



## Features of the Image of American Culture and the English Language in the Novel "A Foreign Woman" by Dolatov

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### Abstract

This essay examines the ways in which Dolatov's novel "A foreign woman" presents an image of American culture and the English language. It should be mentioned that this piece exhibits the traits of the "immigrant literature novels" genre. First, the plot revolves around the characters' state of exile, which dictates not only how they move physically within the given location but also whether or not they must reevaluate the principles that underpin their existence. Second, what separates the city into American space is the duality of its image. It is notable that New York City's spatial elements exist independently of one another rather than in harmony. Furthermore, they frequently point in different directions. Thirdly, national stereotypes form the foundation of the American way of life. The idea of the "American Dream," for instance, and the legend that America is a nation with boundless opportunities and equality for all are also important. A worldview that is based on stereotypes presents character existence as a grand theatrical production in which each person is given a distinct role. The idea of the hero, whose vision of "American life" differs from that of his former fellow countrymen, is given particular focus. The only person who possesses sufficient inner freedom to transcend the confines of "American" New York is him. His image can be viewed through the lens of hippie culture because of the motif of freedom, which is also evident in a number of details. Notably, only the protagonist of the book is able to view the alien culture as something different and not as hostile.

**Keywords:** Literature; National Stereotypes; English Language.

### 1. Introduction

The book "A Foreign Woman" belongs to the tradition of "emigre literature novels," which are written by writers who emigrated during the third wave. The scenario of a break with the homeland, which split the lives of the characters in the works into Here and There, is the pivotal point that served as the basis for the plot's development. The scene of action is a true "part" of New York, situated in Forest Hills at the intersection of 108th Street and 64th Avenue. Approximately 7,000 people, including S. Dovlatov, called this neighborhood home during his time. This enables us to discuss Dovlatov's works in the field of pseudo-documentaries. It's interesting to note that writers from the third wave of emigration talked about in professional creative communities how, when they first arrived in the United States, they were largely reliant on unofficial myths about the country. Their "relationship" with it was shaped by the conflict between Soviet propaganda portraying the country negatively, dissident myths about it almost as an El Dorado, and American reality.

"A foreign woman" by S. Dovlatov is a noteworthy illustration of how to portray both the diaspora and émigré communities in general. It is distinguished by the neighborhood's small-town, isolated feel, which is common to many diasporic cultures and the English language. In S. Dovlatov's novel, the neighborhood's inhabitants are united by a shared language, history, routines, struggles, and memories. This "may create a sense of intimacy and safety among the neighborhood's dwellers, who otherwise would have nothing to do with one another "back home." Despite the Forest Hills' seclusion and insularity, we should also highlight one of its important characteristics: "provincialism," which is demonstrated by the residents' strong reliance on one another's opinions in addition to their familiarity with one another and their frequent discussions of the ups and downs of their neighbors. Dovlatov depicts the neighborhood as a kind of theatrical setting in which each person is assigned a specific role and is required to behave strictly in accordance with the

customs that the community has established. Since only a sense of diasporic closeness can make them feel safe and at ease, the close proximity philosophy compels every resident to remain masked and perform their role (Dovlatov, 2007).

## 2. Literature Review

Since the 1990s, linguistic anthropology has focused more on language relativity research, which examines how people's use of language affects their cognitive processes. This has been evidenced by the works of Lucy (1992), Boroditsky (2003), and Deutscher (2010). Researchers now tend to agree with Sapir's more moderate statement that "Language is a guide to social reality... it powerfully conditions all our thinking about social problems and processes," despite Whorf's assertion that speakers are prisoners of the grammatical and lexical structures of their language. This strong version of the linguistic relativity hypothesis has been rejected. The language habits of the group are largely unconscious and contribute to the construction of the "real world." There is never enough similarity between two languages to say that they represent the same social reality. Different societies inhabit distinct worlds; they do not simply inhabit the same world under different labels. Sapir (1949). The weakened Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is currently accepted as true and is studied in Applied Linguistics from three perspectives: discursive relativity, linguistic relativity, and semiotic relativity (Kramersch, 2004).

Lev Vygotsky and other Soviet psychologists' insights are incorporated into this aspect of language relativity. A semiotic system is a linguistic sign and a cognitive tool, according to Vygotsky. Children learn to think through speaking and interacting with others. They do this by taking in other people's ideas and words on a social level and subsequently internalizing them on a psychological level. Sociocultural theory (SCT) and Vygotsky both hold that the mind and the culture of a community are semiotically organized functional systems that are inherently dialectical (Vygotsky, 1978). "During ontogenesis the biologically specified mental endowment of children is shaped in specific ways once it interfaces with cultural forces as children are apprenticed into their native culture," according to Lantolf (1999) is how she characterizes the process of cultural acquisition in children (Lantolf 1999: 30). Here, "cultural development" refers to assimilating into a particular social group, such as a family, a school, or a sports team (Kramersch, 2014).

