distinctly Soviet national identity beginning with what they may have hoped was a clean slate; a military clothed in a remarkably classless, proletarian fashion devoid of the symbols of the Imperial Army following the Revolution. By the beginning of the Second World War, however, the Soviet leadership apparently realized that the symbols of Imperial Russia could be useful not only in improving the functionality of the Red Army (as in symbols of rank and authority) but also in stimulating a feeling of national solidarity that might be exploited to bolster resistance to the looming German invasion, Operation Barbarossa, that began on June 22, 1941. At this point "the Red Army in many ways, both intentionally and unintentionally, resembled the reviled and much maligned imperial army," and by the time of the victory parade in Red Square it was evident that, "the Red Army completely fell away in practice from its founding revolutionary vision and resembled the tsarist army of the nineteenth century more than it did the Soviet Army of the 1920s."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Roger R. Reese, *The Soviet Military Experience: A History of the Soviet Army, 1917-1991* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 4.

This practice of reinforcing behavioral change through changes in costume has been a constant feature of Russian culture that began in earnest during the reign of Peter the Great who not only cut off the beards of the boyars in 1698 but also replaced the traditionally Russian kaftans of the *streltsi* with uniforms inspired by the successful military states of Sweden, England and the Netherlands.<sup>21</sup> Peter fought to shape the loosely organized and largely untrained *streltsi* into a modern army capable of waging a military expedition against Sweden, the greatest military power in all of Europe. Rather conveniently for Peter the *streltsi* revolted against his rule while he was away from Moscow, and on his return he had the excuse he needed to obliterate them and build a European-style army along the lines he had imagined while constructing his mock battles at the Preobrazhenskoe estate outside of Moscow.<sup>22</sup> Though only one of many bold reforms during his reign, by discarding the long beards and kaftans of the *streltsi* and restocking the wardrobes of the high-profile ruling elite with breeches and waistcoats cut along European lines, Peter hoped to dispel the shadow of Russia's dark Byzantine past. In 1722 he introduced the Table of Ranks, uniting the three branches of his government (army, court, and civil administration) under a military-style chain of command with each rank assigned its



**Figure 3. Tsar Alexis I, father of Peter the Great.**



**Figure 4. Peter the Great.**

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<sup>21</sup> The *streltsi* were units of soldiers raised and equipped by noblemen that could be called upon by the sovereign in times of crisis. While they nominally served the head of state, due to their composition they were subject to the whims of the men who paid and fed them, meaning they could not always be counted on to fight for the head of state if personal interest went against official policy.

<sup>22</sup> The Preobrazhenskii and the Semenovskii would become the first two Guards regiments of the Russian Army. They were also considered the most elite during the Imperial period. The designation of Guards was discarded during the Revolution but was resurrected by Stalin during the thirties. Ibid., 118.

own uniform. Even the clergy was affected, with the design of their vestments now regulated by the state. While the streets of Moscow might be seen to teem with the uniforms of soldiers, clerks, and students, the wearers represented a disproportionate minority in a country populated overwhelmingly by peasants and serfs. While the impoverished majority would have found the tight breeches and embroidered jackets worn by the nobility thoroughly unsuited to their harsh agricultural environment, the lack of uniform signified their exclusion from the official hierarchy.

This was the case for all subsequent Romanov rulers, to varying degrees of success. While Peter the Great, through sheer force of will, managed to accomplish his reforms, the stubborn adherence of Peter III to his own sartorial agenda was emblematic of his seemingly endless shortcomings as monarch; not to overstate the importance of his unpopular clothing reforms, they could not have endeared him to the cabal of noblemen who arranged his assassination. So enamored was he of Frederick the Great's army that he ordered the Russian uniform to be as stiff and rigid as that of his hero, but so threatening was this harsh foreign image to the officer corps that they supported his wife Catherine in the successful coup that ended his single unpopular year on the throne. When she came to power in 1762 she introduced her own profound reforms that relaxed the cut of the uniforms, reflecting her rejection of harsh Prussian discipline in favor of Enlightenment ideals. When her son Paul came to power in 1796 he made clear his rabid hatred for his mother and her policies through an almost immediate return to the strict Prussian lines of his father's uniforms. Not surprisingly, Paul's reign was characterized by a desperate need for control and discipline. Paul's authoritarianism was unpopular and alienating, driving members of his own court to assassinate him in 1801. His son Alexander, whose education had been guided by Catherine, released his subjects from their sartorial bondage and allowed them to adopt elements of fashion that had been so threatening to Paul. Influenced by French Republican dress and English dandyism, collars grew higher, hair got shorter, and a new sense of personal freedom unthinkable under his

father led Alexander to proclaim that, “everybody may dress according to his own pleasure, provided he do not violate public decorum.”<sup>23</sup>

Such freedom was to be short-lived. Alexander was profoundly affected by Napoleon’s invasion of 1812, and by 1815 the light of reform that burned inside him had faded. He ceded much of his responsibility to ambitious ministers like Alexei Arakcheev who developed a string of brutal military colonies to control the same serf and peasant soldiers that had contributed to Alexander’s victory, a minor example of the many unpopular policies that contributed to the deepening divide between Alexander and his people. Groups of military officers and other members of the educated nobility secretly met to plot his overthrow but Alexander died in 1825 before any of these groups could act. The wheels, once set in motion, could not be stopped – on the day his successor Nicholas proclaimed himself emperor two secret societies consisting of military officers who rose against him in what came to be known as the Decembrist Revolt. Though quickly suppressed, Nicholas never forgot or forgave the betrayal of his officer corps and dedicated the rest of his life to ceaseless monitoring of the military. He kept his soldiers and officers constantly engaged in parade and drill in order to keep them from finding the time to plot against him. Accordingly the Russian army attained “a standard of spit-and-polish probably never surpassed either before or since,” and the uniforms were superb, of an “extreme” cut characterized by tight trousers, waists, and cuffs.<sup>24</sup> What was beautiful on the parade ground was not practical in the field however, and when the French general Bosquet remarked of the British at the Battle of Balaclava during the miserable Crimean War in 1854, “C’est magnifique, mais ce n’est pas la guerre,” it could have easily been directed towards his Russian allies.<sup>25</sup> Though neither side could claim conclusive victory in this spectacularly mismanaged war, Russian battlefield deaths far outnumbered those of their allied opponents and, perhaps more

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<sup>23</sup> Mollo, *Military Fashion*, 109.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>25</sup> Abler, *Hinterland Warriors and Military Dress*, 1.

importantly, the country was devastated by the blow to their position as preeminent European military superpower.<sup>26</sup>

After the death of Nicholas I in 1855 (variously ascribed to a case of pneumonia contracted while reviewing a military parade or suicide in embarrassment over the conduct of the war), his son Alexander II began his own military reforms and relaxed the fit of his uniforms. Largely this was a practical response to factors like the punishing heat of the Central Asian campaigns when suffering soldiers took it upon themselves to discard elaborate, constricting uniforms in favor of looser fitting garments like the typically baggy peasant shirt. This evolved, through the addition of shoulder-straps, into the characteristic Russian military garment known as the *gymnasterka*, a sort of loose-fitting blouse worn over the trousers and belted, with cuffed sleeves and an offset collar. In turn his successor Alexander III continued to explore this new “native Russian” look, and “the Tsar pursued a programme of 'Russification' of the army. Dress followed a style developed for an earlier independent Caucasian Corps before the Crimean War and was based on peasant dress.”<sup>27</sup> So important was this reform to the monarch that he made certain his army was fully costumed in this fashion for his coronation, thereby making one of his first policy statements with military uniforms.<sup>28</sup>



