The Disordered Era:

Grotesque Modernism in Russian Literature, 1903 – 1939

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation argues that Russia's confrontation with modernity generated a series of sociocultural paradigm crises that gave rise to a modernist grotesque aesthetic tradition, uniting over forty years of artistic production into a coherent literary movement. While close reading the work of Fyodor Sologub (*The Petty Demon* [*Мелкий бес*]), Andrei Bely (*Petersburg* [*Петербург*]), Evgenii Zamyatin (*At World's End* [*На куличках*]), and Velimir Khlebnikov ("The Crane" [*Журавль*]), I argue that prerevolutionary modernist writers utilized grotesque modes of representation to depict a world where the former cornerstones of pre-modern Russian identity are fracturing under the pressures of modernity.

In contrast to extant scholarship, I argue the 1917 Revolution is not a fundamental break in Russia's experience of the crisis of modernity, but an extension, and an exacerbation of it. Though discourses of Russian identity formation will be rapidly recodified around the Soviet project, the same underlying grotesque aesthetic devices used by pre-revolutionary authors are taken up by a new generation of Soviet-era modernists. Mikhail Zoshchenko's parody in *Michel Sinyagin* (*Мишель Синягин*) elicits skepticism about yesterday's unenlightened masses becoming today's new Tolstoys. Andrei Platonov's anomalous depictions of the Russian periphery in his *Juvenile Sea* (*Ювенильное море*) are still inhabited by monsters, too far from Soviet nodes of power to be assimilated into the national ideological project. And Konstantin Vaginov (in the novel *Goat Song* [*Козлиная песнь*]) and Evgenii Shvarts (in the play *The Shadow* [*Тень*]) capture the prevalence of superfluous intellectuals with ruptured psyches, frustrated by their unsuccessful attempts to adapt to the new Soviet reality.

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NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS AND TRANSLITERATION

The translations in this dissertation are my own, unless noted otherwise. Quotations will appear in English with the Russian original in the footnotes. There are some cases, however, where I have deemed it important to use the original Russian in Cyrillic in lieu of translation or at least provide the Russian after the English translation. I have altered the Library of Congress system of transliteration in this dissertation to reflect the standard Western spelling for the names of well-known authors. For example, Zamiatin will appear as Zamyatin, Gogol' as Gogol, and Krzhizhanovskii as Krzhizhanovsky. For all bibliographic information, however, I follow the Library of Congress system of transliteration without diacritics.

INTRODUCTION

Russia in Paradigm Crisis

Geoffrey Harpham's *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (1982) notes that a culture experiencing an increase in the prevalence of grotesque artistic production signifies a time of paradigm crisis – a time lacking cohesive, palliative explanatory models.[1] *The Disordered Era* – a study of grotesque modernism, an analysis of its aesthetic particularities, and a close reading of several of its most seminal texts – operates under the assumption that Russia's early 20th century was just such a tumultuous epoch. After all, in just the first two decades of the 20th century, Russia was shaken by a series of events that would have been enough to trigger a paradigm crisis on their own: the Revolution of 1905, World War One, two Revolutions of 1917, and the fratricidal Civil War.

However, before anything of value might be said about the cultural phenomenon of 'Russian grotesque modernism,' I will need to formalize the meaning of these key terms. A contextualized discussion of Russian modernism will open the first chapter on prerevolutionary literature, but, more fundamentally, the notion of 'the grotesque' warrants an extended inquiry. The term is a deceptively complex one.

Attempts to define the grotesque often begin with the same well-known factoid: the term 'grotesque' comes originally from the Italian *grottesca* meaning 'of a cave.' The word 'grotto' is of the same root. Though perhaps it is tempting to imagine that the semantic resonance indicates something fundamentally chthonic about the grotesque, the connotation arose for a different reason. In the late 15th century a system of caves was discovered in Rome that turned out to be

[1] Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (Aurora: The Davies Group Publishers, 2007).

an uncompleted palace built during Nero's reign. This excavated palace featured ornate decorative art adorned with all manner of monstrous hybrid creatures – a style that became known as 'grotesque ornamentation.'

While an interesting bit of trivia, the term's etymological origin tells us precious little about its meaning. After all, given the true origin of the ornamental style, why should the grotesque be more closely associated with grottos than with ancient Roman palaces? Moreover, if the term did not exist until the 15th century, are we to conclude that the grotesque itself is not any older than this? No, as the Roman ornamentation itself suggests, the origins of the grotesque are much deeper.

Defining the Grotesque

What makes something 'grotesque'? Is a specific, definitional formulation possible, or is the analyst resigned to abstractions – something like "grotesque images are created in distortions, deformations, and exaggerations"? The question is a difficult one because 'the grotesque' is an exceedingly capacious aesthetic phenomenon. Overbroad formulations risk limiting the utility of the term as a conceptual tool, while over-narrow definitions begin to exclude phenomena that intuition insists still ought to fit. The definition problem appears especially daunting when one dives into the critical literature and finds very little consistency and consensus in the extant research.

A survey of the scholarship makes it clear that the field suffers from no dearth of definitions; in fact, the problem is quite the opposite. In the literature, there is an overabundance of resonant though non-identical definitions. All the definitions gesture toward similar aesthetic phenomena, but differences in their details make them difficult to apply as precise, consistent

conceptual tools. For the sake of standardization and consistency, then, I think it much wiser to shift the emphasis away from 'definition creation' to 'definition synthesis.'

I turn to the work of several historic authorities in the field, scholars who devised the most seminal definitions of the grotesque: Victor Hugo in his "Preface to *Cromwell*" (1827), John Ruskin in *The Stones of Venice* (1851-1853), Wolfgang Kayser in his *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* (1957), and, of course, Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World* (*Творчество Франсуа Рабле и народная культура средневековья и Ренессанса*, 1965). The earliest of the theoretical works, and perhaps even the most influential for global literature's development, is Hugo's "Preface to *Cromwell*." Hugo's preface was the author's attempt to elucidate the essential features of Romantic literature following similar undertakings by Schlegel, Constant, Stendal, Guizot. In his book *Hugo's Aesthetic Revolt*, Albert Halsall notes that "other literary theorists and historians […] would not have been particularly impressed by the 'novelty' of Hugo's ideas […] with the exception of the central importance Hugo was prepared to assign to the 'grotesque' as one of the two defining elements of Romantic literature."[2] The grotesque is Hugo's aesthetic banner – a mode of representing the world that, "in our opinion, separates modern from ancient art, the present form from the defunct form; or, to use less definite but more popular terms, *romantic* literature from *classical* literature."[3] For this reason, Hugo insists that the grotesque is new, absolutely modern: "In the idea of men of modern times, however, the grotesque plays an enormous part. It is found everywhere; on the one hand it creates the abnormal and the horrible, on the other the comic and the burlesque. […] And how free and open

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[2] Albert W. Halsall, "Hugo's Aesthetic Revolt (i), 1820-1827: Inez de Castro, Amy Robsart, Cromwell, and Its Preface," in *Victor Hugo and the Romantic Drama* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 64.

[3] Victor Hugo, "Preface to Cromwell," in *Prefaces and Prologue to Famous Books,* ed. Charles W. Eliot (New York: P.F. Collier and Son Corporation, 1938), 346.

it is in its bearing! how boldly it brings into relief all the strange forms which the preceding age had timidly wrapped in swaddling-clothes!"[4] Polemicizing with the classicists, and the whole ancient world's literary production along with them, Hugo argues that, while the ancients did engage with the grotesque occasionally, it was stifled: "Not that it is strictly true that comedy and the grotesque were entirely unknown to the ancients. In fact, such a thing would be impossible. Nothing grows without a root; the germ of the second epoch always exists in the first. […] But one feels that this part of the art is still in its infancy. The epic, which at this period imposes its form on everything, the epic weighs heavily upon it and stifles it. The ancient grotesque is timid and forever trying to keep out of sight. It is plain that it is not on familiar ground, because it is not in its natural surroundings. It conceals itself as much as it can."[5] He continues, "Comedy is almost imperceptible in the great epic *ensemble* of ancient times. What is the barrow of Thespis beside the Olympian chariots? What are Aristophanes and Plautus, beside the Homeric colossi, Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides? Homer bears them along with him, as Hercules bore the pygmies, hidden in his lion's skin!"[6] Speaking of what 'one feels' – one feels that Hugo's insistence on the dearth of the grotesque (and the comic) in the ancient tradition is not wholly convincing, motivated as it is by his larger artistic, aesthetic, and ideological project. And, in fact, when Bakhtin proposes his theory of the grotesque, it will be presented as the complete inversion of Hugo's project: the 'ancient' grotesque is the authentic well-spring, and the modern grotesque – only a simplified (bastardized, even) distortion. Though Bakhtin, too, likely goes too far in his attempt to denigrate the romantic and modernist grotesque modalities. One feels

[4] Ibid., 348.

[5] Ibid., 346.

[6] Ibid., 347.

that a happier medium exists between these two positions, underscoring the value of synthesizing a more general theory.

Notice that Hugo is already investing his understanding of the grotesque with periodicity – the impoverished ancient grotesque looking shabby in contrast to the 'free and open' modern grotesque, finally allowed to shed its 'swaddling clothes.' Though authors and scholars disagree about the quality and significance of each period's grotesque artistic production, the fact that the study of the grotesque ought to be broken into distinct periods is a fundamental part of later theoretical work. Of course, there needs to be something general enough about the grotesque to make it a coherent term, so any study of its periodicity must contend with the interplay of the specifics of each given period on one hand, and the grotesque's universal features on the other.

How does Hugo understand what the grotesque is, or what it does? His answer is uniquely religious (a component of the theory decidedly less influential than the rest). Hugo suggests that the polytheistic imagination of the ancients pushed them towards a model of the universe where man and the divine inhabited the same planes of existence. Their proximity flattened their vision of the cosmos, conflated distinctions of high and low, making the men mighty like gods, and the gods temperamental like men. The ancients' obsession with epic made them even more single-minded: "the purely epic muse of the ancients had studied nature in only a single aspect, casting aside without pity almost everything in art which, in the world subjected to its imitation, had not relation to a certain type of beauty."[7] The Christian worldview, Hugo contends, is emphatically hierarchical – the 'high,' the realm of the sacred, the dwelling place of God, is never confused with the 'low,' the profane, the mortal realm, or the desacralized plane of evil. Because the Christian worldview brings this 'twofold foundation' of reality and being into

[7] Ibid., 345.

relief, "the modern muse will see things in a higher and broader light. It will realize that everything in creation is not humanly *beautiful*, that the ugly exists beside the beautiful, the unshapely beside the graceful, the grotesque on the reverse of the sublime, evil with good, darkness with light."[8]

A more adequate definition of the grotesque will have to shed both Hugo's polemical stance on classicism – one that forces him to underestimate the ancient world's contributions to grotesque aesthetics – and his theory's religious overtones. Nevertheless, his contention that the grotesque is an essential tool for any artist or writer looking to depict 'reality' is something that does echo through a number of theoretical works to come. Hugo suggests that an aesthetic system that prioritizes beauty over all else will necessarily need to sacrifice the diversity of phenomena – both beautiful and ugly, and everything in between – that populate the realities humans find themselves in. For Hugo, it is a tremendous benefit that the grotesque allows the artist to capture this diversity, for – invoking *Preface's* most oft-repeated line – "the beautiful has but one face, the ugly has a thousand."[9]

While it is difficult to assent to this aspect of Hugo's framework as written – does beauty not have many faces, too? – the intuition about the grotesque's break away from monism (and monistic interpretation) becomes indispensable to later theories of the grotesque. Hugo's references to the epic tradition's tendency to represent 'nature in only a single aspect' speak to his skepticism of art that strives towards idealized representation over something more 'real.' However, referencing 'the real' at all risks falling into monism of another kind – an essentialist vision of one united reality. At times, Hugo's logic seems to fall into this kind of binary

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., 350.

thinking, but there are other moments when his thinking clearly resists it. For instance, while Hugo does portray the move from classicism to romanticism as a simultaneous move from a monistic (the ideal) to a dualistic worldview (the divine, sublime ideal vs. the grotesque real), one may read Hugo's notion of the 'thousand' faces of the ugly as an early attempt to problematize, even deconstruct, the binary that he establishes in the same breath. Perhaps Hugo's most valuable insight is here: that, above all, the grotesque is concerned with multiplicity, that artists are able to use it as a tool to resist monistic worldviews, giving them a device to help them depict phenomena with not one face, but many.

Though his inquiry is primarily concerned with architecture and the visual arts, John Ruskin's formulation in *Stones of Venice* has plenty to say about the way the grotesque functions in literature. Ruskin emphasizes the grotesque's fundamental tendency to represent a duality in a single image. In his words, "it seems to me that the grotesque is, in almost all cases, composed of two elements, one ludicrous, the other fearful; that, as one or other of these elements prevails, the grotesque falls into two branches, sportive grotesque and terrible grotesque."[10] When Ruskin speaks of the 'sportive,' he is referring to an element of the ludic, understood as play and light comedy, that is inherent to the grotesque. This playful element allows for images to jest with the viewer, to amuse them or make them laugh, despite the 'fearful' elements that paradoxically coexist there. In fact, because the coexistence of the 'fearful' and 'sportive' elements in the grotesque is so ubiquitous, Ruskin believes that it would be incorrect to think of them as two separate categories. Instead, 'a grotesque' is created only in the coexistence of these two elements: "we cannot legitimately consider [the grotesque] under these two aspects, because

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[10] John Ruskin, "Grotesque Renaissance," in *Stones of Venice* (III), vol. 9 of *The Complete Works of John Ruskin* (New York: National Library Association, 2009), 126. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/30756/30756-h/30756-h.htm.

there are hardly any examples which do not in some degree combine both elements; there are few grotesques so utterly playful as to be overcast with no shade of fearfulness, and few so fearful as absolutely to exclude all ideas of jest."[11] Ruskin's definition captures the essential ambivalence of the grotesque and recognizes that the grotesque image is generative of contradictory affects in the viewer's/reader's perception (in this case, either fear or laughter).

However, though I will borrow elements from Ruskin's formulation, his approach also has its limitations. Especially when analyzing literature, it is difficult to accept the relatively limiting premise that the grotesque must operate between the two poles of jest or playfulness ('the sportive') and fear; the ambivalence and capaciousness of the grotesque is such that it resists this limitation.

Wolfgang Kayser's *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* adopts aspects of Ruskin's theory, though it shifts the emphasis away from addressing aesthetics only. Instead, he develops a tripartite structure that integrates questions of the grotesque's affect. A more sophisticated definition than Ruskin's, Kayser's understanding of the grotesque requires a more detailed explication.

Kayser starts with an expression of anxiety about the problem of definition: "What I have attempted to do is to give a more precise definition of the grotesque as such on the basis of the somewhat sketchy etymological history of the word."[12] At times, Kayser's definition seems to trouble itself to be more inclusive than his predecessors, but, nevertheless, he opens the chapter 'An Attempt to Define the Nature of the Grotesque' by stating that he wishes to narrow the term:

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature,* trans. Ulrich Weisstein (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), 10.

"Is it significant that the language, the usage of which we have so far followed, suggests the word 'grotesque' over and over again, despite the numerous variations in its meaning? I think it is, although all the phenomena which down through the ages have been so designated certainly do not belong to this timeless conception of the grotesque."[13] What is this 'timeless conception of the grotesque' that animates Kayser's theoretical approach?

Kayser's great innovation is separating the application of the grotesque into 'three different realms,' "the creative process, the work itself, and its reception."[14] When Kayser speaks of grotesque aesthetics in 'the creative process,' he is referring to an *intentional* imbuing of an image with grotesque features by the author. Because it assumes knowledge of authorial intention, this 'realm' is of limited utility – or so I have found in my own work. When speaking of the grotesque that arises from 'the work itself,' Kayser's language suggests that this 'realm' delineates those instances where the grotesque appears *in spite of* the author's intentions – when it 'rises above' intentionality. The choice to tie this category to authorial intention at all seems to me to be a mistake. It would solve the serious problem of asking the philologist to derive authorial intention to speak of this category as *independent from* authorial intention. Detached from questions of intentionality, this is easily the most flexible approach and the one that requires the least guesswork and speculation on the part of the analyst.

Kayser's insistent emphasis on the final 'realm,' receptivity, is among his most productive and novel contributions. He points out that if the grotesque is not detected by the subject (the reader or viewer), then it ultimately does not exist – at least not for that subject. In

[13] Ibid., 179.

[14] Ibid., 180.

his words, "the grotesque is experienced only in the act of reception."[15] Novel though it may be, this third realm also contains potential interpretive pitfalls. While an audience's reception may play a key role in determining a text's aesthetic utility, it is just as absent from the analyst as is the author's intentions. This approach is made workable when the discussion is not framed around actual receptivity, but theoretical receptivity. In other words, it attempts to answer the question: what effect should the grotesque have on a viewer or reader? Finding an answer to this question becomes an important element of my definition of the grotesque, and Kayser's theoretical model cannot be understood without this component.

As for definitions, the initial one Kayser offers is cryptic, "The grotesque is a structure. Its nature could be summed up in a phrase that has repeatedly suggested itself to us: *the grotesque is the estranged world."*[16] He clarifies that the grotesque affect is generated when a subject experiences a 'sudden' and 'unexplained' intrusion into the world – *their intimate, personal* world – that causes reality itself, and the principles grounding that reality, to lose their stability and reliability. "Structurally," he claims, "it presupposes that the categories which apply to our world view have become inapplicable."[17] Struck by the grotesque, "we are unable to orient ourselves in the alienated world, because it is absurd. […] The grotesque is not concerned with individual actions or the destruction of the moral order (although both factors may be partly involved). It is primarily the expression of our failure to orient ourselves in the physical universe."[18]

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[15] Ibid., 181.

[16] Ibid., 184.

[17] Ibid., 185.

[18] Ibid.

For Kayser, the grotesque exposes the world as alien from the subject. In its radical estrangement of the subject, in its ability to lay bare the unfamiliar in the familiar, the grotesque uncovers the essential absurdity of the world itself. Since his theory bridges the real and the unreal, the familiar and the unfamiliar, Kayser, like Ruskin, speaks to grotesques' ability to combine incongruous, ostensibly incompatible elements or impulses into a single phenomenon – the world understood as paradoxically familiar and unfamiliar. Therein lies the incongruity. Despite the strengths of this approach, the premise that the grotesque will push the viewing subject into an absurd relationship with the world may appear to be a radical claim. How does this accord with Shklovsky's usage of the term? The notion of estrangement as a severe, even traumatic force is shared by Ilya Kalinin, who argues that Shklovsky's term is similarly radical: "The mechanism of estrangement – which should, in Shklovsky's view, return perception of the world to the individual – is identical to the mechanism of trauma in its psychological, existential foundation."[19] I will discuss the relationship between Kayser and Shklovsky in more detail soon, but – for now – Kayser's integration of theories of subjectivity and estrangement is an insightful and productive step forward in creating a more capacious, formalized definition.

Mikhail Bakhtin, in his *Rabelais and His World*, criticizes Kayser for resting his understanding of the grotesque too heavily on its ability to bring out the 'hostile, alien, and inhuman.' In fact, Kayser is the theorist who serves as the most explicit counterpoint to Bakhtin's theory; the polemic runs through a number of sections in the book. And, although

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[19] Il'ia Kalinin, "'Istorichnost' travmaticheskogo opyta: Rutina, revoliutsiia, representatsiia," *NLO*, 124 (2013), https://www.nlobooks.ru/magazines/novoe_literaturnoe_obozrenie/124_nlo_6_2013/article/10686/: "Механизм остранения, который должен, с точки зрения Шкловского, вернуть человеку восприятие мира, в своей психологической, экзистенциальной основе оказывается тождествен механизму травмы. В обоих случаях перед нами разворачивается драма столкновения с реальным. Только в случае с травмой это столкновение приводит к нарушению способности субъекта создавать упорядоченный символический универсум репрезентации, в нормальной ситуации позволяющей ему выстраивать 'защитные покровы' (Фрейд), блокирующие сильные внешние раздражения."

Bakhtin does not mention Ruskin's work specifically, he dismisses the central theorem of *The Stones of Venice* – that every grotesque image inspires a mixture of fear and laughter – when he claims that "fear is the extreme expression of narrow-minded seriousness, which is defeated by laughter. […] Complete liberty is only possible in the completely fearless world."[20]

In one sense, Bakhtin sees himself on a liberation project – to free the nature of the grotesque from Kayser, to eliminate fear from the notion of the 'authentic' grotesque itself. Bakhtin's analysis, especially in its focus on the grotesque in its pre-romantic forms and on the grotesque body, is accompanied by a great optimism. Instead of seeing the defamiliarization of the world as a negative, fearful, and traumatic experience for the subject as Kayser does, Bakhtin claims that making the world strange "leads men out of the confines of the apparent (false) unity, of the indisputable and the stable."[21] In other words, the estrangement of the grotesque can break down oppressive norms and over-stable realities that restrict humankind, opening the individual to the 'jolly relativity' that exists beyond their familiarized experience of life. The rigid, unchangeable, oppressive unity that underlies one's experience of the world explodes into a network of possibilities. Adapting Hugo's adage: the fearful grotesque implies but one reality, the carnivalesque grotesque allows for thousands.

Looking more closely at Bakhtin's favorite grotesque site, the body, we can uncover a few more important details of his system. The body is divided topographically and symbolically into the 'high' sphere – including organs of the head: thought, speech, sight etc. – and the 'low' sphere – excretion, sexual activity, etc. Bakhtin recognizes that this topographical split

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[20] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World,* trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 47.

[21] Ibid., 48.

traditionally hides within it a corresponding value system, meaning the 'high' sphere is coded as positive, good, spiritual, lofty, and the low sphere is coded shameful, unmentionable, animalistic. However, as follows from the spirit of Bakhtin's grotesque, these values are often challenged and subverted. To explain this conception, Bakhtin offers the example of a stuttering man 'pregnant' and 'giving birth' to speech: "We specify that it is the word that is born, and we stress this fact: a highly spiritual act is degraded and uncrowned by the transfer to the material bodily level of childbirth, realistically represented. But thanks to degradation the word is renewed; one might say reborn. (We are still within the cycle of delivery and childbirth.) We further see the essential topographical element of the bodily hierarchy turned upside down; the lower stratum replaces the upper stratum. The word is localized in the mouth and in the head (thought); from there it is transferred to the abdomen and is pushed out […]"[22] Bakhtin's utilization of coordinate systems, even as he attempts to reorient or scramble them, is an especially seminal element of his theory.

