

FRIENDSHIP AND POLITICS IN RUSSIA

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Russia, it seems to many, has an overabundance of friendship. Some link this phenomenon to the underdevelopment of formal institutions, which forces people to rely on informal relationships to achieve their goals. Others link it to the Stalinist past, which made friendship a dearly earned achievement, rather than an innocuous ascription: in a society where relatives informed on each other, an ultimate and real friend was a person who withstood the threat of terror and did not betray. No matter what the reason, the ubiquity of profound friendships is acutely believed in by many Russians, who frequently contrast their society with those of the United States and Western Europe by asserting that Russia's is based on friendship. It is surprising, then, that there was no serious study of friendship undertaken in Russia from the 1980s, when Vladimir Shlapentokh's book *Love, Marriage, and Friendship in the Soviet Union* appeared,¹ until 2009, when a group of researchers, including myself, at the European University at St. Petersburg published a volume titled *Druzbbba (Friendship)*.² The book was intended, obviously,

1. Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Love, Marriage, and Friendship in the Soviet Union* (New York: Praeger, 1984).

2. I edited *Druzbbba: Ocherki po teorii praktik [Friendship: Sketches on the Theory of Practices]* (St. Petersburg: European University at St. Petersburg Press, 2009). The research was supported by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York (B7819: for research cooperation

for a Russian audience, and our aim in producing it was to estrange the familiar: friendship practices are so widespread and common that most Russians are unaware of engaging in them. The article preceding mine in this installment of “Peace by Other Means” attends to aspects of Russian society—the veneration of self-sacrifice and *kenosis* for the greater glory of Russia—that can occasion hostility and sometimes war.³ My contribution is meant to summarize and update, for a non-Russian-speaking audience, the findings reported in *Druzhbba* and to do so in the context of a symposium on enmity, friendship’s antithetical counterpart. It is not only relations among enemies that should be considered when thinking about conflict and war but also relations among friends. These two kinds of relationship are not as different as common sense holds, and the definition of one depends on the definition of the other.

1

“There is always too little friendship,” Kapitolina Fedorova claims in her essay for *Druzhbba*, even though many would say that, whatever else it lacks, Russia has an ample supply of at least this resource.⁴ Fedorova’s analysis of discursive practices is intended to correct the stereotype, first of all by arguing that friends and friendships are strange phenomena that behave in ways that, by the usual definitions of them, one would assume they should not behave. A friendship is not, she shows, a self-maintaining institution but rather one maintained by outsiders to the relationship. Fedorova is not the only author in our volume to analyze friendship along these lines: their case is based on close observation of behavior, and my overview of it begins with arguments they make about linguistic behavior.

The word *friend* is not used when we address each other in everyday situations. “Friend, pass the salt” sounds artificial, high-flown, and archaic in Russian, as it does in many other languages. If a Russian speaker addresses someone as a “friend,” “girlfriend,” or “boyfriend” to his or her face, then the person addressed is not yet a friend, no longer a friend, or never likely to be a friend. When the narrator of a children’s radio program addresses the audience with a phrase like “Hello, my little friend!” the narrator’s doing so indicates to outsiders that the

between EUSP and Georgetown University), and the coauthors are particularly indebted to Deana Arsenian of Carnegie and Harley Balzer of Georgetown. I made two earlier attempts to conduct research on friendship in Russia but, in the process, discovered little more than the magnitude of the topic. The two articles I published on the basis of that research appear as chapters (“Friendship: Early History of the Concept” and “Friendship: Classic and Contemporary Concerns”) in my book *Main Concepts of Russian Politics* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005).

3. Gary Saul Morson, “War and Peace: Meditations of a Tolstoy Scholar,” *Common Knowledge* 22, no. 2 (May 2016): 211–19.

4. Kapitolina Fedorova, “Razgovory družei, razgovory o družbiakh, razgovory o družbe” [“Conversations among Friends, Conversations on Friends, Conversations on Friendship”], in Kharkhordin, *Druzhbba*, 81–113.

child is not fully human, is not yet a grown-up. This usage in addressing children is reminiscent of the way in which President Vladimir Putin addresses large audiences: “Friends! Today I would like to discuss with you . . .” It is clear both to the speaker and to all his listeners that this means of address is not expressive of personal friendship. Indeed, Russians tend to regard political friendship, dominated as it is by instrumental motives, as deficient by nature. The assumption is that genuine friendship presupposes the disinterestedness and equality of the parties involved. Thus, when politicians speak of friendship between nations or peoples, they know very well that these relationships are unequal or unequally advantageous to the countries involved, and they know too that, if those peoples are components of a single country (for example, the USSR), “friendship” has been imposed on one or both of the parties and is probably maintained by force. Those who are called “friends” in political speeches and treaties or in appeals to children are clearly not friends in any ordinary sense of the word.

