



## Isolde

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In the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution, many Russians fled the country and ensconced themselves in interwar Europe. Irina Odoevtseva's novel *Isolde* speaks to the sense of alienation that many young Russians felt as they waited, suspended between their new lives in Europe and the memories and fantasies of their motherland.

Fourteen-year-old Liza and her brother, Nikolai, are left to their own devices in Biarritz by their negligent mother. Here they meet Cromwell, an English boy who fancies that Liza is the Arthurian Isolde. Adolescent romance blooms. When Liza, Nikolai, and Cromwell, along with Liza's romantic interest, Andrei, find themselves in Paris, Nikolai and Andrei realize they can take advantage of Cromwell's money to enjoy the finer things of society. Innocence soon gives way to darker urges as Liza is entangled in a dangerous plot to return to Russia.

Odoevtseva eschews the more traditional forms of Russian literature and writes out of her own experience as an expatriate living in Europe. As Russian émigrés occupied a cultural and geographical limbo, so, too, did young teenagers struggle to navigate the waters between childhood and adulthood. This is embodied beautifully in the novel's heroine.

Liza longs for connection with her mother, a warm, familiar presence who grew distant after her husband's death, to the point of asking her own children to call her their cousin rather than their mother. The foreignness of Cromwell and his family seems to offer a refuge, yet Liza, despite the rejection of her symbolic motherland, remains unsettled by visions of an idyllic Russia she's never known. Unable to cope with her rootlessness, Liza wanders from potential haven to potential haven as questions of identity plague her every step.

Unapologetic in its depictions of adolescent sexual and psychological turmoil, *Isolde* sheds light on an overlooked consequence of the Bolshevik Revolution.

MEAGAN LOGSDON (November / December 2019)

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