In summary, Bakhtin maintains the element of estrangement in Kayser's theory but sees it only as a source of renewal and of an ambivalence. Estrangement, through Bakhtin, is a force that frees man from the shackles of the dogmas instituted by the established cultural order. He also experiences the grotesque image as bi-planar, maintaining two contradictory elements in a single image. Although these planes are traditionally assigned a value, high (+) or low (-), the grotesque image seeks to undermine, confuse, and critique these valuations leading again to the deconstruction of established convention and a feeling of 'jolly relativity' in the face of this ambivalence.

Placing Kayser in dialogue with Bakhtin raises an important theoretical question about the specific nature of 'grotesque *modernism*.' In *Rabelais and His World,* Bakhtin claims

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[22] Ibid., 308-309.

Kayser's theory – that the grotesque alienates the individual – is valid, but only as a form of '*modernist* grotesque.'[23] Though here one senses that Bakhtin is using the term 'modernist' as a derogatory term in agreement with Soviet literary discourse of the 1930s-50s; in opposition to regressive, 'fearful' modernist grotesque he promotes his own theory of a more liberating, even 'progressive' grotesque realism. On the other hand, Bakhtin claims that the relativizing principles described in his theory represent a distinctly pre-Romantic form of grotesque: "Kayser's theory cannot be applied to the thousand-year-long development of the pre-Romantic era: that is, the archaic and antique grotesque (for instance, the satyric drama or the comedy of Attica) and the medieval and Renaissance grotesque, linked to the culture of folk humor."[24] However, the modernist Russian literature at the center of our study manifests the relativizing ambivalence of Bakhtin's model nearly ubiquitously.

To solve this inconsistency one cannot, of course, assert that the Russian literature of the early 20th century suddenly reverted to a pre-romantic form of the grotesque. Instead, the logical inconsistencies are swept aside when we simply declare that Bakhtin, despite his claims to the contrary, is nevertheless describing a modernist conception of the grotesque. (Or, at the very least, he is describing a theory of the grotesque that is compatible with the modernist grotesque.) His key example about the stuttering man 'pregnant' with, and giving birth to, speech is an excellent example of the deconstructive impulse of grotesque modernism. There is still a clash of two incompatible elements, the high sphere of the body and the low sphere, but assigning them a consistent value, a plus or a minus, becomes impossible. The female reproductive organs, part of the traditional 'low' sphere, becomes a metaphor for the uniquely human gift of

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[23] Ibid., 46.

[24] Ibid.

speech, part of the traditional 'high.' I am not claiming that this type of ambivalent image did not exist before the modernist period. Instead, I am claiming that, in the modernist period, deconstruction of values, reversals of values, and extreme ambivalence in grotesque images became the norm, the central aesthetic *function* of the grotesque, whereas in the pre-modernist period these images were comparatively scarce. Bakhtin himself, in the introduction to his book, makes a great effort to establish the unique and singular position occupied by Rabelais among authors of his generation. When we begin to discuss the Russian literature of modernism produced in the first few decades of the 20th century, the importance of ambivalence and deconstruction in the grotesque will become increasingly apparent.

At the same time, it would be equally wrong to claim that Kayser's absurdist forms of grotesque are foreign to modernist grotesque. The uses of grotesque by a whole coterie of the writers in this inquiry reflect the alienating or estranging effects of grotesque imagery. Therefore, at least in theory, it appears that modernist grotesque includes both absurdist and carnivalesque modalities as well as a multitude of hybrid forms.

Theories of the Grotesque in Early 20th-Century Russian Thought

Taken together, Hugo, Ruskin, Kayser, and Bakhtin provide an outline of the kinds of ideas, affects, and axiologies mediated by grotesque aesthetics. However, before attempting to synthesize these definitions, I believe it will be useful to survey literary theories of the grotesque conceived and developed from the 1900s through the 1930s in detail. This will ensure that the modernist period of Russian literature possesses enough unique formal features to justify its own independent category and help uncover the period's idiosyncrasies. As previously suggested, I am not simply in search of a definition, so much as looking to synthesize a *spectrum of aesthetic*

principles and devices that can be undergirded by clear elucidations of its constitutive components.

Vsevolod Meyerhold's article "Balagan" (1912) is an early attempt by an influential Russian modernist to define the formal properties of the grotesque. His inquiry concerns the theatre, but – like Ruskin's analysis of grotesque architecture – the general principles at the root of his discussion will be generally applicable. One hears an echo of Hugo in Meyerhold's assertion that "the grotesque does not *only* know the low, or *only* the high. The grotesque fuses opposites, consciously creating a sharp sense of contradiction…"[25] In his "Balagan," one senses the symbolist pathos that finds flickering meanings and mystical synchronicities in the everyday: "Grotesque deepens the everyday to the point where it ceases to represent only the natural in itself. In life, besides that which we see, there is a tremendous domain of the indecipherable. Grotesque, going the way of the supernatural, combines the extracts of opposites in synthesis, creates a picture of the phenomenal, leads a viewer to attempt to solve the riddle of the indecipherable."[26] He draws from the work of Blok and Sologub for examples. Meyerhold recognizes 'contrast' as a fundamental feature; contrasts of 'high' and 'low.' Providing a vivid visual example, he describes a prototypical Gothic church with a bell tower striving to the heavens like a man in prayer put in contrast with the monstrous gargoyles hanging off the sides of the façade, directing the viewers thoughts to hell.[27] Meyerhold's assertion that the grotesque

[25] Vsevolod Meierkhol'd, "Balagan," in *Formal'nyi metod: Antologiia russkogo modernizma,* ed. Sergei Ushakin (Ekaterinburg: Kabinetnyi uchenyi, 2016), in 3 vols. Vol. 3, 542: "Гротеск не знает *только* низкого или *только* высокого. Гротеск мешает противоположности, сознательно создавая остроту противоречий."

[26] Ibid., 543: "Гротеск углубляет быт до той грани, когда он перестает являть собою только натуральное. В жизни, кроме того, что мы видим, есть еще громадная область неразгаданного. Гротеск, ищущий сверхнатурального, связывает в синтезе экстракты противоположностей, создает картину феноменального, приводит зрителя к попытке отгадать загадку непостижимого."

[27] Ibid. 542.

must play with 'high' and 'low' is in line with Ruskin and especially Hugo – who both predate him – and later formulations, echoed to some degree in the work of both Kayser and Bakhtin.

One term that is central to Meyerhold's understanding of the grotesque, but under-elucidated in his article, is his notion of 'contrast.' For Meyerhold, the grotesque is generated in these sharp contrasts, but what does this mean in practice? 'Contrast' is used as the term to describe the relationship of the disparate elements within the grotesque image. And although 'contrast' appears to be an innocuous term, it lacks the technical specificity needed to serve as a component in our definition. It correctly captures the striking difference between the constituent components of the grotesque image, but – by insisting on their difference – it serves to preserve their mutual repellence. The grotesque operates in the interplay of mutual repellence and co-dependency – the disparate elements are in conflict with one another, but the grotesque as such does not exist without their dual-presence. Because of this co-dependence, a pair of 'contrasting' elements become one and the same grotesque image. Therefore, a definition of the grotesque would be better served by a more specific term that captures this interplay of difference and sameness.

For another early 20th-century theory of the grotesque and a means of garnering a deeper and more specified understanding of grotesque 'contrast,' we look to two other prominent Russian theorists: Boris Eikhenbaum and his "How Gogol's Overcoat was Done" (1918) and Yurii Tynianov and his concept '*nevyazka*' – or 'incongruity'[28] – explored in greatest detail in his article "Dostoevsky and Gogol (on the Theory of Parody)" (1921). Although Tynianov is using the term to describe his understanding of how parody is generated by an author – and is ostensibly not concerned with the grotesque – his term is an extremely valuable substitute for

[28] "Incongruity" is the term that I use throughout the dissertation.

Meyerhold's under-descriptive 'contrast.' In his article, Tynianov explains, "in parody there needs to be a 'невязка' [an incongruity] between both [textual] planes […] a comedy will be the parody of a tragedy [and vice versa]."[29] Tynianov's description is remarkably similar to Boris Eikhenbaum's description of the clashing of textual styles in his "How Gogol's Overcoat was Done": "When the comic skaz suddenly breaks into a sentimental-melodramatic aside […] the ascension of 'The Overcoat' from a simple anecdote to grotesque is achieved."[30] We can succinctly reframe Eikhenbaum's formulation using Tynianovian language: the grotesque is achieved through the '*nevyazka*' of the comic skaz and the sentimental-melodramatic aside. The advantage the word '*nevyazka*' has over 'contrast' is precisely that it is a specific kind of contrast; it suggests that the two elements at play are incompatible with one another, incapable of finding accord; in Russian: '*oni ne viazhutsia*,' 'they don't get on well with one another.' Although the '*nevyazka*' most often occurs between phenomena of the same general nature – as is the case in Meyerhold's cathedral anecdote involving two contrasting 'architectural elements,' or in Tynianov's argument involving two 'textual planes' – this is not always the case. One might imagine obnoxious, raucous music being played over footage of a suffering character in a film. For a more literary example, take a character trying to express their sorrow in a comically broken idiom (form versus content) – like the narrator of Vasily Shukshin's "Raskas," who writes an unintentionally hilarious short story meant to help him work through the grief and resentment brought on by his wife's leaving for another man.

In the theories devised by Bakhtin, Kayser, Meyerhold, and Eikhenbaum, the grotesque appears to be construed as a necessary component of 'the real,' of portraying reality with

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[29] Iurii Tynianov, "Dostoevskii i Gogol' (k teorii parodii)" [1921], in *Formal'nyi metod,* vol. 1, 533.

[30] Boris Eikhenbaum, "Kak sdelana 'Shinel'' Gogolia" [1918], in *Formal'nyi metod* , vol. 2, 505.

representational fidelity. Their collective reasoning might be summarized like this: if a specific aesthetic model is only able to represent one aspect of being – like the beautiful without the ugly, the living without the dead, or the comprehensible without the incomprehensible – then its picture of 'real' life or 'real' experience is necessarily incomplete. By incorporating the contradictory elements, – whether that be a manifestation of idealism and realism, life and death, rationality and irrationality, the corporeal and the spiritual, the divine and the animalistic, the sacred and the profane – artists are able to create more complex, multi-layered, or ambivalent phenomena. Through the lens of the work of these theorists, the study of grotesque aesthetics is transformed into a method of analyzing systems resistant to monistic interpretation, a method critical of the selective viewer who only sees a single component of a multifaceted phenomenon. As Meyerhold claims, the grotesque prevents an artist from losing the natural balance of highs and lows and succumbing to aestheticism.[31] However, the grotesque is a more complex representational method than this formula suggests. Especially in the modernist period, the grotesque no longer serves merely as a mediator between the fallen, ugly 'real' world and the notional, beautiful world of the ideal (as it did for Hugo). Instead, the modernist grotesque seeks to create the non-monistic – or even anti-monistic – universe, a model of the world that resists the imposition of simple axiologies, that increases complexity (and the work of interpretation) rather than seeking to reduce it. In order for the non-monistic universe to be built, the grotesque itself must become the constructive principle by which a text is built.

Although the work of the aforementioned theorists provides rich material to help in our conceptualization of the grotesque, all of the definitions surveyed so far lack a strict formal quality. Each theorist provides ample description of the effects that the grotesque is capable of

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[31] Meierkhol'd, "Balagan," 543.

generating, and yet, although many formal qualities of the grotesque can be inferred by their language, they each fail to fit the grotesque into a set of well-defined principles. One of the primary goals of our project will be to distill the theories of the aforementioned theorists and other authorities into a formalized model. However, before I approach this task, it will be informative to look at the attempts of other scholars working in early-20th century Russia to concoct a workable definition of the grotesque.

Recent Scholarship on Grotesque Modernism

Previous research has focused on the Russian Revolution of 1917 as the main stimulus for the sudden influx of grotesque literature that appeared throughout the 1920s and 30s. In extant English-language scholarship, Kevin Platt's book, *History in a Grotesque Key: Russian Literature and the Idea of Revolution* (1997) offers a concept most resonant with our subject matter. Platt's concerns extend beyond the 1917 Revolution's impact on literary production. He argues that revolutions – and other instances of dramatic social or political upheaval – generate a conflict between the discourses of past and future, creating a friction in language (a reflection of frictions in the 'social world') that gives rise to literature written in the 'revolutionary grotesque' paradigm:

> Laughter-inducing language (and […] tear-inducing language as well) consists in the narrative approach to a moment where two incompatible interpretational possibilities are equally likely and necessary, and causes a moment of sudden transition or oscillation from one interpretation to another. In this way, in the moment of laughter and tears one experiences a brief convergence of diverse interpretational possibilities not available under normal cognitive circumstances. […] The reader of the revolutionary grotesque, encountering characters and scenes that amalgamate the conventional behaviors and recognizable features of the fading past and the dawning future – social worlds that are commonly understood to be irreconcilable opposites – falls into the interpretive flux of laughter or tears. In this moment of collapse of socially constituted meaning, or 'semiotic

> catastrophe,' the reader achieves a maximal, perhaps one could say cathartic, recognition of the problematic multiplicity of the social world during such periods.[32]

Platt tests his theory in the post-1917 literary epoch with an analysis of Evgenii Zamiatin's "Comrade Churygin Has the Floor" (Слово предоставляется товарищу Чурыгину, 1922) and Andrei Platonov's *The Foundation Pit* (*Котлован*, 1930). Like his theoretical articulation suggests, Platt's analysis is focused primarily on discursive collisions of 'past and future.' In Zamyatin's story, to take a representative example, he finds that the titular Churygin "cannot seem to utter a word in the peasant language of his childhood without contradicting himself with a word from the propagandistic public discourse of the 1920s."[33] He explains, "In this truly absurd combination of linguistic registers, Zamyatin has applied the technique of the revolutionary grotesque to the material of language itself: in Churygin, what were commonly understood in the postrevolutionary decades to be the language of the past and the language of the future have come together in a self-contradictory muddle."[34] My survey of post-revolutionary grotesque literature will demonstrate similar clashes between the 'new world' and the 'old world' as reflected in the textual fabric, leading to conditions conducive to grotesque aesthetic expression. Works like Mikhail Bulgakov's *Heart of a Dog*, or Isaac Babel's story "The Letter" from *Red Cavalry*, or any number of Zoshchenko's early stories are ripe for examination through his framework. However, because Platt tries to create a generalized notion of the 'revolutionary grotesque' – concentrating on commonalities between post-revolutionary literatures in *any* era – the specifics of the post-1917 era of grotesque literature are not his project's focus.

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[32] Kevin Platt, History in a Grotesque Key: Russian Literature and the Idea of Revolution (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 24.

[33] Ibid., 135.

[34] Ibid.

Nevertheless, Platt's formulation provides a useful theoretical framework to build on: construing grotesque literature as a nexus of contradictions and irreconcilable opposites – a site of laughter and tears, a place where past and future collide. And, following Eikhenbaum and Tynianov, his approach emphasizes the semiotic incongruities that are the building blocks of conflicted characters and monstrous imagery in so many works of grotesque literature.

Elena Men'shikova's book *The Laughter of Proteus* (2009*,* also argues that the rise of grotesque literature in the Soviet 1920s can be attributed to the "monstrous absurdity of [post-revolutionary] life." Unlike Platt's more sweeping survey of post-revolutionary literature, Men'shikova focuses her attention only on the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and its influence on post-revolutionary grotesque literature. Her main innovation is the concept of 'grotesque consciousness,' which is defined as "the carnivalized consciousness of the author, allowing [the subject] to make sense of and laugh at reality through the lens of grotesque imagery."[35] The 'carnivalesque system of coordinates,' a concept borrowed from Bakhtin, refers to the upending of vertically aligned value hierarchies (allowing high to become low, low to become high), softening ossified social orders and allowing subjects to bask in the 'jolly relativity' of all things. Men'shikova argues that the 'grotesque consciousness' is strictly a phenomenon of post-revolutionary Russia: "The chaos of impressions caused by the epoch of post-revolutionary crisis, resulting from tragic uncertainties and sociopolitical instability, generates a consciousness carnivalized in dialogue with historical drama."[36]

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[35] Elena Men'shikova, *Smekh Proteia: Fenomen groteskogo soznaniia* (Sankt-Peterburg: Aleteiia, 2015), 62: "это карнавализованное сознание автора, дающее в гротескных образах осмысление и осмеяние действительности."

[36] Ibid., 249: "Хаос представлений, вызванный эпохой постреволюционного кризиса, вследствие трагических переживаний, социально-политической нестабильности вырабатывает сознание, карнавализированное в диалоге с исторической драмой."

Her debt to Bakhtinian theoretical models is felt on every page. Though an unremarkable fact on its own, it is nevertheless worth noting that this is an explicit shift away from Bakhtin's own self-framing – asserting his own theoretical innovations as grounded in pre-modern 'grotesque realism,' and explicitly against 'grotesque modernism.' Men'shikova's use of these models reinforces the intuition that Bakhtin's insights about the carnival and the grotesque body can be productively applied to all grotesque literatures. Furthermore, Men'shikova's emphasis on the authorial 'consciousness' over Platt's interest in discursive collisions underscores the fact that grotesque literature accommodates a number of methodological approaches – each shedding light on a unique aspect of the literature under review, and, more generally, a unique facet of the grotesque itself.

In an omission characteristic of the extant scholarship, both Men'shikova and Platt do little to address the existence of a rich body of grotesque Russian literature and theory emerging before the revolution that informs what happens later. In excluding pre-revolutionary 20th-century works from their theoretical models, these scholars neglect the complex web of historical and cultural impulses leading to the influx of grotesque literature in Russia post-1917. In the following chapters, I aim to build on the robust theoretical foundation established by both Platt and Men'shikova, and, in so doing, I hope to problematize the narrative of a spontaneously emerging post-revolutionary grotesque literature. Instead, I will attempt to unite pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary grotesque under the singular banner of 'grotesque modernism' and demonstrate the formal properties shared by the grotesque literature of both periods.

Defining the Grotesque

As we can see, there is still no universal, accepted definition of 'the grotesque' – and it has become almost customary to lament, as Kayser put it, 'the somewhat sketchy etymological history of the word.' In the work of the theorists – from Hugo to Bakhtin – the grotesque's many 'faces' are described in detail, but there is a looseness to their explicit definitions that does not suit formalist-leaning analysis of grotesque modernism. However, this is not to say that one cannot derive an implicit definition from their work with careful study of their methodology and flagship examples. To arrive at a single, unified definition, I synthesized the theorists' insights – taking special care to integrate points of confluence, and to be skeptical of idiosyncratic, outlying ideas.

The following is the result of these attempts at synthesis. There is nothing in the formula that is fundamentally 'new,' and, if there were, it would probably be a distortion of the term. The goal is one of specificity and refinement – to understand the notion of the 'grotesque' as an artistic device with constant, predictable formal and structural features.

The Structure of the Grotesque

1. The grotesque requires the localization of two or more ostensibly incongruous elements into a single system, body, or image, or – to use an appropriately general term – into a single entity that will be referred to as a 'site'. The incongruity is best understood as a 'невязка' (*nevyazka*) – adapting Yuri Tynianov's conceptual tool – because the term captures both the incongruity of disparate elements *and* their paradoxical inclusion into a single 'site'.
2. The incongruity (*nevyazka*) will not evoke the grotesque unless the internal incongruity is between a privileged inner facet that is interpreted by the perceiving subject as

representing a 'high' value and another inner facet that is interpreted as representing a 'low' value, which appreciably distorts or profanes the 'high' value facet.

3. The grotesque is evoked when the presence of an incongruity between the 'high' value facet and the distorting 'low' value facet *estranges* the 'site' for the perceiving subject. Generally, grotesque estrangement is a result of various techniques – embellishments, exaggerations, fragmentations, distortions etc. – that draw attention to the divisions between the incongruous facets within the site.

Although components of these claims are found in the work of the aforementioned theorists, they would benefit from additional elaboration and a defense against potential objections. Moreover, all three postulates are interconnected in various ways and listing them as three separate elements risks concealing these connections.

First, a word about the idea of the 'site' of the grotesque. The description of what may constitute a singular 'site' is intentionally and categorically broad. By 'site,' I mean a single place or context, where the two ostensibly incompatible elements coexist. Grotesque incongruity cannot exist without a single chronotope or other discursive entity (speech genre, utterance, scene) circumscribing the site's individual facets – incongruous among themselves, forcing them to coexist with each other. Two individual elements divided into two distinct 'sites' will cause no incongruity no matter how contradictory the elements may be.[37] Although the grotesque is

[37] It might be instructive to analyze the cases of a single painting and a gallery painting. In the study of painting, the entire space of the canvas is most often the 'site,' but, if the single painting has discernable subsections - a 'gallery painting' in the style of David Teniers the Younger, for example - a 'site' might even be a single subsection of the whole (one of the 'paintings' inside the whole). A triptych – Bosch's "The Garden of Earthly Delights," for example – despite the separation of canvases, can and often will be perceived as a single 'site.' Perhaps one might find the two leftmost panels, covered with greenery, grotesquely incongruous with the hellish rightmost panel. (By combining the horizon line in all three panels, Bosch gives viewers a perceptual aid to help them see all three as a single site.) Moreover, one of the individual panels might be perceived as a single site all by itself. Or one might

often imagined in visual terms, the 'image,' whether textual or visual, is only one such site, albeit perhaps the most common one. Theoretically a 'site' can be expanded or contracted, shaped, and adapted for almost any form of perception or discursive construction – the only essential feature is that the perceiving subject receives it as a kind of 'whole,' containing, to repeat, two or more sub-elements. In literature, the site of an incongruity can be many things: a conflicted image described in the text, a psychological incongruity within a character, a discursive incongruity in a sentence, a stylistic incongruity within a text, or anything else perceived as a conflicted whole.

The grotesque often appears through the localization of opposing binary values into the site. The simultaneous presence of diametrically opposed values – natural-unnatural, good-bad, beautiful-ugly, sacred-profane – in a single site leads to sharp, easily perceived contradictions. To be clear, this premise does not presuppose that these binary values exist in some unproblematic way independently of the text. Intentionally or unintentionally, authors invest their texts with axiological structures, and the attentive reader can detect the general axiology of the text and orient themselves to the meaning of the various textual elements that are operating within it.

The distortion of the 'high' value facet by the 'low' value facet (described in the second postulate) is generally the means by which the estrangement occurs. Though, it must be noted that both facets undergo a certain kind of distortion by virtue of their interaction within the site. Here, too, there is no claim to absolute values – absolute 'highs' or absolute 'lows' – embedded in the definition. Texts create their own local axiological systems, and grotesque images are

look to one specific image in one of the panels – the two ears and phallically erect knife in the rightmost panel, for instance – and find the incongruity between ears and testicles grotesque in just that single image-site. In short, what constitutes a 'site' depends heavily on context and the subject's perception; it is meant to be a broad category that can include potentially anything that is perceived as a united whole.

most often created when a text's characters, images, or discourse are as if 'torn apart' by these local axiologies.

