

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4326-2468>

Katya Nikitina

Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich  
Department of Slavic Philology  
e-mail: katya.althea@gmail.com

## THE COW, OR CARE FOR COMMUNISM

**Abstract:** This article offers a reading of Andrey Platonov’s short story *The Cow* (1938) through the lens of social reproduction theory and practical manuals on livestock care, situating the analysis within the context of Soviet animal husbandry from the 1920s to the 1940s. Platonov, a Soviet writer who deeply reflected on collectivization and the building of communism in relation to nature, as well as a practitioner – land-reclamation specialist, and engineer – is today being widely reconsidered from an ecological perspective. In this work, I aim to complicate the discussion of Platonov’s ecological poetics by turning to agricultural practices of care toward different beings. Accordingly, I refer to practices that took shape in the first half of the twentieth century, before the emergence of the concept of “animal welfare,” and went hand in hand with the communist ideal of liberating all exploited workers, regardless of their gender, race, or species.

By considering *The Cow* as a vivid bifurcation point between socialist animal-care practices and communist ideology, and reading the text through the agrobiological discourse of brochures advocating care for all beings, both classed and classless, I develop a critical analysis of the relationships among the story’s characters. My approach extends the material-discursive and biopolitical dimensions of Platonov’s work, especially in relation to care, caregiving, and the construction of a new communist society envisioned to include both human and nonhuman proletarians. To trace the cow’s ambiguous position as a being that is neither fully human nor fully animal but inhabits a liminal space between nature and culture, I engage with the intersections between Platonov’s texts and the concepts of the animal (Jacques Derrida), the Other (Emmanuel Levinas), and *communitas* (Roberto Esposito), exploring more broadly the possibilities of care for the nonhuman.

**Keywords:** animal socialist care, Andrey Platonov, livestock care manuals, nonhuman proletarians

## 1. Martha

The cow had been here since before I was born. Her name was Martha. She was a beautiful brown-and-white creature, severe in demeanor, with screw-sharp horns, and she never liked children. Martha loved spring, and her strong body thrived in the first green meadows. She herself was born in March, hence her name. She possessed both reason and temper and demanded caution from the visitors. One could not approach her from behind – she would kick. Nor could one drop their guard when approaching her face-to-face without respect – she would butt with her head. We shared our interdependence, attention, and care with Martha. She was kept clean, warm, well-fed, and comfortable. Special care was given to her udder: before each milking, it was massaged and thoroughly washed; and after, once more carefully washed, it was smeared with a fat balm to heal any cracks in her soft pink and brown-speckled skin. Martha shaped our lives around the seasons of nature: around haymaking every summer, drying grass, making silage, and regular pasturing. In return, she gave us a sense of sustainability in the world: by coming to us in troubling times, on the brink of communism’s collapse, Martha brought her children, milk, butter, sour cream, cheese – the comforting signs of a safe and secure childhood.

Living with Martha was not about consciously slowing the pace of labor, economic degrowth, or a socialist vision of husbandry adapted to the rhythms of nature and its yields. Caring for Martha was a biological necessity to survive. When Soviet communism began to decay into less nutritious elements, sometimes only Martha was the one working among us, bringing benefits at times when our labor went unpaid. Martha was constructed out of this strange kind of love, when feelings were replaced by patronizing care: to raise, to provide clothes, shoes, and food, to encourage a love of work, and never to love without reason, never in a non-functional way. Granny extended such love to the cow and us, whom she cared for with Martha’s help. In childhood, I imagined we were the children of Martha. From birth, I drank her milk, nourishing my body and creating a shared immunobiological story between us. I thought it was forever: life in a small Siberian town revolved around a cow’s calving, hay making, and milking. There seemed to be no boundary between my school and the warm barn where Martha lived: nature went with culture, or rather, we were never sufficiently “cultural” by the standards of a non-peripheral culture because of our intimate dependence on the cow.

The rupture appeared when Martha began to age and gradually ceased to be “an organized, professional creature.”<sup>1</sup> She became less and less pregnant and produced little or no milk. We stopped calling her foster mother and worker; the cow gradually became an object, and her non-functionality came to the fore. I remember the day

<sup>1</sup> A. Platonov, *Juvenilnoe more* [*The Juvenile Sea*] [in:] idem, *Sobranie sochinenii. T. 2. “Efirnyj trakt”* [A. Platonov. *Collected Works. Vol. 2. “Ethereic Tract”*], ed. by N. Kornienko, Vremya, Moscow 2011, p. 174. Hereinafter, unless otherwise specified, all translations are done by me.

when we killed Martha. Granny made a decision, reasoning that it was because the cow had stopped working. Earlier, a large, nameless pig had been my first anatomy lesson. I was seven now, but I still could not picture Martha in that place. That day, I saw the life she was made of. I saw that Martha had a calf inside her and that they were both dying. I was sure Martha was part of the family, and we do not eat family or friends. But she ended up in a vaguely ambiguous and dreadful relationship with us. On the one hand, we considered Martha a woman: we sympathized with her during childbirth, scolded her like a neighbor, and called her a friend, projecting human features onto her, acknowledging her great working capacity, and addressing her as a member of the laboring, more-than-human collective. On the other hand, when she began to age and lose her former vigor, even though she remained perfectly healthy, she was inevitably blamed for no longer resembling a human. We gradually dehumanized her, even though she had never been human to begin with, and her animality came more and more to the surface of her body.

“Martha got pregnant and gave milk, that was her job,” Granny repeated, recalling set phrases from brochures on livestock care. That was the only kind of literacy her mother had acquired on the collective farm and then passed on to her. During the decay of communism in the late 1980s, in our family, animals were still raised the collective-farm way: a full production cycle, complete with fields kept for growing feed, strict attention to cleanliness and productivity, and disposal, should a worker cease to be useful. Pigs, chickens, horses, as well as cultivated plants, like other oppressed classes and groups of beings, were subject to a compulsory emancipation from nature through productive labor for the common good: a liberation from suffering through the inclusion of nonhuman creatures in socialist society, where they were described as factories and machines of milk, meat, wool, and living matter<sup>2</sup>, as workers and shock laborers of the Five-Year Plans.<sup>3</sup> All of them, including Martha and her genetic legacy, were raised on the principles of socialist care for living matter and the struggle against the purposelessness of nature, which inflicts cruel suffering upon its own children.

In the brochures devoted to communist care<sup>4</sup>, all living beings appear as participants in world-making through productive activity, where creation itself exceeds the

<sup>2</sup> K. Shuvaev, *Socialisticheskoe zhivotnovodstvo [A Socialist Livestock Farming]*, OGIZ Moskovskiy rabochiy, Moscow 1931, pp. 5–6.

<sup>3</sup> See the so-called “hero animals” (animal Stakhanovites) of the 1930s, who were exhibited at the VDNKh in Moscow dressed in colorful national costumes. Some bulls and stallions had sculptures cast in their likeness as exemplary producers—shock workers of socialist labor—as documented in O.A. Zinovieva, *Vos'moye chudo sveta. VSKhV–VDNKh–VVTs [The Eighth Wonder of the World: From the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition to VDNKh and VVTs]*, Tsentrpoligraf, Moscow 2014, p. 42.

