

Title: Country is in the eye of the beholder: The image of the United States in Il'f and Petrov's *One-Story America* and Vassily Aksyonov's *In Search of Melancholy Baby*
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This paper explores the image of the United States in Ilya Il'f and Evgeny Petrov's *One Story America* (*Oдноetazhnaia Amerika* 1937) and Vassily Aksyonov's *In Search of Melancholy Baby* (*V poiskakh grustnogo bebi* 1987). In both works, the image of the United States is simplified in the Procrustean bed of ideology. Il'f and Petrov perceive and represent America through the lens of their belief in socialism as a superior alternative to capitalism. Conversely, Aksyonov is fiercely anti-Soviet, and his reminiscences of life in the Soviet Union can be described as a reversed ethnocentrism—everything that is Soviet is bad, and everything that is anti-Soviet is good.

The comparison of these two ideologically antithetical books, however, reveals some persistent patterns in the perception and analysis of American culture related to the traditional Russian notion that America is a land of technology and materialism, whereas Russia is an old civilization of superior spiritual, moral, and artistic achievements. Despite the antagonistic political philosophies of *One-Story America* and *In Search of Melancholy Baby*, the presentation of the thriving and refined Soviet cultural life as opposed to American infatuation with the material is strikingly similar. In Il'f and Petrov's motherland of the Radiant Future, concert halls are full, audiences are appreciative of music, writers do not worry about the market, and people live with hope. In the densely anti-Soviet atmosphere of Aksyonov's book, the reader also discovers that in the Soviet Union concert halls are full, audiences love music, publishing industry is free of market considerations, and people are interested in art—in short, it seems that the cultural life in Aksyonov's totalitarian anti-utopia is truly intense. The criticism of the profit-driven American cultural production from both Soviet and anti-Soviet standpoints reveals the influence of one of the most popular traditional paradigms in Russia's exchange with the West, namely, the “Spiritual/Cultural Russia” versus the “Materialistic West.”