

stretched over the driveway, the pinks and greens of the serrated leaves lending an illusory tropical air to the yard. The century plant, prehistoric and fearsome in appearance, bloomed and died when I was in high school.

The kids want to collect pecans, so we take buckets from Daddy's toolshed and head for the backyard. A recent storm has brought down the last of them, and some are still covered in the green pods that encase the shell and the oily, sweet-tasting meat. The pine near the fence is dying, looking for all the world like the sailless mast of a shipwreck. The huge elm, its ponderous limbs leaning on the roof of the house, the pecan trees, full of squirrels' nests, the hackberry, and the towering sycamore remain.

Was the sycamore always so big? Maybe my memory is playing tricks on me. Or was it the scale of boyhood adventures that made all trees seem mighty beanstalks stretching to the sky and giants and treasures beyond? My younger brother once climbed to its top, as the tree swayed in a stiff wind. My mother tells me I was nonchalantly munching on a snack when I informed her he was clinging to the swaying treetop and couldn't get down. I can't remember just how he did get down, only that the tree seemed so invulnerable, even then. Not even a tornado I once watched dance only a few yards away from it disturbed the invincible sycamore of my memory.

It seems like an act of defiance to allow kids to climb trees these days. Maybe that's why the sight of my son dangling from the limbs of the live oak gladdens my heart. Or maybe it is something else.

We pick up the pecans, crushing some beneath our heels to snack on. The noise stirs some doves near the fenceline to flight, and I notice the grapevine still clinging to the fence. We used to make homemade wine with its fruit.

Daddy and I sit out on the porch to watch the rest of the day go by, and I ask him about the trees. He claims he planted too damn many of them. The trees, some of them dying, now surround the house, leaving mountains of dead leaves to clean up and causing no end of trouble. Even so, he remembers where he got each one—this one from the property of friends, that one from a relative—and when he planted them in this little patch of coastal grassland where he built a house and raised a family.

That was nearly 50 years ago.

We talk of my parents moving. The

city swallowed our little oasis decades ago. Apart from this island of memory and attachment, what was home is no longer a pleasant place to live. I wonder aloud if we could move the house. But a voice in my head whispers, "What of the trees?"

Wayne Allensworth lives in Keller, Texas.

Letter From London

by *Andrei Navrozov*

Tea With Trotsky



A few months ago, when word of an article of mine about the events of September 11 went round the Russian community in London, I received a telephone call inviting me to a private meeting with Boris Berezovsky. (A relevant question to ponder is whether those Westerners who are unfamiliar with the name have somehow missed out, since it may well be argued that many people who quietly went about their business in the 1930's without bothering to ask who Trotsky was, and why he was ever so cross with Stalin, were emotionally better prepared for the paradox of an approaching world war that would align the West with Soviet Russia. To the writer, to the historian, and to every other species of freethinking pest that troubles our society, however, the perfect emotional equilibrium of a man shoved into the cattle car that bears him to an unspecified destination has not always been the consummate ideal. This worrisome, often lonely, unshaven or bespectacled human-type wants to ferret out the very worst of what there is to learn of his epoch, and what I write here is addressed to him.)

At home, Berezovsky is vilified as an "oligarch" by the secret-police *junta* that has borne President Vladimir Putin, which means that the label is intentionally misleading and can be discarded. I have previously written in this space that setting up these bigwigs was an early initiative of that selfsame *junta*, with the objective of staging a pantomime of free enterprise attractive to Western investment not unlike the simulacrum of constitutional liberty embodied by the Duma and other democratist institutions in

post-*perestroika* Russia. Of the hundreds, perhaps thousands, who had been chosen almost at random to receive the bounteous rewards of various privatizations and shareouts, only a couple—Berezovsky most prominently—went bad in the end and began biting the hand that fed them. At present, there is an order for his arrest, and those who sympathize with his plight will not be surprised to hear of the man's imminent extradition to Russia, nor, for that matter, of his tragic death in a car crash.

In the West, Berezovsky has been called an entrepreneur, a tycoon, a billionaire, and a mafioso. The last appellation was given him by *Forbes*, whereupon he successfully sued the magazine for slander in Britain, where he resides, in a case that went all the way up to the House of Lords. But whatever the label, it is evidently less political than it is prosaic, leading one to ask why on earth anybody so described should be touted as the Trotsky of our time. A flippant answer is that we live in prosaic times. A more substantive reply would acknowledge that, in the 21st century, as George Orwell foresaw back in 1948, big books, big words, big ideas, and all the rest of the romantic *mise-en-scène* of political rebellion that endured until Trotsky's day, count for nothing or next to nothing. Big money, on the other hand—that is to say, money measured in hundreds of billions of dollars—is, if anything, more politically pivotal and historically momentous than ever before. A crucial caveat to this last, however, is that while modern money is certainly mightier than the modern pen, the modern sword is still the mightiest thing on earth, and those who suppose that world dominion can be bought with paper money are quite as deluded as the many ordinary Americans who will happily tell you that their planet is safe for democracy so long as its denizens drink Coke and watch CNN.