<sup>4</sup> I would like to draw attention to the study by G. Jarzębowska, “Dobrostan zwierząt gospodarskich w PRL [The Welfare of Farm Animals in the Polish People’s Republic],” *Zoophilologica. Polish Journal of Animal Studies* 2023, No. 1(11), pp. 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.31261/ZOOPHILOLOGICA.2023.11.05>. In the article, the author examines documents from the 1950s–1970s that record

confines of biological relations. Yet communism, with its collectivization-era conception of the animal as a worker and its rigid classification of animals and plants into “productive” and “unproductive,”<sup>5</sup> enacted a mode of exploiting life. This mode differed little from the capitalist forms of domination it so fervently criticized in communist agricultural manuals and brochures. In official discourse, this contrast was framed as a moral and political distinction. Whereas capitalism was said to abandon the animal to neglect, socialism proclaimed its ethos of care for all living beings and its struggle against cruelty toward them. Especially, the conviction “Animal beating everywhere”<sup>6</sup> was cited as a symptom of the chronic lack of “green mass” or “green matter” on land prepared for work.<sup>7</sup> Exhausting and often unskilled tasks were routinely assigned to cattle, and senseless suffering was inflicted on them at every turn. The only concern of every proletarian was the liberation of animals and nature from meaningless suffering and exploitation through the collectivized care for livestock, their transformation into healthy and productive workers, and the socialization of suffering itself.<sup>8</sup>

In the early post-revolutionary period, the social (re)production of communist society, enacted through practices of care that encompassed the biological and cultural maintenance of all productive living beings, human and animal alike, was oriented toward the accumulation and development of life itself, rather than toward capital accumulation.<sup>9</sup> However, the redistribution of functions assigned to women, such as

---

“bad” and “good” treatment of animals on mechanized farms. The author also advances an interesting argument: that references to the “interests” of animals first appear in Poland in the context of large-scale agricultural livestock production in the 1970s, but in practice these claims are used against the animals themselves. The “nature” of the animals is interpreted as being compatible with the rights-less intensification of production imposed on them by farm managers. Otherwise, the animals would die and cease to produce.

<sup>5</sup> T. Perga, “Little Killers or Victims of the System? Soviet Schoolchildren in Campaigns for the Extinction of Ground Squirrels,” *Journal of Family History* 2025, Vol. 50, Issue 3, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/03631990251318613> (accessed: 15.10.2025).

<sup>6</sup> A. Orlov, *Ukhod, a ne poboi podgonayut rabotu i udoi* [Caring, Not Beating Urges Work and Milking Capacity], Novaya derevnya, Moscow 1929, p. 36.

<sup>7</sup> A. Sevitov, *Ukhod za lugami* [Care for Hayfields], Proletarij, Kharkiv 1925, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> In the article *Equality in Suffering* (1922), dedicated to the famine in the Volga region, Platonov writes that under communism, there will be no individual suffering. There will be no suffering at all: hunger is to become a collective problem. It is not the suffering of each organism but of the entire communist body: “Humanity is one breath, one living, warm being. When one suffers, all suffer. When one dies, all become dead. Down with humanity as dust, long live humanity as an organism” (A. Platonov, *Ravenstvo v stradanii* [Equality in Suffering] [in:] idem, *Sobranie sochinenij. T. 8. “Fabrika literatury”* [A. Platonov, *Collected Works. Vol. 8. “The Factory of Literature”*], ed. by N. Kornienko, Vremya, Moscow 2011, p. 616). The idea that violence against non-sentient nature can be overcome through its socialization – literally, its humanization – by integrating nature into the proletariat and communist society is already present here.

<sup>9</sup> S. Ferguson, *Women and Work: Feminism, Labour, and Social Reproduction*, Pluto Press, London 2020, p. 68.

giving birth to and nourishing “the future labour units,”<sup>10</sup> produced the same form of exploitation, where the primary beneficiary was not the capitalist but the socialist state itself.<sup>11</sup> When the redistribution of social reproduction across genders and different forms of living beings reaches its peak, “it does so equally by reorganizing and devaluing all of people’s life-making activities, most of which have been the tasks assigned to women.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, the problem lies in the fact that the redistribution of women’s reproductive and care labor within socialist society perpetuates the same mechanisms of capitalist social reproduction, grounded in the “strategic naturalization/construction of social kinds and socialization of all kinds.”<sup>13</sup>

In this sense, the goal of socialist care was to expand the reproductive function itself to all human and nonhuman beings. This process enlisted a worker without a fixed gender, who, through interspecies copulations and conjugations, produced new forms of social beings and new modes of production.<sup>14</sup> The functions of this generative labor were aimed at the birth of the human, specifically the transformation of matter into human form. Yet this process, in the end, resulted in profound oppression of both animals and humans engaged in agricultural reproductive work. The non-human proletarians, in particular, bore a double burden: as animals and as workers – members of communist society who always risked being not quite human enough.

The animal’s ability to be unable, the in-ability and vulnerability in anguish, the possibility of sharing the possibility of non-power,<sup>15</sup> is something not tolerated by communist ideology and by socialist animal husbandry oriented toward productive labor. Could Martha *not* have wanted to do useful work? Rhetorically, she was a “nurturer” and a “laborer.” Still, once those roles were exhausted, she became reduced to meat, and I doubt she considered herself part of the “organic matter education process,” a goal detailed in practical manuals for collective farms.<sup>16</sup>

Remembering Jacques Derrida’s anecdote about Emmanuel Levinas as a philosopher unable to respond to the question of whether an animal has a face, since it is

<sup>10</sup> A. Kollontai, *The Labour of Women in the Revolution of the Economy* [in:] idem, *Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai*, ed. and trans. by A. Holt, Lawrence Hill Co., Westport 1977, p. 144.

<sup>11</sup> K.A. Szopa, *Wybuch wyobraźni. Poezja Anny Świrszczyńskiej wobec reprodukcji życia społecznego*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2022, p. 31.

<sup>12</sup> S. Ferguson, *Women and Work...*, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> D.J. Haraway, *When Species Meet*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2008, p. 66.

<sup>14</sup> I borrow the idea of the laboring process as queer conjugations (various couplings of the worker and the productive tools), understood as deterritorialized sex, from N. Sazonov, E. Nikitina, “The Great Plan for the Queerification of Nature,” *Antennae* 2024, No. 64 (2), pp. 75–94.

<sup>15</sup> J. Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)* [in:] idem, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. by M.-L. Mallet, trans. by D. Wills, Fordham University Press, New York 2008, p. 28.

<sup>16</sup> In the article *Proletarians in Care: Laboring Animals and Plants* (2026) for *Space and Culture*, I analyze in detail communist care practices as depicted in Soviet brochures, manuals, and guides from the 1920s to the 1940s, focusing on how care was provided for a wide range of human and nonhuman beings (proletarians).

impossible to indicate where the face begins,<sup>17</sup> I look back at the moment when Martha and I truly met face-to-face and she lowered her horns. I see her as if she were trying to indicate that she would forever remain anonymous, opaque, a cow in her *cow-being*, beyond my understanding. Beyond the violence we had already done to her. It might be easy to consider the dead cow, but Martha was a being beyond that totality. The metaphysical rupture that has always existed between us as Others for each other,<sup>18</sup> which became falsely apparent in a human-centered system at the end of her life, when she no longer resembled a socialist worker, cannot be resolved simply by introducing cows into the world and customs of humans.

There is a rupture between us that is always individual and cannot be shared with anyone else.<sup>19</sup> The rupture with Martha is not the same as being united in that rupture. “It is always a one-sided and unique relationship.”<sup>20</sup> Just as it is impossible to demand reciprocity from her, it is impossible to claim that she is as divided from me as I am. Decades later, when I recall the death of Martha as one of the wounds that are hard to endure, I realize that the horizon of totality in the face of socialist animal husbandry came to shape our relationship, and that I, as the heir of this totality, stand on the side of violence, while the cow remains, even in her destruction, with her otherness, always beyond the reach of this totality – a point towards which the desire for the radically different reaches and strives, an unbalanced desire for the Other, disproportionate to myself. An otherness that cannot be destroyed.

