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Why East and West Don't Understand One Another

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Why East and West Don't Understand One Another

In one of his poems, Czeslaw Milosz writes of a maral—a small Siberian deer—who bellows in the crisp air beneath an October moon. There you have it. That's why East and West don't understand one another.

In America our deer don't bellow. They snort and they grunt at mating season. They scare the fizz out of you if you surprise one while walking through the woods. They run perfectly, as luminous as . . . as . . . as running deer.

American deer can't even imagine their small, bellowing cousins. What would they bellow? ask bucks in Muskingum County. "Bambi, get out of that ivy. You'll get your fall coat all stained!" or "Put out that cigarette. Only you can prevent forest fires."

It doesn't compute. So the guys talk instead of important deer history. How the great deep hypnotist Antlarian would always use headlights in his act. What does a Siberian bellowing deer look like? Has he a froglike sac

engineered for bellowing, generations of genes selected
for power projection: deer howls across the tundra?
What does he bellow? Does he cry angst and loss
like the great Russian poets?

“Wooden Russia, my childhood ran merry
As a fawn near the Don through my sweetwater spring.
Now I age; the fat peasant hunter has me wary.
How we suffered the season when Ivan was king!”

So much melodrama! No wonder the practical does in Ohio
don't dwell on that rot. They're too busy picking up
after the guys' fallen antlers, or drawing up forage lists
or clearing the appointments with the hoof and cud specialists.

And some Soviet intellectuals idealize our country,
a land where the deer keep their mouths shut. How pure!
And when I ask my friends just what they have been thinking
about the Siberian bellowing deer, they have little to say.

They've blocked it from their minds. This is what's called “denial.”
That's why East and West don't understand one another.