Why is it that, in ordinary speech, addressing a tried and true friend as “friend” is considered bombastic and verging on bad form? We might try to explain by quoting from the New Testament (where, contrary to expectation, the word *friend* is rarely encountered): “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (John 15:14). In this discourse, delivered during the Last Supper, Jesus raises his listeners from the condition of God’s servants to the status of friends of the Heavenly Father. It is possible that sincere Christians have always been sickened when the word *friend* is used in vain: only someone sacrilegiously aspiring to divine power could think of appointing someone as his or her friend. On the other hand, the nonreligious may find archaic or even embarrassing expressions such as “gentle friend” or “bon ami” or “schöne Seele” that were common in correspondence of the early modern past. In his contribution to *Druzhiba*, Dmitrii Kalugin shows that this lofty model for letter writing was pervasive in Russia during the late seventeenth century, beginning in the circle of Simeon Polotsky.⁵ A hundred years later, Nikolai Karamzin would write, in a letter, that he found it more pleasant to be addressed as “friend” than as “kind sir” by his correspondents. Russian fiction writers of the nineteenth century sometimes imposed this more stately mode of address on characters even during face-to-face encounters. In Dostoevsky’s “The Crocodile,” for instance, we find: “My friend, my advice is to apply directly to the superintendent’s office.” The declarative romanticism of this form of address is a vestige of an earlier time, when the tacit rules for using the word *friend* were still unformulated in Russian culture. Even in the contemporary context, however, we can still address a genuine friend, in a private letter,

5. Dmitrii Kalugin, “Istoriia poniatiia ‘druzhiba,’ ot Drevnei Rusi do XVIII veka” [“History of the Concept of ‘Friendship,’ from Ancient Rus’ to the Eighteenth Century”], in Kharkhordin, *Druzhiba*, 187–289.

with such words as “My dear friend Katya,” but this mode is for correspondence only. One’s “dear friend” must be absent to be so addressed.

The word *friend* is also used in Russian speech when we suspect or are certain, as during a quarrel, that a significant transformation has taken place: “I thought of you as a friend, but you . . .” In this instance, the word is used to call into question a friend’s status, and, after hearing such a reproach, the accused may indeed cease to be one’s friend. If so, then one would return to the practice of avoiding use of the word *friend* when speaking to or about that person. In the most extreme case, when a friend dies, we can address him or her as such in graveside remarks or in posthumous letters and reveries. In other words, we address a friend as “friend” only when the friend is absent or nonexistent. In contemporary Russian speech acts, we can address someone as “friend” only when there is no friend. When we mention particular friends in conversation with third parties, it is to make introductions (“This is my friend Peter”) or to delineate, for someone unfamiliar with them, the boundaries of our company of friends (“I have this friend Peter—you don’t know him yet. Well, he . . .”). Such naming is primarily an oral practice, for example, when pressed to answer an interviewer’s questions. Fedorova found numerous instances where someone was designated a friend in oral interviews, but she found rather fewer in the Russian National Corpus of Written Texts. An absent person might be designated as a friend when a new, third party is included in a friendship, but the same thing happens when someone is excluded from a friendship—for example, when a husband waves off his wife as she attempts to take part in his telephone conversation. The phrase “Let me talk with my friend” lays down the boundary firmly: this is *our* friendship—you are not part of it. The naming of an absent person as “friend” thus has the latent function of outlining the boundaries of a community, an act that is frequently pointless in ordinary life (which for the most part is lived within the community of friends) or in letters to members of the community. When, however, these boundaries are marked in letters sent to people outside of that community, such texts take on the appearance of official (and thus somewhat artificial) recommendation letters, which nowadays constitute a rare genre in Russia.

Establishing the boundaries of a circle of friends is important to Russians, because most often it is not discrete friends but a circle of them that functions as actant when we describe our friendship practices to third parties. Indeed, it is extremely rare for a friend to become an actant in our accounts, while the actant known as “friends” unproblematically figures in Russian speech, even without a predicate. A friend has to be someone’s friend—mine, hers, Peter’s, Dad’s; otherwise, the phrase in which it figures will sound incomplete. The use of possessive pronouns (which, as Fedorova notes, is quite often superfluous) points to the simple secret of this phenomenon: “possession” requires a minimum of two centers of attraction. We should note, however, that dyadic relationships—

friendships between two people (and no more)—are a rare and relatively recent phenomenon in Russian history. In the examples (which are mainly medieval but date to as late as the time of Ivan the Terrible) that Kalugin cites in his *Druzbbba* contribution, the reference to *friends* in the plural is more typical. Most often, *friend* is used in the singular in compilations of translated homilies, where it has two generalized meanings: a “neighbor” (as in “love thy neighbor”) or a “partner in a particular enterprise, campaign, or affair.” When the word is encountered along with an indication of whose friend is indicated, then the context is either non-Russian or elevated, as in the translation of Old Testament phrases such as “friend of God” (applied, for example, to Abraham and Moses) or in references to individual friends of Caesar. The only reference to “one’s own friend” that Kalugin mentions is found in an early Bulgarian text, “The Court Law for the People,” that later entered Russian legal compilations.