Jumping ahead to the conclusion of our chat over tea with biscuits, I must say that Berezovsky's inability to accept that crucial caveat is one of his most notable intellectual limitations: "Verily, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle," I kept thinking during the three hours of conversation, "than it is for a billionaire to admit that economics is not the answer to everything." So, in his own day, it was quite impossible for Trotsky to accept the notion that his own cultural capital—his education, his oratory, his knowledge of foreign languages, or, for

that matter, his penmanship or his fashion sense—might not entitle him to the eminence of Stalin, apparently a Georgian bandit with only a pockmarked face and a soldier's tunic to his name, who had nonetheless attained, and would always retain, that eminence with his subtle cunning, his will to power, and his way with the ice pick. "The most outstanding mediocrity in our Party," as the great *Kulturträger* Trotsky once ridiculed him, Stalin understood that culture was not the answer to everything.

We plunge into the interview *in medias res*, with Berezovsky stating that he has assembled an archive of documentary evidence, and prepared for release a documentary film based upon it, demonstrating that the notorious apartment-building bombings in Moscow two years ago were perpetrated by the secret police on Putin's orders and not, as Putin has maintained, by Chechens unknown on the orders of shadowy Muslim warlords. This had been a working assumption of mine when I published my article on the events of September 11, if only because Putin's clamorous insistence on the political and religious consanguinity of the two groups of conspirators—starting on the very day of September 11, before any investigation of the hijackings had taken place—proved such an important lever for cranking up public opinion in the West in favor of a new strategic alignment with the Kremlin. "We are now all of us victims of the menace of Islam," Putin has, in effect, told the United States and Britain,

but if Continental Europe is absorbed into Russia's sphere of influence—finally creating the "common European home" first proposed by President Gorbachev to President Bush—then Russia will serve the West as the shield, and if need be the sword, against the Muslim hordes.

Producing conclusive evidence that Putin's agents were behind the Moscow bombings would be tantamount to proving Putin's complicity in the September 11 operation, which all too easily centered on the shadowy Osama bin Laden, who, like many of the *mujahedin* commanders allegedly fighting the Russians during the Soviet occupation—some of them later joining, and betraying, Ahmad Shah Massoud, Afghanistan's only credible anti-Taliban force apart from

the Moscow-controlled Northern Alliance—may have been a Soviet double agent from the beginning. But Berezovsky, who expects to use the material he has gathered to shame the Russian parliament into an investigation of the Moscow bombings, goes a good deal further. He is convinced that the timing of the bombings is a clue to the time scale of the planning of the September 11 operation. Hence, he believes, it is utterly implausible that, during the nearly two years of worldwide terrorist preparations for the attack, involving hundreds of amateur conspirators, neither the CIA nor the Israeli intelligence services operating in the Middle East knew anything of the conspiracy. In other words, even though Franklin D. Roosevelt's probable foreknowledge of Pearl Harbor remains unproved as a matter of historical fact, the Pearl Harbor of our epoch, meant once again to align Washington with Moscow in a war over the future of Europe, is likely, in Berezovsky's opinion, to be laid bare to international scrutiny in the weeks, months, or years to come. Then Putin falls.

What falls then, in my own mind, is a long, wide shadow. It is the shadow between Berezovsky's deeply informed premise and his naively wishful conclusion, suggesting that the pen, to say nothing of the money, is mightier than the sword. Because the weapon in question—the modern totalitarian weapon now wielded by Putin—is not the ice pick, the gun, the tank, or the rest of the rusting paraphernalia of individual vengeance and territorial conquest from Genghis Khan to Stalin, but the 21st-century nuclear superpower whose immensely sophisticated and cunning leaders have successfully lured their only credible opponent into an all-but-irreversible policy of lackadaisical fraternization, market interdependence, and unilateral disarmament. Moreover, if, as Berezovsky must logically accept, the relationship between the intelligence establishment in Russia (where it has overtly constituted the ruling class since the death of Brezhnev) and in the United States (where it has been augmenting its power clandestinely since the Kennedy assassination) exists on another, still deeper and closer—perhaps symbiotic—level than that of their respective foreign policies, then his dream of busting open the Pearl Harbor of our time is more than a little absurd.

Thus we get philosophical. What is

modern totalitarianism? And again, I think of how difficult it must be for him to see the future through his billions, as he tells me what I have heard on countless other occasions, in both the United States and Europe, from prominent businessmen who unswervingly believe that all is for the best (except antitrust legislation and capital-gains taxes) in this best of all possible worlds (where big money makes even bigger money). Thus, liberty will surely triumph the world over (because it is more ergonomic). Tyranny will inevitably fall away (because it hinders innovation). Freedom of speech is important (after all, somebody makes money selling newspapers). And democracy is the worst form of government except all the others (because they nationalize industries and print funny money).