My story about Martha is an unacceptably personal prologue to an analysis of Andrey Platonov’s short story *The Cow* (1938). I read this story through the lens of the

<sup>17</sup> For more details, see: J. Derrida, “*But as for me, who am I (following)?*” [in:] idem, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, p. 108.

<sup>18</sup> N. Sazonov, K. Nikitina, “drug-s-drugom. seriya 1: levinas vstrechaet sobaku [one another. series 1: levinas meets a dog],” *Syg.ma: A Community-Run Multilingual Media Platform and Translocal Archive*, February 2025, <https://syg.ma/@posthlab/nikita-sazonov-i-katya-nikitina-drug-s-drugom-seriya-1-levinas-vstrechaet-sobaku> (accessed: 15.10.2025).

<sup>19</sup> My understanding of the Other, otherness, and ethics in relation to the Other is based on Emmanuel Levinas’s *Totality and Infinity* (1961), as well as on subsequent rereadings that extend Levinas’s concept of the human face to the domain of human-animal ethical relations. These include both Derrida’s works as well as later approaches to this issue in the writings of Donna Haraway, Joanna Zylińska, and others. The Other here is understood not only as the human Other but also as the animal and vegetal Other – an always unknown alterity beyond the human, though not exceeding the otherness itself. In my reading of Platonov’s texts, I introduce another figure: *the other* (in italics and lowercase), or *the prochie* (the “rest” or “miscellaneous”), a term borrowed from Platonov’s prose. *The prochie* have no class and exist outside the social realm; however, this does not make them akin to animals or plants. Rather, within the biopolitics of otherness unfolding in the context of care, the Other and *the other* represent different modalities: the latter is the result of a violent fusion through communist care, while the former is an irreducible call toward another mode of existence beyond the totality of war in the Levinasian sense.

<sup>20</sup> Here, I address the issue of the rupture between “me” and the Other, as it emerged in our dialogue with the philosopher and artist Nikita Sazonov about Levinas and the animal. I quote his statement here. See: N. Sazonov, K. Nikitina, “drug-s-drugom. seriya 1...”

practical agricultural literature of the period – manuals on the care of livestock and crops – and through the idea of caring as a means of involving nonhuman proletarians in the building of communism. The collectivization of the late 1920s and 1930s affected the entire population and the interspecies relationships that accompanied it. Brochures on the construction of the socialist economy, published and introduced into peasant education through universalizing institutions, formed a collective reality that drowned out the individual stories that were never told. The language of Platonov’s prose itself is a material-discursive suspension of the historical, ideological, and hyperrealistic “literal” reality of decrees, manuals, slogans, and artistic imagery, which he blends to create a qualitatively new dimension.<sup>21</sup> The conversation about the cow is yet another material instance in which language enacts the reality of collectivization. Artistic fiction coincides with this reality in a surreal manner, representing it by speaking in the language of practical manuals on the care of living beings – a language of care that was essential for replenishing living matter on exhausted land.

Moreover, in Platonov’s very practice of writing, the ecological idea of zero-waste production and the conceptualization of producing essential goods, such as wool, meat, or grain, extended into literary creation. Electrification, mechanization, land reclamation, engineering, agriculture, and literature formed a single entangled *ecological* system, breaking down the dichotomy between matter and idea, in which the production of meaning immediately found its material embodiment and application, as seen in Platonov’s *The Factory of Literature* (1926). Here, irrigation works and participation in kolkhoz become a material extension of writing, and the writer himself becomes a kind of agricultural hybrid – part animal, part predator, and part machine – transforming the “socially edible substance” of “semi-finished products,” the “obsolete” literary dregs and waste, into a “useful” product, an edible living matter – “*I will be consumed and read*” – from which the true organic essence of life will blossom.<sup>22</sup>

However, despite the optimism expressed by the writer in his articles and notebooks of the 1920s, I try to show that *The Cow*, on the one hand, exposes the ambiguity of care practices toward the animal as a being assumed to exist in a state of perpetual uncultured helplessness. On the other hand, the story constitutes an important gesture of opposition: the personal, animal existence is set against the collective, human one. Even though communism seeks to overcome the senselessness of nature, Platonov’s text becomes a celebration of animal “meaninglessness,” without irony, a contemplation of the solitude of suffering that can never be shared or made collective.

<sup>21</sup> See: M. Mikheev, *V mir Platonova cherez ego yazyk* [*Entering Platonov’s World through His Language*], Izdatelstvo MGU, Moscow 2003.

<sup>22</sup> A. Platonov, *Fabrika literatury* [*The Factory of Literature*] [in:] idem, *Sobranie sochinenii. T. 8. “Fabrika literatury”* [A. Platonov, *Collected Works. Vol. 8. “The Factory of Literature”*], ed. by N. Kornienko, Vremya, Moscow 2011, pp. 45–56.

## 2. Caring for Communism

In countless care brochures for sugar beets, soil, poultry, pigs, bees, crops, meadows, sunflowers, cows, and bulls, to name just a few, the collectivization and socialization of livestock are portrayed as the literal creation of a new society – one that folds animals into an expanded proletarian body, rooted in the materialist conviction that nature awaits humanity in order to build communism with it. This intertwining of the social and the biological opens onto a broader consideration of materiality: the common substance (*veshchestvo*) shared by humans and nonhumans creates a polyphonic discourse on matter and its role in the construction of all living beings, thereby becoming central to debates about care understood as the management of nature and its creatures. *Veshchestvo* plays a significant role in Platonov’s writing, as almost all scholars of his work have noted, especially those attempting to situate his ideas within an environmental framework.<sup>23</sup> However, recalling that the concept of *veshchestvo* was not exclusive to the philosophical and near-environmental writings of figures such as Vladimir Vernadsky or Konstantin Tsiolkovsky – who are often read in parallel with Platonov – may help reveal unexpected connections between literary poetics and Soviet care practices.

*Veshchestvo*, as a concept, was extensively developed in the natural sciences from the 1920s to the 1950s. It held a central place in communist agrobiology as the “raw material” of animals and plants, that is, matter (as opposed to genes) that was to be cultivated through the influence of the social environment and transformed into plant or animal proletarians and model workers.<sup>24</sup> Authors of manuals – N. Lomov’s *Care for the Cow and Calf* (1931), Vladimir Konge’s *Care for Pregnant Animals* (1926),

<sup>23</sup> Among studies devoted to Platonov, particular attention should be paid to the following works: J. Tymieniecka-Suchanek, *Literatura rosyjska wobec upodmiotowienia zwierząt: w kręgu zagadnień ekofilozoficznych* [*Russian Literature and Animals’ Empowerment: Eco-Philosophical Issues*], Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2020 (The author examines, from an ecological perspective, the motif of death and the dying of nature in Platonov’s writings); A. Barcz, *Environmental Cultures in Soviet East Europe: Literature, History and Memory*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London 2020 (See the section devoted to the *Stalinocene* as an era of tyranny exercised not only over humans but also over nature, as well as the discussion of *The Foundation Pit* from the perspective of posthumanist ethics in relation to the nonhuman); K. Barsht, *Poetika prozy Andrey Platonova* [*The Poetics of Andrey Platonov’s Prose*], Filologicheskij fakultet SPbGU, St. Petersburg 2000; M. Chehonadskih, *Alexander Bogdanov and the Politics of Knowledge after the October Revolution*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2023; A.T. Thomas, *Ekologicheskaya poetika Andrey Platonova* [*The Ecological Poetics of Andrey Platonov*], Common Place, Moscow 2023.