**Figure 5. *Lubok*, a popular print, showing the blouse upon which the *gymnasterka* was based, including a small offset placket at the neck.**

Shifting the look of military uniforms from European parade splendor to peasant inspired campaign dress is representative of the struggle that characterized

<sup>26</sup> While the Russians are thought to have lost 256,000 men total to the Allies’ 252,600, Russian battlefield deaths are estimated at 128,700 to the Allies’ 70,000. The lion’s share of the difference is attributed to the effects of cholera. R. Ernest Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy, *The Encyclopedia of Military History from 3500 B.C. to the Present, Revised Edition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 829.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

Russian intellectual life in the nineteenth-century. It is important to remember at this junction that there is never inherent “meaning” in anything, much less peasant or folk dress, just what is imparted by various factions to justify ideological agendas. During the nineteenth-century one side, the Westernizers (*zapadniki*) maintained that Russia must continue to locate itself culturally and politically within Western Europe; the other side, which came to be known as the Slavophiles, rejected Western Europe as corrupt and encouraged Russians to direct their gaze inwards to seek what was “authentic” inside their own borders. For the Slavophiles it was the “horrors of the French Revolution [that] led [them] to reject the universal culture of the Enlightenment and to emphasize instead those indigenous traditions that distinguished Russia from the West,” leading to an idealization of the “common folk (*narod*) as the true bearer of the national character (*narodnost*’).”<sup>29</sup> Moscow and St. Petersburg became emblematic of this struggle; the former being the locus of Pre-Petrine power and marked by the Byzantine lines of Slavic architecture, the latter a “Venice of the North,” built by Peter the Great as proof that Russia was a western European nation. Orlando Figes writes, “For the Slavophiles, Peter’s city was a symbol of the catastrophic rupture with Holy Rus’; for Westerners, a progressive sign of Russia’s Europeanization.”<sup>30</sup> While Alexander III was based in St. Petersburg, the Slavophiles shifted focus to Moscow, the ancient city of Ivan the Terrible, Boris Godunov, and the “Time of Troubles” that preceded the Romanov dynasty.

[Those] fifty years were seen as a crucial period in Russia’s past. They were a time when everything was up for grabs and the nation was confronted by fundamental questions of identity. Was it to be governed by elected rulers or by the Tsars? Was it to be part of Europe or remain outside of it? The same questions that were being asked by thinking Russians in the nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup>

Moderate intellectuals sought a compromise between the two poles, suggesting that Russia could simultaneously belong to the west and the east. The

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<sup>29</sup> Orlando Figes, *Natasha’s Dance: A Cultural History of Russia* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002), 133.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

practical campaign dress of the army of Alexander III, representing the east, was still accompanied by dress uniforms, representing the west, as elaborately designed as they had ever been. This idea is reflected in the words of Esper Ukhtomskii who accompanied the tsarevich Nicholas on a tour of the Caucasus shortly before he took the throne:

You unwillingly feel yourself in a kindred setting, from which emerged the types of the ‘terrible eyes’ of the Riurik dynasty, Kalita, Fedor Ivanovich, with their boyars, coming from Prussia and Lithuania, from the nearby Hordes and from far away beyond the Volga. Only our historical figures can personify and fuse Western and Eastern principles, as if the birth of a new race, mixed in blood but distinctive in spirit, begins distinctly to emerge.<sup>32</sup>

The tsarevich was deeply attracted to this romantic notion of Russia as an ancient land with a distinctive spirit and sought to connect himself to this through his "openly disclosed his preference for Muscovite cultural

forms - art, dress, and ritual. He shared the belief...

that ancient icons represented a true Russian art form, uncorrupted by the Western spirit, and revealed the spiritual reality of God's grace to Russia and the

Russian people."<sup>33</sup> Accordingly at his coronation he ensured that he was crowned with the Monomakh cap, the fur-edged crown that predated the ornate metal confection concocted by Catherine the Great, but this could hardly be interpreted as evidence of a Slavophile or Populists agenda. After all, Slavophiles, “believed in the moral superiority of the peasant commune over modern Western ways and argued for a return to these principles [and the] Populists were convinced that the egalitarian



**Figure 6. A medal struck in commemoration of 300 years of Romanov rule, with Nicholas II to the left Mikhail, the founder of the dynasty, wearing the Monomakh cap.**

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<sup>32</sup> From Esper Ukhtomskii *The Voyage of His Imperial Highness, Sovereign Heir, and Tsarevich in 1890 and 1891 to the East*, quoted in Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy: Volume Two: From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 325.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 374.

customs of the commune could serve as a model for the socialist and democratic reorganization of society.”<sup>34</sup> Nicholas II held no such revolutionary aims, and at the same time that he took the Monomakh cap upon his head he published in his Coronation Manifesto an unequivocal rejection of the peasant commune and an affirmation of his dedication to autocracy:

I know that recently, in zemstvo assemblies, there have been heard voices carried away by senseless dreams about the participation of zemstvo representatives in governmental affairs.<sup>35</sup> Let everyone know that, devoting all my strength to the good of my people, I will preserve the principles of autocracy as firmly and undeviatingly as did my unforgettable father.<sup>36</sup>

Pre-Petrine history was far from Nicholas’ only passion, for as a frail and rather soft young man ignored by his father and doted on by his mother, Nicholas found his masculine identity in the military obligations forced upon him both by tradition and paternal negligence.

Nicholas' initiation into the guards' regiments followed the traditions created by Nicholas I in the 1830s. The heir was to experience a personal as well as symbolic bond with the elite of the armed forces who would serve him as emperor. But for Nicholas II these bonds took on an especially significant and almost exclusive importance. Much more than his predecessors, he was allowed to revel with the officers. While he loved the parade ground, he was most taken by the diversion of socializing with officers and young men of his own age, whose flattery he appears to have taken at face value.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Figes, *Natasha's Dance*, 100.

<sup>35</sup> A *zemstvo* was a local elected council.

<sup>36</sup> David Warnes, *Chronicle of the Russian Tsars: The Reign-by-Reign Record of the Rulers of Imperial Russia* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1999), 200.

<sup>37</sup> Wortman, *Scenarios of Power, Vol. II*, 320.