Next, a clarification on the notion of estrangement. Due to a potential conceptual misalignment between Shklovsky's 'estrangement' and Kayser's 'estrangement,' it is necessary to qualify this term. Shklovsky's term is itself slippery. Evgenii Soshkin, in his article "The Devices of Estrangement: An Attempted Unification," finds two different meanings of 'estrangement' in Shklovsky's work: either to "break through the habitual appearance of phenomena to come to a deeper understanding of reality," and, a meaning with a slightly different emphasis, "to preserve the freshness of the outer shell of phenomena […] to represent things with reference to an act of perception that has not been infected by any causal explanations."[38] If the difficulty of perception is augmented in a text, drawing out the time it takes to digest an image, then habitual and automized phenomena are made new again for the perceiving subject. In other words, Shklovsky's estrangement belongs to the sphere of epistemology. For Kayser, estrangement is more explicitly radical. In Kayser's conceptual framework, an encounter with the grotesque *causes* what might be called ontological estrangement; it is an outcome rather than a device. The grotesque in Kayser's theory renders the world itself unfamiliar – or confusing, disorienting, hostile et cetera – the grotesque becomes the potentiator for a subject's radical disassociation from the reality they thought they understood. Any grotesque that causes estrangement as radical as Kayser's concept of the term is unquestionably grotesque. And, as Kalinin argued, Shklovsky's estrangement is not incompatible with this more radical interpretation. However, 'estrangement' as referenced in the

[38] Evgenii Soshkin, "Priemy ostraneniia: opyt unifikatsii," *NLO* 114 (2012), https://magazines.gorky.media/nlo/2012/2/priemy-ostraneniya-opyt-unifikaczii.html

third postulate should be understood to originate in the epistemic meaning. Estrangement is primarily a device that refers to the way a particular site is presented, to the particular component-facets of the site's content that are highlighted, exaggerated, obscured etc. based on how they are rendered.

The grotesque is generated most effectively when the encounter of the incompatible facets is palpable and even jarring. 'Sites' with a sizable number of distinct facets tend to muddy the water, creating a din of potential meanings and making it difficult to feel the poignant punch that a direct, one-versus-one opposition often invokes. Therefore, in the majority of cases, the grotesque appears when the ostensibly paradoxical 'incongruity' is primarily between **only two** facets. As noted above, the two incongruous facets are often positioned against each other in a traditional binary pair, i.e., natural-unnatural, good-evil, sanity-insanity etc. However, although this is a tendency, it is by no means a rule.

Although in the following chapters I will focus my attention on textual manifestations of the grotesque, a sample example will be in painting for the sake of visual immediacy.

Reflect on the popular folk image of the mermaid. The prototypical mermaid meets the first two criteria of our formula: there is a potential *nevyazka* between its human nature and its fish nature. Moreover, as is traditional in the dissonance between man and animal, the elegant female head and torso (+) are presumably privileged over the tail of the fish (-). Why then do we not reach for the word 'grotesque' when imagining the prototypical mermaid? Consider, for a concrete visual example, the painting of John William Waterhouse titled "A Mermaid," a prototypical rendering of the creature. Since the mermaid is such a ubiquitous part of popular mythology, almost all of us have been exposed to the fantastic creature enough that it has become quotidian and familiar. It is almost as if it has become its own creature – not a hybrid of

woman and fish, but a separate creature in its own right. Moreover, the image preserves the intuitive hierarchy of human (in the upper-sphere of the body, at the seat of consciousness), over fish (occupying the lower-sphere of the body). However, it is enough to reverse the order of the mermaid's features – as Belgian surrealist René Magritte does in his famous painting "Collective Invention," depicting a creature with a woman's legs and a fish's head and torso – and the grotesque potentiality of woman/fish hybridity is made clear again. In general terms, if a grotesque phenomenon has become ubiquitous enough, if it incapable of estranging the viewers gaze or imagination, of forcing the viewer to take inventory of the phenomenon's individual parts and the relationship between them, then it will lose its subjective grotesque impact. However, there are ways to make traditional mermaids grotesque again – the artist just needs to reevoke the hybrid incongruity between the human and fish facets of the figure. For instance, in the 2019 film *The Lighthouse*, director Robert Eggers has a mad lighthouse keeper fall in love with a mermaid while stranded on a remote New England outpost. In one hallucinatory scene between them, a shot of the mermaid's genitals, apparently modeled after a female shark's, appears on screen for only a moment – but that is enough to re-estrange the mermaid. The digestible idea of 'mermaid' – familiarized by our encounters with the denatured creature in popular mythology – becomes profoundly alien, and the apparent unity of the mermaid is destroyed, re-creating the 'fishwoman,' a bi-partite, hybrid creature. A grotesque.

The comparative discussion of the mermaid and 'reverse mermaid' as it pertains to Waterhouse's and Magritte's paintings provides a preliminary example of the fundamental difference between romantic and modernist grotesque modes. Though Waterhouse's "The Mermaid" was created in 1900, it was explicitly inspired by the 1830 poem "The Mermaid," written by the romantic poet Alfred Lord Tennyson. As Tennyson's poem anticipates, the

prototypical mermaid is compelling to the romantic mind because it expresses the latent danger in the allure of beautiful women: "All the mermen under the sea / Would feel their immortality / Die in their hearts for the love of me."[39] The mermaid's beautiful body, with the accent on her fine hair – "Who would be / A mermaid fair / Singing alone / Combing her hair" – accentuates feminine beauty as temptation, but her tail and dwelling under the water affirms the latent chthonic pact that accompanies any relationship with her. The lover's pursuit ends in a drowning – the sex and death drive are acted out concurrently. The enthralling nature of the romantic creature itself conceals what is otherwise a relatively straightforward axiological hierarchy.

Magritte's modernist reimagining of the mermaid scrambles the romantic image, compromising the latter's relatively simple axiological orientation. In Waterhouse's traditional mermaid, the upper stratum of the body – including the mind, the seat of rationality – corresponds with the 'high'-coded human features. Accordingly, the lower stratum of the body corresponded with the 'low'-coded features of a fish. Magritte's inversion does not simply lead to an inverted axiology – it is more complicated than 'high becomes low, and low becomes high.' The upper stratum of the inverted mermaid's body still retains something of its privledged status as the site of the intellect, but it is significantly descecrated by the 'low' nature of the fishhead (and the implied dull, fish-like intellect). Likewise, the lower stratum of the body retains something of its profane nature as the site of excretion, the site of procreation, the site furthest away from the brain. However, this 'low' sphere is elevated by the fact that it bears the mark of the human; the legs and waist are the only thing keeping Magritte's reverse mermaid from becoming a simple fish. The modernist mermaid still relies on the same combinatory play

[39] Alfred Tennyson, "The Mermaid," in Tennyson Poems Published in 1842, ed. A. M. D. Hughes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914), page 44-45, lines 1-30.

of high and low and of human and fish as the romantic mermaid – but the former emerges as far and away the more ambiguous image. After all, if it was a fairly easy interpretive operation to decode the romantic mermaid, the same cannot be said of its modernist counterpart.

How does one make sense of the mermaids in Magritte's painting? There is something undeniably comic about Magritte's ugly inversion – privledging the fish – acting as a kind of desceration of the traditional mermaid's prototypical beauty. The image's denial of the mermaid's traditional human intellect also gestures towards the comic. However, in the way Magritte portrays the two fishpeople together – sitting on a rock, leaning against one another in a display of anthropomorphic intimacy, staring into the sky preoccupied by who know what kind of thoughts – one detects something existential, tragic. The viewer quickly finds that it is impossible to ascribe a satisfactory 'meaning' to Magritte's tragicomic pair; the fundamental ambiguity of the image resists it. If the romantic mermaid was dualistic, the modernist mermaid is emphatically non-monistic – suggestive of a plurality of competing, even contradictory meanings. The modernist era's penchant for resisting monistic and dualistic interpretive schema, I argue, makes it especially fertile ground for grotesque imagry.

Next Steps: Towards a Modernist Grotesque

In formulating a general hypothesis about the grotesque's structure, I have attempted to create a definition that can be used to understand the grotesque as a formal device. Next, I will attempt to move from this general definition to a conceptual understanding of the specifically *modernist grotesque.* Through my analysis of both pre- and post-revolutionary Russian literature, I will demonstrate how the grotesque, especially in its problematizing, deconstructive paradigm, depicts the ambiguities, contradictions, and paradoxes of the modernist era.

The definition of 'modernism' that undergirds my treatment of Russia's grotesque modernist movement is deliberately capacious. Modernism, as an artistic movement, owes its genesis to the expansion and development of modernity – but the relationality between the two is not as straightforward as the nomenclature suggests. In Marshall Berman's *All That is Solid Melts into Air,* one finds a broad definition of modernity – one that accords well with the nebulousness of the episteme itself: "[Modernity is] any attempt by modern men and women to become subjects as well as objects of modernization, to get a grip on the modern world and make themselves at home in it."[40] However, without a more refined understanding of what is meant by 'modernization' and 'the modern world,' the definition risks becoming circular. For Berman, modernity shares in the grotesque's oscillation between duality and singularity: "Modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish."[41] Although still not entirely precise, Berman's emphasis on disunity belies a broader tendency in the academic literature on modernity: though scholars and critics disagree on the exact moment of its inception, and the exact causes for its ascendency, nearly all converge on the idea that it is a response to broader cultural, sociopolitical, scientific, or philosophical transformations.

In his *Modernity versus Postmodernity*, Jurgen Habermas gives a more detailed account of modernity's genesis: "The project of modernity formulated in the 18th century by the philosophers of the Enlightenment consisted in their efforts to develop objective science,

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[40] Berman, Marshall, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), 5.

[41] Ibid., 15.

universal morality and law, and autonomous art, according to their inner logic. At the same time, this project intended to release the cognitive potentials of each of these domains to set them free from their esoteric forms. The Enlightenment philosophers wanted to utilize this accumulation of specialized culture for the enrichment of everyday life, that is to say, for the rational organization of everyday social life."[42] The Enlightenment's 'modern' orientation and its willingness to dispense with the epistemological authorities of antiquity signaled a monumental sea change in the West's relationship to the past and the future. Habermas gives an account that is highly suggestive as to how this emphatically 'modern' cultural paradigm shift eventually gives rise to the 'modernist' artistic movement:

> This most recent modernism simply makes an abstract opposition between tradition and the present; and we are, in a way, still the contemporaries of that kind of aesthetic modernity which first appeared in the midst of the 19th century. Since then, the distinguishing mark of works, which count as modern, is the 'new.' […] The emphatically modern document no longer borrows [the] power of being a classic from the authority of a past epoch; instead, a modern work becomes a classic because it has once been authentically modern."[43]

This novelty-obsessed phase of modernity, as Habermas describes it, demanded the kind of radical and continuous experimentation that came to define modernist art. The preoccupation with 'the new' came with a completely different temporal orientation – the weight of the past is replaced by a fixation with the unfolding future. An artist, to be truly modern, needed to capture the elements of modern life that genuinely separated it from past epochs. The rapid pace of sociocultural, political, and economic transformations and paradigm crises in the late 19th and early 20th century gave these artists plenty of fodder to work with, especially in Russia.

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[42] Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity versus Postmodernity," *New German Critique,* trans. Seyla Ben-Habib, no. 22, Special Issue on Modernism (Winter, 1981*)*: 9.

[43] Habermas, "Modernity versus Postmodernity," 4.

Modernism, by all accounts, is the art of crisis. Pericles Lewis, in his *Introduction to Modernism* , evokes a number of late 19th century artists who felt the oncoming of culture of crisis, including the poet Stephane Mallarme writing of a 'crisis in verse,' and the playwright August Strindberg writing of a 'theatrical crisis.' This cultural geist carried into the early 20th century with prominent figures like Walter Benjamin "identifying a 'crisis of artistic reproduction' that corresponded to a 'crisis of perception itself.'" For Lewis, the manifold crises of the modern age triggered a corresponding 'crisis of representation' in late-19th and early-20th century cultural production – a crisis catalyzed by corresponding sociopolitical, economic, scientific and philosophical crises sweeping Europe. In the modernist period, Lewis affirms, "the crisis of representation becomes permanent."[44] Given the grotesque's affinity for moments of paradigm crisis, it is little wonder that modernist artistic output is so rife with monstrous incongruities.

Although Lewis's attention is focused on a broader European context, his assertion that the modernist period marked the era of 'permanent crisis' can be applied wholesale to Russian culture. The calamaties endured by the country in the first decade of the 20th century were manifold: an inglorious defeat in the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-1905, accompanied by the events of Bloody Sunday in January of 1905. The capitulations offered in the October Manifesto and subsequent Russian Constitution of 1906 were widely understood to be temporary compromises, calculated to quell the unrest of the 1905 Russian Revolution. The outbreak of the WWI and the Russian Civil War – to say nothing of the 1917 revolutions – only added to the impression that Russia's 20th century was to be rife with sociopolitical catastrophe.

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[44] Lewis, Pericles. *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2-6.

The 'crisis of representation' took hold in Russia as it did in Western Europe. In his introduction to *Cultural Mythologies of Russian Modernism: From the Golden Age to the Silver Age*, Boris Gasparov speaks to this sense of rupture: "Modernist culture [in Russia] did not view itself as the most recent historical 'stage,' but rather as an eschatological and messianistic 'phenomenon,' which was conferring new (and perhaps ultimate) meaning on the entire course of 'history' and on all of history's preceding development."[45] Gasparov highlights an important circumstance that will often reappear across this work – that Russian modernism most often borrowed from, and innovated on, Russian romantic literary production: "In its battle against Positivism and Naturalism – the reigning artistic trends of the late nineteenth century – the age of Modernism invoked many values characteristic of the Romantic era and in this sense bore 'Neo-Romantic' traits." However, "Modernism breathed new life into the romantic cult of the creative personality and of the artist's messianic calling. […] Where the Romantic artist 'fled from the quotidian to serve his creative calling, the Modernist artist refused to live in historical time at all. Every moment of the Modernist artist's life was seen as a synthetic creative act that occurred in a paradigmatic time where all his potential symbolic reflections were mythologically copresent."[46] In other words, the perpetual torrent of paradigm crises afflicting Russian life in the early 20th century gave the era a sense of eschatological finality. In the midst of this historical rupture, haunted by the sense that tradition held little, if any meaning for the present, it is little wonder that artists preoccupied themselves with creating ambiguous, unfinalizable, non-monistic artistic worlds. The present itself resisted interpretation.

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[45] Boris Gasparov, "The 'Golden Age' and its Role in the Cultural Mythology of Russian Modernism," in *Cultural Mythologies of Russian Modernism: From the Golden Age to the Silver Age,* ed. Boris Gasparov, Robert P. Hughes, and Irina Paperno (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 2.

[46] Ibid., 4-5.

Dissertation Outline: General Structure

In my first chapter, *The Prerevolutionary Grotesque – Monsters of the Modern Age*, I open with an examination of Andrei Bely's reappropriation of Pushkin's image of *the Bronze Horseman* in the novel *Petersburg* as the symbol par excellence of Russia's prerevolutionary paradigm crisis. Though Bely's horseman – a visual representation of the precarious balance between order and chaos in early 20th century Russia – is of abstract, almost cosmic significance, I try to show that analogous, though much more localized conceptual fissures run through many grotesque literary works of Bely's contemporaries. Khlebnikov's poem *The Crane*, for example, reveals the explosive chaotic potential and steep human cost of Saint Petersburg's initiatives to establish a Westernized, industrialized order. Then, I argue that modernism itself is largely defined by its attempts to grapple with the same kinds of discontinuities identified by Bely and Khlebnikov. Modernist literature is naturally preoccupied with the incongruities of 'modern life' – forced upon subjects in the general sociocultural and economic push to be 'modern.' Because Russian life was affected by a number of culturally traumatic, paradigm-shifting events – the Revolution of 1905, the Russo-Japanese War, and World War One – concurrently with a more global shift towards modernity, the sociocultural incongruities and discontinuities that came to define Russian grotesque modernism begin to appear very early in the 20th century – well before the 1917 Revolutions. To demonstrate how these sociocultural shifts reverberated through the literary landscape, ultimately giving rise to a new movement of grotesque literature – 'grotesque modernism' – I examine three texts from this burgeoning style: Fyodor Sologub's *Petty Demon*, Andrei Bely's *Petersburg*, and Evgenii Zamyatin's *At World's End*. *Petty Demon*, I argue, begins as a text of grotesque realism, and, descending into insanity with the text's protagonist Peredonov, ends an explosive work of grotesque modernism. Sologub's novel discovers the

untended unconscious of the provincial mind and reels in horror at its destructive envy, its ruthlessly unrestrained desire, and its vicious sexual urges. Bely's *Petersburg* sees the faceless, unconscious masses seeping into Petersburg – the rational seat of the Russian body politic's mind – like a thick green miasma. For Bely, the grand war between order and chaos tears nearly all of *Petersburg's* 'sites' asunder –the bodies and minds of his characters, Russia's northern capital, and the very cosmos itself. The grandeur of the text's totalizing upheaval causes a 'sublime grotesque' aesthetic, a style that is uniquely suited to Bely's symbolist poetics. Zamyatin's *At World's End* paints a bleak picture of Russia's far-Eastern military outposts. Far from any locus of power or order, the men and women of Zamyatin's outpost – guided by a frog chef moonlighting as a general – devolve into monstrous, animalistic hybrids. Schmidt – a lieutenant who clings to a desire to maintain order and his own dignity – is destroyed in the attempt to resist the bestial influence of the other soldiers. Written in the aftermath of Russia's loss against Japan in 1905, it is no wonder that Zamyatin's novella was censored upon publication.

The analysis of Khlebnikov, Sologub, Zamyatin, and Bely reveals two modalities or strategies of grotesque representation: grotesque polarity and grotesque hybridity. In short, the difference between polarity and hybridity is made manifest through a difference in the relationality of the two (or more) internal terms causing the incongruity in the grotesque 'site'. Polarity arises when the two internal impulses are at complete odds with one another, when there is a rejection of the possibility of synthesis in favor of a futile pulling apart of the internal impulses. Polarity relies on an intentional segregation of these two internal forces, rather than an attempted integration. If polarity relies on the internal forces of the site pulling away from one another (a segregation doomed to fail), then hybridity is an expression of just the opposite – an

attempt to integrate the incompatible internal impulses. Grotesque hybridity arises when *integration attempts* fail – when attempts to resolve internal conflict create monsters instead. In fact, the monster is the emblematic creature of grotesque hybridity. The thorny, and perhaps tragic, consequence of failed integration arises from the fact that the incompatible impulses are still trapped within one site, and so the site must go on existing at odds with itself – not so painful for a painting, but a different matter entirely for a human being.

Equipped with this set of new tools for analyzing the grotesque, and a sense of the various incongruities in prerevolutionary life that motivated a rise in grotesque literary representation, I move to the postrevolutionary period. The postrevolutionary grotesque section of my dissertation includes four extended close readings on a selection of texts that highlight uniquely post-revolutionary sociocultural discontinuities, and see authors utilizing grotesque polarity and hybridity to represent them: Evgenii Shvarts's *The Shadow* (*Тень*, 1939), Konstantin Vaginov's *Goat Song* (*Козлиная песнь, 1926*), Mikhail Zoshchenko's *Michel Sinyagin* (*Мишель Синягин*, 1930) and Andrei Platonov's *Juvenile Sea* (*Ювенильное море,* 1931).

I have avoided a simple chronologic approach to my material in favor of a chapter sequencing that highlights particularities of the two modalities of grotesque representation. The first two chapters are explore more straightforward manifestations of my two primary grotesque modalities: polarity (*The Shadow*) and hybridity (*Goat Song*). The latter two chapters on *Michel Sinyagin* and *Juvenile Sea* explore texts where the use of these grotesque modalities are more ambiguous than in the former two. As I will argue, Zoshchenko and Platonov's work employs aesthetic devices of grotesque polarity and hybridity simultaneously, at times destabilizing the modalities themselves in the process. This movement from simple to complex is meant to affirm

the existence of these two modalities while also highlighting their eventual failure in more ambiguous, marginal cases.

The analysis of postrevolutionary grotesque modernism begins with Evgenii Shvarts, who extensively makes use of the less intuitive modality – polarization – in his play *The Shadow*. First, I examine the trope in popular Romantic literature – Hoffmann's *Devil's Elixirs*, Poe's "William Wilson," and Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde* – and demonstrate that the trope of 'the double' arises from a failed segregation of one part of the self from another. Then, anticipating Shvarts's dialogue with Hans Christian Andersen, I perform a close reading of the latter's fairytale – also titled "The Shadow." The chapter ends with an extended analysis of Shvarts's *Shadow* – revealing how the author's tragicomic modernist implementation of the doubling trope differs from the largely tragic romantic examples explored previously in the chapter, especially Andersen's work. *The Shadow*, I argue, is full of characters at odds with themselves, trying to negotiate their moral position in relation to abusive state power – many desiring to live at peace with their conscience, but very few willing to accept the ramifications of actually doing so.

The second chapter on the postrevolutionary grotesque moves to an analysis of Konstantin Vaginov's *Goat Song*. The novel's protagonist, Teptyolkin, illustrates a move from grotesque polarity, caused by a neurotic cultural project that blinds him to Soviet life, to grotesque hybridity, an (ultimately unsuccessful) attempt to abandon his former aspirations and make peace with the world around him. *Goat Song*, I argue, reveals the monstrous potential of conformity – a particularly salient lesson for the intelligentsia in the late 20s – but also the cruel catch-22 of trying to navigate a culture that is wholly alien to the self. Moreover – to emphasize the novel's affinity with grotesque hybridity and to capture Vaginov's sophisticated textual gamesmanship – I shine a light on how *Goat Song's* profane, comically-oriented author-narrator

engages in a complex process of co-creation with his tragic characters. In this way, Vaginov's novel operates in the tragicomic, ambivalent space between condemnation of, and sympathy for its characters.

The third and fourth chapters, on Mikhail Zoshchenko's *Michel Sinyagin* and Andrei Platonov's *Juvenile Sea*, continue to show the versatility of grotesque polarization and hybridity as artistic tools for representing other aspects of the postrevolutionary paradigm crisis.

The chapter on *Michel Sinyagin* explores how parody can be productively interpreted through the lens of the grotesque. Zoshchenko's novella, I argue, is transparently derisive in relation to its out-of-touch titular character, a naïve, painfully talentless Symbolist poet trying to live a bohemian life in post-revolutionary Leningrad. However, a reading of the narrator reveals an authorial type just as absurd as Sinyagin. Zoshchenko exploits grotesque discursive collisions to maximum effect – to allow him to mock and denigrate the still non-existent Red Karamzins and Red Tolstoys being promoted by contemporary theorists as the ideal Soviet writer. Zoshchenko's narrative performance, I argue, sees him utilizing a potent form of subversive affirmation, a technique called 'overidentification' that fits well within the grotesque polarization paradigm.

