

## **“The Republic(s) of the Southern Cross: Displaced Geographies in Valerii Briusov and Aleksandr Grin.”**

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In 1907, ten years prior to the October Revolution, Valerii Briusov publishes a chilling anti-utopian story, “The Republic of the Southern Cross,” in which he foretells the catastrophic collapse of an international society governed by planned economy and the Orwellian principle of sham equality. In 1927, the year of the Revolution’s tenth anniversary, Briusov’s admirer and follower Aleksandr Grin offers a *clinamen* (polemical reinterpretation) of the same topic, investing the symbol of the Southern Cross with a radically different content, in one of his best short stories, “Fandango.” Both authors turn the map 90 degrees to reflect on the eternal Russian split between the geopolitical “East” and “West.”

Setting his story in the cold and starving Petrograd of the early twenties, Grin starts where Briusov leaves off: with the collapsed economy and deteriorating morals, although, unlike in Briusov’s anti-utopia, wheels of the governmental apparatus run smoothly, even in the absence of horses eaten up by the hungry citizens (Grin 1965: 346). If the dynamics of Briusov’s story develops from the enforced harmony to violence, destruction, and entropy, Grin’s emphasis in “Fandango” is on the liberating “anarchy of pleasure, the true organizing principle of our [human] nature” (Grin 1965: 374). The source of pleasure is an imaginary “Cuba” to which one can travel in an altered state of consciousness.

Both texts lend themselves easily to a Freudian reading, in which the polar notions of Id and Superego are intimately connected to the geopolitical East and West. However, if Briusov, in “The Republic of the Southern Cross,” carries out Dostoevsky’s dream of smashing the Crystal Palace and realizes Konstantin Leont’ev’s anxiety of the entropic forces associated with the homogenization of the western society, Grin eulogizes the essentially colonial western “South” (his imaginary “Cuba” is still owned by Spain in 1927) contrasted with the infantile, rigid, and anal Russian “North.” The repeated tropes of “crossing” and “cutting across,” combined with

the positive image of the “South” in “Fandango,” create a positively charged alternative to Briusov’s dark symbolism of the Southern Cross.

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