For Nicholas II, military uniforms may have provided a connection to the masculine power he needed to rule but dressing like a soldier did not bestow upon him a mastery of the military sciences and his reign was marred by the many demoralizing defeats of the Russo-Japanese War. It was this conflict, however, that prompted another change in the design of military costume, a change that mirrored the court's new fashion sensibility. Perhaps motivated by wartime necessity and economy, Russian uniforms during this period were simplified and, in the process, infused with a Russian character of their own. In 1908 the *kittel* uniform jacket was introduced, with hip pockets for officers and without such pockets for enlisted men. In order to display distinctions of rank a system of reversible

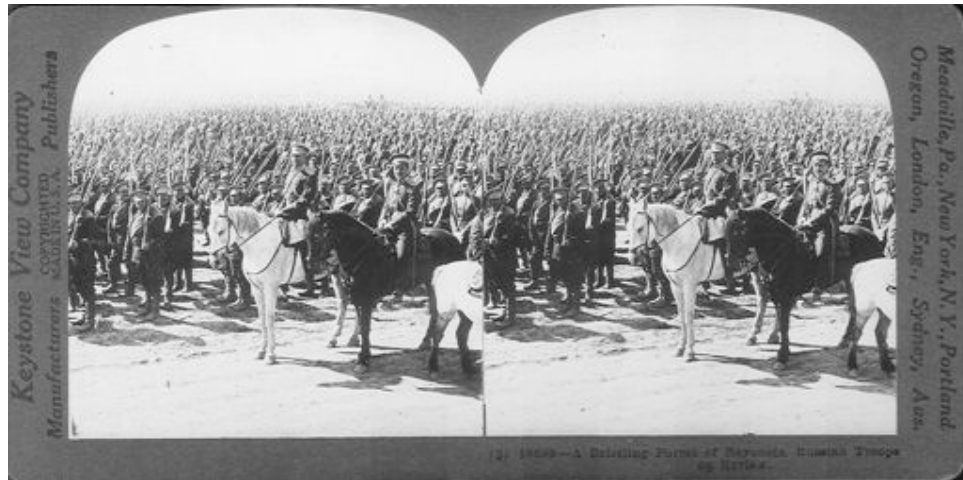


**Figure 7. Nicholas II in 1898 wearing epaulettes, the origin of the *pogoni*.**



**Figure 8. Russian staff officers of the 5<sup>th</sup> Siberian Corps in 1916 wearing a collection of uniforms including kittel jackets and *gymnasterki* belted at the waist. All but one wear *pogoni* on their shoulders.**

shoulder tabs, or *pogoni*, was introduced with practical, drab designations on one side for field use and the colorful dress counterpart on the other. In 1910 the enlisted troops lost the *kittel* and instead once again wore the peasant-style *gymnasterka*; it was in this uniform that Nicholas sent his soldiers to face the German Army during World War I.



**Figure 9. Russian infantry of the First World War. Note the similarity between the officers in this picture and that of Zhukhov and Rokossovskii at the Victory Parade of 1945.**

## Bolshevik Actor-Soldiers: Attacking Form and Reassessing Content

The abolition of the monarchy and subsequent provisional government threw all of the civil, political, military, and cultural institutions of the nation into disarray. All of a sudden their stewardship was uncertain, the battle for control was between moderate preservationists and radical revolutionaries. These became respectively the Whites, supporters of the Imperial state, and the Reds, the Bolsheviks who fought to replace it with a socialist state. The complete erasure of Imperial Russian culture was one of the primary goals of the coalescing Bolshevik state. This cleansing was intended to create a new canvas upon which to compose a Soviet definition of Russianness, replacing the rather muddled one inherited from Nicholas II. As Christopher Binns writes,

To remove memories of Tsarist glory and counteract the power of Orthodoxy (closely linked to Tsarism) the new regime needed to establish its own authority and distinctive identity, to create a legitimising genealogy. To this end, Tsarist emblems and memorials were hauled down and gradually new Bolshevik ones replaced them; streets, buildings, soon also towns and people received new, revolutionary names; new forms of address ('Comrade') were used; new flags, banners and badges (especially military) were devised.<sup>38</sup>

This blank slate was extended to the nascent military and its virtually non-existent uniform. In fact the early Bolshevik soldier wore his own clothes and was designated as a combatant by little more than a red armband around his sleeve or a red star on his cap or chest. A. J. Barker describes the uniform of this period as “the simplest, the most functional—and the most uninspiring—in the world.”<sup>39</sup> Regardless of the functionality of the uniform, this new military was remarkably scattered and therefore struggled towards their eventual defeat of the Whites during the Civil War. The small, spontaneously formed, poorly armed workers’ units that

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<sup>38</sup> Christopher A. P. Binns, “The Changing Face of Power: Revolution and Accommodation in the Development of the Soviet Ceremonial System: Part I,” *Man* New Series 14, no. 4 (December 1979), 588.

<sup>39</sup> A. J. Barker, Lt. Col. *Soviet Army Uniforms and Insignia 1945:75*. (London, Arms and Armour Press, 1976), Introduction.

had sprung up in urban centers were not sufficiently well organized to be deployed along a frontier or to fight pitched battles against troops trained in the Imperial Army.

Though there was no central command of the White forces, they by and large dressed in some variant of the tsar's uniform, clearly communicating their political and ideological sympathies. The Reds, on the other hand, did not yet have the time to worry about constructing a sartorial agenda. Many Red soldiers were men and women who had taken up arms in the abortive revolution of 1905, forming ad hoc units known as Red Guards (*krasnogvardeytsi*). Their uniform, which was often little more than a red armband affixed to regular working clothes, was admirably proletarian. Those Red Guards units that had supported the Revolution formed the kernel of the first official Red army, the Workers and Peasants' Red Army (*Raboche Krest'ianskaia Krasnaia*

*Armia* or *RKKA*). In keeping with the ideals of the revolution the Bolsheviks decided from the beginning that this force would not replicate the tsarist army.<sup>40</sup> In true Marxist fashion the RKKA was intended to be classless and egalitarian, embodying the spirit of

Revolutionary ideology. To their credit, it seemed for a brief moment that they had achieved this ideal. Reese writes, "The Bolshevik's new army... surprisingly enough, started out nearly as Lenin had envisioned. Based on Red Guard detachments the Bolsheviks' first military force was completely voluntary, drawn from the working



**Figure 10. The Red Guard detachment for the "Vulkan" factory. Note the assortment of military uniforms and civilian clothes. Interestingly there are still several officers wearing their *pogoni*.**

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<sup>40</sup> Also known as the RKKA. For the purposes of this paper, however, I will refer to the RKKA as the Red Army. Reese, *The Soviet Military Experience*, 3

class, and determined to defend the revolution."<sup>41</sup> What the early Red Army sought to eliminate was

[Its] class nature, in which elites ruled and the oppressed served; the physical violence inflicted on soldiers; often abysmal conditions of life, especially poor food and housing; the lack of political and civil rights for soldiers; and the lack of accountability of officers for their men. In some aspects the Soviets achieved temporary success, and in others complete failure.<sup>42</sup>

On March 1, 1917 the very first official order of the RKKA decreed that the often beaten and exploited common Russian soldier must become “a citizen,” and so consequently, on November 10, 1917, all ranks and grades were eliminated from the Red Army. Their removal meant that the *pogoni*—the Russian variant of the epaulette that represented the essence of Imperial class hierarchy and privilege—quickly became a reviled symbol of the tsar’s regime.

From the beginning epaulettes had been removed... [in a] 'symbolic execution', or within a 'mock court' scenario.<sup>43</sup> It signified the removal of power, as well as distinction ... epaulettes, dress codes, titles, salutes and privileges were all removed or attacked, in order that the officers would look more like the soldiers.<sup>44</sup>

While all rank was officially abolished, and (supposedly) the iconographic system of class oppression that went with it, the persistent need to distinguish friend from foe led to the introduction of the first RKKA badge in July of 1918: a large red



**Figure 11. Leon Trotskii in full "boyar" uniform, including the pointed *shlem* and *kaftan* with three *razgovorii* across the chest.**

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>43</sup> This is a common translation for *pogoni*, as is “shoulder board.”