In older texts, for instance, in ancient and early Christian epistolography, the dyadic relationship of author/addressee always presumes a third party, an outside reader. Atticus found it possible to publish and sell the letters of his friend Cicero, and when the Church Fathers wrote to each other, they always assumed that the third person (often, a friend) who would deliver the letter might read it along the way or deliver it to an address where it could be read by other nonaddressees.⁶ Kalugin notes a similar quality, still present much later, in the correspondence of the “gentle friends” who gathered around the figure of Simeon Polotsky (1629–80). Their letters often refer to third parties (“X said of you that . . .”) and thus actualize a whole network of connections beyond the dyad of author and recipient. Russian adaptations of Montaigne, who was capable of dyadic friendship only with Étienne de la Boétie (after Étienne’s death, Montaigne was able only, as he put it, to befriend books), are an exception to the rule within this tradition. Alexander Radishchev could describe with feeling the virtuous life of his late friend Fyodor Ushakov, but even in that context the dyadic friendship appears to be secondary to the friendship within their entire circle of friends, young men who set off to study together in Leipzig during the era of the Enlightenment. The friends (*drugi*) mentioned in Russian chronicles, mainly medieval, quite often comprise a *druzbbba*. This latter term can designate a prince’s armed guard or the circle of his advisers, a trading community for shipping goods down the Dnieper River, and even a community of religious pilgrims. In literature translated into Russian, the word is also used to designate a monastic community, and this usage apparently became customary over time. The seventeenth-century schismatic Avvakum, for example, used the term *druzbbba* to describe the relations among his followers.

6. Caroline White, “Friendship in Absence—Some Patristic Views,” in *Friendship in Medieval Europe*, ed. Julian Haseldine (Stroud, UK: Sutton, 1999), 79–81.

Such communities have not much in common with circles of friends as they are known in the West. In Russia, the foundational principle of such relationships may be spiritual and self-sacrificial, on a pattern set by the Gospel verse, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). On the other hand, this foundational principle may be easily defied by the suddenly revealed reality of material self-enrichment. An example might be the circle of friends to which the priest Sylvester belonged during the early years of Ivan the Terrible’s reign. Sylvester was the tsar’s spiritual adviser until Ivan came to suspect that the priest was using his influence at court to advance the interests of his own friends, a particular group of aristocrats whose interests and Ivan’s did not coincide anymore.⁷ Notable during this era is the frequency of appeals, to those judging court cases or exercising other public duties, to “favor not your friend, avenge not your foe”; hence we may assume that the opposite practice was widespread. In the formation of such circles, we most often observe a coincidence of emotions and experiences, of intentions and interests, but these vary from spiritual to material kinds. Dmitrii Kalugin summarizes the history in his essay on the concept of friendship in Russia: starting from the days of Karamzin and Pushkin, he writes, narratives on friendship speak mainly of spiritual phenomena and make almost no mention of material things. In the years that preceded this era, however, *things* were so palpably present in friendships that it was impossible to imagine any friendship existing without them.

2

Friendship has never been wholly independent of material concerns. We recall the ancient Greek saying that “friends have all things in common,” and we remember the ideal of late antiquity that, in dyadic friendships, two bodies share one soul. Despite these expressions of idealism, however, there has always been the practice of exchanging gifts as a sign of friendship. As Marcel Mauss and Claude Lévi-Strauss showed long ago, gift giving is a practice that is regulated in considerable detail. Many would say that the exchange of favors or services remains the basis of any friendship and thus that all friendship is instrumental, no matter what assurances of altruism or disinterestedness the parties may offer each other. In a situation—say, in international relations—where friendship is openly and purely motivated by instrumental considerations, exchanging gifts helps to establish a first, minimal level of community.⁸ Thus, the military friendship between the

7. Thomas Riha, ed., *Russia before Peter the Great*, vol. 1 of *Readings in Russian Civilization*, rev. 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 95–97 (“The Kurbsky-Ivan the Terrible Correspondence”).

8. Gifts were attached to military obligations already in ancient Greece. Most contemporary scholars of ancient Greek friendship view it as a fairly simple mutual assistance pact, devoid of personal attachments; see, for example, Malcolm Heath, *The Poetics of Greek Tragedy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987); Gabriel

Kievan general Pretich and a Pecheneg prince in 968 AD was marked, Russian chronicles tell us, by a gift exchange, as was the conclusion of friendship pacts between British colonizers and the Cherokee in North America and between British conquerors and Indian princes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁹ Relations between medieval German princes were also largely devoid of emotion, despite the active exchange of gifts. As Gerd Althoff writes, “The bond of friendship, as one meets it in the medieval political arena, was not a bond of feeling but rather a contract involving rights and obligations.”¹⁰ Improper gifts or even the refusal to accept a gift would have been taken as a sign of dissatisfaction with the manner in which the other party had fulfilled the obligation.¹¹ Friendship of this kind at that time was, like marriage, contractual.

In friendships based on the giving and receiving of gifts, much effort goes into establishing value so that equivalent gifts can be given in response. Valuation was not always simple. When a letter to a friend was itself viewed as a gift,¹² or when, as in Italy during the Renaissance, people sent their own portraits as gifts, or when a *parsuna* (a semi-iconic portrait) was sent as a gift in seventeenth-century Russia, what could one send in reply besides an instance of the same genre?¹³ Exchanges of letters as simple tokens of attention have continued to be an interesting phenomenon. In his contribution to *Druzhba*, Boris Gladarev analyzes contemporary Russian friendship on the basis of everyday communication.¹⁴ He notes the multitude of “caring” phone calls or “maintenance” messages (containing, say, only a question mark or an emoticon): these contain no information but testify that “I care about you.” We find precedents for this practice in the ordinary exchange of letters in antiquity and indeed up until the Petrine era in Russia, when they were regarded as valuable gifts no less than as valuable sources of information. In one such letter, perhaps representative of this kind of correspondence in antiquity, Marcus Cornelius Fronto writes to Emperor Mar-

Herman, *Ritualized Friendship and the Greek City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); and Mary Whitlock Blundell, *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies: A Study in Sophocles and Greek Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). David Konstan, however, has made the persuasive objection that this approach, which has been standard since Moses Finley published his work on Homer, is merely a consequence of our reading the findings of modern anthropology (in particular, the work of Marcel Mauss) into ancient Greek society. Konstan insists, for instance, that Herman detected in Greek antiquity what anthropologists had described in cases of ritual friendship in Africa and the medieval Middle East, but that the ancient written sources offer no evidence for any such thing. Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 4, 36.

9. See Evgenii Roshchin, “Poniatie ‘druzhba’ v kontekste mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii” [“The Concept ‘Friend-

ship’ in the Context of International Relations”], in Kharkhordin, *Druzhba*, 290–423.

10. Gerd Althoff, “Friendship and Political Order,” in Haseldine, *Friendship in Medieval Europe*, 92.

11. Althoff, “Friendship and Political Order,” 95.

12. White, “Friendship in Absence.

13. See Peter Burke, “Humanism and Friendship in Sixteenth-Century Europe,” in Haseldine, *Friendship in Medieval Europe*, 267.

14. Boris Gladarev, “Sotsiologicheskii analiz druzhby: Perspektiva setevogo podkhoda” [“A Sociological Analysis of Friendship: Perspectives of a Network Approach”], in Kharkhordin, *Druzhba*, 114–86.

cus Aurelius: "I am anxious to know, my lord, how are you. I have been seized with pain in the neck. Farewell, my lord. Greetings to your lady."¹⁵ And in the seventeenth century Lazar Baranovich writes to a friend that it is necessary to correspond often, even if there is nothing to write about: "If you are well this is good; I am also well" is said to suffice.¹⁶

Gifts remain in the possession of the recipient, where, among other things, they function as reminders of the need to give gifts of equivalent value in return. Friends do, however, share certain items, things that are either not the property of any one friend or, if they are owned by one, are not fully at the owner's disposal. In his analysis of this aspect of contemporary Russian friendship, Gladarev singles out three classes of things held in common. The first class is of circulating things—photographs, music, books, films—which as a result of their circulation among friends accumulate new meanings and significance in their circle. The second class consists of expendable things—money, alcohol, items of food, camping equipment, and so forth—which are diminished in volume or value, or are altogether destroyed, during friendly gatherings. Finally, there are mediators—including telephone networks; communication devices, such as e-mail and social media; kitchens, apartments, beach houses, saunas, and other spaces "for friendship"—that serve either to mediate interactions or to function as their setting. It is, again, worth comparing Gladarev's empirical findings with historical cases. Thus, among things that circulated among friends during the Italian Renaissance, we find, unsurprisingly, that books had pride of place. More interesting is the practice of placing dedications or inscriptions to friends in books passed from hand to hand.¹⁷ Sometimes requests for more reading material have been included as well. In his essay for *Druz'ba*, Kalugin cites the first Russian letter (dated 1450) that contains such a request (in this case, to send "theological and prayer books"). This practice became common in Russia only later, in the seventeenth century, within the circle of *virshi* (syllabic) poets. Books were rare, and friends asked each other to send volumes that they could copy. It was not uncommon to ask a friend to send, say, a volume of Aristotle or books of theological commentary (which were often published in Polish or Latin). On occasion, the recipient might even retain a book permanently, thus changing its status from a common property in circulation to an expropriated gift.

Circulating things are not, indeed, the most significant among items held in common by circles of friends. Things consumed or destroyed together—the elements of a feast or sacrifice—are more crucial to friendship. As scholars of medieval friendship in Western Europe have noted, "The celebration of a *convivium* was apparently so tightly bound up in the mind-set of the Middle Ages with the concept of friendship that medieval historians used the expression 'they

15. White, "Friendship in Absence," 74.

17. Burke, "Humanism and Friendship," 267.

16. Cited in Kalugin, "Istoriia poniatiia," 239.

ate and drank together' when they wanted to refer to a friendship alliance."¹⁸ Daniel the Exile's remark about false friends who "dipped their hands into the salt cellar" with him, but only when all was well, witnesses to the same practice in thirteenth-century Russia. And as late as 1708, in the Petrine era, Dimitry of Rostov spoke scathingly in a sermon on friendship about how the relationship of junior officials and august lords was based on no more than "toasts to each other's health." Sharing a drink or a meal, that is to say, points to intimacy but is no guarantee of sincerity or, therefore, of a friendship's likely continuation. The words *eat*, *drink*, and *befriend* appear together in a very large number of old Russian texts. Commenting, for example, on a fourth-century exhortation of St. John Chrysostom about avoiding the defilement of befriending heretics ("in repasts and imbibings"), Joseph Volotsky (1439–1515) recasts it as a demand "not to have intercourse with them, neither in food nor in drink, neither in friendship nor in love." Volotsky, a vehement foe of the "Non-Possessors," an antimaterialist movement in the Orthodox church, demanded that no one "have intercourse [with them] in friendship and in counsel, nor cohabit with them." He condemned the Novgorodian-Muscovite heretics in a similar formula: "Nowadays, in the houses, and on the roads, and in the markets, monks and laymen . . . all inquire of the heretics and apostates of Christ about the faith . . . and they befriend them, and drink and eat, and learn Judaism from them."¹⁹ Another source—a fifteenth-century Russian version of the tenth-century *Secretum Secretorum*—advises the tsar not to let go of "[his] friends, [his] finest table companions" but also recommends that he amuse himself "at food and drink" with them no more than three or four times a year. And in the sixteenth century Prince Kurbsky blamed Ivan IV for ignoring the counsel of true friends, while listening instead to "flatterers, good and loyal comrades of the table and the cup, and friends of various pleasures."²⁰

In these passages, a contrast is made consistently between friendship as such (when circulating things augment the meaning of a relationship) and the friendly practice of simply eating and drinking with comrades; there is likewise a contrast between befriending, in a superficial sense, and wise counseling. Cohabitation is identified in such texts as the expression of friendship on all levels, which would indicate that sharing expendable materials and fleeting experiences are less basic to true friendship than sharing places—venues—and things that circulate. The ideal of friendship, then, would appear to be the sort of cohabitation that is found in monasteries, where books circulate, food and drink are consumed in a common room, and all social intercourse takes place inside a given set of buildings and spaces. In the seventeenth century, the term *neighbor in Christ* was often used to define such friendships, and indeed it then became more natural to say or

18. Althoff, "Friendship and Political Order," 94.

20. Cited in Kalugin, "Istoriia poniatiia," 224.

19. Cited in Kalugin, "Istoriia poniatiia," 218.

write *blizhnii* (“neighbor”) than *drug* (“friend”). A common faith and a common world are conditions of the friendship of all in Christ. As one late seventeenth-century Russian text puts it: “Every man is our neighbor, for all gifts . . . do we have in common: one is the faith, one is the baptism, one is the table of the earth, the shelter of the heavens, and the lamp of the sun.”²¹ How far this Christian ideal may be pressed is indicated in Dmitry Donskoi’s oration before the Battle of Kulikovo (1380): “Our guests are approaching, they stand on the River Nepriadva, by the Field of Kulikovo arrayed in battle; and in the morning we shall have to drink with them from a common cup that we shall pass to one another; for it is this cup, my friends, that we desired while still in Rus.”²² During the battle, the common cup unites Russian friends with Mongol foes.

Brian McGuire, in his book *Friendship and Community*, proposes at least four models for friendship in Christ.²³ One is a euphoric choir singing ecstatic psalms, as practiced, it has been said, among the apostles and in the early Christian communities. Another model is the military school, whose disciplinary practices the first Benedictine monastery imitated. A third model is the practice of correspondence between monks at different monasteries, as during the religious renaissance of the twelfth century. Moreover, Christian friendship of the most exalted kind could require (as we find in the works of St. Ambrose) that the believer deploy *fides*—the trust in and reliance on one Roman aristocrat by another—in the formation of his friendship with God. In each of these models, however spiritual, friendly intercourse presumes the holding of palpable things in common, done in a specific place, in a specific manner, via specific channels of access, with specific expenditures and acquisitions, and yet at the same time done in communion with God. Ultimately, friendship may be regarded *as* communion. Friendship with and in Christ is accomplished through the ritual of communion—that is, of partaking and thus becoming an element literally “in” the body of Christ. In a document of the mid-fifteenth century, a Lithuanian Orthodox bishop refers blithely to friendship with enemies, asking Christians to eschew all “communion or conjunction with them.”²⁴

It should be no surprise, then, that material things, as mediators of friendship, should eventually give ground, particularly in the era of sentimentalism and sensibility. In this vein, Mikhail Muraviev (1757–1807), one of the leaders of the Russian Enlightenment, writes of friendships that “a certain mysterious

21. Stater (1684), cited in A. S. Eleonskaia, *Russkaia oratorskaia proza v literaturnom protsesse XVIII veka* [*Russian Oratorical Prose in the Literary Process of the Eighteenth Century*] (Moscow: Nauka, 1990), 174, itself cited in Kharkhordin, *Druz'ba*, 242.

22. Cited in Kalugin, “Istoriia poniatiia,” 191.

23. Brian Patrick McGuire, *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience, 350–1250* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1988), xvi, 45, 408.

24. Izmail Sreznevskii, *Materialy dlia slovaria drevnerusskogo iazyka po pismennym pamiatnikam* [*Materials for the Dictionary of the Old Russian Language on the Basis of Written Records*], vol. 2 (St. Petersburg: Academy of Sciences, 1893), 1441–42.

predilection mutually attracts beautiful souls. There is a certain noble gaze, a manner, a courtesy, which my sensibility could never resist. Esteem bound me to these estimable individuals, whose every act displayed the worthiness of their hearts.”²⁵ Soul, sensibility, heart: how could there be any place for quotidian, material things among these sublime phenomena?

In our contribution to *Druzhbba*, Anna Kovaleva and I discuss personal friendship in Russia today.²⁶ Currently, it is acceptable to rebuke a friend for growing colder toward you or for concealing things that he or she used to share.²⁴ But it is quite hard to say, especially in public, that he or she has become less of a friend because the bicycle that you loaned him or her was returned with the spokes bent. The very act of speaking about your friend in this way will cast you in a negative light; you are seen not as a friend but as petty and a miser. And so, as Fedorova notes in her essay, the expression “a useful friendship” seems unnatural in colloquial Russian. What kind of wretched utility could there be in a relationship where the norm is the fusion of “beautiful souls”? At the present time, Russians indeed achieve their own instrumental goals with the help of friends, and friends are indeed connected to one another by a myriad of quotidian things, but making these material aspects a matter for discussion is usually out of the question.

It apparently took a long time and a great deal of effort to teach Old Russia to use the word *druzhbba* and to believe in the existence of genuine friendship. Obviously constructed on the pattern of such ancient Russian words as *sluzhba* (“service”), *tiazhba* (“contest”), *tat’ba* (“thievery”), and *vorozhba* (“sorcery”), *druzhbba* was used only in translated texts until the fourteenth century, while in ordinary life it was much more natural to use the word *druzhbina*.²⁸ Indeed, as Kalugin shows, *druzhbba* is encountered rarely until the mid-sixteenth century, where we find it, for example, in the life of St. Cyril (Constantine), where “friendship with the Khazars” is mentioned, and in an epistle by Maximus the Greek (who employed Byzantine formulas), where there is a reference to the “friendship” enjoyed by the tsar with “all the tongues [peoples] living everywhere.”²⁹ *Druzhbba* entered Russian usage via ecclesiastical texts, in which it was impossible to avoid

25. Mikhail N. Muraviev, *Sochineniia [Writings]* (St. Petersburg: Smirdin, 1847, vol. 2), 320, quoted in Kalugin, “Istoriia poniatiia,” 261.

26. Oleg Kharkhordin and Anna Kovaleva, “Gradatsii blizosti v sovremennoi rossiiskoi druzhbe” [“Degrees of Proximity in Contemporary Russian Friendship”], in Kharkhordin, *Druzhbba*, 48–78.

27. We discuss three acceptable types of reproach in that essay: reproaches for actions taken behind a friend’s back (that is, for concealing things that friends should share with one another); reproaches for misrepresenting the

image of one’s friend; and reproaches dealing with the transition from friendship to sexual intimacy. All three are comprehensible in terms of friends’ attention to things. First, there is the reproach that things held in common have become fewer; second, that one’s friend and oneself no longer have any things in common; and third, that the friend wants *all* things to be held in common.

28. Kharkhordin, *Main Concepts of Russian Politics*, 120.

29. Kalugin, “Istoriia poniatiia,” 217.

translating foreign terms, and through the texts of international pacts of friendship. As Evgenii Roshchin shows, in his essay for our volume, generic Russian contracts used the word *liubov'* (“love”) to describe relations between princes, but the Latin *amicitia* (“friendship”) or its local equivalent was used in the agreements of Polish kings and Lithuanian princes; a Russian equivalent was essential for translations. Finally, the lofty letter writing that was a practice of spiritual and sentimental friendship in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries brought *druzhiba* into more common use among the upper classes. When Russia as a whole did finally learn to use the word, it proved to be unworkable and unwieldy. As Fedorova notes, it is much harder to use the noun *druzhiba* than, for example, the verb *druzhit'* (“be friends with,” “be friendly with”). Contemporary Russian speakers might attempt to *druzhit'* or even succeed in *(po)druzhit'sia* (“making friends with”), without being bound by the ties of genuine *druzhiba*. It is often said in Russia, “We are just close acquaintances.”

Contemporary Russian *druzhiba* is more demanding linguistically than the act of making friends, possibly because one can *druzhit'* without holding in common with one's friend every type of mediator and material thing that *druzhiba* entails. In relations defined by the phrases *my druzhili* (“we are on friendly terms”) and *my poddruzhilis'* (“we made friends with each other”), the accusation of treachery that can come with genuine *druzhiba* would be meaningless. To say that you are someone's friend is to say, in Russian, that you are “bound” by genuine friendship. It is the noun *druzhiba*, and not the verb *druzhit'*, that presumes the presence of things—expendable, circulating, and mediating things—held in common. When a meltdown occurs, former friends, like divorcing spouses, must tediously and at great length examine each thing held in common and, rehearsing the accusations surrounding each one, determine to whom it now belongs. Things are thus not only the props but also the fetters of *druzhiba*. Some joint properties, however, cannot be distributed or divided. As Fedorova shows, the most vital part of a friendship is discursive: friends possess a subcode, which means a capacity to communicate quickly and unproblematically in a language understood only within their own circle. Such languages deploy particular linguistic means to evoke episodes that the friends have experienced together or have discussed with some intensity of affect. These means include foreign or regional accents and the rearrangement of the letters in words or the adding of letters to them (for example, *sulshaem* or *slushaem-s* instead of the standard *slushaem* [“we are listening”]). Friends may also use nonce expressions or abbreviations (such as “RG” for “regular guy”). All such means mark those who are “inside” the friendship and are incomprehensible to those “outside” it. As Gladarev notes, it is perhaps the emergence of a linguistic subcode that makes interaction with friends the central task of friendship.

The verb *obshechatsia*, for which “to socialize” and “to hang out” are the

closest English equivalents, defines what friends in Russia do, whatever their age cohort or social status. They drink and talk together, applying and developing their shared subcode, with considerable frequency, and they take it as a matter of course that friends should do so. They interpret new situations and experiences together, translating them with little waste of time into their common language and digesting them almost effortlessly at each encounter. Common themes, motifs, interpretations, and emotions take shape, so much so that, as a well-known Russian joke has it, friends who constantly tell each other the same jokes decide to assign them numbers and thereafter begin to laugh as soon as the numbers are uttered. The feeling of intimacy characteristic of such friendships is achieved when the friends feel that everything has already been verbalized (or, as we say in Russia, “contained”). Meanwhile, “hanging out” may sound as secular as activities come, but *obsbchatsia* may also bear the sense of *priobsbchatsia*, that is, of communing. Of course, friends hanging out do not commune with the body and blood of Christ, but they do participate in (or even become part of, as the structure of the Russian word indicates) a circle whose members hold many things in common and who break bread and drink wine together regularly. Friends, moreover, make moral judgments together. Aided by alcohol, which lowers the capacity to analyze secondary information critically, these judgments can lodge themselves deep in a friend’s soul. Such evenings can be recurring Last Suppers, where anyone may become Christ for the evening, imparting to his friends special truths, moral commandments, or aesthetic judgments. The mystery of communion—the sense that something magical and incomprehensible brings these friends together and makes them one—is often profoundly felt. In the sixth century, St. Gregory the Great defined the friend in Christ as a *custos animi*, one who cares for and curates the soul.³⁰

3

It is only personal friendships that Russians think, speak, and write about in this intricate and exalted way. Revealingly, when we speak of political friendships (that is, alliances of states or other large units), we use passive voice constructions: we say that the friendship of Russia and Belarus “was established,” “is preserved,” “will be strengthened.” There is no friendship per se among states if the friend-in-Christ model that informs close personal relationships is the standard. International friendships have sometimes been based on things held in common—notably, common armies (the Allied Powers of World War II, for example) and common sacrifices—but never on the elaboration of a discursive subcode that

30. Gregory’s definition is recorded in one of the most popular treasuries of knowledge of the medieval Latin world, the *Etymologiae*, compiled by St. Isidore of Seville (c. 560–636). For details, see McGuire, *Friendship and Community*, 428.

accompanies intimacy. And yet we judge both international relations and domestic political alliances in just such terms. Instrumental friendship in domestic politics, which was once the norm in the relations of patron and client, suzerain and vassal, now appears to us to be groveling and grasping. Such friendships have never presumed emotional intimacy and its epiphenomena as their basis, so why should we rely on the criteria of sincere feeling and equality when we evaluate them? Besides, all of us are well aware that instrumental interests are also present in the friendship of equal individuals who enjoy emotional bonds and a private language. Instead of rejecting instrumental friendship as petty, or as no friendship at all, might it not be possible to adopt a more pragmatic stance?

There are two differences between these kinds of friendship, and they are simple differences. First, in contemporary Russian parlance, personal friendship is active; political friendship is passive. Second, personal friendship is based on the blend of *obsbchatsia* and *priobsbchatsia*, of hanging out and spiritually communing, that is peculiarly Russian and relatively recent. Political and international friendships of the kind that contemporary Russians disdain are much more universal and are based much more on material things and balanced exchanges. To alter attitudes, we might try to nudge international and domestic political friendships out of the passive and into the active voice, enabling each participant to assume agency and responsibility with respect to all other participants. It is not our personal friendships alone that should have the capacity to bloom. If we Russians are ever to get from the rumbling of distant cannons to a flourishing civic life and a salutary international role, we might develop spaces for interaction that give the agents of political friendships the chance to elaborate a subcode for more intimate communication.

We might need, in particular, a language that enables the political actor to be an other (*drugoi*) while at the same time a friend (*drug*). American politics is less capable of this feat than it once was, though former US presidents of adversarial parties have often become close friends, and the currently most liberal justice and the most conservative on the Supreme Court attend the opera together regularly. British politics, which has had many centuries of stormy experience in which to develop a language that political adversaries can speak to each other as intimates, is consequently enigmatic to outsiders, in the way that circles of close friends are often incomprehensible to nonmembers. Why is there a man named Black Rod banging a stick against the door to the House of Commons, which has just been shut in his face, and then why is the door being opened immediately to admit him, only for members to laugh derisively when he announces that the sovereign requests their presence in the House of Lords? Why does the Royal Household take a member of the House of Commons hostage when the sovereign addresses Parliament? Why does half the House of Commons jeer and half cry "Hear!" when the prime minister addresses fellow members? Why do Tory MPs

touch the feet of the Churchill statue as they enter the House of Commons? Why is the speaker of the house, when elected to the position, dragged physically by other MPs to the speaker's chair? Why are Peers addressed as "my Lord" and judges as "m'Lud"?

Such customs may be opaque and, even when explained, seem risible to outsiders, but the same may be said of many practices that pervade successful friendships (and, for that matter, marriages and families). To outsiders, the elegant subcode of personal friendships may appear purposefully excluding, but exclusivity is not necessary to friendship. Perhaps by widening access to the elegant subcode of friendship, thus enabling an environment slightly less freighted with private meanings, our circles of friends could be widened and then directed toward the achievement of civic as well as private aims. What the contributors to *Druzbbba* suggest is that Russians might need to shift political friendship in the direction of personal friendship, by developing a more emotional subcode of communication, and, at the same time, to make personal friendship closer to the political, by admitting material interest and loosening the subcode a bit.³¹ Furthermore, friendship is not only a matter of holding things in common but also a matter of what is done with them: friendships allow for new meanings to emerge for the things and practices that constitute them. Thus, friendship is not only a relationship, or a set of relationships, within a group; it is also a kind of event. As Bruno Latour writes, in the opening pages of his book *Reassembling the Social*, groups are not suspended in a condition of social givenness. Rather, groups are the outcomes of constant efforts to form and reform them.³²

4

A part of Latour's point is that, in order to exist at all, any group must comprehend itself in a particular form, acquire a measure of stability, and find a speaker for itself. If the central event is the emergence of a representative who speaks for the group, then it is clear that friendship does not qualify as a group. It is easy to imagine my speaking, as rector of the European University at St. Petersburg, on behalf of that institution and its members but impossible to imagine my speaking on behalf of any friendship in which I am a participant. At no point is there an actant in a friendship to whom responsibility is or may be assigned. On inquiring as an outsider, one is always referred in Russia to an other or others, none of whom can speak for the friends in question. The ever receding presence

31. Strictly speaking, the number of vectors for changing friendship within the system of coordinates given is four, not two. The other two vectors are, first, making personal friendship a passive recipient of outside influences—that is, depriving it of its status as an actant—and, second, making political friendship an actant without adding

a subcode. I find these two additional vectors, however, neither promising nor attractive.

32. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 43, 54.

of friendship, which I have emphasized in this essay, makes it fundamentally impossible for friendship ever to function as, in Latour's sense of the term, a group. His well-known theory—that it is not *people* who act but rather *networks* of things and people, whose apparent capacities for action can be redistributed and reassigned—has profound implications for the understanding of friendship. When a friend borrows or is given a significant thing, or when he or she uses a thing that is held in common, we must assume that this circulation does not merely support existing relations. The friend will have changed, to however small a degree, in the process of viewing a DVD passed among friends who acquired it together or in the process of reading a borrowed book. The video or novel too will have changed, though the disc or book may not have altered physically. If the friend who saw the video or read the novel did not enjoy it, when the object returns to its owner its meaning will be different. Things change, as Latour tells us: things are not pure means. They are also mediators, with their own dynamic in any network of friendly exchanges, expenditures, and acquisitions. Interobjectivity is as vital as the intersubjectivity to which sociology has afforded all of its attention until recently.

Are sites like Facebook.com and odnoklassniki.ru (“classmates.ru”) merely means for communicating with friends, or are they active agents that change friendships? They are neither the one nor the other. The online category of *friend* and the neologisms *to friend* and *friending* that are used on these social media sites confront Russian users with a dilemma that, apparently, American users do not face. When Russians are asked to accept someone as an online friend (in Russian computer slang, *frend*), they are being asked to reconsider the meaning of friendship. In Russia, after kindergarten, verbalized offers of friendship are rare, but Russians, presuming that American friendships are as superficial in person as the relationships that they develop online, may think that such offers are typical of adult American behavior. On the other hand, one's obligations as a *frend* are so unburdensome online that refusing the request to become someone's friend in the social media sense could seem nothing but rude. As a consequence, many Russians have more *frends* than they want and are confident, perhaps more than ever, that friendship in the Russian sense, the blend of *obschchatsia* and *priobshchatsia*, is available neither overseas nor in any Russian public medium, institution, or venue.

We must ensure, then, that *frend* and *friend* are clearly distinguished, if ever we are to shift political friendship in the direction of personal friendship and bring the personal to converge on the political. The difference between the two is not only that an online *frend* makes minimal demands but that real friendship is an event—an ongoing event that generates new meaning. After any encounter with genuine friends, the world always looks different to an extent, however limited. Without the continuous flow of newly emergent meanings, a friendship

would be no better than a machine, and its subcode no better than a tedious set of instructions for use. Moreover, without this flow of meanings, there would be little point in trying to make political relationships more like those that develop among personal friends. The point of the effort must be to transfigure, as every friendship does transfigure, those things that are held in common—to make them feel as though friendship were their effect or attribute. Liberals in Russia have complained about their minority status in the State Duma, because “if you have the majority in parliament, at any stage of the legislative process you can say ‘we have spoken enough about parliamentary procedure . . . let’s vote!’”³³ The intent behind saying “we have spoken enough” is diametrically opposed to the intent that enables friendship. Both “hanging out” and spiritual communion—*obsbchatsia* and *priobsbchatsia*—depend upon unstoppable, good-natured, invigorating, and fully appreciated speech. *Friends never have enough of talk*: can one really think of a better tenet on which to construct a political community or a relationship between peoples?

33. As quoted in Edwin Bacon and Bettina Renz, *Securitising Russia: The Domestic Politics of Putin* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2006), 144. On the subcode of public language as different from both cold officialese and the intensely emotional subcode of friends’

talk, see Oleg Kharkhordin, “The Past and Future of Russian Public Language,” in *Public Debate in Russia*, ed. Nikolai Vakhtin and Boris Firsov (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).