In the final close reading chapter, an analysis of Andrei Platonov's *Juvenile Sea*, I argue that a short scene in the novella involving the monstrous kulak Comrade Sacred (*Tovarishch Sviashchennyi*) provides a key to understanding the whole of the work. Using the theory of René Girard, I claim that Platonov transforms the character Comrade Sacred into an ideal scapegoat – a paragon of relentless consumption, sabotage, decay, and death. Platonov stages the death of this infinitely consuming body – a symbolic 'liquidation of kulaks' – in order to stage its replacement with the body of the novel's vigorous protagonist, Bostaloeva. In stark contrast to

Comrade Sacred, Bostaloeva is a bountifully producing body – creating not organic life, but the building supplies needed to construct Communism. The meaning of Comrade Sacred's consuming body and Bostaloeva's producing body – along with the significance of the novella's sacrificial gesture – can best be understood through the lens of the Bakhtin's 'grotesque body' chronotope and its creating/destroying bipartite structure. Once the kulak threat is destroyed, the novella transforms from a bleak production story into a utopian Communist fairytale. *Juvenile Sea's* unrestrained optimism about the imminent arrival of Russia's long awaited utopia once the kulak threat is destroyed is another expression of subversive affirmation – casting doubt on the notion that 'class enemies' are singlehandedly hindering the Soviet drive to progress. The killing is merely a ritual one participates in to affirm one's belonging to the community.

The grotesque – and the modalities of polarization and hybridization – were exceptionally effective in authors' attempts to dramatize the large-scale discontinuities and contradictions of modernity as they tore through Russia's sociocultural fabric, disuniting the minds and reshaping the bodies of Russian subjects. My survey of the grotesque modernist movement is an attempt to articulate the heuristic potential of grotesque 'hybridity' and 'polarization,' and, more broadly, of grotesque modernism as a self-sufficient artistic system.

CHAPTER ONE:

The Prerevolutionary Grotesque – Monsters of the Modern Age

Prelude: Andrei Bely's Teetering Steed as the Symbol of Russia's Prerevolutionary Paradigm Crisis

Early in the 20th century's tumultuous second decade, Andrei Bely writes *Petersburg* (1913) depicting Russia at a moment of great national strain. In the novel, he reimagines one of the northern capital's most prominent symbols, the Bronze Horseman monument.

The image is a potent one, not only as the image-centerpiece of Bely's novel and the symbolic drama that occupies it, but also as an emblem of prerevolutionary Russia in paradigm crisis. Bely's treatment of the monument can provide insight into the incongruities that suffused the prerevolutionary period of Russian literature, especially those that helped shape the conceptual concerns that came to define much of the era's grotesque modernist art:

> From that fraught time when the metal Horseman came tearing along to this place, when He settled his steed on the Finnish granite – Russia was split into two; and the fatherland and fate itself were also hewn in two; and so, divided in two, through suffering and tears, till its final hour – Russia.
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> […]
>
> You, Russia, are like a steed! Your two front hooves have ascended far into darkness, the abyss; and your two hind legs are set deeply into the granite foundation.
> Once reared up on his hinds, sizing up the air with his eyes, the bronze steed will not lower himself again: the leap over history – will be; and great will be the trembling; the earth will tear itself open; and even the mountains will be crushed by that great *earthquake*.
>
> […]
>
> When those days come, all the tribes of the world will abandon their homes; a great war will commence, - war, unlike the world has ever seen […] the European plains will run red with oceans of blood.[47]

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[47] Andrei Bely, *Peterburg: Roman v vos'mi glavakh c prologom i epilogom,* in *Sobranie sochinenii,* edited by V. M. Piskunov (Moskva: Respublika, 1994), 75**:** "С той чреватой поры, как примчался к невскому берегу

Bely's image finds its origin in Pushkin's immortal poem *The Bronze Horseman:* "Whither are you galloping, proud steed, / And where will you lower your hooves? / O, powerful master of fate! / Was it not thus that you, / Tightening the iron reins, reared Russia / Up on her hinds over the abyss?"[48] In this stanza, Pushkin's vision of Peter is decidedly heroic. The image seems to insist on the emperor's role as Russia's national protector, the only man capable of stopping the wild steed of Russia from galloping into the precipitous gulf of chaos.

However, *The Bronze Horseman* goes beyond the simple, valorizing interpretation suggested by the monument itself; the poem unfreezes the steed's eternal stasis to reveal that it only depicts a partial truth. What is to happen to the steed of Russia after Peter pulls it away from the abyss, planting all four hooves on stable ground?

Pushkin sees Peter build his city, Saint Petersburg, in defiance of the swamplands bordering the Gulf of Finland. And, in so doing, he opens his window to Europe – to the 'ordering' West. The city itself becomes a monument to Peter's order: a gauntlet thrown to the ever-returning forces of the eschatological, chaotic deluge that intermittently rises up in revolt against the city's granite barriers.

The impetuousness of Peter's imposition of order against nature's chaotic insurrection causes the undoing of Evgenii, Pushkin's hapless protagonist. When he finds himself caught in

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металлический Всадник, с той чреватой днями поры, как он бросил коня на финляндский серый гранит -- надвое разделилась Россия; надвое разделились и самые судьбы отечества; надвое разделилась, страдая и плача, до последнего часа -- Россия. Ты, Россия, как конь! В темноту, в пустоту занеслись два передних копыта; и крепко внедрились в гранитную почву -- два задних. […] Раз взлетев на дыбы и глазами меряя воздух, медный конь копыт не опустит: прыжок над историей -- будет; великое будет волнение; рассечется земля; самые горы обрушатся от великого т р у с а; Бросятся с мест своих в эти дни все народы земные; брань великая будет, -- брань, небывалая в мире: желтые полчища азиатов, тронувшись с насиженных мест, обагрят поля европейские океанами крови."

[48] Aleksandr Pushkin, "Mednyi vsadnik," *Stikhotvoreniia,* edited by N. Rozman (Moskva: Izd. 'E', 2017), 523-524: "Куда ты скачешь, гордый конь, / И где опустишь ты копыта? / О мощный властелин судьбы! / Не так ли ты над самой бездной / На высоте, уздой железной / Россию поднял на дыбы."

one of Petersburg's periodic floods, he bears witness to the consequences of Peter's drive to order. The result of Peter's haughty defiance of nature is predictably tragic. Evgenii finds that his bride-to-be has been swept away in the flood and goes mad. His insanity binds him to the chaotic realm of irrationality – putting him in ironic alignment with the flood itself. Evgenii encounters the statue of Peter and curses it for bringing the misfortune of his insanity upon him. Ever the enemy of insubordination against his order, the monument comes to life and chases Evgenii until he, too, has been eradicated. His corpse is eventually found floating in a derelict hut.

Although Pushkin's rendering of Peter does situate him in his role as national savior early in the poem – saving Russia from a descent into the chaotic abyss – his status as protector is compromised by the despotic imposition of order that follows. Where, if anywhere, is the reasonable middle way, the golden mean? Is there a catch-22 here? Must one suffer the whims of watery chaos or be subject to the highhanded edicts of an oppressive order? It is precisely at this impasse that Bely's image has something to add to Pushkin's poem – depicting that potential third way, but one that is nevertheless tainted with bitter historical irony.

Bely's image of the Horseman riding his steed, like the bronze monument itself, is frozen in place as if in time, and has been teetering in perilous imbalance since its creation. The monument's granite pedestal, the so-called Thunder Stone [*гром-камень*], serves as a solid foundation for steed's hooves. For Bely, this granite base indexes to Peter's westward orientation, a platform representing the rational stabilization made possible by the ideals of the European Enlightenment. Off the rock, where the steed's front two hooves are suspended, is the realm of the unknown and chaotic. Bely's version of the steed is precariously teetering over the edge of the granite. However, it has slowly been gathering the resolve to disobey the strong

hand of his master and leap into the chaotic unknown. Bely presents this as a virtual guarantee: "the leap over history – will be; […] and even the mountains will be crushed by that great *earthquake*."

The horse – the steed of Russia – still has within it a manifestation of nature's chaotic caprices. Only the tenuous loyalty to Peter and the reluctant acquiescence to his orders keeps his two hind legs planted on the Thunder Stone. In a word, Bely's steed – teetering between its desire to leap in the abyss, and the staying power of Peter's strong guiding hand – is the emblem *par excellence* of an eternal battle between order and chaos.

Strange as it may be, the steed's frozen pose – his paralyzed indecision between order and chaos – may be the most tolerable stance for the Russian people. With two hooves in the air, and two in the ground, the steed becomes the manifestation of a potential 'third way.' Russia, then, avoids the fate of a second coming of the Tatar-Mongol Yoke (something Bely explicitly associates with 'chaos') – or, in an alternative vision of 'chaos,' a submergence in that watery eschatological echo of Noah's flood in Genesis – that symbolically accompanies the leap into the chasm. And yet, because the steed remains in this precarious balance, Russia avoids the temptation of outright rejecting its Asiatic past, its undeniable historical affinity with the East, in favor of a dissolution into the greater structures of European society. Settling the steed's four hooves on solid ground and letting it run free is ostensibly equivalent to that tyrannical order that Evgenii is subjected to in *The Bronze Horseman*. In either case, the most agreeable option remains the 'third way,' the way of the steed, hanging in the balance between order and chaos without letting one or the other prevail.

Bely, then, finds escape from the dire 'either/or' at play in Pushkin's poem in the uneasy synthesis of order and chaos. Looking into his treatise "Symbolism," we find that this principle

is important to the author outside of its symbolic dualism in *Petersburg*. In his characteristically recondite treatise, Bely returns to the 'order/chaos' dichotomy as it applies to the process of artistic creation. In his mind, the artist finds a balance between the chaos of fantasy and the appearance of reality in creation:

> The artist does not want to see his surroundings because the voice of eternity sings in his soul; but a voice devoid of words is chaos to the soul. For the artist, this chaos is a 'native' chaos; in the regularity of the nature outside he sees his own death, there, in the nature of appearance his wicked fate lies in wait for him. From the depths of the unconscious he closes himself from the nature of veiled fantasy; he creates fantastic images (shades), unseen in nature. With the veil of fantasy he guards himself from the world of being. […]
>
> But, having created another world, a better world, the artist sees that the world of being is created according to the image and likeness of that world; nature is a bad copy of his world, but a copy nevertheless. The fog of his dreams precipitates onto reality, washing it with the dew of creation; that native chaos begins sing for the artist in nature as well. This is the path from fantastic romanticism to the romanticism of reality; such is the fantasy of reality.[49]

While not all authors discussed in this chapter share Bely's vision of artistry, his expression does belie the tendency of many practitioners of the pre-revolutionary modernist grotesque movement to fixate their attention on the junction of order and chaos, synthesizing the concretism of empirical reality with the artifice of their flights of fantasy. This interplay Bely identifies between the real and the fantastic I will argue, is a near-constant in grotesque modernist literature. These references to the real are not meant to evoke a kind of naïve realism

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[49] Andrei Bely, "Simvolizm." *Arabski. Kniga statei. Lug zelenyi. Kniga statei*, edited by L. A Sugai (Moskva: Respublika; Dmitrii Sechin, 2012), 387-388: "Художник не хочет видеть окружающего, потому что в душе его поет голос вечного; но голос — без слова, он — хаос души. Для художника хаос этот — «родимый» хаос; в закономерности природы внешней видит он свою смерть, там, в природе видимости — подстерегает его злой рок. Из глубины бессознательного закрывается он от природы завесой фантазии; создает причудливые образы (тени), не встречаемые в природе. Миром фантазии огораживается он от мира бытия […]Но, создав иной мир, лучший, художник видит, что по образу и подобию этого мира построен мир бытия; природа — плохая копия его мира, но все же копия. Туман его грез осаждается на действительность, омывает ее росой творчества; родимый хаос начинает петь для него и в природе. Таков путь фантастического романтизма к романтизму реальности; такова фантастика реальности."

in my analysis; the real, Bely claims, is created by fantasy, in the process of artistic creation. The primacy of creation over appearances allows the artists to bend these appearances to his will; he can attempt to make them 'mean' anything by constructing them as he pleases. In the role of the creator, the artist – the author – can *create* the non-monistic world, a space where conventional meaning is undermined and destabilized, where things are in conflict with themselves and 'mean' more than one thing.

Although the grotesque tends to be made manifest by various incongruities, Bely's work encourages us to look not only to *the fact* of incongruity, but to how the incongruity is actually playing itself out. In this case, is the watery eschaton desecrating the order of Peter and his city, or is Petersburg's concrete infringing on nature's domain? As with Bely's monument – stuck on its hinds, delving neither into tyrannical order nor into the destructive realm of chaos – the most agreeable resolutions accompany the balance of irreconcilable values. However – especially in art seeking to capture periods of great disorder and turmoil – moments of balance and 'happy mediums' are exceedingly rare. The grotesque often arises when one of the forces begins to overtake and subdue the other.

When this balance is disturbed in the creations of artistic fantasy, the imbalance becomes reflected and embodied by those that inhabit that world. Since, as Bely states, there is a relationship between the artist's fantasy and the world of being itself, these imbalances are acutely felt by the reader. I will argue that these imbalances are particularly noticeable when political, economic, and social indeterminacy, contradictions, and incongruities are embodied in the population itself by means of the artist's fantasy. Moreover, the incongruities at the heart of a text can be intuited through careful analysis of the grotesque imagery therein. The grotesque elements of a text, in this way, gesture to sets of what I will term 'fracture points,' or conceptual

tensions/incongruities pervading the text that do not always find overt explication in the text itself. Bely's image of the Bronze Horseman reveals this conceptual fracturing at work. According to the logic of the image, the monument *is* the force that 'split Russia into two' – i.e., severed its fabric between the forces of chaos and order, setting itself on its hinds to maintain the balance among them. Moreover, the teetering steed is the product of Bely treating the widespread sense of political tension and historical indeterminism as a wedge, which he drives into one of the most fundamental symbols of Russian national development. The result is a dualism in the object itself between the stable granite foundation of a centuries old political dynasty, and the great chaotic unknown that awaits should the steed overcome the will of its rider and *leap*.

In my analysis of the grotesque modernist literature of Russia in the prerevolutionary period, I will discuss Velimir Khlebnikov's *Crane (Журавль, 1909),* Fyodor Sologub's *The Petty Demon (Мелкий Бес, 1905),* Andrei Bely's *Petersburg (Петербург, 1913),* and Evgenii Zamyatin's *At World's End (На куличках, 1914).* In each of these works, the fragile balance of order and chaos will play a central role. These texts not only highlight the madness of unfettered chaos, but also reveal the tyranny of absolute order. Finding a balance between the forces of order and chaos will prove a difficult task, as the impulse will always remain to embrace wholeheartedly one or the other. As with the monument, the eternal struggle of these elemental forces will often play out in localized sites, most often finding expression in the minds and bodies of the text's characters.

Prelude Two: Unmasking the Realm of Appearances – The Grotesque of Velimir Khlebnikov's Crane

Stepping away from the conceptual monumentalism of Bely's teetering steed still leaves us on the streets of Petersburg, where Velimir Khlebnikov's *The Crane* (1909) will continue to disclose the defining prerevolutionary conceptual divide of order and chaos. Velimir Khlebnikov's poem pulls off the mask of Petersburg's inert appearance, revealing a terrifying vision of the city's hidden grotesque face. Khlebnikov's crane, alongside Bely's steed, is an emblem of its epoch. Exploring its meaning will help set the scene before a more abstract, conceptual analysis of the prerevolutionary period can begin.

Written in 1909 on the occasion of Futurist poet Velimir Khlebnikov's first encounter with the urban sprawl of Saint Petersburg,[50] *Crane* is a salient test-case of the explosive grotesque potential that accompanies the unstable coexistence of order and chaos in the city of Petersburg. In spite of all Khlebnikov's inventiveness, here, of course, he is strongly grounded in a longstanding Russian literary tradition. Khlebnikov joins a line of likeminded, Slavophilic artists who feel a certain tyrannical, unnatural, and anti-Slavic spirit in the so-called 'window to Europe.' Alexander Herzen, in his essay "Moscow and Petersburg," provides a prototypical account of this feeling: "In the fate of Petersburg there is something tragic, dark, and grand. It is the favorite child of the northern giant […] renouncing his country for his own good, and oppressing it in the name of Europeanism and civilization."[51] Ivan Aksakov, one of 19th century Russia's prominent Slavophiles, writes, "The first condition for freeing in oneself the imprisoned

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[50] S.V. Starkina, "Kommentarii." *Serdtse recharia*, edited by S. V. Starkina (Sankt-Peterburg: Vita Nova, 2009), 537.

[51] Aleksandr Gertsen. "Moskva I Peterburg," in Vol 3 of *Sochineniia* (Geneva: H. Georg, Libraire-éditeur, 1878), 285. В судьбе Петербурга есть что-то трагическое, мрачное и величественное. Это любимое дитя северного великана […] любимое дитя царя, отрекшегося от своей страны для ее пользы и угнетавшего ее во имя европеизма и цивилизации.

feeling of the national ethos is to hate Petersburg with all your heart and all of your thoughts."[52] And Khlebnikov, himself an adherent of the Slavophiles, echoes these sentiments in a letter sent home shortly after his arrival into the city in November 1908, "Petersburg is acts as a good draft and cools everything. Frozen, too, are my Slavic sympathies."[53] In these sentiments, perhaps, one senses the instinctive rejection of the unnatural tyranny of order imposed by Peter. Indeed, Khlebnikov's *The Crane* does reject the impulse to adopt 'Western' cultural models that are supposedly on the side of 'order.' However, he is not content to portray order and chaos as two distinct categories; drawing on the tradition of the 'Petersburg text,' Khebnikov shows that the chaotic eschaton is paradoxically embedded in the very notion of order itself.

As the first several scenes of *Crane* unfold, Khlebnikov depicts the signifiers of Petersburg's industrialized world in revolt against the human beings they are theoretically meant to serve. The city's smokestacks and pipework begin to twist free from factories of their own accord, casting shadows over the city reminiscent of 'a sorcerer playing shadow games with his fingers.' Iron railroad tracks and even the train cars are ripped apart and pulled by some unknown force to assist in the construction of an iron giant that is beginning to take shape. The metal framework of the city is uprooted by this strange gravitational pull. Buildings are ripped apart, bridges are torn free – and it isn't long before the metal creature at the epicenter of the destruction assumes its form: a monstrous iron bird, an enormous crane. The titular crane turns out to be the product of a long-hidden plan devised by 'things' (вещи): "The things were

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[52] Vladimir Toporov, "Peterburg i 'Peterburgskii tekst russkoi literatury,' in *Petersburgskii tekst russkoi literatury,* edited by N. G. Nikolaiuk (Sankt-Peterburg: Iskusstvo-SPB, 2003), 14: Первое условие для освобождения в себе пленного чувства народности — возненавидеть Петербург всем сердцем своим и всеми помыслами своими.

[53] Velimir Khlebnikov, "E. N. Khlebnikovoi," vol. 3 of *Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh,* edited by S. V. Starkina (Sankt-Peterburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2001), 319: "Петербург действует как добрый сквозняк и все выстуживает. Заморожены и мои славянские чувства."

executing some kind of ancient plan, / following an age-old scheme. / They hurried themselves along like conspirators."[54] If objects are the conspirators, then – for reasons unexplained by the poem – the deceased become their co-conspirators: "The cemetery's dead came flying to [the crane] / and dressed its iron frame with their flesh / […] / Betrayers of the living, / the corpses gloatingly jeered / and their ranks, like combatant forces, / biliously hovered over the square."[55] Their mutual purpose sees them fuse together in a terrible, unnatural hybrid creature; their fusion is unnatural, incongruous, grotesque. The monstrous crane is depicted as the consequence of man's overreliance on, and overinvestment in, the world of material things: "O man! What treacherous spirit, / at once advisor and murderer, whispered to you: / 'Pour the spirit of life into things!' / You mindlessly spilled your reason here and there, // and now you've become tributary to the cranes once again."[56] The denizens of Saint Petersburg are powerless to stop the crane. It celebrates its victory over the city with a perpetual feast of human meat, interrupted only for ecstatic fits of folk dancing. When the elders notice that it has acquired a taste for infants, they begin to take babies from mothers to offer them to the crane as tribute. And when it has finally eaten its fill, the crane is "wear[ing] the remnants of human meat on its beak," and

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[54] Velimir Khlebnikov, "Zhuravl′," in *Serdtse recharia*, edited by S. V. Starkina (Sankt-Peterburg: Vita Nova, 2009), 198: "Вещи выполняли какой-то давнишний замысел, / Следуя старинным предначертаниям. /Они торопились, как заговорщики."

[55] Ibid., 201: К нему слетались мертвецы из кладбищ / И плотью одевали остов железный […] Изменники живых, / Трупы злорадно улыбались, / И их ряды, как ряды строевых, / Над площадью желчно колебались."

[56] Ibid., 201: "О, человек! Какой коварный дух / Тебе шептал, убийца и советчик сразу: // 'Дух жизни в вещи влей!' / Ты расплескал безумно разум — / И вот ты снова данник журавлей." *Crane* is the first expression of the 'revolt of things' trope that begins to appear shortly after in the work of Khlebnikov's Futurist colleagues, especially in Mayakovsky's plays and verse. See: "Vladimir Mayakovsky," "Cloud in Trousers," and "Mystery-Buff."

proceeds to perform its final dance – "as a savage dances over his defeated foe"– and finally flies off never to be seen again.[57]

Though it lacks the deluge motif of so many other 'Petersburg texts,' Khebnikov's *Crane* is so thematically resonant with the tradition that it unquestionably deserves a place within it. Even absent the flood, *Crane* is preoccupied by the northern capital as a nexus of order and chaos. However, the manifestation of Petersburg's eschatological valence in *Crane* is decidedly modern, reworked and reinvented by Khebnikov. Vladimir Toporov, in his seminal book on the 'Petersburg text' writes that, "the eschatological myth of Petersburg is about the cosmos dissolving into chaos, the cosmos being overcome by it, and that chaos is primarily that of water."[58] Given that water is such a conspicuous absence, one must assume that its absence is a calculated artistic choice. But why does Khlebnikov exclude it?