<sup>44</sup> Rendle, “The Symbolic Execution,” 34.

enamel star with a hammer and plough set in the center of a silver wreath composed of a laurel branch on the right and oak on the left.<sup>45</sup> In the coming years, the plough was to be replaced by the more elegantly simple sickle, which marked the genesis of the most enduring symbol of the Soviet Union.

In March 1918 Leon Trotskii, who took control of the RKKA, was faced with the mammoth task of organizing an effective fighting force from 200,000 volunteer soldiers who lacked adequate clothing, weapons, ammunition, or a supply system. As a result, "[Red Army commanders] were forced to make do with existing Tsarist Army stores and to condone the widespread use of civilian clothing."<sup>46</sup> Finally, the RKKA was seriously

demoralized, a problem Trotskii sought to remedy at least in part by issuing the first set of uniform regulations. This was the so-called "boyar" uniform, so called because of its resemblance to the uniform of the *streltsi*, the warriors that Peter I had endeavored to eradicate and that Nicholas II would have been happy to resurrect.

The first element of the boyar uniform was a *gymnasterka* (for all ranks), to which the *shlem* cap was added on January 16, 1919. This was a soft cloth cap with a pointed peak that went by many nicknames: because of its pointed top it was called *bogatirka* after the warrior heroes of Russian myth, *frunzevka* after army commander Mikhail Frunze, and *budenovka* after Semion Budennii, the famous cavalry commander of the Civil War and a Bolshevik hero.<sup>47</sup> While not as extreme in outline, it resembled one of the onion domes of the Kremlin and was entirely unlike any



**Figure 12. Guard Lt. Levshin in costume as a bogatir at the 1903 Bal d'Hiver.**

<sup>45</sup> Khvostov relates two legends as to the creation of the red star as badge - one involving the aspiration of Jewish commanders that the new Russia be the homeland promised the Jews, and the other being the distinguishing of local troops from those returning from the front by a white tin star pinned to the uniform, painted red by enthusiastic Bolshevik soldiers. (Khvostov, *The Russian Civil War*, 20)

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>47</sup> *Bogatir*

headgear in service in any contemporary European or North American army. On April 8, 1919 the third and last element of the boyar uniform, the newly redesigned overcoat, was added. With its fuller skirt, three colored tabs across the breast, and associated historical silhouette this coat was called *kaftan* rather than the usual *shinel*, the former suggesting a link to the robes of the *streltsi* as opposed to the European-style armies of Peter the Great and his successors.<sup>48</sup> Sources disagree as to whether this design was created before or after the Revolution, but no matter its point of origin, it was clearly a legacy of experiments in military fashion during Nicholas' reign.<sup>49</sup> Take, for example, a plate in the official souvenir album of the 1903 Bal d'Hiver that depicts Guard Lieutenant Levshin in the dress of a Circassian cavalryman.<sup>50</sup> Uniforms in the two periods share a distinct silhouette, the true capstone of which is the *shlem*. While the existence of such a high, impractical piece of headgear is initially perplexing, particularly as other militaries moved towards simpler cloth caps out of the field and metal helmets in battle, its genesis is clear when viewed alongside the revival of Pre-Petrine clothing styles during the last years of the Romanov dynasty.

The [Boyar Uniform], which was very reminiscent of the old Russian boyar costume, abolished by Peter the Great, was not introduced by the revolutionary government as a reaction to Tsarism; on the contrary, it turned out to have been yet another project for a new uniform for the Romanoff

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<sup>48</sup> "Clearly inspired by the colourful uniforms of the 17th-century Russian musketeers, called *streltsi*, the new greatcoat was introduced on 8 April 1919." Khvostov, *The Russian Civil War*, 24.

<sup>49</sup> Khvostov challenges Mollo's assertion that the boyar uniforms had actually been designed and produced prior to the Revolution. "It is often said that the uniform which came to typify the Red Army in the Civil War - the pointed hat and long greatcoat with coloured tabs - had been designed in 1913, to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the Romanov dynasty. ... In apparent confirmation of this idea, the greatcoat had three bastion-shaped *razgovory* tabs - one for each century of the Romanov dynasty. ... In reality, the design of the new uniform seems to have been accomplished by the RMSR. On 25 April 1918 a Commission on the Elaboration of Uniform was set up, and on 7 May it initiated a competition to design a new uniform for the Red Army."

Ibid., 23.

<sup>50</sup> "Gvardeiskago ekipazha Leitenant Levshin (Voevoda pervoi poloviny XVII veka)" <http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/id?1224865>

celebrations of 1913. That the last essays in military romanticism of the Russian Imperial family should have become the symbol of the new régime, is one of the most ironic of all the vagaries of fashion.<sup>51</sup>

While photographs of soldiers wearing the boyar uniform certainly do exist, in light of the severe shortages not only in military supply but in all aspects of Soviet life, it is difficult to say with certainty that the uniform was distributed widely. Whether there was a shortage of material to construct the uniforms or the military administration realized that this visibly theatricalized uniform was lacking in proletarian flavor, the boyar uniform slowly disappeared bit by bit and was soon nothing more than a memory.

While not necessarily the most successful of experiments, what is significant about the effort to institute the boyar uniform is the dedication displayed by the state to the destruction of symbols that connected the new world to the old. That the Imperial uniform that predated the boyar uniform in itself was considered so visually potent as to be counter-revolutionary indicates how deeply ingrained it was in the Russian psyche. The boyar uniform therefore circumvented this difficulty by referencing pre-Petrine style. Attacking these familiar symbols was a necessity, for the vast majority of people continued to live according to the rhythms of Imperial life, and from the state's point of view this rhythm had to be disrupted. Along with rites of marriage, funerals, and other milestones of Russian life, religious holidays that marked the progression of the year had to be replaced with appropriate Bolshevik alternatives.

This also applied to theatre, a major cultural institution, and in 1918 Lenin established the Theater Section of the People's Commissariat of Education and charged it with the "creation of a new theater connected with the rebuilding of the state and society upon the principles of socialism."<sup>52</sup> Murray Frame writes

During the early years of the Soviet regime, a fierce debate took place among cultural activists about the fate of pre-revolutionary theatres. Some comrades

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<sup>51</sup> Mollo, *Military Fashion*, 226.

<sup>52</sup> Nikolai A. Gorchakov, *The Theater in Soviet Russia*, trans. Edgar Luhrman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 109.



regarded them as bourgeois institutions which had to be entirely destroyed... [others], including Lenin, argued that the cultural accomplishments of the pre-revolutionary era must be preserved for posterity.<sup>53</sup>

The amateur theatres and companies that sprouted wildly following the revolution offered an early proletarian alternative to the bourgeois theatrical establishment.<sup>54</sup> Providing a wide range of amenities depending on their size and location, these clubs were a haven for those seeking information on employment opportunities, perhaps a meal at a canteen, or just some diversion from the disorder and strife of daily life during the first difficult years following the revolution. These diversions often took the form of theatrical entertainments of various kinds, from puppet shows and propaganda pieces to performances of classics. Lynn Mally writes, “No matter where they were staged, amateur performances helped to legitimize the Soviet state. By seizing on the pressing issues of the day, many works encouraged army enlistment, mobilized participants for Soviet celebrations, and informed audiences about international events. [...] At a time when film equipment was scarce and illiteracy was high, theaters spread the political message of the revolution.”<sup>55</sup> The Red Army had its own extensive network of clubs, hosting some 1,210 theatres and 911 drama groups by 1920.<sup>56</sup> Often soldiers performed *agitiki* (short for *agitatsionnaia p’esa*), or agitation plays, short pieces on social themes that encouraged political action. These plays were not meant to be subtle or nuanced, and as they pitted absolutes against each other such as “the strong soldier in his peaked

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<sup>53</sup> Murray Frame, *School for Citizens: Theatre and Civil Society in Imperial Russia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 200.