<sup>24</sup> This approach is currently being elaborated by Nikita Sazonov, who challenges the conventional cosmological interpretations of *veshchestvo*. Instead, by examining the relationships between ideas and matter, he introduces the conceptual rhyme between *veshchestvo* and *sushchestvo* (“living being”) that inhabits the agrobiological writings of Olga Lepeshinskaya and Trofim Lysenko on the origins of life, cells, and species, writings whose theories offered, in their peculiar way, a vision of communism embodied in practice. This topic was first discussed in detail in Sazonov’s presentation, “The Substance: Care, Maintenance and Transformation of Species,” delivered on December 13, 2024, as

and A. Sukhomlin's *Care for Pigs* (1934) – invoke the notion of “organic matter,” frequently employing terms such as “mass,” “fleshiness,” and “milkiness,” which signal the increased productivity of cultivated animals and plants. As another example, in his 1939 book *Care for Crops*, Vladimir Shiman emphasizes that the goal of care is “the formation of organic matter [*veshchestvo*].”<sup>25</sup> This organic matter is what unites all living beings into a common mode of existence. Shiman sees its growth embodied in the “lush, fleshy greenery of waist-high cultivated plants,”<sup>26</sup> a vitality that ultimately transforms into the “fleshiness” of animals and humans, culminating in a collective corporeal existence that unites all into a single living organism.

In Platonov's publicistic writings and notes from the 1920s and 1930s, the management of nature and the distribution of its resources resemble the “production of the thoroughly social” and relate to a concern for the increase of living matter, or *veshchestvo*, on earth.<sup>27</sup> Proper land management can only bridge the gap between humans and nature. Among the tools of this humanization-construction are land reclamation, mills, power plants, irrigation, the electrification of agriculture, and relief reconstruction. Essentially, communism is presented here as a project in which man encompasses “natural” elements: he is both “the son of every woman” and “of every blade of grass,” and he merges with the machine.<sup>28</sup> In Platonov's revolutionary writings, communism is understood as the transformation of nature into cultivated, cultural nature through technical instruments such as the plow, pumps, dams, motors, and lathes – a vision articulated in his 1921 text *The Earth's Revolutionary Military Council*. It consists in restoring the bond, in cultivating “sensitivity to nature,” in “feeling kinship with the world,” in “living as one with nature,”<sup>29</sup> which implies its reformation along communist lines. This kinship carries a distinctly “revolutionary” significance. Revolution here means a return to origins: to the animal, to a disintegration into mineral elements, to a state that can be reassembled anew in the human being of the future.

On the one hand, Platonov, like the authors of brochures who introduced care for the other in practice and advocated the increase of living matter as a means of constructing communism, points to the same idea in his programmatic articles and

---

part of the exhibition *The Only Possible Story* (Anastasiia Batishcheva) at the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts in Munich. See: [https://goodbyestalin.com/home\\_en](https://goodbyestalin.com/home_en) (accessed: 15.10.2025).

<sup>25</sup> V. Shiman, *Ukhod za posevami* [*Care for Crops*], Selhhozgiz, Moscow 1939, p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 53.

<sup>27</sup> A. Platonov, *Pitomnik novogo cheloveka* [*The Nursery of the New Man*] [in:] *idem*, *Soichneniya. Tom vtoroj 1926–1927* [A. Platonov, *Works. Vol. 2. 1926–1927*], eds. by N. Kornienko et al., IMLI RAN, Moscow 2016, p. 373.

<sup>28</sup> A. Platonov, *Revvoensovet Zemli* [*The Revolutionary Council of the Earth*] [in:] *idem*, *Sobranie sochinenij. T. 8. “Fabrika literatury”* [A. Platonov, *Collected Works. Vol. 8. “The Factory of Literature”*], ed. by N. Kornienko, Vremya, Moscow 2011, p. 615.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 614–615.

publicistic writings on collectivization.<sup>30</sup> However, in his literary works, matter pauses at the stage of decay rather than proceeding to reassembly, contrary to the optimistic image the agrobiologists offer. While the Party envisions communism as a proliferation of vigorous, fleshy plants, in Platonov's prose this fleshiness becomes that of weeds, and communism becomes a union within a "poor life," one decomposed by excessive labor. This descent reaches the "bottom of the pit," a condition closely resembling "bare life," unconscious *zoe*. In this sense, revolution appears as a *zoe*-revolution: an uprising of poor, most defenseless life against the rigid existing order; an uprising of life itself, persisting despite all forms of exploitation; and a regression to the animal, even to a proto-animal state. Maria Chehonadskih frames this idea in the following way: "Platonov stresses that everything that exists has to be liberated from the state of poor life, yet socialism could only arise from the elementality of nature."<sup>31</sup> She also notes that Platonov saw nothing great or sublime in the essence of life, as there is ultimately nothing to anticipate or glorify, only the endless repetition of birth and death at the zero point of organic existence, the infinite work of exhausted comrade animals and plants.<sup>32</sup>

In Platonov's narratives, humans merge with their surroundings, gradually losing any sense of boundaries or distinctions and dissolving into elemental layers, descending into exhausted, depleted nature. They enter this state and call it communism. Everything becomes overgrown with burdock and weeds: humans stop sowing, cows and horses cease to plow, and all go out into the empty fields to gather what the true proletarians – untended soil, wind, rain, and sun – have prepared for them, a world shaped by a care that is their own, not the Party's.

Platonov created an entire constellation of characters preoccupied with overwhelming care for communism. "The common sense of the kolkhoz population at large was **worry and care** [bold in the original – K.N.]."<sup>33</sup> "Upoev was devoting his efforts to **caring for** the poor masses;"<sup>34</sup> the artel chairman, comrade Mchalov, went to **work with sorrowful care on his face**;<sup>35</sup> Filat lived in **intense concern** for the goods and order of the kolkhoz;<sup>36</sup> Prushevsky desired **ceaseless care** for objects and mechanisms rather than friendship and affection for people; the socialist Safronov

<sup>30</sup> A. Platonov, *Za bolshevistskogo schetovoda v kolkhoze! (Zametki razyezdnoho korrespondenta)* [For the Bolshevik Accountant in the Collective Farm! (Notes of a Traveling Correspondent)] [in:] idem, *Zapisnye knizhki. Materialy k biografii* [A. Platonov, Notebooks. Materials for a Biography], ed. by N. Kornienko, Nasledie, Moscow 2000, p. 296.

<sup>31</sup> M. Chehonadskih, *Alexander Bogdanov and the Politics of Knowledge...*, p. 211.

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, p. 207.

<sup>33</sup> A. Platonov, *Vprok. Bednyatskaya khronika* [For the Future's Sake: A Poor Man's Chronicle] [in:] idem, *Sobranie sochinenij. T. 2. "Efirnyj trakt"* [A. Platonov, Collected Works. Vol. 2. "Ethereic Tract"], ed. by N. Kornienko, Vremya, Moscow 2011, p. 289.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem, p. 324.

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem, p. 336.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, p. 340.