In contrast to his forebears, whose depictions of nature's revolt against man's unnaturally imposed rational order became the hallmark of the 'Petersburg text,' Khlebnikov depicts the dwellers of the northern capital under siege by the very infrastructure built to protect them. The chaos is not represented by water; it enters Khlebnikov's poem in the guise of the supposedly 'orderly' city itself. In this way, the image undergoes an explosive self-negation, a polarized shift, a grand turnaround in its axiological significance within the tradition Khlebnikov is operating in: Petersburg's drive to order – which is supposedly a protective, defensive force against the hostility of nature – *is the most dangerous manifestation* of chaos, destruction, and death (-). Khlebnikov provides an early example of the two modalities of grotesque imagery that

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[57] Ibid., 202: "клюв одел остатками людского мяса," "так пляшет дикарь над телом побежденного врага"

[58] Ibid., 47: "Эсхатологический миф Петербурга – о том, как космос растворяется в хаосе, одолевается им, и этот хаос – по преимуществу водный"

run through the entirety of my project: monstrous hybridity (between the dead and 'things') and explosive, destabilizing polarization (extreme order *is* chaos).

If Petersburg is a kind of masked city – hiding its true 'face' behind the superficial façade of its orderliness – then *Crane* is an expression of the potential explosiveness of its unmasking. In Khlebnikov's poem, the 'mask' only stays on while the city is secretly developing towards its eschaton and comes off when it comes time for 'things' to execute their long-concealed plan. Khlebnikov accentuates the hidden danger behind the inert appearance of 'things' in the pre-cataclysmic (pre-*Crane*) period by ascribing to them the property of 'conspirators-in-hiding.' The tension between the ostensible security offered by the city's infrastructure and the carnivorous crane hiding within it serves as the underlying incongruity of the grotesque imagery in the poem. Put more simply, the unconcealment of the hidden crane ostensibly makes the poem's grotesque possible. All of the *Crane's* grotesque imagery – the crazed devouring of men, women, and children, the vengeful smile of the reanimated corpses etc. etc. – are made possible by it. This, of course, is not the equivalent of claiming that the 'protector-city vs. destroyer-crane' incongruity is the *most grotesque* image in the poem; conceptual incongruities like this one rarely generate the visceral punch that an incongruity localized in a single image does. However, I argue that it *is* the *most fundamental* incongruity within the poem itself.

Finding the core incongruity at the heart of Khlebnikov's poem serves as the point of departure for my analysis of the grotesque properties in *Crane*. The next inquiry, then, must be devoted to explaining the significance of this central tension. The image of the iron crane is said to be taken from a Kalmyk fairytale, but the form of Petersburg's infrastructural uprising is less important than the historical and political impulse that generated it.[59] The poet's unconcealing of

the modern city's dangerous hidden face, and the skepticism of 'things' in general, is the first expression in Russian Futurist poetry of the 'revolt of things' trope, later developed in Vladimir Mayakovsky's poetry, plays, and essays. The first decade of the 20th century, an era of rapid industrialization and national economic gains that left the majority of its agents poor and disenfranchised, serves as the poem's implied backdrop. Khlebnikov's titular crane acts as a physical manifestation of this dissonance, revealing the inhumanity of an industrial system that consumes the very people at the heart of it. In Mayakovsky's "Now to the Americas!" (1914), the poet reformulates a number of thematic elements in *Crane*; only now, in November 1914, the threats of the modern world seem even more alive and pressing with the advent of WWI. "[…] The peace of today is only a senseless breakfast on a lit gunpowder cellar. (After all, two years ago V. Khlebnikov wrote, plain as day, that, in 1915, man would travel the path of war and bear witness to the obliteration of nations)"; Mayakovsky continues: "Last year in my tragedy [*Vladimir Mayakovsky*], I put forth that same 'revolt of things,' which today is occurring in Wales."[60] Aside from the invocation of Khlebnikov's own name and chaos-bringing prophecies, Mayakovsky nods to his Futurist colleague by continuing the 'revolt of things' theme started in *Crane.* Moreover, by invoking Wales, Mayakovsky points both to England's recent foray into WWI, and to the rising prominence of coal strikes in the region as a response to general mistreatment of the miners, brutal, unsafe work conditions, and rising economic disparities.[61]

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[59] S. V. Starkina, "Kommentarii," in *Serdtse recharia,* edited by S. V. Starkina (Sankt-Peterburg: Vita Nova, 2009), 537: note 195.

[60] Vladimir Maiakovskii. "Teper' k Amerikam," in vol 1: Stikhotvoreniia, tragediia, poemy i stat'i of *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 13 t,* ed. V. A. Katanian (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literature, 1955-1961), 311-312: "Сегодняшний покой — только бессмысленный завтрак на подожженном пороховом погребе (ведь В. Хлебников два года назад черным по белому пропечатал, что в 1915 г. люди пойдут войною и будут свидетелями крушений государств, ведь в прошлом году в моей трагедии, шедшей в Петрограде, в театре Комиссаржевской, я дал тот самый бунт вещей, который сегодня подмечен Уэльсом)."

[61] G. R. Carter, "The Coal Strike in South Wales," *The Economic Journal* 25, no. 99 (1915): 453–65. https://doi.org/10.2307/2221909.

Mayakovsky's essay also offers an expression that may elucidate the strange detail of the crane's appetite for infants: "It's true, we had a lot of tricks to shock the bourgeois. But what are these tricks if not opposition to their wish to destroy us, and by 'us' I mean all that is young." Khlebnikov's deeply grotesque portrayal of a society feeding their young to the revolting 'things' can be understood as a condemnation of a future that would doom generation after generation to an arduous life in the physically dangerous, underregulated, materialistic spaces of the rapidly industrializing world. A more literal interpretation might look to the substantial, albeit declining, number of children under 15 still working in Russian factories throughout the 1900s.[62] In any case, *Crane* functions as an expression of the unjust incongruity at the center of Russia's increasingly successful industrialization project – an incongruity that sees the nation's upper-echelons growing wealthy from the working class's labor and their sacrifice of health and well-being.

Balking at the canonical rendition of the Petersburg tale, *Crane* sees Khlebnikov estranging the artifice of the capital city; though it was built to protect the city dwellers from the hostilities of the environment, it becomes its own elemental force of chaos. The Futurist poet's Tables of Fate (*Doski sud'by, 1922)* reveal his interest in finding mathematical relationships between the greatest tragedies in history. Mayakovsky's note about Khlebnikov's forecasting of a worldwide 'obliteration of nations' represents just one of his many predictions. Amidst the present-day preoccupations with nuclear holocausts and global climate change, it almost strikes one as given that humanity and its machinations are the most destructive force on a global scale. However, for an overwhelming period of mankind's subsistence on the planet, nature itself

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[62] Boris B. Gorshkov, *Russia's Factory Children: State, Society, and Law, 1800–1917* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 153-154. *Project MUSE* muse.jhu.edu/book/3745

played the role of the great destroyer. The recurrence of mythological and religious apocalyptic tales, like the aforementioned deluge myths, and the historical legacies of great tragedies – like the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, for instance – evidence nature's longstanding grip on the eschatological imagination of the world. Khlebnikov's poem, then, represents a paradigm shift that I see in relation to the modern era of industrial and technological advancement. Mankind, with its newfound power to exploit natural resources on a massive scale and its inexhaustible ability to invent new, inspired ways of killing one another, supplants nature as its own greatest threat. The apocalypse myth of Petersburg, also inspired by Pushkin's *Bronze Horseman,* becomes the ideal medium through which to portray the supplanting of the tale of a nature-driven deluge with skepticism about the utility of human technological progress. The corpses joining the ranks of the 'things' causes the dead to resurrect and return to earth, one of the necessary trappings of any eschatological fantasy worth its weight. The massive iron crane is the manifestation of a vengeful god – taking the form of a natural being – and the dead assist it in the judgment of the living. As I have argued, Khlebnikov's poem is an unorthodox metaphorical unmasking. Petersburg is no longer the symbol of mankind's manifestations of order against the destructive chaos of natural forces. Instead, *Crane* reveals that chaos has begun masquerading as its ostensibly ordered opposite; unchecked, it will eventually pull off the mask of its own accord, revealing itself in an event of apocalyptic violence.

This unmasking theme is especially characteristic of early, prerevolutionary grotesque modernist literature. The sociocultural move into modernity – along with the accompanying paradigm crises – leaves many of the most destructive, dangerous elements of 'what it means to be modern' to be discovered. Though later, post-revolutionary grotesque modernist texts will occasionally stage dramatic 'unmaskings' of particular conceptual incongruities, they do not

revel in the novelty of the discovery as much as the prerevolutionary texts covered in this chapter.

If one is convinced about "The Crane's" preoccupation with the destructive human cost of Russia's pursuit of industrialization, then we have derived another conceptual fracture point – 'order vs. chaos' – that finds expression not only in Khlebnikov's poem, but throughout Russia's entire prerevolutionary modernist literature. And indeed, recalling Bely's image of the teetering from the beginning of the chapter, one can see that it also evokes an apocalyptic mood driven by a broader sense of the fundamental inner-contradictions of order and chaos sewn into the fabric of the country, and the fabric of reality itself.

The Role of Core Incongruities and '(Un)Concealments' in the Grotesque

In the two preludes to this chapter, I gestured towards the importance of 'core incongruities' in the analysis of a text's grotesque properties. The primary conceptual fracture that emerged in my analysis was the incongruity between 'order' and 'chaos.'[63] This inconguity in particular will continue to define much of the prerevolutionary grotesque period. Before I move on, I believe it will be helpful to clarify a few properties regarding the concept of a 'core conceptual incongruity' in general.

It is important to stress that conceptual incongruities are not determined by their own grotesque nature. The notion of the conceptual incongruities themselves are not definitionally more or less grotesque than the images that have the incongruity localized within them. However, in practice, conceptual incongruities are nearly always less grotesque – if they are

[63] Strictly speaking, there are many other conceptual fractures that emerged in the Bely image and the Khlebnikov poem. For example, in *Crane* one might pick out the incongruity of 'animate vs inanimate,' gestured towards by the images of the dead coming to life and by the depictions of the self-aware metalwork and the crane itself.

grotesque at all – than the concrete images that represent or embody their incongruous conceptual qualities. Because images have distinct borders – i.e., they are 'bound' – they are much more sensitive to distortions than the more-or-less formless contours of concepts. However, the images that contain the incongruities are also *not necessarily* going to be grotesque – the impression caused by the incongruity needs to be strong enough to cause estrangement.

In any case, the structural properties of the grotesque are such that it thrives in environments of incongruity and contradiction. In general, the conceptual incongruities should not be understood as being strictly subordinate to individual grotesque images or vice versa. Often it can be difficult – impossible in a practical sense – to be certain if the conceptual incongruities are responsible for individual grotesque images, or if the images are gesturing towards a conceptual fracture, and materialize the distinction as a category in the process. However, for all practical purposes, in the process of reading one naturally collects textual data on the level of images. The conceptual categories that these images gesture towards only become clear in the course of reading. The grotesque, with its stark and palpable incongruities, serves as a device that makes images 'speak' about the nature of incongruities within societies, philosophies, concepts, theories of reality or virtually anything else.

Expressing incongruity and conjuring the grotesque in an image is impossible if the image is one homogenous 'whole.' One might assume, then, that artists trying to express incongruity on the level of the image would need to go out hunting for phenomena with built-in conceptual or visual disunity. Perhaps they are hunting with something like a zebra's alternating black-and-white stripes, something that contains a dissonance or duality 'by nature.' However, as we have already seen, this is not the case. The disunifying of a phenomenon is most often a

product of artistic construct, the desire to construct a non-monistic artistic universe and the objects that compose it.

The image of the teetering steed is a fine example. Bely's transformation of the Horseman into a carrier of 'order' and 'chaos' is pure artifice (built on Pushkin's artifice), but this artifice does create the potent illusion that, if one looks beyond the realm of outward appearance, there might be some deeper meaning lying concealed.

To review the texts we have addressed thus far, Pushkin's "Bronze Horseman" reveals both the terrors of an eschatological imposition of chaos and the tyrannical counterforce of imposed order. Bely's text marks an orientation towards fantasy and towards the future; he tries to find the compromise between these two extremes, showing that the only true solution is in the precarious balance between order and chaos as embodied by the Bronze Horseman monument unstable on its hind legs, teetering between the two extremes of Pushkin's poem. If the problem of Pushkin's deluge seemed all too distant to the dwellers of a better fortified twentieth-century Petersburg, Khlebnikov also exercises his prophetic artistic vision, revealing that an order too heavily imposed and too readily embraced conceals within itself an element of chaos that threatens to burst free. Further, Pushkin differs from his modernist descendants in that the latter attempts to hybridize the forces of order and chaos in a single (non-monistic) image. The choice of chaos and order is no longer either/or; instead these forces are shown as extant simultaneously in many phenomena. This inner duality must be reckoned with somehow, for – as Khlebnikov shows – even embracing one side or another still leaves the individual partially blind, exposed to a significant backlash from the opposing force. Bely, then, proposes a tenuous solution to this problem. If these opposing forces are somehow brought into balance, a temporary standoff from the destructive alignment with one side or the other becomes possible. However, as Bely aptly

demonstrates in his image, this balance is constantly at risk of falling out of alignment, never reaching a point of eternal stability.

I do not pretend to claim that the 'order / chaos' problem is novel in early twentieth-century Russian literature. Attempts to balance the forces of order and chaos have existed since the beginning of recorded human history, in works like *The Epic of Gilgamesh* or *the Enuma Elish*. The situation I described above – namely the interplay of chaos in order (and vice versa) and the imperative to find a balance between the forces – is perhaps most prominently depicted in the symbol 'Tao,' which symbolizes the balance of 'yin' and 'yang' to find 'the way,' or the ideal path through the world. The idiosyncrasy of the modernist period comes from the tying of the world of fantasy to the world of 'reality' – the strategy as described by Bely,[64] a strategy that infuses these broad, even cosmic concerns into the images of everyday Russian life. When the hybridization of order and chaos becomes localized in place and body, the artistic word assumes shape and flesh; imbalances in these forces range from the abstract, to expressions in the real. In the realm of the real, the tensions between order and chaos often manifest themselves in hideous displays of the grotesque, the likes of which have already been demonstrated, especially in Khlebnikov's eschatological revolt of chaos within order.

Bely's splintering of the Bronze Horseman into a monument to the unstable balance between order and chaos, like Khlebnikov's reveal of the forces of chaos in the structures of order, is an artistic strategy that, I argue, falls under the broad category of an 'unconcealment.' 'Unconcealing' artistic strategies can take many forms, but in this specific case the classification stems from the tactic of looking beyond the façade of empirical appearances to uncover

[64] And not only; as I proceed to the remaining primary texts, I will demonstrate that this tying of the world of the mind to the world outside of it is a conscious artistic decision for each author discussed.

something within them that speaks to the zeitgeist of early twentieth-century Russia. Again, when I speak of Khlebnikov and Bely's 'unconcealing,' I do not mean to suggest that they actually tap into a hidden meaning immanent within the real. Instead, their descriptive technique is designed to pull away the veil of the inert façade revealing a second, more profound layer of hidden meanings – one that they create. The effect, I stress, *is artifice*. In the primary texts included in my discussion, I will attempt to demonstrate that artistic artifice functions to create the sense that these more abstract forces are hiding unseen in the real. While 'order and chaos' may have a sort of cosmic primacy among these abstractions, many other forces will be inserted, acting in a way as their proxy. These proxies include other deeply traditional binary sets like 'rationality and irrationality,' 'beauty (form) and ugliness (formlessness),' 'man and animal,' 'sobriety and drunkenness' etc.

To speak more generally, *the distinction of 'order and chaos' is subsumed by the tension between 'high and low' that is fundamental to the creation of the grotesque*. As I will attempt to demonstrate, the grotesque arises when these forces fall out of balance; each pole of the dichotomy may be seen as an extreme that, more often than not, results in grotesque expression when localized in a single site. I hope to complicate the notion that a 'high' pushed to its extreme is at all 'good.' Both Bely and Khlebnikov express the idea that principles – when pushed to their extremes – can paradoxically become their opposite. The other texts in this chapter, and in this project, see this become a repeated motif.

This gesture of 'unconcealing' the hidden nature of a phenomenon is deeply rooted in the grotesque tradition, and, although studies of this tradition invariably cross paths with these techniques, few studies have attempted to describe their complete indispensability to it. They go beyond the application of the literal 'masks,' 'unmaskings' and 'masquerades'; they extend into

metaphor. The techniques of metaphorical 'unconcealments' are often encoded into the very DNA of grotesque literary production because they allow the artist to complicate the unity of any image. Any image can become an expression of the thematic incongruities of its text. The author 'unconcealing' an image is – to emphasize – artifice, an artistic gesture. The artist is able to create the impression that there is something behind the realm of appearances; what appears to be 'X' *is actually* 'Y.' All of these impressions are generated by the artist, all of it is under their control. For the remainder of this chapter, I will argue that the play of metaphorical 'unconcealments' is an essential property of Russia's prerevolutionary grotesque and the movement's common goal of constructing the non-monistic (or anti-monistic) world.

Importantly, the task of differentiating between a 'concealment' and an 'unconcealment' might appear formidable, give the entanglement of the 'realm of appearances' and the 'realm of the subjective experience (including, at times, the realm of the author's imagination).' One may call the dualism of Bely's Bronze Horseman or that of Khlebnikov's Petersburg 'unconcealments.' These 'unconcealments,' however, belie a particular perspective; they show that the speaking subject is treating the 'realm of appearances' as a 'concealing' mechanism that is 'unconcealed' by the artist in his treatment of his phenomena. However, there will be moments – as imminent as the next section on Sologub's novel – where the text, most often in the form of narratorial commentary, will be shown to point to a 'truth' about the appearance of a phenomenon that is 'concealed' by a particular character's subjective perception of it. In other words, a character may fail to recognize a meaning 'hidden' somewhere that is unconcealed (to the reader) by the textual details. In both of these cases, the play of 'concealments' and 'unconcealments' privileges the perspective of the narratorial or authorial voice providing a meta-commentary on the text's proceedings. For the sake of clarity and consistency, I will –

unless otherwise stated – privilege the voice of the artistic artifice and treat 'the world of appearances' from the authorial/narratorial perception. However, it is certainly not clear that the 'truth' objectively lies on their side; by reversing perspectives often reverses the effect. Therefore, it is important to understand the phenomenon as a *play of 'concealments' and 'unconcealments.'*

To summarize: Grotesque images require internal incongruities. Incongruities can be created in otherwise unified phenomena through the artifice of 'metaphorical unconcealments.' These unconcealments create the illusion that a meaningful incongruity hides under the unified or inert appearance of a phenomenon. Therefore, these metaphorical unconcealments can be used to make nearly any phenomenon grotesque. Individual grotesque images will often gesture to a more abstract conceptual incongruity. If a great number of discrete grotesque images in a text gesture toward the same conceptual incongruity, that particular conceptual incongruity may be the text's constructive principle. The ability to find the conceptual incongruities that form the basis for a grotesque text, that emerge as the text's constructive principle, is an integral skill for the study of the grotesque in general. In this project, I will continue to search for these core conceptual incongruities and explain both how they become the source for much of the text's grotesque imagery, and how they are fundamental to the text's message.

The Major Prose Works of Prerevolutionary Grotesque Modernism – An Outline

The synchrony of the discordant prerevolutionary period with the burgeoning Russian modernist movement made for the cultural conditions necessary for a surge of grotesque literature. The political, economic, and cultural ruptures of the period called for an aesthetic strategy that could properly express them. Although the three authors that appear in this

chapter's analysis belonged to different literary factions, they share a common modernist aesthetic strategy and a desire to address the contentious issues of the modern period.

Fyodor Sologub, as a first-generation Russian symbolist, bridges the rift between realism and modernism in his most famous novel, *The Petty Demon*. The novel's protagonist, Ardalyon Peredonov, gradually descends into a nightmare of his own making. Guiding the reader through the deepest chasms of Peredonov's pathological psyche, Sologub embraces the role of Virgil in a psychological Inferno. As a second-generation symbolist, Andrei Bely fixates on the troubled political landscape of Russia in 1905 in his novel *Petersburg*. Constructing a competing set of symbolic systems, Bely weaves the zeitgeist of the first of the Russian revolutions into the fabric of the text, creating palpable discursive fault lines. *Petersburg* utilizes the 'magic of words' to great effect, creating an impossibly dense web of symbols, and evoking scenes that are dizzily overdetermined with meaning. The competing systems of symbolization are often localized in the bodies of Bely's characters, violently rending them into pieces and infusing them with far more meaning than their bound physical limits should theoretically allow. Evgenii Zamyatin, the self-proclaimed 'novorealist,' describes the animalizing lawlessness of a Far-East military outpost in his novella *At World's End.* Intentionally sidestepping metaphor, Zamyatin's idiosyncratic style is intended to provide unmediated access to the world beyond appearances. The immediacy of his style creates a textual landscape teeming with characters whose bestial devolutions are fundamentally embodied. The uncompromisingly disparaging representations of corrupt military hierarchies and the unbounded absurdity of those who inhabit them led *At World's End* to be targeted by wartime censorship in the midst of WWI's outbreak.

In my analysis of these texts, I will argue that they share a few common features and aesthetic approaches that justify their inclusion into the overarching category of 'grotesque

modernism.' Moreover, I will attempt to uncover a few of the core conceptual incongruities in each text that set the tone for each text's grotesque imagery and motifs. And finally, along the way, I will examine notable individual grotesque images that gesture towards the core conceptual inconguities of each text, helping to find the idiosyncrasies of each author's approach and reinforcing each text's connection to the prerevolutionary 'grotesque modernist' corpus.

Fyodor Sologub's The Petty Demon: Stepping from Realism into Modernism

The Petty Demon was written over many years – starting in the last decade of the nineteenth century and continuing until its first appearances in print in 1905. Sologub's novel whisks the reader into the 20th century and into the new era of modernism in art, both in the chronology of its formation and in the aesthetics of the text itself.

The transformation of the novel's protagonist – the provincial grammar-school teacher Ardalyon Peredonov – is demonstrative of a modernist era shift in the dominant understanding of subjectivity. *Petty Demon* problematizes the notion of a 'knowable' realist subject. As Peredonov's psyche becomes unraveled, he begins to look like a paragon of the impenetrable human subject: the junction of irrationalism, paradox, and pathological obsession. The novel itself adopts a deceptive veneer in both theme and form. *The Petty Demon* initially telegraphs a plot that revolves around the marriage prospects of Peredonov. Though Peredonov is a profoundly vulgar bachelor, he manages to stay in high demand owing to the province's lack of marriageable men. Leveraging his position, he accepts any and all favors of would-be brides, refusing to make a definitive choice as long as he pleases. Although the bride selection narrative is one of *The Petty Demon's* most developed plotlines, its significance as the primary narrative axle slowly wanes as the novel progresses. The bachelor plot is a trojan horse, a familiar

narrative rolled out to placate the unwary reader – all the while sneaking the pernicious psychological elements into the novel that define its latter half.