## 3. Methodology

The idea that reality should be viewed through the lenses of Our and Several humanities disciplines are currently facing a significant problem. The issue of national identity and intercultural communication is one of its important constituents. It is important to remember that the humanities have long studied the issue of nationality in all of its manifestations. But it wasn't until the 21st century that this issue in fiction started to be consistently and methodically understood. However, research centers addressing the issue of national myths (in Kazan) and national codes (in Nizhny Novgorod) in relation to literature, culture, and the English language have already been established. These cities host regular conferences on this subject. Two doctor of sciences dissertations have been defended by Kazan scientists. Breeva (2010) and Khabibullina (2010) conducted scientific research that culminated in the monograph "National Myth in Fiction," which examines the dismantling and reassembling of national myths. The issue of cross-cultural studies is also examined in the Kazan School of Literary Studies, notably in the papers of Shevchenko et al. (2019). The study of American stereotypes, which are examined in the article by (Strukova et al., 2017), and the issue of the American dream, which is impacted in the study by Shepacheva et al. (2018), were required by the selected research material. Within the context of our study, the scientific works devoted to the issue of how a city's image is received in literature—such as the articles by Afanasyev and co-authors and Khabibullina (2019)—are also noteworthy.

## 4. Results

We now shift our focus to the enduring myths about America that play a big role in the made-up setting of "A Foreign Woman." The "American myth" first and foremost portrays this nation as a democratic one, a land of equal opportunity, and one in which social hierarchy is completely eradicated. Using an ironic twist, Dovlatov applies this thesis: America truly is a nation of equal opportunities, as demonstrated by the fact that a former professor, musician, and driver all have an equal right to pursue careers as drivers. The idea that one can start a "new leaf" here is another essential element of the "American myth." Numerous episodic characters' outcomes also appear to "illustrate" this mythologeme. It is best illustrated by the story of Lemkus, the "mysterious social activist," who went from being a Soviet social event planner to an American Baptist minister. The widely held belief that America offers tremendous opportunities is one that we cannot ignore. From this angle, the destiny of Laura, Marusya's cousin, who was viewed as a "poor cousin" by the

Tatarovich family in the Soviet Union, is instructive. She and her spouse thought they were moving up the social ladder in New York when the chance presented itself, and within a year they were speaking a passable level of English. Fima enrolled in courses in accounting. Lora studied under a manicurist. They were hired within a few months (Shevchenko et al., 2018). They are happy to have an apartment now, and Laura can lend Marusya her blouses. It is important to note, though, that their version of the "American dream" is rather small, and their generosity stems from a desire to exact revenge for past wrongs in order to prove their current superiority rather than compassion for a less fortunate cousin.

Its residents' inability to integrate into the nation that was once their dream is a result of both formulaic thinking and the neighborhood's isolation in New York City. They become residents of Forest Hills, where natives of Germany, Mexico, Armenia, and other countries coexist with émigrés, rather than citizens of the United States. Ironically, Dovlatov observes that because everyone speaks English with an accent there, that is precisely where they can feel at home and blend in with other foreigners. The novel "A foreign woman" reflects the typical model of the city that became their new homeland, which was constructed on the spatial antithesis of the Our and Their. In an interview, the writer attempted to characterize his view of New York by stating that "the past, present, and future are all riding in the same harness." It seems as though one is on a ship carrying millions of people. However, Afanasev et al. (2020) depict the neighborhood where émigrés live as an independent state, even though New York City is regarded as one of the most multicultural cities in the world. For instance, the "official" language in Forest Hills is: The locals are like strangers to us. Speaking in English makes us apprehensive. Occasionally, we demand, "Speak!" Residents of the community perceive not only Koreans, Indians, Arabs, or Chinese, but also some Americans as foreign and suspicious: an independent state: Texans seem like strangers, and Iowans seem like they've come from another planet. Despite this, they feel just as at home as many other foreigners because everyone speaks English with an accent.

This type of unity is predicated not only on shared life experiences but also on a refusal to acknowledge the unquestionably other right to otherness of another person. For this reason, the people of Forest Hills are a little wary of Marusya Tatarovich, who obviously "falls out" of the "collective portrait" of her former fellow countrymen. Rafael, her middle-aged Hispanic boyfriend, is noticeably more cautious. At first, Marusya's neighbors had prejudices against Hispanics, saying things like, "They seem like mysterious people with boom boxes." They are unknown to us. But we hate and fear them just in case. And the general animosity is only heightened by his liberal, unconventional for an ex-Soviet citizen demeanor: "The men believed Rafa to be a terrorist or even a gangster. The women believed him to be a typical intoxicated person. They then come to the conclusion that he is a careless man who will surely "make millions." The impact of societal myths and stereotypes on the émigré community's perception of Raphael must be noted.