But what has any of it to do with *modern* totalitarianism, the system now being perfected by Putin's *junta* with tacit approval from the rest of the world once called free? Nothing. Indeed, how can any of the rich man's inside-out Marxism—or, for that matter, the average man's knee-jerk Thatcherism—so much as refer to something so fundamentally new, uncharted, and unknown? For, while it is clear that, among others, the new system recombines and reconstitutes some known elements of Lenin's New Economic Policy, Stalin's practice of strategic deception, Beria's concept of political tolerance, Khrushchev's cultural liberalism, Mussolini's *compromesso* with the Church, Hitler's *laissez-faire* with respect to small and medium-size business, New Communist China's openness to foreign investment, the European Community's principle of transnational bureaucratism, and America's own 40-year experience with the taxidermy of democratic institutions, not a single study of that system as a whole has yet been published. Just because Berezovsky is product enough of it to understand its potential for deception and evil does not mean that he is in a position to appreciate its actual, for all intents and purposes infinite, vitality and strength.

And so we part and go our separate ways—he, a new Trotsky with all the panache of a warrior on a white charger; I, with the crooked smile of a tired old unbeliever under the bleak lamps of the No. 14 double-decker bus.

Andrei Navrozov is Chronicles' European correspondent.

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by Srdja Trifkovic

We Are the World

In the aftermath of September 11, the chairman of the House International Relations Committee noted that the war on terrorism has revealed the need to overhaul U.S. foreign policy. "Can anyone doubt that the sum of our efforts has been insufficient?" asked Rep. Henry Hyde (R-IL) on October 10, opening a hearing into the role of public diplomacy in the campaign against terrorism. "Our efforts at self-defense, which should be supported by every decent person on this planet, instead spark riots that threaten governments that dare to cooperate with us."

Mr. Hyde was referring to the Islamic world, of course. According to a disquieting recent poll, America's image abroad is deeply at odds with its self-perception everywhere, including Western Europe. The Pew Charitable Trust's survey of the world's opinion-forming elites (<http://www.people-press.org/1219012.htm>) found that 56 percent of respondents outside of the United States think that U.S. foreign policy—especially in the Middle East—was a major cause of the attacks.

In France, *Le Monde's* Herve Kempf summed up the mood of many Europeans when he wrote (January 8) that the attacks "did not change America's position on dealing with major world issues." This view was shared by Pascal Boniface of the Institute for International Strategic Relations, who commented in the Parisian daily *Libération* (January 7) that the collapse of the Taliban reinforces Americans' belief that they are almost always right and that they can always impose their point of view: "America has learned nothing and could face other rude awakenings." On the conservative side, Jean-Pierre Ferrier lamented, in *Le Figaro* (January 4), the demise of Europe and its military incompetence, manifested in three wars initiated and led by the United States in the past ten years:

Iraq presented the opportunity to verify the individual faithfulness of the members of the Alliance. Kosovo showed the minimal role that was played by European allies whose participation the Pentagon considered as a weakening factor militarily but nevertheless diplo-

matically useful. Afghanistan served to summarize the situation: The allies have the obligation to participate in missions decided by the United States following the guidelines determined by Washington. In each instance the rules are the same: At most, the Europeans have the right to information, or to the impression that they have been kept informed.

In Russia, *Sovetskaya Rossiya's* Vasily Safronchuk warned on December 29 there have been no real changes inside Russia or in its relations with the West since September 11. The current regime is wooing the West, hoping for Russia to be recognized as a partner, but that is not acceptable those who seek global hegemony:

It is surprising how easily Putin fell for the antiterrorist trap Bush set up for him. He readily joined the U.S. action against Afghanistan and used his influence to get Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to pitch in and offer their bases for the U.S. aviation and airborne troops. The ungrateful Washington responded by declaring its withdrawal from the ABM Treaty . . . Putin has Russia bonded with the U.S. war chariot against all those who oppose American global hegemony.

While the decision by President Bush to serve formal notice on December 13 that the United States was pulling out of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty with Russia was largely ignored at home, abroad it was seen as his most important foreign-policy decision so far. Most U.S. allies in the antiterrorist struggle see the step as proof that Washington's multilateralist rhetoric was only a tool used to help the administration garner international support immediately after the terror attacks. A commentator for the London *Independent* summed up the mood on December 14:

Increasingly, the question is being asked: is the administration, em-



boldened by military success in Afghanistan, reverting to the bad old days before 11 September? The U.S. is again riding roughshod over international deals it does not like . . . and talking of sending its hi-tech posess after Iraq and other countries with whom it has scores to settle.

It is remarkable that not one single major daily newspaper in Europe or Canada endorsed President Bush's argument that September 11 underscored the need for missile defense. Indeed, one commentator after another made the opposite case: that the terrorist attacks show the uselessness of a missile shield. The view from the Kremlin was given by Anatoli Anisimov in Moscow's official *Parlamentskaya Gazeta* (December 15):

Everything we have heard over the last few years about the basically new non-confrontational, if not partner-like, relationships between the U.S. and Russia, has turned out to be empty talk. When the Americans needed support for their military action in Afghanistan, they called us a partner. But they forgot the partnership once they decided that they wanted to scrap the ABM Treaty, a cornerstone of the disarmament policy. It is true what people say about charity beginning at home. With the damage done, no praise for President Putin's restraint will repair it.

In Britain, the *Economist* commented on December 15 that "Mr Bush is right to take a radical look at America's arms-control commitments in a dangerous world," but added that the test of any treaty or policy should be a practical one: