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The Post-Communist Russia In The Works of Vasily Aksenov

Aksenov's incongruous symbols of the Soviet Russia, populated by an unrepentant post-Stalinist party bureaucracy tormenting the creative intelligentsia, gave way in his post-Soviet novels to a new literary landscape, in many ways experimental and unfriendly to reader expectations, of an emerging new Russia with its new Russians who had to deal with the violence, secrecy and the criminal mentality they inherited from their recent past. In my paper, I argue that Aksenov's angry satire on the KGB agents and party officials in his post-exile fiction has changed into comic grotesque on Russian businessmen longing for the return of Stalinism. The demonic symbolism, typical for Aksenov's earlier novels, is replaced by a grotesque-absurd world of Soviet apparatchiki acting as unscrupulous capitalists. The thematic connotations in Popenkov's character, a hybrid of a bird and an airplane, and a devotee of Soviet totalitarianism in the novel *The Steel Bird*, are transferred to the ex-Komosomol activist Burevyatkov in *The New Sweet Style*. In *Rare Earths* the change of target in Aksenov's satire resulted in its refocusing from the unspeakable Soviet grotesque onto an utopian ideal of free capitalism and a high tech society. As an alternative, in adopting Schopenhauer's maxim that compassion is the most humanitarian feeling from heavens, Aksenov creates a utopian hero, an honest New Russian who rejects violence and at the end of each novel is transformed into a man of the future, an artifact of vegetarianism and gene technology.