<sup>54</sup> Lynn Mally relates that there are two words in Russian that convey the meaning of “amateur theatre.” The first is *liubitel’s tvo*, coming from the word “love” and might carry the same slightly disdainful connotations for Americans as “community theatre.” This is distinguished from *samodeiatel’nost’*, or “do-it-yourself,” which “represented all that was good in the Soviet approach, including collective interaction and productive social results.” It is in the latter sense that I invoke the word “amateur.”

Mally, *Revolutionary Acts*, 2.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>56</sup> Frame, *School for Citizens*, 200.

Red Army cap juxtaposed to the fat capitalist in his top hat,” costuming played an important role in these productions.<sup>57</sup>

Offstage the image of the “strong soldier in his peaked Red Army cap” was also powerful; it was employed to great effect by Josef Stalin, a relatively minor figure of the revolution compared to Trotskii and Lenin. A costume change, however, was about to create an identity that would serve him well on his almost meteoric rise to power. One of Stalin’s first posts in the new government was as head of the Commissariat for Nationality Affairs (*Narkomnats*), a position he held from 1918 until his appointment as General Secretary of the Central Committee Secretariat in 1922. As Commissar of this newly created bureau, one without precedent in the Imperial government, he was in charge of overseeing the dismantling of the empire and ensuring the rights of all former constituent states and ethnic regions to determine whether or not to join Russia in founding a new unified state. Officially ceding independence to Poland and encouraging Finnish separatist ambitions, this wave of seemingly progressive thinking might be seen as a maneuver designed to seduce them into remaining under Russian control by at once offering the illusion of choice and providing the opportunity for Russia to divest itself of expensive commitments to its former colonies. Not for the first time, this brought Stalin into conflict with Trotskii who still wanted to use the revolution in Russia as a spark to inflame the socialist revolution internationally; an idea of little interest to Lenin. Ultimately Stalin and Lenin drew closer through their mutual desire to focus on the internal affairs of Russia.

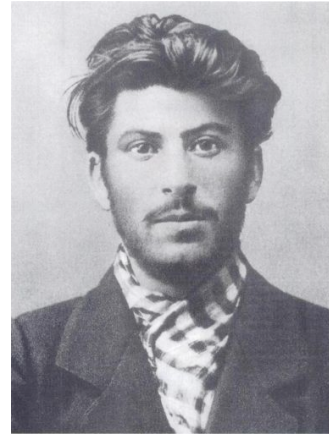


Figure 13. Stalin in 1902.

This understanding not only brought the two men closer together, but also ensured Stalin’s ascendancy within the party. Stalin made great use of his appointment to what Jeremy Smith has characterized as “a minor commissariat dealing with a so-called ‘soft’ policy area which had little weight against the far

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<sup>57</sup> Mally, *Revolutionary Acts*, 38.

more powerful institutions dealing with the economy, the army, and internal security.”<sup>58</sup> Hitherto without significant access to these three powerful policy areas, Stalin must have jumped at the opportunity offered to him by the powerful Council of People’s Commissars (*Sovnarkom*) in May of 1918. Desperate to ameliorate the increasingly dire food situation, Stalin was detailed to journey south to obtain grain from the fertile Volga and Caucasus regions. He packed up his staff and underwent the difficult journey to Tsaritsin, a city that would later be renamed in his honor. Arriving a week later, he was directed to coordinate his efforts with Andrei Snegarev, a former general in the Imperial Army, who oversaw the Red Army contingent in the region.<sup>59</sup> Though the relationship between Snegarev and Stalin was officially defined by the latter’s coordination with the former, who would offer his troops to aid in grain requisition when necessary, as always Stalin saw an opportunity to distinguish himself and grabbed it. He placed himself in direct charge of these troops, thus becoming commander of the entire North Caucasus front and elevating himself above the former tsarist officer.

He now had to prove himself up to the task, to position himself as a Red warrior fighting on the front-line of the Revolution and not simply commissar of a minor department concerned with “soft” policy, and he needed to look the part as much as act it. After all, his major adversary within the party was clearly Trotskii, with whom he constantly clashed, but who had proven his mettle as creator of the Red Army. Though some in the party protested, Stalin was quick to defend himself to Lenin in a letter written a month after his arrival in Tsaritsin.

“The food-supplies question is naturally entwined with the military question... I myself without formalities will overthrow those commanders and commissars who are ruining the cause. [...] The absence of a scrap of paper from Trotski won’t stop me.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Jeremy Smith, “Stalin as Commissar for Nationality Affairs, 1918-1922,” in *Stalin: A New History*, ed. Sarah Davies and James Harris (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 45.

<sup>59</sup> Robert Service, *Stalin: A Biography* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 164.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

Stalin realized that the mere appearance of power was not enough; in order to solidify his martial credentials he would have to see battle himself. Keeping risk to a minimum, he decided to survey the efforts to reestablish a rail line severed by the Whites at Abganerovo-Zutovo. Taking an armored train there and back there is no evidence that he ever actually placed himself in the line of fire, but upon his return he exploited his errand into harm's way to the best of his ability, forging his own Military Council to replace Snegarev and, with the support of other such glory-seeking opportunists as Kliment Voroshilov (later to be rewarded for his loyalty with a string of important military appointments and ultimate elevation to rank of Marshal), Lenin granted his request and he was given control over the newly defined Southern Front.

The train ride to Abganerovo-Zutovo proved to be an excellent gamble that paid off handsomely. Stalin emerged unscathed and triumphant, and in addition gaining Lenin's confidence in his abilities he could finally call himself a fighting man; the equal of anyone in the party, including Trotskii. Stalin understood how important this credential was, and he was naturally determined to ensure that it could never be called into question. In an anecdote related by

Fyodor Alliluev, one of Stalin's retinue from *Narkomnats* and brother of his future wife, Nadezhda, one of Stalin's first acts upon being granted command of the Southern Front was to adopt a military style of dress; one that would become his signature style through the rest of his life. He ordered a pair of knee-high black boots to complement his collared tunics, "abandoned suits, ordinary shirts and shoes forever... [and] started to comport himself with a soldierly bearing. He carried a gun.



**Figure 14. Stalin in 1918 after the Abganerovo-Zutovo incident.**

He adopted a brisk way of carrying himself as a commander.”<sup>61</sup> It is significant that one of Stalin’s earliest political victories was accompanied by a deliberate change in dress, and it suggests that subsequent mandated changes in clothing (particularly those of military uniforms in the period leading up to the Second World War) were directly influenced by a leader who understood from personal experience how clothes really could “make the man.”

Though far from a seamless and uncontested transition, Stalin ultimately succeeded Lenin upon his death in 1924 and began to insinuate himself into all aspects of Soviet life. Where Lenin had largely left cultural matters in the hands of Anatolii Lunacharskii, head of the People’s Commissariat for Enlightenment, and occasionally his wife Nadezhda Krupskaya, Stalin, who had a perfect grasp of both repressive and ideological state apparatuses, took the stewardship of Soviet culture upon himself. He was, according to Robert Service, "determined to get the kind of culture, high and low, appropriate to the state and society he was constructing."<sup>62</sup> Economic policy and political strategy clearly required his careful oversight, but so too did cultural transformation. Stalin’s direct intervention into cultural policy suggests that events produced publicly during his regime were approved—by the great leader himself—for participation in the larger projects of state building and social reconstruction.

Stalin’s cultural stewardship took many forms; in the theatre, he became an avid spectator of productions at the newly energized academic theatres. Among others, he saw Mikhail Bulgakov's *Days of the Turbins* at the Moscow Art Theatre and Konstantin Trenyov's *Lyubov Yarovaya* at the Malyi Theatre. Although the plays are very different in tone and content, they share one notable feature: both required embodied representations of White Russian soldiers. In Bulgakov’s play, the soldiers were portrayed sympathetically while in Trenyov’s they were objects of ridicule. Two aspects of contemporaneous productions of these plays are striking: the fact that White Russian soldiers appeared onstage at all and Stalin’s apparent preference for the Bulgakov play. In his role as the self-appointed ideological steward of Soviet

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 302.

culture, Stalin should logically have preferred Trenyov's play, but he did not. Indeed, his obsession with *Days of the Turbins* was fetish-like. Over the years he attended many productions of the play and personally intervened on Bulgakov's behalf to secure a permanent position for the celebrated satirist at a time when pressure from Stalin's own censors made finding work very difficult—especially for a controversial writer.

Why this ideologically anathema play so fascinated Stalin is mysterious—but the temptation to speculate is great. It seems unlikely that he was drawn to the play's content or tone, but could it have been something in the production? Perhaps the White Guard uniforms? Although Stalin's biographers might scoff at the idea that Stalin fetishized military uniforms, he did change sartorial practices at the highest level of government. In contrast to Lenin, who conducted state business in the modest civilian suit of a Russian intellectual, Stalin—who had never served in the military—preferred a military uniform. Stalin's sartorial self-representation indicated new directions in Soviet society, which was beginning to resemble the police state it had replaced. Like the Romanov tsars before him, Stalin seemed to prefer the authority and the aesthetic of the military uniform. Perhaps this is what drew him back time and again to performances of *Days of the Turbins*; and perhaps the White Guard uniforms worn by the actors influenced his decision to dress his own soldiers in the uniforms of the imperial Russian state.

In 1925 Mikhail Bulgakov began adapting his novel, *The White Guard*, for the stage. The original title of both the novel and the stage adaptation was controversial, as the Whites – monarchist forces in opposition to the Reds during the Civil War – were not seen as appropriate subjects. Most troubling, the novel and the stage adaptation painted a sympathetic view of the Turbins, the White family at the center of the novel. On April 29 of the following year, the Collegium for Artistic Matters and Repertoire responded to controversy over the manuscript,

Having due regard to the fact that the title of M. A. Bulgakov's play *The White Guard* has very serious connotations and to the difficulties which may be anticipated in the production's passage [through the censorship]... the

Collegium considers it essential that some alternative title be found for the play *The White Guard*.<sup>63</sup>

Rewrites completed, Bulgakov returned in 1926 having changed the title to the far less provocative *The Turbin Family*, which eventually became *Days of the Turbins*.<sup>64</sup> However, when the play was performed for the theatrical censorship board in June it was not deemed appropriate for production, mostly because of its overtly sympathetic portrayal of White characters. Apart from the problems prompted by his work's content, Bulgakov himself was the target of negative criticism for his perceived personal incompatibility with socialism. Because of his service in both the Imperial and White armies, and his family's White sympathies, he was "savagely attacked [in the press] for looking backward with longing instead of forward with selfless dedication."<sup>65</sup> Despite the reservations of the press and the censors Bulgakov's play finally did open on October 5, 1926.

Konstantin Trenyov's *Lyubov Yarovaya* premiered in December at the Maly Theatre in 1926, and typifies the successful plays of this period. The story revolves around the trials of Lyubov Yarovaya, a sort of Soviet Every-Person, who has been separated from her husband by the Civil War. While he falls in with the Whites she ultimately commits herself to the Reds. The play is almost *agitiki* with its clear delineation between good and evil, with rakish Reds on one side facing off against heartless Whites, and while it clearly followed the party line, it has been suggested that the audience was not necessarily attending the theatre for ideologically correct

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<sup>63</sup> Anatoly Smeliansky, *Is Comrade Bulgakov Dead? Mikhail Bulgakov and the Moscow Art Theatre*, trans. Arch Tait (New York: Routledge, 1993), 72.

<sup>64</sup> Smeliansky in *Is Comrade Bulgakov Dead* mentions four other titles suggested: *White December, 1918, The Fall of the City* and *The White Storm*.

<sup>65</sup> Frank Dwyer, "An Afterward for Zoyka's Apartment," in *Zoyka's Apartment*. (Lime, NH: Smith and Kraus, 1996), 141.

Not simply on an artistic or ideological level, *Days of the Turbins* is significant in early Soviet theatre history as it provided a much-needed lift to the fortunes of the struggling Moscow Art Theatre. "*The Days of the Turbins* was a sensation, just the new *Sea Gull* or *The Lower Depths* that the troubled Moscow Art Theatre so badly needed, and despite the controversy which continued to rage, it became one of the most popular and lucrative plays in the theater's history."

Ibid, 145.

reasons. Serge Orlovsky suggests they may indeed have attended for the “wrong” reasons.

Many people went to the second act of [Trenyov’s] *Lyubov Yarovaya* to look at the well-dressed women, see the beautiful uniforms of the White officers, to hear the old songs, and to see, however briefly, a piece of the beautiful life which had disappeared into the past.<sup>66</sup>

If audiences were not necessarily motivated to see *Lyubov Yarovaya* for its ideological purity, perhaps they were drawn to the images of the past not merely out of nostalgia but because they represented a life that they understood, in contrast to the constant change around them. What makes the contrasts between these two plays notable is that while both deal with the ideologically sensitive issue of portraying white officers on the stage, ultimately Bulgakov's characters are always sympathetic and Trenyov's are not. Bulgakov, even after round and round of vetting, never convincingly degrades the Whites; it is not until the fourth act that Victor Myshlaevsky, an artillery captain, says "Personally, I've had enough. I've been fighting since 1914. And what for? For my country? The country which treated me so shamefully? And now you want me to go back to those has-beens, the princes and generals and barons?" accompanied by an obscene gesture, that a major character formally renounces the former regime.<sup>67</sup> It is true that in the second act Leonid Shervinsky makes a point of assuring the footman of his former employer the Hetman of the Ukraine that he has “always been a democrat at heart,” and asks to shake his “honest working-man’s hand” but this is clearly a poorly-concealed attempt to stay in the good graces of a man who might well give him up to the Bolsheviks now that his master the Hetman has fled.<sup>68</sup>

Where Bulgakov’s play relies on words, and precious few of them, in order to meet ideological standards, Trenyov’s play is passionate in its denunciation of the

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<sup>66</sup> Serge Orlovsky, *Moscow Theaters, 1917-1941* in *Soviet Theatres: 1917-1941*, ed. Martha Bradshaw (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Edwards Brothers, 1954), 28.

<sup>67</sup> Mikhail Bulgakov, *The White Guard* in *Mikhail Bulgakov: Six Plays*, ed. Lesley Milne, trans. Michael Glenny (London: Methuen Drama, 1998), 83.

<sup>68</sup> Bulgakov, *White Guard*, 47.



Whites. In his play there is neither loyalty nor compassion for those who wear the White uniform, for that side has, in the words of the titular character Lyubov, "sung their swan song."<sup>69</sup> The symbolic execution of an Imperial uniform in the first act establishes the direction of the narrative; the scavenger and speculator Groznoy who proudly shows the typist Panova the embroidered military trousers he wears under his overcoat, (she calls them "counterrevolutionary pants") is shot by the dashing commissar Koshkin.<sup>70</sup> Of the Whites themselves Yarovoy, Lyubov's husband, is the only semi-sympathetic character, but even he does not hesitate to order machine guns be set up in the town square to stop the Bolsheviks from marching on the prison to free Zheglov's men. Finally, in the climax of the play Lyubov, Yarovoy's wife, understands that even her loving husband must be executed alongside all other Whites in order to prepare the world for the new Bolshevik future; it is in that realization that she becomes a true comrade of the revolution. This black-and-white commitment to Bolshevik ideology was a hallmark of the ascendant artistic form known as Socialist Realism, which Stalin himself defined. Socialist Realism was a form that "drew freely upon established symbols of prestige and power while applying them to the new social and political reality: simple workers could now be depicted enjoying the bourgeois pastimes of taking the waters, climbing mountains, and going to the seaside."<sup>71</sup>

*Lyubov Yarovaya* became a foundational play of the "new Soviet dramaturgy," but it did not enjoy the same popular success as *Days of the Turbins* nor did it share with Bulgakov's play the distinction of being one of Stalin's favorite shows.<sup>72</sup> While Service suggests that this was due to Stalin's "willingness to understand the fighting in terms much less simplistic than in official history textbooks," I suggest this need not have been the case. Perhaps Stalin was drawn to the spectacle of the uniforms on stage initially on an aesthetic level but quickly

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<sup>69</sup> Konstantin Trenyov, *Lyubov Yarovaya*, in *Soviet Scene: Six Plays of Russian Life*, ed. and trans. by Alexander Bakshy in collaboration with Paul S. Nathan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946), 37.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>71</sup> Bowlt - *Socialist Realism and Design*, 43

<sup>72</sup> Murray Frame, *School for Citizens: Theatre and Civil Society in Imperial Russia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 206), 201.

perceived how the audience responded in kind, and he understood that what drew audiences to the theatre might bring citizens closer to him. If he had found it so successful in his own life, why not in the life of his nation? If the clothes truly had, in his case, made the man, could the clothes then make the nation? Surely it is no coincidence that Stalin's major uniform reforms began so soon after the opening of *Days of the Turbins*.



**Figure 15. Act III of *Days of the Turbins* in the hallway of the Alexander I High School. At the head of the stairs is Alexei Turbin, looking dashing and handsome in his sheepskin coat as he orders the cadets to disband and throw away their epaulettes.**



Figure 16. LARIOSIK: Yeliena, gentlemen - these cream-coloured blinds... give one such a sense of peace and security... that one can forget all the horrors of civil war. And our wounded souls are so longing for tranquility..." Act I, Scene 2.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Bulgakov, *The White Guard*, 25.

## Stalinist Simulacra: Everything Old is New Again

1928 was the first year that there was an adequate supply of clothes for the entire army, and if it is adequate supply that defines a uniform then that of 1928 might be considered the first “true” uniform of the Red Army. “Except for his forage-cap (*pilotka*), this infantry private is hardly to be distinguished from a soldier in Tsarist times. The pullover tunic (*gymnasterka*) was used before the First World War and the belt and equipment are of Tsarist pattern, together with the method of carrying the rolled greatcoat either strapped to the pack or thrown across the left shoulder.”<sup>74</sup> Finally, in 1943, Stalin surprised everybody, particularly the old Bolsheviks, by re-introducing the detested symbol of Tsarist militarism, the shoulder board.<sup>75</sup>

So why would Stalin find it useful to integrate these items? Why would the state reintroduce the very same distinctions of rank, shoulder boards, and braids that were specifically targeted as fundamentally incompatible with socialist doctrine in 1918? This seeming inconsistency was handled in typical Soviet fashion, and the explanation offered in the official army publication *Red Star* was that, “the Red Army had at first refused to wear the pre-revolutionary shoulder-straps; but now, ‘the country can trust her soldiers to wear the traditional uniform of the Russian people.’”<sup>76</sup> This appears to acknowledge that, at least for the Soviet state, military costume was as important as folk dress in embodying the spirit of the nation. Whether the common soldier fighting to defend Stalingrad accepted this explanation



**Figure 17. A Red Army soldier wearing a *pilotka* in 1945. The uniform is otherwise remarkably similar to the uniforms of the First World War.**

<sup>74</sup> Albert Seaton, *The Soviet Army*, Man-At-Arms Series, ed. Philip Warner Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 1972, 38.

<sup>75</sup> Andrew Mollo, *The Armed Forces of World War II: Uniforms, Insignia and Organization* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1981), 168.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, Introduction.

is another question, and the following quote suggests that even they had trouble reconciling the addition of Imperial military regalia into the uniform of the Red Army. “There were some who asked themselves whether the term *comrade* would now be replaced with *Your Excellency*, as officers were addressed under the tsars.”<sup>77</sup> These items of costume were clearly powerful symbols, and their reintroduction had an immediate impact on the culture of the Red Army.

Along with the *pogoni*, decorations and medals of merit were resurrected. The earliest Soviet military decorations were not the elaborate confections of ribbons and gilt so popular and widely distributed under the Romanovs, such as the Order of St. George, the penultimate award of the Romanov period second only to the Order of St. Andrew the First-Called, instituted during the reign of Catherine II in 1769. Its design was an enameled white cross formy (with the arms of the cross widest at their termination) inset with a red disk bearing the image of St. George slaying a dragon suspended from a ribbon with alternating stripes of black and orange (three and two respectively). Awarded for feats of arms performed by officers, the First Class decoration was rarely given out, and when it was it went to the likes of Alexander Suvorov and Mikhail Kutuzov. In addition to the lesser classes this was supplemented by the Badge of Honor of the Military Order; a St. George’s cross for non-officers with the same ribbon but a much simpler, single piece, cast metal cross. As the most highly respected order of military merit, its ribbon was attached to campaign medals for particularly successful campaigns, including that awarded for the defense of Sevastopol in 1854.<sup>78</sup>

Further, its characteristic black and orange ribbon was also applied to standards, adorned presentation weapons, and was even incorporated as piping into the dress uniform and badge of the Military Order 13<sup>th</sup> Dragoon Regiment.



**Figure 18.**  
**Order of St.**  
**George.**

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<sup>77</sup> Broekmeyer, *Stalin, the Russians, and Their War*, 195.

<sup>78</sup> V. A. Durov, *Russian and Soviet Military Awards: Order of Lenin State History Museum* (Leningrad: Vneshtorgizdat, 1990), 14.