In addition to providing a private haven, the ethnic community also acts as a social barrier at this point. It is noteworthy that hardly any of the Forest Hills residents are depicted in the larger area of New York City. Marusya Tatarovich turns into an anomaly. Naturally, she is extremely uneasy about leaving Forest Hills for the first time: "Marusya would run to the subway stop early in the morning and then spend an hour in the rumbling, scary underground of New York." However, at first, she found New York to be both fascinating and alluring in addition to frightening: "For Marusya, New York was a concert, a spectacle. It took a month or two for it to become a city. As the chaos subsided, shapes, hues, and sounds became apparent. Suddenly, the busy marketing intersection disintegrated into its individual parts, which included a delicatessen, an insurance company, a cafeteria, and a grocery store. It's also crucial to remember that Marusya didn't feel intimidated or alienated by New York because she didn't see it as a hostile or foreign place. Instead, it was a source of irritation for her. On the other hand, she yearned to blend in with this world and feel like a part of it: "Marusya felt intimidated and irritated by New York." Marusya was envious of everyone who felt a part of the city, including the kids, the police, and the beggars.

It's possible that Marusya's innate acceptance of this world kept her from going home when things got too tough. Ultimately, Soviet embassy representatives informed her that she would have to write a letter disparaging the United States and painting her American experience in a negative light in order to earn the right to be pardoned and welcomed back. Marusya was unable to accomplish that. We can assume that her relationship with Raphael, which appears scandalous to the community, is an intuitive desire to become closer to inner freedom rather than the wish of a pampered young lady to find a wealthy patron who can solve all her problems. Ultimately, the primary argument of Raphael is that émigrés who are living in "their own shell" are terrified by him, not because of his inebriation or his supposed criminal connections: "Emigre society could have forgiven them almost anything: welfare cheating, mooching, drugs." All things aside from heedlessness (Meerzon, 2015). It should be mentioned that Marusya Tatarovich was not like other émigrés at first. She didn't need to look to America as a fairy tale of a beautiful life because she was the daughter of party

functionaries, used to a beautiful life and the fact that her wishes were immediately granted. She left the Soviet Union for non-political reasons. She considered emigration to be exotic and stylish.

She finds herself in America, and she takes a while to get used to her new circumstances—not because she finds them offensive on the inside. It is undoubtedly challenging for her to accept the need to pursue a profession in order to obtain employment because she has never had to support herself. Rather, there is another issue at hand. At first, Marusya was more aware of America. She possessed an inner freedom that her former countrymen lacked and still lack. Even the English language and hippie culture can be used to understand the image of Marusya. Here, we are reminded of her vibrant attire, which gave her daughter an older father back in the Soviet Union. Additionally, she has a certain lack of manners: she has been in multiple fake marriages and has "Mexican passions" in her relationship with Rafael. A complete acceptance of communal life is also present. Therefore, she doesn't find it embarrassing that she and her son depended on her cousin for a long time and used her belongings without her consent. It is noteworthy that she is going to make a bracelet after deciding to study jewelry art. Marusya also experiences the tragicomic incident when she tries to make a petal and is struck in the boot by a hot piece of metal.

### 5. Discussion

The problem of the relationship between Our and Them is predetermined in the literary legacy of S. Dovlatov due to his status as a dissident and émigré writer. The author, however, does not seem to be drawn to the opposition between Our and Thier. When discussing émigrés' experiences in America, S. Dovlatov highlights cultural differences without ever complimenting or disparaging them. He freely acknowledges that his opinion could be incorrect. Only the narrator, out of all the residents of Forest Hills, exhibits a similar viewpoint toward America in general and New York City in particular. He gets curious about the city because of things like how many squirrels there are in the parks. He laments that he is adjusting to American culture rather slowly; he still hasn't picked up driving skills, developed a taste for American music, or taken to speaking the language fluently. His perspective blends Our and Their points of view. The narrator thus presents herself in the text as a well-known author who has authored numerous books in both English and other languages: "I had been an American citizen for approximately a year and a half by that point. I basically survived off the money I made writing. My books were translated well and published."

### 6. Conclusion

In Dovlatov's writings, space is ambiguous; his characters converse and live in different, foreign nations. The narrator believes that while it helps emigrants overcome loneliness to some extent, it hinders assimilation. Assimilation is necessary for immigrants, though, as there can be no meaningful and respectable life in a foreign land if one cannot make one's own. Characters by S. Dovlatov no longer possess a keen sense of boundaries. In an effort to start over, they accept emigration and depart freely, putting it in the past. It's interesting to note that perceptions of both the new and abandoned America are predicated on persistent stereotypes of these two realities, which enables us to discuss how differently they have been mythologized. The writers examine how the American myth is collapsing in the face of American reality at the same time.

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