**was concerned** that the body should contain enthusiasm;<sup>37</sup> the activist **was bloated with worry**; Federatovna **went to care for** the Soviet meat household, while Bostaloeva was seized by **anxious concern** for the five-year plan; the club administrator **cared for** youth recreation;<sup>38</sup> Viktor Vasilyevich conceived **a passion for maintaining** weights and scales;<sup>39</sup> Chagataev **cared for** the Dzhan people;<sup>40</sup> and the proletariat, together with *others* in its ranks, sought to organize the whole living world **by their very care**.<sup>41</sup>

Care for communism, or care for the (re)production of a new society, is reflected in Platonov's literary world as a practical question of such a possibility. The writer attempts to reinvent community itself through a radical search for a mode of relation that cannot be achieved through familiar forms of unity – one that lies beyond the rule requiring each subject of the community to engage in an immunological dialogue with the Other and to allow themselves to be consumed in one form or another. This is a community that, for Platonov's characters, exists neither in nature nor in culture and can arise only beyond the kinds of unification one ordinarily imagines. Platonov's protagonists want to rethink community, yet mutual consumption within it cannot be abolished. This search for an impossible form of union may be called communism. They do not wish to devour one another; yet even when they cease to eat, community and communism fail to come into being. It is this tension that enables Platonov's text to open a field for further inquiry into the biopolitical dimension of community.

Within Platonov's fictional world, communism appears as *munus* (a gift)<sup>42</sup> taken to the extreme, as the constant exploitation of *communitas*.<sup>43</sup> The heroes direct all

<sup>37</sup> A. Platonov, *The Foundation Pit*, trans. by R. Chandler, E. Chandler, O. Meerson, nyrb, New York 2009, pp. 26, 16.

<sup>38</sup> A. Platonov, *Yuvenilnoe more...*, p. 383.

<sup>39</sup> A. Platonov, *Schastlivaya Moskva [Happy Moscow]* [in:] idem, *Sobranie sochinenij. T. 4. "Schastlivaya Moskva"* [A. Platonov, *Collected Works. Vol. 4. "Happy Moscow"*], ed. by N. Kornienko, Vremya, Moscow 2011, p. 46.

<sup>40</sup> A. Platonov, *Soul and Other Stories*, trans. by R. Chandler et al., Vintage Classics, New York 2013.

<sup>41</sup> A. Platonov, *Chevengur*, trans. by R. Chandler, E. Chandler, Vintage Classics, New York 2024, p. 342.

<sup>42</sup> For detailed analysis of Esposito's affirmative biopolitics and its implications for rethinking the functioning of community – particularly through the dynamics of inclusionary exclusion and exclusionary inclusion – read Timothy Campbell's introduction to the English edition of *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy* (T. Campbell, *Bios, Immunity, Life: The Thought of Roberto Esposito* [in:] R. Esposito, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, trans. by T. Campbell, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London 2008, pp. vii–xlii).

<sup>43</sup> Drawing on the biopolitical framework developed by Roberto Esposito in his trilogy on *bios, communitas*, and *immunitas*, I aim to highlight that within the collective's economy of gift exchange two forms of gifts circulate: *munus* and *donum*. These relate to one another as the particular to the whole. *Donum* prescribes relationships based on gift exchange between the collective and the individual, while *munus* remains in the shadow of this balance. It represents a kind of gift that signifies the individual's debt to the collective, placing the subject in a position of perpetual obligation to the common good – a situation in which the gift risks slipping into debt. *Munus* carries an element of coercion, leaving the subject vulnerable to destruction and expropriation by the social order. In its

their biological and social activity “for the benefit of *the other*.”<sup>44</sup> At the same time, this is not entirely tied to brutal collectivization. The Chevengurians, along with other characters in the novel, such as Pashintsev, actively or passively resist it, believing in their own version of communism. However, what truly testifies to the biological disintegration of the individual body is the loss of the meaning of *munus*. In their care for communism and the socialist household, the characters in the novella *For the Future’s Sake* (1931) make seemingly meaningless things and perform pointless actions, much like “the man with a bucket of oleonaft,” who “smears all iron moving and stationary parts around the kolkhoz, fearing that they will perish by rust and friction.”<sup>45</sup> Similarly, in the novel *Chevengur* (1926–1928), Zakhar Pavlovich makes an “oak frying pan,” and Kopenkin “plows not for his own nourishment, but for the future happiness of another person – Sasha Dvanov.”<sup>46</sup> In *Chevengur*, whoever lived there, “wishing comfort for his own life, each now looked on some other Chevengurian as his own best good – and so he began gathering grain for him, or cleaning up boards; from these boards he might then knock up **some gift** or other.”<sup>47</sup> These efforts accumulate huge amounts of meaningless items and result in clutter and cramped conditions. These cramped conditions and overcrowding indicate the death of the individual through the overproduction of the gift for *the other*. When communism takes on a literal and material form as care for each other, or, more precisely, for *the other*, the heroes’ subjectivities manifest as linguistic materiality: “they walked in plural form.”<sup>48</sup> Such a collapse into *the other*, or the erosion of immunity between human and nonhuman communist builders, mirrors the many individual deaths that result from exhaustion, from the fatigue of constant thought about one another, and from laboring not for oneself but for *the other*. As Platonov writes: “*Each other* [italics in the original – K.N.] was working not for himself, but for someone else,” “not for benefit, but for *each other*,” “*the others* ate only occasionally; they foraged to treat one another.”<sup>49</sup> Caring for communism functions as its very premise, denying care for oneself and postponing what is called humanism – and the human itself – to the future, quite literally, *For the Future’s Sake*. This represents a different kind of humanization of the future that dehumanizes the present. Nowhere is this more vividly expressed than in the Platonovian formula that we encounter both in *Chevengur* and

---

extreme form, *munus* entails the death of the subject. I previously suggested the possibility of interpreting the functioning of community in Platonov’s works through Esposito’s biopolitical thought in the article: E. Nikitina, “Hogweed vs. Sunroot: Zoemachy of Soviet Postanthropocentrism,” *Przegląd Kulturoznawczy* 2019, No. 40(2), pp. 135–150, <https://doi.org/10.4467/20843860PK.19.008.10903>.

<sup>44</sup> A. Platonov, *Chevengur*..., p. 327.

<sup>45</sup> A. Platonov, *Vprok*..., p. 289.

<sup>46</sup> A. Platonov, *Chevengur*..., pp. 5, 432.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 410.

<sup>48</sup> A. Platonov, *Vprok*..., p. 289.

<sup>49</sup> A. Platonov, *Chevengur*..., p. 433.

in later works such as *Among Animals and Plants* (1936): man never made anything for himself – neither a family nor a home; in summer, he simply lived in nature.<sup>50</sup>

The very slipping into the abyss of *the other* arises in Platonov's writings from an encounter with the earth itself – with the flesh and blood, the matter of humans, animals, and plants that is not structured according to the principles of communism. In other words, the pit becomes a collapse into *the other*: what was originally conceived as the foundation for a new society, for the collectivization of suffering and the construction of communism with nature, instead turns into a fall into the human themselves, who – like the fragile animal in these writings – does not wait for communism. Such a revelation undoubtedly intensifies the need for the Other. And Platonov gives us the intriguing sense that the animal can be a partner and yet remain entirely Other, insisting on its separateness and teaching humanity a lesson in self-preservation.

### 3. The Cow

The cow is a pillar of socialist livestock farming.<sup>51</sup> “Our cow should become a milk factory,” states the manual on cow care.<sup>52</sup> The boy Vasya, the protagonist of Platonov's story, is just learning to read and names the cow, who previously had no name, as it appears in his reading book: “Cow.” This mention of reading is an important element of the narration, introducing the dichotomy between “what is written – what is enacted” (what is not written remains opaque, like the animal opacity of the cow to the boy). It is written that cows are “sensitive animals” and must live in warm and clean spaces, be fed a varied diet, and receive “both rich, coarse fodder and green fodder.”<sup>53</sup> Before and after pregnancy, a cow should be fed more and not burdened with work. The brochure also states that calves should be kept free, as their stomachs are very delicate, and coarse food like potatoes can cause illness and even lead to death. “Calves must not be kept on a tether: this makes them unhappy and stunts their growth.”<sup>54</sup> Additionally, young animals should not be slaughtered but properly raised.

Vasya's cow is lonely. However, she shouldn't be, because she is a cow. It is written about her this way. But in reality, the cow lives among worn-out things: “In the shed, beside the firewood, the hay, the millet straw and the household things that had seen better days – a trunk without a lid, a burnt-out samovar flue, some old rags,

<sup>50</sup> A. Platonov, *Among Animals and Plants* [in:] idem, *Soul and Other Stories*, trans. by R. Chandler et al., Vintage Books, New York 2013, p. 167.

<sup>51</sup> If the main machine for meat production is the pig, then “the second factory, primarily a milk factory, is the cow” (K. Shuvaev, *Socialisticheskoe zhivotnovodstvo...*, 1931, p. 14).

<sup>52</sup> N. Lomov, *Ukhod za korovoj i telenkom* [*Care for the Cow and Calf*], Selkolkhozgiz, Moscow 1931, p. 17.

<sup>53</sup> D. Katuntsev, *Ukhod za korovoy*, izd. 3 [*Care for the Cow, 3rd ed.*], Selkhozgiz, Moscow and Leningrad 1930, pp. 28, 47.

<sup>54</sup> D. Katuntsev, *Ukhod za korovoy...*, p. 61.

a chair without legs.”<sup>55</sup> She is “continually exhausted or lost in thought,” with “her horns, her brow, and her large, thin body which was the way it was because, instead of saving her strength for herself in fat and meat, the cow gave it all away in milk and work.”<sup>56</sup> Her food is poor and monotonous, and the cow “has to labour<sup>57</sup> at it for a long time in order to get enough nourishment.”<sup>58</sup> And her calf fell ill and was sold for meat.

Vasya tries to view the cow as a socialist foster mother and worker. Still, from his naïve perspective directed toward the animal, the cow’s individualism, inviolability, and otherness – qualities that resist collectivization – cannot be concealed. It is as if the cow’s matter itself revolted against this, insisting on hospitality and an unbridgeable distance, but not on communism. From the cow’s perspective, there is a distance between herself and the human. She lets the boy come near while distancing herself from him at the same time: “In the afternoons and evenings, Vasya Rubtsov, her owner’s son, **would come and visit her**, and stroke the soft hair around her head. He came this day too.”<sup>59</sup> In the original text, this reads: “k ney v **gosti** prikhodil mal’chik.”<sup>60</sup> Here *v gosti*, given from the animal’s perspective, signifies the cow’s hospitality – what she allows and what she refuses – suggesting a relationship as the proper distance between different others, not as likeness or assimilation: “The cow **looked sideways** [*vbok* – K.N.] at the boy and remained silent, chewing a blade of withered grass that had long ago been worn out by death. She always **recognized** the boy, and he loved her.”<sup>61</sup> But it is never said that the cow loved the boy. She does not accept Vasya as a substitute for her lost calf, but recognizes the boy as the Other, as a human. She simply lets him be near, demonstrating Levinasian kindness toward the Other’s existence, without taking possession of his body or boundaries.

In socialist animal husbandry, the distinction between the mother and the cow is blurred. The following excerpts are from the brochure *Care for a Child* (1929) by Vladimir Skryabin: a woman “milks herself” (*sdaivaet moloko*) and, like a cow, does not eat garlic or onion, which spoil milk; after giving birth, she oils the child with thick cow’s milk; if a woman has insufficient milk, she feeds the child raw milk from a single cow; it is considered good if the child spends the whole day grazing in the

<sup>55</sup> A. Platonov, *The Cow* [in:] idem, *The Return and Other Stories*, trans. by R. Chandler et al., The Harvill Press, e-book, London 1999.

<sup>56</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>57</sup> The motif of the cow’s labor – processing (*scarce*) feed into milk – almost verbatim matches excerpts from zootechnical lectures, which state: “The cow performs extensive and hard work in converting feed into milk” (*Ukhod i sodержanie krupnogo rogatogo skota molochnogo napravleniya, lekciya 1* [*Care and Maintenance of Dairy Cattle, Lecture 1*], ed. by V.M. Ryleev, Krestyanskaya gazeta, Moscow 1932, p. 2).

<sup>58</sup> A. Platonov, *The Cow*...

<sup>59</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>60</sup> A. Platonov, *Korova* [*The Cow*] [in:] idem, *Sobranie sochinenii. T. 6. “Sukhoi khleb”* [A. Platonov, *Collected Works. Vol. 6. “Dry Bread”*], ed. by N. Kornienko, Vremya, Moscow 2012, p. 37.

<sup>61</sup> A. Platonov, *The Cow*...

grass like a calf, while the mother protects it from flies as she would a calf; a woman can become a “dairy woman” (*molochnaia zhenshchina*, by analogy with a “dairy cow”) if she nurtures others besides her own children, as a cow nurtures humans and other animals, such as pigs.<sup>62</sup> A “dairy woman” should take special care of herself: she should milk herself and knead her “udder,” just as a dairy cow is carefully treated.

A cow’s pregnancy, like that of a human, lasts nine months. From Vasya’s perspective, the cow gave birth not only to her calf but also to him and his entire family: “The boy also looked at her tender, quiet udder with its small shrivelled teats that fed him with milk”; “While she lived, my mother, my father and I all ate milk from her. Then she had her son – a calf – and he ate milk from her too, there were three of us and he made four, and there was enough milk for us all.”<sup>63</sup> To Vasya, the cow is not the Other but an extension of himself, a decent worker he aspires to resemble in the future. After all, the cow kept nothing for herself; her body was entirely dissolved into others – into people and into animals that consumed her milk, and into the soil she plowed: “The cow gave us everything, that is her milk, her son, her meat, her skin, her innards and her bones, she was **kind**.”<sup>64</sup> However, this kindness creates a fracture in the narrative. What constitutes the cow’s kindness and what the boy interprets as kindness turn out to be opposing notions. The cow’s kindness is built on maintaining a distance from the Other, while human kindness, as embodied by the boy, is rooted in longing, a yearning for what is unattainable: merging with the Other, becoming one with it, and uniting the endlessly generative life of the Other (the cow’s milk was born ceaselessly<sup>65</sup>) with one’s own living substance. This is always countered by the individualism and defiance inherent in nature.

Vasya believes that the cow can cry; he has great compassion for the cow and tends to respond with kindness to the animal’s kindness. The boy tries to care for the cow: feeding her, cleaning her, giving her water, stroking and hugging her, unconsciously striving to become a substitute for the calf. Yet such human care for the nonhuman Other results in indifference and obstinacy on the part of the animal. The natural collides with the cultural, just as individualism clashes with collectivism. In this conflict, the story reveals Platonov’s perspective on nature, which is pitiable because it cannot become human: “Unlike a human being, she [the cow – K.N.] was unable to allay this grief inside her with words, consciousness, a friend or any other

<sup>62</sup> See: “Cow’s milk is the best feed for piglets, so it should be given to sucklings at least in small amounts: from the 20th day after birth, a quarter liter per head daily, increasing to half a liter per head per day” (A. Sukhomlin, *Ukhod za svinyami* [*Care for Pigs*], OGIz, Selkhozgiz, Moscow and Leningrad 1934, p. 17). See also: “If fostering piglets is impossible, the extra ones [*lishnie*] should be artificially fed with cow’s milk” (S. Dorofeev, *Ukhod za molodnyakom: Telyata, porosyata, yagnyata* [*Care for the Young Stock: Calves, Piglets, Lambs*], Zap. obl. gos. izd-vo, Moscow and Smolensk 1934, p. 66).

<sup>63</sup> A. Platonov, *The Cow...*

<sup>64</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>65</sup> See the original: “[...] moloko v ney **rozhalos’** tozhe **bespreryvno**” (A. Platonov, *Korova...*, p. 38).

distraction;” “the cow did not understand that it is possible to forget one happiness, to find another and then live again, not suffering any longer;” “her dim mind did not have the strength to help her deceive herself;” “**she was entirely obedient to life, to nature** [...]. She was looking into the darkness with large, bloodshot eyes, and she was unable to cry with them to weaken herself and her grief.”<sup>66</sup>

Like a mother, the newly calved cow longs for her calf. She remains unyielding and “indifferent” in her individualism: “The cow did not eat the bread and **remained indifferent, just as before**. Vasya stood beside her for a while and then put his arms round the cow’s neck from underneath, **so she would know that he understood and loved her**. But the cow abruptly jerked her neck, threw off the boy and, with **an uncharacteristic guttural scream**, ran away into the field.”<sup>67</sup> While the human, in this bond with the livestock animal, openly absorbs the cow’s products and traits into his own body, into his own living substance, the cow does not accept such unification; cultural substitutes do not suffice for her.

She remains a cow and wishes to be singular in her distinct individualism: this is her calf; this is her *cow-being*, her cow sorrow, expressed through that distinct throat sound which cannot be understood or shared by anyone. The human, on the other hand, stands for collectivization, cohabitation,<sup>68</sup> and the upbringing of the animal’s work habits. That is why Vasya and his father explain the cow’s grief and longing through the common projection of animal feelings onto human emotions: their “heart aches for the calf”; they “cared for him a long time” and “had grown used to him,”<sup>69</sup> now feeling sorrow for his death, since he was still “little,” like Vasya. “He’s still young and he’s got everything ahead of him, but **he’s a real little man already**.”<sup>70</sup> These words can be applied both to a calf and to a child. The boundaries between animals and humans blur.

However, this does not help explain the behavior of the grieving cow; perhaps the care given to the animal was inadequate, for in reality, things are not as they are written: a lack of feed, uncultivated land, virgin soil – these are the reasons why animals suffer, endure violence, and cannot work properly. In Platonov’s words, due to ill-considered human actions and the unreasonable waste of a small, healthy calf, living substance seeps away from humans, animals, and plants, leading to decline. Either way, the cow’s grief cannot be expressed in words: she stops being “timid, sensitive, and meek” and becomes “sullen and uncomprehending,” “mischievous,”

<sup>66</sup> A. Platonov, *The Cow...*

<sup>67</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>68</sup> Here, I am referring to the word *so-zhitelstvo*, which lacks an ecological meaning and instead points to a forced or circumstance-driven (e.g., by collectivization) “live-in” arrangement in a specific place, shared with *others*, not necessarily in close relationships or legally formalized. More often, it refers to living on state-owned government land or living as required by one’s work location. In our context, the latter meaning is the most appropriate.

<sup>69</sup> A. Platonov, *The Cow...*

<sup>70</sup> Ibidem.

“deaf,” and “stupid.” As a result, the cow is struck by a train, a machine whose existence is transparent to Vasya and which, unlike the cow, accepts his diligent care.

The end of the story – the “Karenin cow” mourning her calf and falling under the locomotive – emphasizes the animal’s opacity and otherness as well as its separateness and individuality. With the money earned from selling “the cow’s carcass to the district co-operative [...] Vasya was hoping to buy some reading-books from the shop,”<sup>71</sup> perhaps in part to learn more about cows. Vasya’s school composition in the final scene is not childishly naïve but rather unconsciously tragic. In response to the question “How I will live and work in order to be of service to our Motherland?” Vasya writes that he wants to be like a cow. He wants to be a working being who benefits others and gives everything he has, even his body, to the Motherland. Yet beyond this post-anthropocentric gesture and the unconscious, cruel collectivization of himself (in the manner of the cow: from human to beef) lies a yearning for the impossibility of becoming such a cow. He does not know where the cow and her calf are now, after they were consumed as food and transformed into a useful product. Despite their kindness and hospitality, these animals no longer exist; they have been absorbed into collectivization, though they did not understand or share it in a natural or biological sense. To be *like* an animal is the only possibility available to the human. In the human paradigm, care for a nonhuman companion and love for such a companion move in *only one direction: from human to animal*. Yet, in this act of care, there is a sense of sorrow for the inevitable loss of one’s own self.

\*\*\*

Did Platonov support collectivization? Did he change his attitude towards nature<sup>72</sup> when he lost his son and went to war as a military correspondent? There is no clear answer to these questions. Platonov himself often repeated that his views had never changed; he always shared the communist position.<sup>73</sup> It seems that, in his relationship with Stalinist discourse, the writer was like the boy Vasya from *The Cow*: what was read and written was constantly confronted with what remained unwritten and opaque, like an animal.

I would say that the question should be phrased this way: Why, when reading Platonov’s stories, do we feel sorrow for his animals, such as the cow in *The Cow* and the camel in *Dzhan*, who did not know how to cry? Is it because they were eaten and disappeared into the circle of the exhausting work of life? Is it because they

<sup>71</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>72</sup> Alex Trustrum Thomas advocates this perspective in his book *Ecological Poetics of Andrey Platonov: Stories from the Late 1930s–1940s*, which was published in Russian in 2023.

<sup>73</sup> Platonov wrote about himself: “My ideals are monotonous and constant. I won’t be a writer if I state only the invariable ideas. No one would read it. I have to vulgarise and vary my thoughts to make acceptable works.” (Cit. ex.: M. Chehonadskih, *Alexander Bogdanov and the Politics of Knowledge...*, p. 178).

could not become human, disintegrate into atoms, and then reassemble into a more complex universality – a human being? Or are we bearing in mind the moment of the animal’s in-ability, which brings the difference between the cow and the human closer, calling for a view of the world beyond the horizon of Levinasian totality (the all-encompassing war), urging us to kindness as openness-to, a one-sided striving towards the Other, awakening in us the desire for this radically different life?

## Bibliography

- Barcz A., *Environmental Cultures in Soviet East Europe: Literature, History and Memory*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London 2020.
- Barsht K., *Poetika prozy Andreya Platonova [The Poetics of Andrey Platonov’s Prose]*, Filologicheskij fakul’tet SPbGU, St. Petersburg 2000.
- Chehonadskih M., *Alexander Bogdanov and the Politics of Knowledge after the October Revolution*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2023.
- Derrida J., *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. by D. Wills, Fordham University Press, New York 2008.
- Dorofeev S., *Ukhod za molodnyakom: Telyata, porosyata, yagnyata [Care for the Young Stock: Calves, Piglets, Lambs]*, Zap. obl. gos. izd-vo, Moscow and Smolensk 1934.
- Espósito R., *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, trans. by T. Campbell, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London 2008.
- Ferguson S., *Women and Work: Feminism, Labour, and Social Reproduction*, Pluto Press, London 2020.
- Haraway D.J., *When Species Meet*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2008.
- Jarzębowska G., “Dobrostan zwierząt gospodarskich w PRL [The Welfare of Farm Animals in the Polish People’s Republic],” *Zoophilologica. Polish Journal of Animal Studies* 2023, No. 1(11), pp. 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.31261/ZOOPHILOLOGICA.2023.11.05>.
- Katuntsev D., *Ukhod za korovoy, izd. 3 [Care for the Cow, 3rd ed.]*, Selkhozgiz, Moscow and Leningrad 1930.
- Konge V., *Ukhod za beremennymi zhyvotnymi [Care for Pregnant Animals]*, Priboj, Leningrad 1926.
- Kollontai A., *The Labour of Women in the Revolution of the Economy* [in:] idem, *Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai*, ed. and trans. by A. Holt, Lawrence Hill Co., Westport 1977, pp. 142–149.
- Krever S., *Ukhod za konem, izd. 2 [Care for the Horse, 2nd ed.]*, Gosudarstvennoe voennoe izdatelstvo Narkomata oborony Soyuza SSSR, Moscow 1936.
- Levinas E., *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. by A. Lingis, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, The Hague 1979.
- Lomov N., *Ukhod za korovoj i telenkom [Care for the Cow and Calf]*, Selkolkhozgiz, Moscow 1931.
- Mikheev M., *V mir Platonova cherez ego yazyk [Entering Platonov’s World through His Language]*, Izdatelstvo MGU, Moscow 2003.
- Nikitina K., “Proletarians in Care: Laboring Animals and Plants,” *Space and Culture* (forthcoming 2026).

- Orlov A., *Ukhod, a ne poboi podgonyaut rabotu i udoi* [Caring, Not Beating Urges Work and Milking Capacity], Novaya derevnya, Moscow 1929.
- Orlov A., *Ukhod za krestyanskoj loshadyu* [Care for the Peasant's Horse], Novaya derevnya, Moscow 1925.
- Perga T., "Little Killers or Victims of the System? Soviet Schoolchildren in Campaigns for the Extermination of Ground Squirrels," *Journal of Family History* 2025, Vol. 50, Issue 3, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/03631990251318613>.
- Platonov A., *Among Animals and Plants* [in:] idem, *Soul and Other Stories*, trans. by R. Chandler et al., Vintage Books, New York 2013, pp. 155–183.
- Platonov A., *Chevengur*, trans. by R. Chandler, E. Chandler, Vintage Classics, New York 2024.
- Platonov A., *Korova* [The Cow] [in:] idem, *Sobranie sochinenii. T. 6. "Sukhoi khleb"* [A. Platonov, *Collected Works. Vol. 6. "Dry Bread"*], ed. by N. Kornienko, Vremya, Moscow 2012, pp. 37–47.
- Platonov A., *Pitomnik novogo cheloveka* [The Nursery of the New Man] [in:] idem, *Soichneniya. Tom vtoroj 1926–1927* [A. Platonov, *Works. Vol. 2. 1926–1927*], eds. by N. Kornienko et al., IMLI RAN, Moscow 2016, pp. 371–376.
- Platonov A., *Ravenstvo v stradanii* [Equality in Suffering] [in:] idem, *Sobranie sochinenij. T. 8. "Fabrika literatury"* [A. Platonov, *Collected Works. Vol. 8. "The Factory of Literature"*], ed. by N. Kornienko, Vremya, Moscow 2011, pp. 616–617.
- Platonov A., *Revvojensoviet Zemli* [The Earth's Revolutionary Military Council] [in:] idem, *Sobranie sochinenij. T. 8. "Fabrika literatury"* [A. Platonov, *Collected Works. Vol. 8. "The Factory of Literature"*], ed. by N. Kornienko, Vremya, Moscow 2011, pp. 614–616.
- Platonov A., *Schastlivaya Moskva* [Happy Moscow] [in:] idem, *Sobranie sochinenii. T. 4. "Schastlivaya Moskva"* [A. Platonov, *Collected Works. Vol. 4. "Happy Moscow"*], ed. by N. Kornienko, Vremya, Moscow 2011, pp. 9–110.
- Platonov A., *Soul and Other Stories*, trans. by R. Chandler et al., Vintage Classics, New York 2013.
- Platonov A., *The Cow* [in:] idem, *The Return and Other Stories*, trans. by R. Chandler et al., The Harvill Press, e-book, London 1999.
- Platonov A., *Vprok. Bednyatskaya khronika* [For the Future's Sake: A Poor Man's Chronicle] [in:] idem, *Sobranie sochinenij. T. 2. "Efirnyj trakt"* [A. Platonov, *Collected Works. Vol. 2. "Etheric Tract"*], ed. by N. Kornienko, Vremya, Moscow 2011, pp. 264–350.
- Platonov A., *Juvenilnoe more* [The Juvenile Sea] [in:] idem, *Sobranie sochinenij. T. 2. "Efirnyj trakt"* [A. Platonov, *Collected Works. Vol. 2. "Etheric Tract"*], ed. by N. Kornienko, Vremya, Moscow 2011, pp. 351–432.
- Platonov A., *Za bolshevistskogo schetovoda v kolkhoze! (Zametki razyezdnoho korrespondenta)* [For the Bolshevik Accountant in the Collective Farm! (Notes of a Traveling Correspondent)] [in:] idem, *Zapisnye knizhki. Materialy k biografii* [A. Platonov, *Notebooks. Materials for a Biography*], ed. by N. Kornienko, Nasledie, Moscow 2000, pp. 295–301.
- Sazonov N., "The Ocean of Green: Hogweed Against Russian World," *Space and Culture* 2025, Vol. 28(1), pp. 50–66.
- Sazonov N., Nikitina K., "drug-s-drugom. seriya 1: levinas vstrechaet sobaku [one another. series 1: levinas meets a dog]," *Syg.ma: A Community-Run Multilingual Media Platform and Translocal Archive*, February 2025, <https://syg.ma/@posthlab/nikita-sazonov-i-katya-nikitina-drug-s-drugom-seriya-1-levinas-vstrechaet-sobaku>.

- Sazonov N., Nikitina E., “The Great Plan for the Queerification of Nature,” *Antennae* 2024, No. 64(2), pp. 75–94.
- Sevitov A., *Ukhod za lugami* [*Care for Hayfields*], Proletarij, Kharkiv 1925.
- Shiman V., *Ukhod za posevami* [*Care for Crops*], Selkhozgiz, Moscow 1939.
- Shuvaev K., *Socialisticheskoe zhivotnovodstvo* [*A Socialist Livestock Farming*], OGIZ Moskovskij rabochij, Moscow 1931.
- Skryabin V., *Ukhod za rebenkom, izd. 2* [*Care for a Child, 2nd ed.*], Nauchnaya mysl, Kharkiv 1929.
- Sukhomlin A., *Ukhod za svinyami* [*Care for Pigs*], OGIZ Selkhozgiz, Moscow and Leningrad 1934.
- Szopa K.A., *Wybuch wyobraźni. Poezja Anny Świrszczyńskiej wobec reprodukcji życia społecznego* [*The Explosion of Imagination: Anna Świrszczyńska's Poetry in Relation to the Reproduction of Social Life*], Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2022.
- Thomas A.T., *Ekologicheskaya poetika Andrey Platónova* [*The Ecological Poetics of Andrey Platonov*], Common Place, Moscow 2023.
- Tymieniecka-Suchanek J., *Literatura rosyjska wobec upodmiotowienia zwierząt: w kręgu zagadnień ekofilozoficznych* [*Russian Literature and Animals' Empowerment: Eco-Philosophical Issues*], Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2020.
- Ukhod i sodержanie krupnogo rogatogo skota molochnogo napravleniya, lekciya I* [*Care and Maintenance of Dairy Cattle, Lecture I*], ed. by V.M. Ryleev, Krestyanskaya gazeta, Moscow 1932.
- Zinovieva O.A., *Vos'moye chudo sveta. VSKhV–VDNKh–VVTs* [*The Eighth Wonder of the World: From the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition to VDNKh and VVTs*], Tsentrpoligraf, Moscow 2014.