

Title: Measuring Time and Eternity in "The Potudan' River"

Author: Alexei Pavlenko, Colorado College

Email: apavlenko@coloradocollege.edu

The Potudan' River (1937) has been noted as unique among Platonov's works for its sustained lyricism, unusually positive representation of sensual love, absence of the heretofore frequent images of death and decay, and an optimistic denouement suggesting a viability of earthly happiness (Varlamov, V'iugin, Seifrid). The povest' is also remarkable for its meticulous and clearly intentional indicators of time—personal (future-bound and prone to rash rejection of the past), historical (experienced as ineluctable watershed events and grand projects), and universal (characterized by the eternal, cyclical life). The finale's joyful reunion and the consummation of the protagonists' marriage is achieved only when Nikita and Liuba synchronize their personal time, which is shaped by the Civil War and reconstruction, with that of the cosmic rhythm of the rotating seasons, when the heroes' personal and historic consciousness dissolves—literally and figuratively—in the eternal cyclical. The narrative begins and ends “late in the summer.” Nikita visits Liuba throughout winter and “knows that she would be his wife in the spring and that a long and happy life would start then.” In mid February, Liuba tells her fiancÈ that her doctor's exams will start on February 20th, “because doctors are badly needed and people could not wait long for them.” “Just before March” Liuba sends her word to Nikita that she is ready to get married, in spite of the fact that there is still much snow and Potudan' is frozen. The discord between the personal and the universal times is revealed through Nikita's heart, which is unable to send his blood to all the organs in order to partake of “pitiful but necessary pleasure.” The story masterfully illustrates the stages in a characteristically Platonov's tension between utopianism and eschatology.