The two closest associates of Peredonov are Pavel Volodin, recognizable by his sheep-like naiveté and bleating outbursts of laughter, and Varvara, the crafty third cousin of Peredonov who lives with him under one roof. Volodin's simple-mindedness and gullibility make him the ideal sycophant for Peredonov and his endless stream of boastful lies. Varvara's relationship to Peredonov is predicated on her former connection to a certain Princess Volchanskaya who, as Varvara insists, will offer Peredonov the envious position of city inspector should he marry her – should he marry Varvara, that is.

The Petty Demon begins with a bit of sly foreshadowing that reveals more about its nature than one would expect from a first paragraph: "All were costumed as for a holiday and exchanged inviting glances among themselves, and it appeared that life in this city was peaceful and friendly. Even cheerful. But all of it was only an appearance."[65] Pay attention to the position of the narrator in this fragment; he casts a sweeping glance over the province-dwellers, noting the apparent normality of their outward appearance, but then gestures to the essence of truth by making a statement about how it all 'really was.' This passage ostensibly sees Sologub's narrator take on the role of an omnipresent, omniscient authority of truth. The narrator's ability to present the more 'objective' surface of appearances serves as the anchor point for the readers who will be reminded from time to time about 'what is really happening' so they do not get lost among the vindictive minds and petty squabbles of the provincial dwellers. This narrative strategy marks the text with an element of 'realism' that places it distinctly in the

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[65] Fedor Sologub, *Melkii bec,* ed. N. P. Utekhin (Moskva: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1991), 26: "Все принарядились по-праздничному, смотрели друг на друга приветливо, и казалось, что в этом городе живут мирно и дружно. И даже весело. Но все это только казалось."

transitionary zone between the great nineteenth-century realist novel and the move to 'modernism' that will become more prominent in the latter scenes of *The Petty Demon* and the latter works explored in this chapter. These little 'revelatory' details are sprinkled throughout the text and reinforce the narrator's role in enforcing a sharp divide between truth and deception. The binary worldview is built in passages like these – but it will eventually be destroyed.

Indeed, the narrator's omniscience is invoked on a number of occasions to stabilize 'the real'—the element of realism that invariably accompanies Sologub's play with the realist tropes of the 19th century. In one boudoir scene, Peredonov and Varvara prepare to make love and the narrator interjects, "Although Varvara intoxicatedly stumbled and though the sluggish lasciviousness of her facial expression would have aroused feelings of disgust in any spirited [*свежий*] individual, her body was gorgeous like that of a soft nymph […] That magnificent body was a source of sordid temptation for those two little drunk, dirty figures. This is the way it often happens – truly, in our time it falls to the lot of beauty to be desecrated and profaned."[66] The narrator captures the 'real' visage of Varvara's nauseating face and notes that the beauty of her body – as 'real' as it may be – is subjectively construed by the characters in a way that completely debases it. The 'high and low' of the grotesque finds its proxy here as the 'beautiful and the vulgar.' From the perspective of the narratorial voice, the true nature of Varvara's beauty is 'concealed' from Peredonov due to his fundamental baseness and inability to see past the realm of simple appearances. In another scene, a group of sisters – all potential female suitors of Peredonov – are singing simple folk songs in a manner that increases their emotional

[66] Ibid., 67: "Хотя Варвара шаталась от опьянения и лицо ее во всяком свежем человеке возбудило бы отвращение своим дрябло-похотливым выражением, но тело у нее было прекрасное, как тело у нежной нимфы […] И это восхитительное тело для этих двух пьяных и грязных людишек являлось только источником низкого соблазна. Так это и часто бывает, - и воистину в нашем веке надлежит красоте быть попранной и поруганной."

weight: “the unstressed sounds were drawn out [by their style of singing] in a way that was especially unpleasant. The impression was achieved to a stunning degree: that singing would have driven a deathly longing [смертная тоска] into any spirited [свежий] listener…”[67] Then, the narrator inserts a prosaic ode to the deathly longing that transforms the great vivacious Russian song into the ‘insane howl’ of the sisters.

In these two cases, a pattern of narratorial interpretation appears that runs through the novel exposing the banality, vulgarity, and ‘poshlost’ of the novel’s provincial setting. Sologub continually puts his narrator into a position antagonistic to the ‘baseness’ of the unrefined, spiritually underdeveloped provincial dwellers. Their gaze ‘conceals’ what is ‘unconcealed’ to the narrator and, consequently, to the reader. The artifice of exposing ‘reality’ allows the narrator to assume the vantage point of an aesthetic and moral judge of the events in the provincial city. He stands in opposition to the *poshliak.* In Nabokov’s famous essay on the topic, a *poshliak* – a vulgarian, roughly speaking — is a force that opposes the narrative voice’s omniscient eye for taste. The *poshliak* embraces that which “is not only the obviously trashy but also the falsely important, the falsely beautiful, the falsely clever, the falsely attractive.”[68] In her *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life*, Svetlana Boym expands on this definition – using, like Nabokov, the prose of Nikolai Gogol as the basis of her discussion: “The postlost’ of life is the major source of [Gogol’s] artistic inspiration, and the embodiment of the evil spirit that he is trying to exorcise. Gogol’s fascination with this phenomenon will be later interpreted as his ‘realism.’ […] [Belinsky] considers Gogol’s gift not merely that of ‘clearly exhibiting the

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[67] Ibid., 134: “Растягивались особенно неприятно те звуки, на которых ударение не падает. Впечатление достигалось в превосходной степени: тоску смертную нагнало бы это пение на свежего слушателя. . .”

[68] Vladimir Nabokov, *Nikolai Gogol* (Norfolk: New Directions Publ. Corp, 1971), 70.

poshlost' of life but rather a gift in exhibiting the phenomena of life in their fullness, reality, and truthfulness.' Poshlost' is a key term in the transformation of the Romantic aesthetic to the aesthetic of realism."[69] Boym's intuition about poshlost relying on an aesthetics of realism – an (artificial) difference between appearance and real – applies wholesale to Sologub's narrative strategy.

In his work, Nabokov clarifies that 'poshlost' does not apply to children, who have not yet developed their own tastes and values. The 'poshlost' strikes them when they get older and are enchanted by the false shimmer of appearances. This same privileging of children is incorporated into the discourse of *The Petty Demon*. The following passage reaffirms the simple-minded purity of children, but also points to a hovering threat that awaits to compromise them: "Only children, those tireless vessels of God's joy on earth, were alive, playing and dashing about, but already an obliqueness fell upon them, and some kind of faceless and invisible monster nesting behind their shoulders glanced from time to time with eyes full of threats upon their suddenly stupefying faces."[70] As I have argued, in *The Petty Demon* the narrator inserts himself into various scenes to engage in a didactic explication of the differences between 'high and low' cultural reception; he is the arbiter of 'poshlost'. I will continue to pursue the narratorial arbitration of these values, specifically in the depictions of Peredonov and

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[69] Boym, Svetlana. Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia. (London: Harvard University Press, 1994), 48.

[70] Sologub, *Melkii bec,* 91: "Только дети, вечные, неустанные сосуды божьей радости над землею, были живы и бежали, и играли, - но уже и на них налегла косность, и какое-то безликое и незримое чудище, угнездясь за их плечами, заглядывало порою глазами, полными угроз, на их внезапно тупеющие лица." The contextual ambiguity of this passage allows for several interpretations; one might see that 'invisible monster' as a manifestation of Peredonov's gaze. Even if that is the case, Peredonov is the ultimate physical embodiment of the 'poshlost' trope. As such, his gaze is essentially equivalent to that of an unseen provincial monster that threatens to strip the children of their innocence. Though Peredonov exudes these vulgar qualities, he is not the source of all vulgarity; the province itself is the breeding ground of it.

his psychological receptions of various phenomena, in order to discover how it might relate to the grotesquery of *The Petty Demon.*

Attending to his students one day, Peredonov notices slight movements and quiet whispers in his classroom. We are told that Peredonov's mind exaggerates and amplifies these stimuli, giving him the impression that his students are acting disorderly and disrespectful. The narrator explains: "Even in a calm state, Peredonov, like all crude people, could not accurately perceive subtle phenomena: he either didn't notice them or he exaggerated their meaning. Now, agitated by anticipations and fears, his senses served him even more poorly, and slowly-but-surely, all of reality crawled into his view in a haze of revolting and evil illusions."[71] 'Like all crude people' is the operative phrase; Peredonov becomes representative of a *type* of unsophisticated, uncivil, uncultured individual whose systems of perception are so unrefined that they begin to distort the reality around them. The implication is that a refined subject should have similarly refined faculties of perception and should be capable of seeing 'the truth.' The *poshliak's* crude faculties of perception allow them to do no such thing. The narrator is continually telling the reader that Peredonov – and crude subjects like him – view the world through a distorted lens, a lens that desecrates and desacralizes nature, one that exaggerates and corrupts their perceptions: "Peredonov felt the reflection of his own dejection in nature, his own fear before the mask of its enmity towards him. He had no notion of the inner-life in all nature which is inaccessible to external characterization, the inner-life which alone creates true bonds, deep and irrefutable, between man and nature. He lacked this notion because, in his eyes, all of

[71] Ibid., 114: "Даже и в спокойном своем состоянии Передонов, как и все грубые люди, не мог точно оценить мелких явлений: он или не замечал их, или преувеличивал их значение. Теперь же, когда он был возбужден ожиданиями и страхами, чувства его служили ему еще хуже, и мало-по-малу вся действительность заволакивалась перед ним дымкою противных и злых иллюзий."

nature was suffused with petty human emotions. Blinded by the temptations of individualism and detached being, he could not conceive of the elemental Dionysian raptures clamoring and reveling in nature. He was blind and pitiful like many of us."[72]

'Poshlost' is a concept with a hidden dualism; as in Nabokov's formulation, it is the 'falsely' beautiful, clever, attractive. The artist who uses the adjective *poshlyi* means to create a division between the 'appearance' of a phenomenon and a hypothetical 'real' value of that phenomenon. The judge of 'true' and 'false' – the one who can proclaim a phenomenon is *falsely* beautiful while another is beautiful *truly* – is the refined individual, capable of subtle perceptive insight. The refined individual 'unconceals' the false veneer of appearance to reveal to himself and others the 'true nature of the thing itself.' Understood in this way, poshlost' contains one of *The Petty Demon's* central conceptual incongruities; it mirrors a number of other conceptual dyads in the text that compliment it, or can be effectively supplanted by it, including: 'false appearances and true essences,' 'refined people and their unrefined counterparts' etc. Since the narrator controls the space of the novel – what readers 'see' – it is difficult, if not impossible to determine if there is any truth to his claims of 'how things really are.' Searching for a reality behind the text is not the point – it is the gesture, Sologub's ludic approach to reality and appearances that interests us. *There is a play between 'concealments' and 'unconcealments,'* and the position one occupies is dependent on whose perception one would like to privilege. Although I have chosen to take the perspective of the narratorial/authorial

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[72] Sologub, *Melkii bec,* 198: "Передонов чувствовал в природе отражения своей тоски, своего страха под личиною ее враждебности к нему, - той же внутренней и недоступной внешним определениям жизни во всей природе, жизни, которая одна только и создает истинные отношения, глубокие и несомненные, между человеком и природою, этой жизни он не чувствовал. Потому-то вся природа казалась ему проникнутою мелкими человеческими чувствами. Ослепленный обольщениями личности и отдельного бытия, он не понимал дионисических, стихийных восторгов, ликующих и вопиющих в природе. Он был слеп и жалок, как многие из нас."

voice, untangling the perceptions of the narrator and his characters to find 'the real' is a functionally impossible task. The narrator and, almost certainly, Sologub would like the reader to trust his aesthetic and moral judgments. In any case, however, the truth value of the narrator's statements is not the point; the importance is in the gesturing towards these incongruities as a series of divisions that define the text's conceptual preoccupations. 'Poshlost' – its defining division between misleading façades of aesthetic value and the vulgarity of the reality behind the façade – can be recorded as a conceptual fracture that plays an important role in the grotesquery of the novel. The falsity of the façades may go unnoticed – barring the appearance of the grotesque – unless they are somehow 'unconcealed.' Sologub's omniscient narrator performs the 'unconcealments' of these misleading façades, creating that sense of incongruous dualism and, often, giving rise to grotesque imagery.

The internal logic of 'poshlost' implies that its aesthetic critique comes from the perspective of a 'refined subject' who is able to get in touch with reality to see what the *poshlyak* does not see. As the novel progresses, however, Peredonov develops a different subjective dynamic, a dynamic defined by more than just what he fails to notice. While there is plenty of evidence to suggest that Peredonov has the vulgarian's gaze early in the novel, the same is not true in its later sections. Eventually, Peredonov does develop a gaze that penetrates the façade of empirical phenomena. However, this gaze works in a much different way from that of the 'truth-revealing' eye of Sologub's narrator. "His gaze, wandering strangely, settled on something far away. It seemed as if he was always staring behind the object. Consequently, the objects in his eyes doubled, drooped, and swam about."[73] What are readers to make of Peredonov's 'doubling' vision?

Peredonov's gaze projects the gazer himself, his fears, his pathological paranoia out onto the world. Peredonov thinks that he is 'unconcealing' the realm of appearances, but to the narrator and even to the reader it is clear that he is only further veiling it with his own pathological subjectivity. The more Peredonov exhibits signs of detachment, and the more his observations conflict with those of the reader, the harder it becomes to identify with his perspective. The explicit emphasis on Peredonov's disunifying 'doubling gaze' and his near-complete envelopment in the projections of his own psyche would suggest, based on our model, that an outpouring of grotesque imagery is inevitable. And this is indeed what we get.

The *nedotykomka*, the most iconic of the protagonist's projections, is a tiny illusive demon that, as it seems to our protagonist, was sent by an unseen cabal of conspirators to terrorize him: "It was filthy, smelly, disgusting, and frightening. Its enmity towards Peredonov was obvious […] as was the fact that it had never existed at any time, in any place beforehand. It was made, and it was brought to life by the power of magical utterances."[74] This creature appears to Peredonov in the same chapter that he visits the home of one of his young students, Sasha Pylnikov, to punish him for imagined infelicities in his behavior at school. The other children are calling him a girl, and Peredonov takes this schoolyard bullying literally, beginning to suspect that Pylnikov is crossdressing. Peredonov's increasingly paranoid thoughts augment his inborn sadistic tendencies. In a haze of delusions, he travels from home to home to preemptively punish the students who make him uncomfortable and – to his disturbed mind – present a vague threat. Though Peredonov wants to punish Sasha Pylnikov for these imaginary

[73] Sologub, *Melkii bes,* 168: "Взгляд или был остановлен на чем-то далеком, или странно блуждал. Казалось, что он постоянно всматривается за предмет. От этого предметы в его глазах раздваивались, млели, мережили."

[74] Ibid., 217: "Она была грязная, вонючая, противная, страшная. Уже ясно было, что она враждебна Передонову и […] что раньше никогда и нигде не было ее. Сделали ее - и наговорили."

crimes, his guardian protects him from the raving schoolteacher's whims: "no one is going to touch you."[75] This little phrase works its way into Peredonov's paranoid mind, associated with the little demonic boy he cannot touch.

Peredonov leaves the residence in a huff, convinced that the boy needs to be investigated. Only a page later, Peredonov encounters the *nedotykomka* again: "From somewhere or other a small creature of indistinct features ran over to him – a small, grey, nimble *nedotykomka*. It laughed, quivered, and hovered around Peredonov. When he stretched out his hand, it quickly escaped, ran out the door or under the wardrobe, and appeared again only after a minute, and quivered, and teased – grey faceless, nimble."[76]

The *nedotykomka* is a mental projection of Pylnikov, a paranoid hallucination come to life. If their proximity within the novel does not make a compelling enough case, a scan of the nedotykomka's appearances in the novel reveals a possible etymological connection based on Pylnikov's affinity with the Russian word *pyl'* or 'dust.' For example, "Besides, the 'nedotykomka' alarmed him. It was dirty and dusty [*pylnaya*] and was always hiding under the robe of the priest" and "In the clouds of dust [*v klubakh pyli*], whipped up by the wind, the grey *nedotykomka* periodically flashed into sight" and "[the *nedotykomka*] either rolled along the field, or pretended to be a rag, a ribbon, a branch, a flag, a cloud, a dog, or a column of dust on the street, and everywhere crawled and ran after Peredonov."[77] Furthermore, because Peredonov

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[75] Ibid., 118.

[76] Ibid., 119. Откуда-то прибежала маленькая тварь неопределенных очертаний -- маленькая, серая, юркая недотыкомка. Она посмеивалась и дрожала и вертелась вокруг Передонова. Когда же он протягивал к ней руку, она быстро ускользала, убегала за дверь или под шкап, а через минуту появлялась снова, и дрожала, и дразнилась -- серая, безликая, юркая.

[77] Fedor Sologub, *Melkii bec,* ed. M.M. Pavlova (Vita Nova: Sankt-Peterburg, 2021), 290; 275; 313 "Кроме того, тревожила его недотыкомка. Она была грязная и пыльная и все пряталась под ризу к священнику"; "В клубах пыли по ветру мелькала иногда серая недотыкомка"; "То по полу катается, то прикинется тряпкою, лентою, веткою, флагом, тучкою, собачкою, столбом пыли на улице, и везде ползет и бежит за Передоновым."

is not able to whip the boy – since, thanks to his guardian, 'no one is going to touch him' – one may assume that the imagined threat of Pylnikov manifests itself in the little untouchable demon.[78] His 'indistinct features,' 'facelessness,' and general affinity for shapeshifting are likely a product of Peredonov's suspicions that Pylnikov is a cross-dresser; he cannot get a read on his true identity. His inability to remove the threat he sees in the boy creates a subconscious manifestation of that extant threat in his mind. Accordingly, Peredonov launches a full-on investigative campaign to reveal the 'secret' of Pylnikov's hidden life as a little girl, searching for a reason to satisfy his desire to inflict punishment on the poor student.[79] All this suggests that Peredonov's desire to engage in violent behavior serves the purpose of fighting off his abstract fears using real-world violence. If Pylnikov is indeed the source of the projection for the 'nedotykomka,' one would expect that other manifestations of Peredonov's fears would begin to materialize in his experience of day-to-day life.

And indeed, Peredonov's diseased subconscious continues to conjure up his various fears into the malleable empirical realm in front of him. Princess Volchanskaya, the mysterious Petersburgian luminary who has supposedly promised to find him employment as an inspector, appears in a deck of cards in the form of the *Queen of Spades.* The illusions spread to the rest of his playing cards, which assume the countenances of city guards – he is constantly in fear that other members of the community will inform on him and get him arrested – the grammar-school boys from his gymnasium, and other personages from the provincial city who are, in his mind,

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[78] The etymology of the word 'nedotykomka' can be traced to the verb tikat' or 'to poke/jab.' The prefix 'nedo' indicates that he cannot be reached – with a poke, that is – and is an untouchable little beast. Also, the work finds some commonality with the word 'nedotroga,' meaning 'a touchy person,' a reflection of Peredonov's own easily offended nature.

[79] Of note is that the incongruity squashing narrator goes as far as to relay the locker-room impressions of Pylnikov's gym teacher so the reader may be *absolutely sure* that all is in order with the boy's parts; he is, we learn, indeed a boy.

out to get him. The illusions are so potent that they generate elaborate scenes of grotesque imagery: "The shapeshifting grammar-school boys teased Peredonov. They lifted their legs in a strange, unnatural movement like that of a compass leg, only their legs were hairy and hooved. Instead of tails they grew birch rods; the boys brandished them with a whistle, and a shudder ran through them with each swing."[80] The information that these metamorphoses provide for the reader go deeper than fears. In the image of the schoolboy playing cards there is a palpable sense of eroticism complimenting various other textual manifestations of a hidden erotic gratification that is associated with young boys. For instance, Peredonov repeatedly reflects on the perverse pleasure of young boys crying at his feet, asking for forgiveness. The playing cards have afflicted him with a fear so profound that he begins to slice up the cards, "looking around when cutting the kings so he wouldn't be seen and charged with a political crime."[81] Finally deciding to burn the deck of cards, he recoils in terror when the Queen screams as if in real pain. The projections of his mind become so real that they become indistinguishable from 'reality' itself; Peredonov is so lost in his mind's hallucinations by the end of the novel that the outside world becomes a giant theatre – with him as the lead actor – endlessly performing increasingly more convincing versions of his nightmares.[82]

The 'killing' of the cards desensitizes Peredonov to violent behavior; if he's already killed so many kings and queens, what's the harm in taking a few more lives? Emboldened by

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[80] Fedor Sologub, *Melkii bes,* ed. N. P. Utekhin (Moskva: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1991), 218: "Вертлявые мальчишки-восьмерки дразнили Передонова, - это были оборотни-гимназисты. Они поднимали ноги странным, неживым движением, как ножки у циркуля, но только ноги у них были косматые, с копытцами. Вместо хвостов у них росли розги, мальчишки помахивали ими со свистом и сами взвизгивали при каждом взмахе."

[81] Ibid., 218: "Режучи королей, он озирался, чтобы не увидели и не обвинили в политическом преступлении."

[82] Bely's *mozgovaya igra*, which will be discussed in the next section of textual analysis, is conceptually quite similar to Sologub's use of this motif.

his courage and the disassociating push of his pathological infliction, Peredonov, suspecting that a man is living in his wallpaper, purchases an awl and uses it to murder his new foe. "He deftly swung the awl into the wallpaper. […] His eyes flashed with crazed triumph. Only one thing concerned him: it smelled rank. The punctured spy behind the wallpaper decomposed and stank. Horror and triumph shook Peredonov: he killed the enemy! His heart was steeled to its very core with that murder."[83] The homicide of the 'spy' behind the wallpaper marks the moment when Peredonov's subjective projections become synonymous with reality itself. The burning of the screaming cards frightened him, but this murder inextricably binds him to the hallucinations. If in prior scenes, when Peredonov wanted to punish the gender bending Pylnikov, for instance, the desire to inflict violence to resolve psychological distress was a largely subconsciously motivated impulse, after this homicide the desire is fully conscious, as real as the flesh and blood around him. Moving deeper and deeper into the realm of hallucination, the grotesque arises in these scenes as a product of the disintegrating elements of reality that manage to seep into Peredonov's waking nightmares.

The climax of the novel's grotesque imagery come at the peak of Peredonov's dissociative episode at the end of *Petty Demon*. Steeled by the murders of his psychic projections, Peredonov allows his imaginary psychological projections to spill over violently into the real world. The sheep-like Volodin, one of Peredonov's closest acquaintances, becomes an absurdist sacrificial lamb[84]; he dies only to unconceal his killer's insanity to his criminally

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[83] Ibid., 219: "Он стремительно ударил шилом в обои […] Глаза его сверкали диким торжеством. Одно только было нехорошо: скверно пахло. Гнил и вонял за обоями заколотый соглядатай. Ужас и торжество сотрясали Передонова: убил врага! Ожесточилось сердце его до конца в этом убийстве."

[84] The transformation of Volodin's image from sheep-like fool to sacrificial lamb is indicative of a pattern that is more broadly characteristic of the literature of the prerevolutionary grotesque. There is an aesthetic evolution from the metaphor to embodiment that progresses as the prerevolutionary modernist period develops in Russia. Metaphor only suggests likeness, appearance – a facet of surface-level observable reality; embodiment is a becoming, a

inattentive associates who – unlike the narrator – were incapable of 'seeing' it for themselves: "Peredonov quickly snatched up the knife, threw himself onto Volodin and slashed across his throat. Blood gushed out of him in a stream. […] Volodin bleated and bleated, trying to grab at his throat with his hands. […] Suddenly his life left him and he collapsed onto Peredonov."[85]

Peredonov's reconfiguration of the world around him in conformity with his delusions, and the author's omniscient foundation of 'the real,' creates a stark incongruity that hangs over the novel. Peredonov lives in a world of fantasy – created by him alone – and the narrator grounds us in 'the real.' The most significant conceptual incongruity in *The Petty Demon* is this confrontation between the realist mode – manifested in the narrator's continuous remarks on truth and 'the real,' and the modernist mode – expressed, in part, by Peredonov's gaze that projects his own subjectivity out into the outside world.

The modernist element of the novel is present in the sections where scenes are dictated by characters', Peredonov's primarily, subjective transformations of the observable world. This claim is not intended to suggest that the subjective and psychological elements of *The Petty Demon* are completely alien to realism. Moreover, I do not mean to suggest that the difference between 'modernism' and 'realism' is a simple split between the appeal to 'objective' reality and the 'subjective' perception of reality. Instead, I argue that Sologub's novel, in a paradoxical manner, both 'unconceals' and simultaneously upholds the mythology of realism. It

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transformation that occurs when metaphor is performed, internalized, and projected out onto the world. When Volodin is encountered in the first scenes of the novel, his sheep-like laugh and dumb gaze function as a superficial description of his appearance. Slowly though, the metaphor becomes so integral to the image that Volodin, if only for a fateful moment, is literally overtaken by it. The metaphor becoming embodied by the subject is a theme that will be developed in much greater detail in my analysis of Zamyatin. Volodin's metamorphosis is made possible by Peredonov's vision at the end of the novel, which loses its ability to fixate the appearance itself, and what is beyond it.

[85] Ibid., 263: "Передонов быстро выхватил нож, бросился на Володина и резнул его по горлу. Кровь хлынула ручьем. […] Володин все блеял и старался схватиться руками за горло. Видно было, что он смертельно испуган, слабеет и не доносит рук до горла. Вдруг он помертвел и повалился на Передонова."

problematizes the narrator's claim to the objective and the 'real' by revealing that the pathologies of the modern man can become *as real* in their manifestations *as reality itself*. *The Petty Demon's* narrator keeps one foot firmly planted in the clear-minded dimension of sanity, interrupting the text periodically to insert sobering reminders about *what actually is.* The dissonances between Peredonov's 'real' circumstances and his perceptions of them are pregnant with humor when they reveal his foolishness, pettiness, and paranoia. However, when Peredonov's paranoid obsessions go undetected, are shared by the novel's other characters, and when they rise to the surface and manifest themselves in acts of sadistic violence, the pathological and the real become fundamentally inseparable.

The aesthetic incongruity has two sources in *The Petty Demon*. On the one hand, the narration toggles back and forth between realist and modernist modes, creating stylistic dissonances that tear through the text. On the other, the novel's modernist elements generate their characteristic splitting between the object and its subjective expression. The grotesque can arise from either of these sources.

For example, see again the narrator's interruption of Ardalyon and Varvara's intercourse to tell us about the way her face looks outside of Ardalyon's imagination: "the sluggish lasciviousness of her facial expression *would have aroused feelings of disgust in any […] individual*." Sologub's narrative voice is more often didactic – explaining the shortcomings of his 'little dirty figures' with a heavy hand. The jarring reveal of 'what really is' feels particular grotesque after a stretch of prose that describes the way things look to the book's characters, a stretch of prose that sees the characters inhabiting their own 'reality,' blind to the vulgarity of the things around them.

When *Petty Demon* begins, the 'refined' narrator provides readers with many reassurances about 'how things are.' Readers are made to feel that reality and delusion are separable categories. However, as the novel progresses, Sologub's text becomes less and less anchored by the realist narrator. The perceptions of Peredonov and the other delusional characters dominate the text; they create doubt in a shared reality, and instead create their own. The notion that the refined narrator's reality is more 'real' than that of the characters becomes more suspicious as the narrative develops; after all, the characters do not see what the narrator sees, so his observations have little effect on the way the novel unfolds. If the delusions of Peredonov shape the unfolding events more than the narrator's expositions of reality, is the latter really more in touch with reality? Or are the narrator's perceptions as much the fantasy as Peredonov's?

Petty Demon expresses a kind of horror about the 'refined individual's' inability to maintain a monopoly on reality. If the world is shaped by perception, then no individual – no matter how refined – can legitimately claim that their perception should be considered more 'real'. Given the modernist emphasis on the subjective mode of world creation, there is little to no reason to privilege the 'refined' subject's vision over that of his antithetical counterpart.

In this way, the delusional provincial minds of *The Petty Demon's* cast pose a real threat to the refined narrator's claim to 'the real.' Sologub unconceals this threat and uses an alternating system of modernist and realist techniques to switch the primary textual thrust between incursions into the crude provincial mind, and rational – or even idealized – critiques of it. The realist ideal of 'objective reality' becomes an essential device for Sologub's critique of provincial vulgarity; the realist vision of objectivity becomes the only recourse to critique Peredonov's subjective delusions.

In this section, I have attempted to demonstrate that *The Petty Demon* introduces a new problematic of competing subjectivities at the start of the 'grotesque modernist' period, while also staging the move from realist to modernist techniques of representation. I have tried to demonstrate that Sologub's novel theorizes an ideal, 'refined' subject who can be relied upon for a 'real' description of the world 'as it really is.' However, the novel's narrative performs the death of the illusion that there is – that there can be – one shared reality among all. I have suggested that Peredonov's gaze shapes the world around him to conform with his delusions; and – though he may be tasteless, provincial, and neurotic – he is a world-creator, and an equal competitor with the narrator in this endeavor. This turn towards subjectivity, and subjectively created worlds is a defining feature of the modernist era. *The Petty Demon's* aesthetic insights will become increasingly more poignant as the analysis turns to twentieth-century historical and literary developments.

Now we turn to Bely's *Petersburg.* where we will find that Sologub's pathological provincial element has flooded into the streets of the northern capital; the people, like the sardine tin at the novel's center, are all potentially concealing the ticking of their explosive inner-machinations.

Andrei Bely's Petersburg – Grotesque Embodiments of Order and Chaos and the Grotesque Sublime

While *The Petty Demon* never completely abandons its nods to realist objectivism in its exploration of the emerging implications of a modernized model of unknowable man, *Petersburg* dispenses with it to immerse itself in the modernist aesthetic landscape. No longer is there a persistent narrative presence that pulls the reader out of the unreliable subjective perceptions of the protagonists, officiating the line between 'seemed like' and 'but in reality.' Bely, like

Sologub, was a Symbolist, albeit of the younger generation. The symbol as an aesthetic tool is indispensable to either novel, but Bely's stylistic program invests in it far more aggressively. *Petersburg* features intricate, branching webs of meaning that would collapse if not for the myriad associative and indexical strands that connect clusters of symbols into systems.

Explicating the meaning of Symbolism several years before the construction of *Petersburg,* Bely makes the following note in an article titled "The Meaning of Art" (Smysl iskusstva, 1910). In this section of the article, Bely is attempting to justify a method of artistic expression that ties reality (i.e., the realm of empirical phenomena) to the reality of subjective experience of those phenomena.

> Symbolism in art is a technique of expression; it is achieved in the freedom of relation to the images of [the realm of] appearances and the models of imageless experience of internal life; [...] changing the realm of appearance or filling it with one's own experiences, the artist stays true to reality, since he stays true to his own experience and to the general systems of creating the images based on appearances; changing the image of appearances, he, in essence, highlights the general features of the image; the method by which this is done, and also the order of expression of the general traits of appearance is dictated by experience. Therefore, by staying within the bounds of appearance, and creating something like non-extant worlds, - the artist stays a realist in relation to reality and simultaneously transforms into a symbolist in relation to appearance.[86]

In this passage, there is a palpable echo of the tensions between a more objectively anchored realism and subjective modernism (through Symbolism) that were notable in *The Petty Demon.* Because the subjective experience of reality is part of reality itself, the modernist Symbolist does

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[86] Andrei Bely, "Smysl iskusstva," in *Sobranie sochinenii: Simvolizm: kniga statei,* edited by V. M. Piskunov (Moskva: Respublika; Kul′turnaia revoliutsiia, 2010) 159: "Способ выражения -- художественный символизм; он осуществляется в свободе отношения к образам видимости как к моделям безобразных переживаний внутреннего опыта; [...] изменяя видимость или насыщая ее своими переживаниями, художник остается верным действительности, поскольку он остается верным и переживанию, и основным схемам построения образов видимости; изменяя образ видимости, он, в сущности, подчеркивает основные черты образа; способ, каким он это совершает, а также порядок изложения основных черт видимости -- диктуется переживанием. Поэтому и оставаясь в пределах видимости, и творя будто бы недействительные миры, -- художник остается реалистом в отношении к действительности и одновременно превращается в символиста по отношению к видимости"

not consider themselves to be departing from the role of the realist. However, Bely's vision of the artist is someone who creates 'reality' themselves and does not distance the impressions left upon him by his experience from his conception of 'the real'. The Symbolist connects various 'things' in the material world and describes the realm of empirical phenomena according to his own experience of them. In doing so, he transforms the world into a state that may be unrecognizable to some, but, for the artist, this interconnected experience of reality is no less real than the empirical and material connections between various phenomena of the world. This Symbolist principle plays a vital role in the aestheticizing of *Petersburg*, and it will be informative to review an example from the novel. The novel's magic happens in these baroque chains of signification.

Let the common Petersburgian phenomenon 'smoke' serve as the point of departure. Smoke constantly pours from the factories surrounding Petersburg's center and brings to mind the machinations of industrial labor. Since the smoke billows from the working-class neighborhoods on the peripheral islands of Petersburg, it also becomes indexical to the workers themselves. The increasing prevalence of labor strikes among the factory workers connects the visible smoke to workers' discontentment and the possibility of a chaotic uprising. The appearance of smokers, discreet producers of smoke, suggests that these individuals are connected to this field of linkages. Bely frames tobacco use as a threat to the brain's grey matter, so another linkage is established between smoke and the loss of rationality. The degradation of rationality leads to the loss of sanity, and smoke indexes to this concept as well. Thick smoke often complicates sight and visual clarity, complementing the aforementioned obscuration of mental clarity. The gas-like expansion of smoke in the air is compared to the entropic forces of the universe which are antithetical to the notion of order. Smoke is analogous to fog and clouds,

so it also indexes to these phenomena and their associative webs. I will stop here, but an in-depth cataloging of smoke's associative relationships and potential meanings could go on for pages. Each passing reference to smoke in the novel emits a flurry of possible meanings, each expressed to varying degrees based on contextual clues and an individual's intuitive understanding of the underlying associative network. In Bely's words, "the process of building models for [the expression of] experience through the images of appearance is the process of symbolization."[87]

When this process of symbolization is engaged in Petersburg, it is simultaneously imbued with indeterminate and overdetermined meaning. A single object becomes evocative of a series of other objects, concepts, scenes, characters etc. that have been tied to it through textual, contextual, and associative clues. In theory, an arbitrary image that has been integrated into a system of symbolization will bring to life a whole array of meanings. Furthermore, given the infinite creative potential of the artist, the process of symbolization nears the potential infinite. In Bely's words, "It is unsurprising that the unknowable imagery of the artist for many is only seen as the outcome of an artistic dream, and not reality. But the one who has grasped the true nature of symbols cannot not see in appearance, and also in the visible 'I' the reflection of another 'I', true, eternal, creative."[88]

Previous scholarship has attempted to frame Bely's implementation of grotesque poetics as a reappropriation of romantic-era literature – especially the work of Edgar Poe and E.T.A.

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[87] Bely, "Smysl iskusstva," 160: "Процесс построения моделей переживаниям посредством образов видимости есть процесс символизации."

[88] Andrei Bely, "Simvolizm," in *Sobranie sochinenii: Arabski: kniga statei; lug zelenyi; kniga statei*, edited by L. A. Sugai (Moskva: Respublika; Dmitrii Sechin, 2012) 385: "Неудивительно, что непознаваемая образность художника для многих — лишь порождение творческой грезы, а не действительность. Но тот, кто постиг истинную природу символов, тот не может не видеть в видимости, а также и в видимом своем «я» отображение другого «я», истинного, вечного, творческого."

Hoffmann. Vera Korolyova, in her article "A.A. Bely and E.T.A. Hoffmann. Hoffmann's Style in the Works of A. Bely," notes that the author sought to recontextualize the aesthetic achievements of the romantic era to make them amenable to modern Russian life: "Bely emphasized that it was not his goal to revive romanticism, but to reinterpret it: 'we aren't in need of a fairytale or a faraway land – we need the Arbat.'"[89] In the turn away from the 'fairytale' to the concretism of 'the Arbat,' the middle-class Moscow street, Korolyova sees Bely moving away from grotesque romanticism towards a a poetics of 'grotesque realism' and its comic leanings. She elaborates, "For Bely, irony and the grotesque become the highest form of mockery of the world and of himself."[90] Although there is something darkly comic in Bely's poetics, one instinctually feels that the experimentation and tragicomic ambiguity of *Petersburg* is far closer to grotesque modernism than grotesque realism.

Olga Matich's "Poetics of Disgust: To Eat and Die in Andrei Belyi's *Petersburg*" analyzes the novel's grotesque poetics through the lens of their affective impact on the reader. While noting that the "striking grotesque and metamorphic imagry […] reflect[ing] a sensibility inimical to stable representation" defines the poetics of the novel, Matich nevertheless worries that "Belyi's use of modernist fragmentation […] does not tell the whole story, nor does the symbolist aspect of the novel."[91] Matich's affective approach to *Petersburg's* grotesque poetics may well, as she claims, "creat[e] a discursive space in which to negotiate the reader's aesthetic, sensual, and moral values," the affective conjunction between disgust and grotesque is not

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[89] Vera Koroleva, "Cherty gofmanovskogo stilia v tvorchestve A. Belogo*," Novyi filologicheskii vestnik* 38, no. 3 (2016): 2, https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/a-belyy-i-e-t-a-gofman-cherty-gofmanovskogo-stilya-v-tvorchestve-a-belogo

[90] Ibid., 9.

[91] Olga Matich, "Poetics of Disgust: To Eat and Die in Andrei Belyi's 'Petersburg," *Slavic Review* 66, no. 2 (Summer, 2009): 284-287.

unique to Bely's novel or grotesque modernism – it is a more universal accompaniment. In my analysis of Bely's implementation of grotesque poetics, I will attempt to retain certain elements of this affective approach while searching for an affect that better represents the profound ideosyncracies of Bely's novel.

Grotesque imagery crops up most often when the image is internally divided into two incongruous pieces. What is the result, then, when a symbol gestures to such a multitude of unfolding meanings outside of itself? Most often, the meaning of the individual symbol is far too diffuse and complex to evoke the grotesque. If the individual symbol is often not grotesque in itself, then where does the grotesque spring from in *Petersburg*? The answer lies in the text's competing textual systems that create its core incongruity. The two systems at the heart of *Petersburg's* narrative can be divided into 'the system of Order' and 'the system of Chaos.' Occasionally conceptual incongruities have proxies that are virtually interchangeable. In *Petersburg*, the Apollonian and Dionysian incongruity, for example, is essentially interchangeable with the Order and Chaos incongruity. Or rather, the Apollonian and Dionysian incongruity is more of a repackaging of 'Order and Chaos' than a separate category. This correspondence is far from trivial, and Bely himself offers the most lucid description of its importance.

> The abyss yawns at our feet when we tear off the mask worn by things. […] We are horrified by the difference between appearances and being. In solitude, we withdraw millions of miles away. We cannot overcome the abyss. The deceptive veil of things and apophatic judgments about essence enervate our spirit when we encounter the depths. […] The placid surface of the sea is hiding more than a few monsters. Chaos starts to call out. […] But no matter how we try to paper over chaos, we are forever on the border between it and life. This is the combination of essence (the spirit of Dionysus) with appearance (with the spirit of Apollo) - our tragedy is the movement of our hand to our eyes when a blinding light deprives them of sight, leaving only a few circular traces in our gaze - monsters that appear to us as a real expression of essence. There should come a time when we remove our hand from our eyes and once again come to believe in the mask worn by things - or, in other words, return to appearances. But it is impossible to

> forget what was once seen. We can turn away. [But] turning away is horrible *to us*, though traveling into the abyss is horrible *to those around us*. These two horrors keep us on the border between pessimism and tragedy, between cretinism and symbolism.[92]

In so many words, this paragraph is a concentrated statement of many of the themes running through this chapter of my project. Moreover, if read carefully, this passage alone provides nearly all the theoretical backdrop one need know before diving more deeply into an analysis of the role of grotesque in Bely's novel. For Bely, the forces of Apollonian order lie in appearance. One overlays one's own perceptions and understandings on empirical phenomena to make sense of the world. The chaotic force of Dionysus is the elemental and chaotic foundation of nature, things as they are, unmodified by the meaning-making of human perception. Echoing the Apollon and Dionysian impulses at the heart of Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy,* Bely sees man's fundamental condition within the dyad of Order and Chaos. When 'the mask is pulled off' of the realm of appearances – that Apollonian impulse – a great Dionysian chaotic abyss is all that remains. Bely's explication suggests one is in a state of ignorance before one's appearances are unmasked and shown flawed and false. The mythology of realist discourse often, though certainly not always, operates on this plane. However, once 'appearances' become unconcealed – whether the unconcealment is the result of an artistic or aesthetic treatment of appearance or it

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[92] Andrei Bely, "Simvolizm kak miroponimanie," in *Sobranie sochinenii: Arabeski: Kniga statei; Lug zelenyi: Kniga statei*, ed. by L. A. Sugai (Moskva: Respublika; Dmitrii Sechin, 2012), 177-178: Пропасть разверзается у наших ног, когда мы срываем с явлений маску. [...] Мы ужасаемся разницей между виденими и бытием. Уединенно удаляемся за миллионы верст. Не осилить пропасти. Обманчивый покров явлений и рассуждения о сущности от противного лишают бодрости духа при встрече с глубиной. [...] Гладкая поверхность моря таит не одно чудовище. Хаос начинает взывать. […] Но как бы мы ни завешивали хаос, мы вечно остаемся на границе между ним и жизнью. Это совмещение сущности (духа Диониса) с видимостью (с духом Аполлона) -- наш трагизм, движение руки к глазам, когда ослепительный свет лишает зрения и в глазах какие-то круги -- чудовища, принимаемые нами за реальное выражение сущности. Должна настать пора, когда мы отнимем руки от глаз или вторично уверуем в надетую маску, т. е. вернемся к внешности. Но забыть раз виденное нельзя. Можно отвертываться. Последнее -- ужас *для нас,* а первое, т. е. наше ухождение в глубину, -- ужас *для окружающих.* Оба ужаса стерегут нас на границе между пессимизмом и трагизмом, между критицизмом и символизмом

is catalyzed by a new scientific or technological achievement – there is no way to unproblematically veil them again. Bely's vision of the Apollon/Dionysian tragedy situates man at a crossroads between two horrors. If one surrenders themselves to the chaotic Dionysian, the result is a horror for others. Peredonov's decent into the chaotic abyss of his own pathologies, away from shared, socially constructed meaning structures that define the external world, certainly evidences this claim. The other horror – that of a willful return to the ordered meaning of appearances, once lost in the confrontation with chaos, is terrible and negating for the self. The horror lies in having to act on supposedly meaningful structures that one no longer believes in. Constrained on both sides by this pair of horrors, the individual will then balance between conflicting, dialogic philosophical systems without ever falling into one completely.

In this way, the incongruity of Order and Chaos is the text's most fundamental incongruity. Order and Chaos (or the Apollon and Dionysian) are echoed in other dichotic scales; the other incongruities saturating the text can be very often be subsumed within this overarching framework. These include the incongruities between form and formlessness, rationality and irrationality/mysticism, man and animal/non-man, the division of the West and the East, sobriety and drunkenness, sanity and madness, peace and revolution, and so on.

As the latter sections of *The Petty Demon,* the imagery of *Petersburg* relies on the conceptual principles of the modernist gaze – its ability to (re)create the object, its allowance for subjective modifications of the observable – to manifest protagonists' perceptions, impressions and expressions into the 'real'. However – unlike the voice of Sologub's narrator, supposedly anchoring the reader in 'reality' – the narrator in *Petersburg* is one of the most grotesquely creative subjectivities within the book. In fact, Bely's narrator often plays the role of an expressionist as understood though Czech critic Antonin Matějček's seminal definition: "An

Expressionist wishes, above all, to express himself […] He rejects immediate perception and builds on more complex psychic structures... Impressions and mental images that pass through […] people's soul as through a filter which rids them of all substantial accretions to produce their clear essence [and] are assimilated and condense into more general forms, into types, which he transcribes through simple short-hand formulae and symbols."[93] In this way, an expressionist writer is keen to reshape/reconfigure the images in his text so the meaning expressed by that image aligns with what he would like to express about it. Expressionism often necessitates an aggressive reshaping of the image, and, especially when the image is of a living individual, the result is often profoundly grotesque. This is especially true when a concept or conceptual incongruity is 'expressed' into a body, forcing physical deformities to speak in a conceptual language.[94] Again, Bely himself comments on this facet of his work, invoking the biblical notion of forming word into flesh: "The creative word is the word manifest, the word as flesh. And, in this sense, it is real; the living flesh of man is its symbol; the word-as-term is its skeleton."[95] However, even if the aesthetic reshaping of an image is performed less aggressively than an expressionist might be keen to do it, the embodiment of *any* conceptual fracturing is more often than not going to be grotesque. In further analysis of *Petersburg*, I will provide a number of examples of embodied conceptualizations and incongruities that steer the novel's imagery into the realm of the grotesque, analyze what information this imagery communicates about the

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[93] Donald E. Gordon, *Expressionism: Art and Idea* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1987), 175-176.