Like the uniforms they decorated, early Soviet awards were practical and proletarian in nature, which suited and supported the tone of the young nation. One of the very first orders for battlefield merit, the Order of the Red Banner of the RSFSR created in 1918, is a rather crudely crafted dull gray set of oak leaves framing a simple red star over crossed hammer and plow under a red banner exhorting the proletarians of the world to unite. Also popular as military awards during this period were weapons, such as the decorated Mauser pistol awarded to the Civil War commander S. M. Budennii for heroism in 1921. Just as in uniforms, however, by the Second World War these proletarian awards had fallen out of favor, to be replaced with colorful and intricate orders recalling heroes of Imperial Russian mythology, such as Alexander Nevsky, for whom an order was established in July of 1942. The Soviet Order of Alexander Nevsky clearly echoed that of the star of the Imperial Order of St. Alexander Nevsky; the former replaced the center cipher of the latter with a portrait of Alexander Nevsky in a pointed *bogatyr* helmet atop a large red enamel star, but its visual vocabulary is still much the same. For instance, the large laurel branches the curl around the central disk of the Soviet order are evocative of the small laurel sprigs found at the bottom of the Imperial order and the hammer and sickle neatly take the place of the Romanov crown.



**Figure 19. Imperial Order of Alexander Nevskii.**

Another example is the Order of Glory, created as the enlisted soldier's complement to the officers-only Order of Victory in November of 1943. The Order of Glory was awarded in three classes, and while the medal itself was a relatively simple cast metal star with an inset disk on which is the Spassky Tower above the word *slava*, its ribbon is identical to that of the Order of St. George. V. A. Durov



**Figure 20. Soviet Order of Alexander Nevskii.**

suggests that as the medal was designed to “closely resemble the statute [sic] of [the] prerevolutionary St. George’s cross – the most honorable soldiers’ decoration at the time,” the designer, N. I. Moskalyov, “deliberately used [the] black-and-orange St. George’s ribbon as the ribbon of the Order of Glory.”<sup>79</sup> Less than thirty years after the dissolution of the Order of St. George it was possible for a soldier to wear the same ribbon for roughly the same honor on roughly the same uniform during their military careers. Durov offers the case of Private S. T. Kuzin who was actually twice awarded the cross of the Order of St. George before the Revolution and then twice awarded the Order of Glory during the Second World War.



Figure 21. Order of Glory.

Further, as had been done with the Order of St. George, the orange and black ribbon was used for the commemorative medal for the greatest Soviet victory to that date, the defeat of the Hitler’s *Wehrmacht*. On May 9, 1945, Stalin announced the creation of the Medal for Victory Over the Germans in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945 and made sure that it was distributed in time to be worn on the left breasts of the soldiers who packed Red Square during the Victory Parade on June 24. In the place of the star on the Order of Glory the Medal for Victory Over the Germans in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945 was a single gold-colored medallion with a bust portrait of Stalin on its obverse surrounded by the words “our cause was just” and “we were victorious.”<sup>80</sup> Stalin is depicted in Marshal’s uniform with a high, embroidered collar, epaulettes on his shoulders, and an elaborate order at his neck. Save for the small star on his chest, Stalin has both literally and figuratively cast himself as tsar.



Figure 22. Medal for Victory Over the Germans.

<sup>79</sup> Regarding the use of the word “statute,” the text in the volume is presented in both Russian and English. The word in the Russian section on page 57 is *statut* which perhaps might be better translated in this sense as “regard” or “stature.”

Durov, *Russian and Soviet Military Awards*, 64.

<sup>80</sup> *Nashe delo pravoe, my pobedili.*

## Conclusion

At the beginning of Soviet involvement in the Second World War "the Red Army in many ways, both intentionally and unintentionally, resembled the reviled and much maligned imperial army," and by the time of the Victory Parade in 1945 on Red Square it was evident that "the Red Army completely fell away in practice from its founding revolutionary vision and resembled the tsarist army of the nineteenth century more than it did the Soviet Army of the 1920s."<sup>81</sup> To refer to the essay by Carmody mentioned in the Introduction, as "Robert Fall's *mise-en-scène* of this play asks us to accept the proposition that Alceste 'belongs' in the Hollywood of 1989," Stalin's *mise-en-scène* of the Victory Parade asked Soviet citizens to accept the proposition that his simulacra of Imperial Russian military uniforms "belonged" in the Soviet Union of 1945.<sup>82</sup> Examining the discourse of this particular *mise-en-scène* reveals a spectacle that successfully celebrated the triumph of the Soviet Union through a uniform that was a fantasia of Imperial Russian symbology interpreted through Soviet ideology.

Following the precedent set by Peter the Great, the monarchs of the Romanov dynasty marked changes in their conceptualization of national character through changes in dress that communicated dedication to a variety of ideals: Prussian strictness, French Enlightenment philosophy, rejection of a corrupting Western European influence, or a romanticized celebration of the *narod*'. This was particularly noticeable and effective in the case of military uniforms as the provisioning of troops was centrally controlled, making soldiers effective set pieces in the Imperial Russian *mise-en-scène*.

The Bolsheviks continued this practice, thus when they came to power they attempted to discard everything that signified the old order and start fresh. They even

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<sup>81</sup> For instance the introduction of military orders honoring the military heroes of Imperial Russia and Stalin's reintroduction of "Guards" units whose regimental distinctions mimicked those of the Imperial Army. Both are discussed in some detail in the work of Reese and Gladkov.

Reese, *The Soviet Military Experience*, 4.

<sup>82</sup> Carmody, "Alceste in Hollywood," 37.



tried to create an entirely new uniform for the Red Army, but it was the soldiers' involvement in propagandistic amateur theatricals that made more of an impact on the development of the Soviet state than the irregular issue of the highly theatricalized *bogatyr* uniform. At the same time as the *bogatyr* uniform fell out of favor the portrayal of Imperial Russian military uniforms on the legitimate stage in the 1920s demonstrated that it was possible to retrieve images and items from the Imperial past in an ideologically appropriate manner. Stalin exploited this possibility and, over the course of the 1930s and throughout the Second World War, nearly transposed the Imperial Russian military uniform onto that of the Red Army. As succinctly exemplified by the Medal for Victory Over the Germans, Stalin drew direct comparisons between himself and the tsars, between the Soviet Union and Imperial Russia, to legitimize his regime and provide Soviet citizens and soldiers with encouraging links between themselves and Russians who had fought triumphantly against foreign invasion in the past.

The major difference between the uniforms of Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union is the intended audience, and that is what ultimately differentiates Stalin's uniforms from those of Nicholas II. As the discourse between the polity and the state changes so too does the *mise-en-scène*; the seeming contradiction of the *pogoni* on the shoulder of a Red Army soldier is actually nothing of the sort but a new *mise-en-scène* built upon source material updated to fit a modern audience. Richard Stites refers to the work of Nicholas Timasheff when he describes the Stalinist period as "a museum of Russian historical styles drawn from various periods: architecture of the 1820s endowed with the political monumentalism of the 1930s, concert music of the mid-nineteenth century, and educational disciplines of the late nineteenth century."<sup>83</sup> To this list can surely be added Imperial Russian military uniforms that, as powerful pieces of the Stalinist *mise-en-scène*, contributed to the creation of a state that was, "not even a reactionary form, nor even a weld of tradition and revolution, but a wholly new thing."<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 246.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

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