[94] Even when only a single 'side' of a binary distinction is embodied, there is more often than not a palpable incongruity between the 'natural' form of the body and the 'unnatural' form of its conceptual sculpting. Because Bely needs to maintain distinction between the two competing symbolic systems, the missing 'side' of the binary set still maintains its significance to the whole, even in its absence.

[95] Andrei Bely, "Magiia slov," in *Sobranie sochinenii: Simvolizm: kniga stateĭ,* edited by V. M. Piskunov (Moskva: Respublika; Kulʹturnaia revoliutsiia, 2010), 319: Творческое слово есть воплощенное слово (слово -- плоть), и в этом смысле оно действительно; символом его является живая плоть человека; слово-термин – костяк.

novel's core conceptual incongruities, and demonstrate that information gleaned in this manner influences the meaning of the work as a whole.

The novel's two main protagonists, Apollon Apollonovich Ableukhov and his son Nikolai Apollonovich, wear their conceptual affinities, not on their sleeves, but on their faces and in their heads.

Apollon Apollonovich Ableukhov, a highly respected dignitary in the Imperial government, bares the traces of the novel's unending clash of Chaos and Order, East and West, in his name. As befits his status in the state, his name and patronymic point to his affinity to highly rationalized systems of order (Apollo). His surname – concealed in professional exchanges of name and patronymic with his colleagues – reveals the character's well-hidden affinity with the East when it is named in the novel. Ableukhov's great-great-grandfather was a mirza named Ab-Lai, and Ukhov, a homonym with the Russian word for 'ear' (ukho), was Ab-Lai's born-again sobriquet.

The tension between the order/chaos, east/west conceptual divisions is suffused through Ableukhov's name, his body, and his mind. Like the bodies of so many other characters in the novel, his becomes the site of an internal coexistence of the incongruous forces of order and chaos. Ableukhov, by irony of fate or by the expression of an unseen meaning-maker beyond himself, embodies the mark of his ancestor through his green-tinted ears. When caricatured by the nation's leftist satirical publications, it is his "pure green, colossally augmented ears" that identify him as he stands before "the bloody background of a burning Russia."[96] Green is a

[96] Bely, Andrei. *Peterburg: Roman v vos'mi glavakh c prologom i epilogom,* in *Sobranie sochinenii: Peterburg,* edited by V. M. Piskunov (Moskva: Respublika, 1994), 11.

heavily symbolic color in the novel that points towards the discourse of chaos.[97] Nevertheless, Ableukhov fancies himself a man of order, and – as befitting a man with a love for geometric symmetry – he loves to ride in the enclosed cube of his carriage, and is fitted with a 'cranium' that invites a literal translation of the Russian equivalent 'skull box.'[98] But, despite his best efforts to embrace circumscription and enclosure, he is afflicted with a mysterious condition, an involuntary 'mind play', that continually draws some part of him outside of his own physical bounds. "The mind play […] was defined by a number of exceptionally strange characteristics: […] every thought stubbornly projected itself as image across space-time; and continued its uncontrolled actions outside the senator's head."[99] Ableukhov's mind, much like Peredonov's, casts itself into the outside world and blurs the distinctions between the real and the subjective. "Apollon Apollonovich was like Zeus: gods and geniuses seeped from his head; one such genius, […] rising up like another image, already sprang into being. […] And one fleeing thought was the thought that the stranger did indeed exist."[100] These conscious projections and their interactions out in the empirical world place the green-eared dignitary's representation in the novel firmly in the modernist tradition. Moreover, these embodiments reach a grotesque crescendo when his cold rationalizing gaze finds mythological synergy with the astral projections

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[97] The 'green' motif can be found scattered throughout the pages of the novel. Taking only a smattering from the beginning of the novel we see green in the "dank, greenish fog" covering the swampy lands surrounding Petersburg, to the green "bacilli-infected water of the Neva" to the green tables that surround Apollon Apollonovich just before his consciousness expands far outside of his own head (Bely 17, 37, 39).

[98] Ibid., 17, 27.

[99] Ibid., 27-28: "Мозговая игра […] отличалась странными, весьма странными, чрезвычайно странными свойствами: […] каждая праздная мысль развивалась упорно в пространственно-временной образ, продолжая свои -- теперь уже бесконтрольные -- действия вне сенаторской головы."

[100] Ibid., 28: "Аполлон Аполлонович был в известном смысле как Зевс: из его головы вытекали боги, богини и гении. Мы уже видели: один такой гений (незнакомец с черными усиками), возникая как образ, забытийствовал […] И одна такая бежавшая мысль […] была мыслью о том, что он, незнакомец, существует действительно."

of his thoughts: "thought-bolts flew from his head in all directions like snakes from the bald spot on his head; a fantast would, without a doubt, have seen before him the head of Gorgon-Medusa."[101]

If his father's name revealed an affinity for order, the veneer of Nikolai Apollonovich Ableukhov's name ostensibly suggests that the embodied elements of order and chaos within him strike a better balance. However – in this case as in others – appearances deceive. In the beginning of the novel, there are passages that see Nikolai reflecting his father's embodiments of rationality as when we learn that when he "submerged himself in serious thought, his gaze would turn to stone."[102] However, it is heavily suggested that these similarities are what push Nikolai to embrace the symbolic systems of the East: "Nikolai Apollonovich cursed his mortal existence and, considering that he was the image and flesh of his father, he cursed his father as well; […] Nikolai Apollonovich knew his father on an intimately sensory level, down to the smallest folds and indistinct quivers; he was the absolute sensory equivalent of his father; he didn't know where he stopped and where that senator began…"[103] And further, pressing the relationship of father and son into grotesque territory, the narrator adds: "Nikolai Apollonovich perceived [the false gestures of tenderness between them] as a shameful physiological act; in that moment he would have perceived the discharges of their kindred affinities as the discharge of an organism."[104] And further on, when son spies father shuffling awkwardly out in the fog:

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[101] Ibid., 40: "Мысли-молнии разлетались, как змеи, от лысой его головы; и если бы ясновидящий стал в ту минуту пред лицом почтенного мужа, без сомнения пред собой он увидел бы голову Горгоны медузы."

[102] Ibid., 35: "Когда погружался в серьезное созерцание, взгляд окаменевал."

[103] Ibid., 80: "Николай Аполлонович проклинал свое бренное существо и, поскольку был образом и подобием он отца, он — проклял отца […] Николай Аполлонович отца чувственно знал, до мельчайших изгибов и до невнятных дрожаний; был чувственно абсолютно равен отцу; он не знал, где кончается он и где в нем начинается этот сенатор…"

[104] Ibid., 81: "Менее всего могла походить на любовь эта близость; ее Николай Аполлонович ощущал как

"Apollon Apollonovich Ableukhov resembled death in a top hat. Nikolai Apollonovich […] imagined Apollon Apollonovich in the act of marital intercourse; and, with newfound intensity, experienced a familiar nausea (thus was he conceived)."[105] The discourse of conception evokes the duality of mother and father, and Nikolai perceives those parts of him from his father – his cold rationality and embrace of order – to be tainted, oppressive, shameful. When Nikolai agrees to participate in a terrorist plot to kill his father, one assumes that he is partially motivated by grotesque incongruity within his own body. Nikolai feels that his father's movements and characteristics are quite literally projected into his own flesh.

However, the impulse to rid himself of his father's ordering elements begins to uncouple Nikolai from reality itself. The sardine tin, concealing the bomb that is to kill Apollon Apollonovich, begins to assume a corporeal life of its own in his mind: "I brought her [the bomb] into motion: before [the bomb] was, you might say, dead… When I turned the key; even, yes: it started to sob, I assure you, just like a drunken body shaken half-awake…"[106]

After waking the bomb, the overly porous Nikolai begins to feel the chaotic potential of its destructive force creeping into his body: "Incredibly expansive sensations got hold of me, flowing incessantly one to the next […] Revulsion swelled up […] I was nauseous, nearly bursting!.. Well, as if I… swallowed it… […] I became the bomb: with its ticking in my stomach."[107] Whereas Peredonov and Apollon Apollonovich reshaped outside objects to fit their

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позорнейший физиологический акт; в ту минуту мог он отнестись к выделению родственности, как к выделению организма."

[105] Ibid., 164: "Аполлонович Аблеухов напоминал смерть в цилиндре; Николай Аполлонович — бывают же шалые мысли — представил себе Аполлона Аполлоновича в момент исполнения супружеских отношений; и с новой силой почувствовал знакомую тошноту (так был он зачат)."

[106] Ibid., 195: Наверное копошилась там жизнь, как я привел ее в действие: была, так себе, мертвой... Ключик я повернул; даже, да: стала всхлипывать, уверяю вас, точно пьяное тело, спросонья, когда его растолкают...

[107] Ibid.: "Вообще говоря, очень-очень обильные ощущения овладели мной […] меня отвращение

perception of them, Nikolai allows objects to get into him – and there, in a grotesque reversal, *they reshape him*, transform him into all kinds of abstract hybridized monstrosities.

The result is another physiological nightmare which Nikolai describes to the psychologically disheveled revolutionary who originally provided him the bomb, Aleksandr Dudkin: "All of this transforms into a mighty sensation, as if you're being torn in pieces, as if you're being dragged apart in opposite directions: your heart explodes in the center; your spine is torn out from your back"; and Dudkin responds: "…tortured like Dionysus."[108]

In other words, Nikolai experiences a personal, embodied, physiological transformation into Dionysian chaos after having rejected the orderly Apollonian impulse within him. Having dispensed with the rational anchoring – the only thing, evidently, keeping him circumscribed in space and time – Nikolai learns why it is problematic to embody only one side of a dualistic symbolic dyad. In keeping with the modernist tradition, the subjective anguish of his psychological self-mutilations are not merely abstract anxieties – they are *expressed* in matter, in the flesh.

Although the horrible tortures that Nikolai describes may be relegated to the subjective – a mere 'play of his mind [*mozgovaia igra*]' – he rejects Dudkin's proposal that his torture was only a consequence of being 'beside himself' with emotion: "How very easy to say 'beside yourself'; an allegorical saying, not based on any sort of bodily sensation; I felt *beside myself* bodily, physiologically even…"[109] If Bely had depicted Nikolai's descent into chaos as a purely

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распирало... Верите ли,-- так меня распирало, тошнило!.. […]Ну, будто бы я ее... проглотил... […] То есть стал ходячею на двух ногах бомбою *с* отвратительным тиканьем в животе"

[108] Ibid., 196: [Все] превращается в мощное чувство, как будто терзают на части, растаскивают в противоположные стороны: спереди вырывается сердце: а из спины вырывают, как из плетня хворостину, твой собственный позвоночник.' […] 'И были вы, Николай Аполлонович, как Дионис терзаемый…'

conceptual problem, the novel's conflict structure would be overly abstract, weak. The image comes alive when Nikolai's confrontation with chaos is embodied, when it tears his flesh apart.

In *The Petty Demon,* Peredonov was projecting his pathological consciousness out into the material world. *Petersburg* attempts a reversal of the traditional dynamics of 'psychological projection.' In other words, most of Bely's characters in the novel take the conceptual incongruities of the outside world and localize them into their bodies.

Petersburg's tendency to enliven conceptual incongruities by forcing them into bodies serves as the most common device for the creation of grotesque imagery in the text. The emphatic fleshiness of Bely's expansive symbolic play suggests an aesthetic dynamic that makes *Petersburg* wholly unique among the other works addressed in this chapter. But how does Bely manage to fit these almost infinitely complex, expansive symbolic systems into the body?

The definition of the grotesque assumes that grotesque images are essentially *bounded.* In other words, the grotesque relies on incongruous elements being *circumscribed* in a *single* site. Is this at odds with the idea of the 'unbound' nature of Bely's potentially endless symbolic chains? Bely's grotesque images – as is especially apparent in the aforementioned embodiments of 'order' and 'chaos' – are indeed circumscribed in a specific site like the body. Their conceptual boundlessness does not interfere with the 'boundness' of the image.

It is also important to take note of the fact that the constancy of overdetermined meaning in *Petersburg* is also a device. The symbolic play in Bely's novel is *not* the equivalent of a certain object's *potential connectedness* to a number of others in empirical reality outside the text. In other words, the intertextual connections are a device that has very little to do with

[109] Ibid., 196: "Хорошо это вам говорить "вне себя»; «вне себя" -- так все говорят; выражение это -- аллегория просто, не опирающаяся на телесные ощущения. Я же чувствовал себя вне себя совершенно телесно, физиологически, что ли."

traditional associations that one may hold from their empirical experience. For example, green has nothing *essentially* to do with 'chaos'; the connection is made by Bely within the text. Again, this is Bely's artifice.

Because Bely is free to create conceptual paradox in his artificial literary construction, he can fuse 'unbound' conceptual meaning into 'bound' grotesque sites. Remarkably, this paradox is felt by Bely's characters because they are forced to embody his concepts, no matter how paradoxical. For this reason, Nikolai feels his heart and spine explode out of his body 'as if [he's] being torn in pieces […] being dragged apart in opposite directions.' A 'bound' grotesque image combined with the sheer overwhelming magnitude of symbolic play in its constituent parts leads to an image that is, at once, grotesque and sublime. But why sublime exactly?

In her article "Henry Adams and Andrei Bely: The explosive mind," Caroline V. Hamilton sees *Petersburg's* famous ticking sardine-tin bomb as an expression of 'the anarchist sublime':

> The bomb is both a form of expression and the annihilation of expression. Just as the sublime, encapsulated in the bomb, exceeds representation, the anarchist rejects representation, both as a form of government and in the aesthetic. The specific Kantian language of the sublime – abysses, expansion, infinity, immeasurability – is prominent in *Petersburg*, not surprisingly since Bely was a student of Kant. […] The bomb in *Petersburg* participates in the logic of the sublime, partly because it is terrifying and partly because its function is ultimately to explode limits, to expand and destroy consciousness.[110]

Hamilton's explication of Bely's engagement with the sublime is insightful, but its importance to *Petersburg* extends beyond its locus in the image of the ticking bomb and the novel's anarchic preoccupations. The sublime, I argue, is far more significant for its poetic rather than its political implications.

[110] Caroline V. Hamilton, "Henry Adams and Andrei Bely: The Explosive Mind," *Anarchist Studies* 18, no. 2 (2010): 76.

To explain, I will follow Hamilton's lead and look to Kant's seminal definition of the sublime. Kant speaks of human's sublime reception of nature – but, to him, nature essentially is a stand-in for something that, though conceptually understood to not be absolutely infinite, still exceeds the power of human imagination: "Nature is sublime in those of its appearances whose intuition carries with it the idea of their infinity. But the only way for this to occur is through the inadequacy of even the greatest effort of our imagination to estimate an object's magnitude." And further, on the estimation of magnitude: "It must be the aesthetic estimation of magnitude where we feel that effort, our imagination's effort to perform a comprehension that surpasses its ability to encompass the progressive apprehension in a whole of intuition, and where at the same time we perceive the inadequacy of the imagination – unbounded though it is as far as progressing is concerned – for taking in and using, for the estimation of magnitude, a basic measure that is suitable for this with minimal expenditure on the part of the understanding."[111]

For the reader of Bely, intuitional sense is indispensable. Each individual symbol is inextricably interconnected with so many others. And each symbolic system grows in complexity by the page as new symbols join the ranks of the old, as more scenes appear that may shape the meaning of what has come before and will come after. It is certainly true that one does develop an intuitive sense of the meanings of each system, and one may even begin to perform the mental computations required to conjure up a mental map of a symbol's many relations. However, even the most attentive reader of Bely – the one who has fastidiously mapped out the symbolic systems for themself – will find themself unable to comprehend the totality of localized meaning in many of the overstuffed grotesque images and embodiments in *Petersburg.*

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[111] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment,* trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hacket Pub. Co., 1987), 11.

Bely's Symbolist compatriot Vyacheslav Ivanov defined the symbol as following: "The symbol is only a true symbol when it is inexhaustible and boundless in its meaning, when it speaks in its (hieroglyphic and logical) language of hinting and suggesting something indelible and inadequate to the outer word."[112] Imagination reaches its limit and intuits that the interconnectedness of the symbols and their meanings, arranged in various permutations, far exceeds one's comprehensive capabilities. To use the Kantian terminology, the sheer magnitude of symbolic weight becomes intuitable and the imagination recognizes its failure to capture all of it.

To repeat, these symbolic systems are a *constructed* element in Bely's novel, they are a *device.* If it is true that virtually all phenomena are *in reality* interconnected in a manner incomprehensible to the human mind, their interconnectedness is concealed by habituation to reality. Bely's symbolic systems estrange the notion of interconnectedness. His symbols are situated in a textual environment that proposes particular connections. By estranging the 'unity' of phenomena (people, objects, concepts, etc.) by symbolically linking them to a whole incomprehensibly overdetermined ecosystem of others, Bely conjures the sublime. And, as I argue, he fixes the sublimity of his systems not *in,* but *to* 'bound' grotesque images. The grotesque incompatibility is bound by facets *within* the image – creating an incompatibility that is largely sustained even without the symbolic value of the facets – and the symbolic meaning of the incongruity extends far outside the image, well past the threshold of human comprehensibility. In this way, Bely's *Petersburg* contains the unique combination of aesthetic

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[112] Viacheslav Ivanov, "Poet i chern′," in vol 1 of *Sobranie sochinenii,* eds. D. V. Ivanova and O. Dershchat (Bruxelles: Foyer Oriental Chretien, 1971), 712: "Символ только тогда истинный символ, когда он неисчерпаем и беспределен в своём значении, когда он изрекает на своём (иератическом и логическом) языке намёка и внушения нечто неизгладимое, неадекватное внешнему слову. Он многолик, многосмыслен и всегда тёмен в последней глубине."

properties needed to combine 'boundedness' of image and the 'unbounded' extension of symbolic meanings resulting in the 'sublime grotesque.'

The sublime grotesque in *Petersburg* is especially prominent when the entropic elements of chaos take bodily form; the combination of form with formlessness – in practice but also by definition – leads to grotesque deformities and/or self-obliteration. Although the case of the dissociative revolutionary Alexander Dudkin can be put forth as an example – his sub-plot is extraordinarily expressive in its manifestations of the symbolism of chaos – I give slight favor to the yellow double-agent Lippanchenko. In the following paragraphs, I will attempt to show just how overdetermined Bely's 'grotesque sublime' images can be – a task that requires a great deal of framing.

Lippanchenko is the novel's 'big bad,' the most antagonizing antagonist, an expression of nearly pure chaos that is only held in being by his round physical form (itself, it would seem, on the verge of bursting.) Lippanchenko is described as a "clever Ukrainian" in a red tie – "the color red was the emblem of the chaos killing Russia," as Apollon Apollonovich reminds us further into the narrative – who looks like he has Mongol blood.[113] In a clever double-entendre, Lippanchenko says of himself that he works "exporting Russian swine over the border."[114] Later, we see him in the guise of a certain Pavel Yakovlevich who – bending his head over his fingers as he reads a book – appears to Nikolai as a "monster: a head with blinking eyes, with unkempt dog's hair, with a maliciously snapping laugh, running over the table on ten legs – his fingers: along the pages of the book, looking like a ten-legged spider."[115] The insect theme is a

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[113] Bely, *Petersburg,* 123.

[114] Ibid., 51.

[115] Ibid., 159: "Поганая, заморгавшая глазками голова, с волосами, точно из псиной, гребнем начесанной шерсти, окрысившись отвратительным смехом, желтыми складками кожи бегала над столом на десяти своих

common signifier of chaos and, more specifically, a category of things that might be summed up as 'ticking bombs.' At various points in the novel, the bomb masquerading as sardine-tin, the constant flow of pedestrians on Nevsky (as centipede), and Lippanchenko are all instilled with this description. Each one of these things is portrayed as an unstable force that threatens to conceal the explosive power of chaos within them. Earlier in the chapter I discussed the explosive moment of 'unconcealing' in general, and in Khlebnikov's *Crane* specifically; the theme is also contained here. Each of these forces in *Petersburg* will only shed their mask and reveal their chaotic potential when it is time for them to explode, whether it be through widespread destructive rioting, a successfully executed terrorist plot, or a literal old-fashioned explosion.

Later in the narrative, we see Lippanchenko through Dudkin's eyes – here as the mysterious 'personage' whom Dudkin's neurotic mind cannot identify – from several angles. The constant flow of grotesque images is overwhelming. In Dudkin's perception, Lippanchenko appears in contradictions: with penetrating, but crying eyes that could be seen if "if his eyelids were raised…"[116] He has the suck(l)ing set of lips of a breastfed infant, and the head "of a prematurely born child whose undergrown brain sprouted gigantic bony outgrowths."[117] Concealing his 'softening brain' are the protrusions of bone at his brow that appear as if taken from a gorilla, and the biggest one – front-and-center on his forehead – calls to mind a

прыгавших пальцах по листикам книжечки, вид имея огромного насекомого: десятиногого паука, по бумаге шуршавшего лапами." One could hardly ask for a better ekphrastic description of Odilon Redon's "The Smiling Spider." Everything is accurate: the ten legs, the tussled dog hair, the evil smile, and even the yellow background, though not invoked in this passage, fits thematically with Lippanchenko's constant symbolic identification with the color.

[116] Ostensibly a reference to the most terrible of the monsters in Gogol's Viy who has colossal eyelids that, when the other monsters help him lift the lids up, reveal eyes that are capable of 'penetrating' the magic barrier the protagonist has created to conceal himself.

[117] Ibid., 206: Так внимательный разбор чудовищной головы выдавал лишь одно: голова была -- головой недоноска; чей-то хиленький мозг оброс ранее срока жировыми и костяными наростами;

rhinoceros. And finally: "The combination of the sickliness [of head and brain] combined with the rhino-like intransigence created a chimera: the chimera materialized in the night: on the section of dark-yellow wallpaper into a genuine Mongol."[118]

Instead of pointing to the mechanics of these standout grotesque images – relying on monstrous, contradictory hybridities: man and baby, man and rhinoceros, man and spider – I will highlight the symbolic significance. His all-but-melting brain connects him most directly to Dudkin himself – suffering from extreme insomnia and a smoked-through brain – but also, more generally, to *Petersburg's* discourse of chaos. The sucking set of lips, aside from making him look like an overgrown infant, is the position needed to make the 'u-u-u' (in Russian: y-y-y) sound, which is repeatedly referred to as the 'song of 1905.' (A joke: Bely calls u-u-u 'the song of 1905' due to the terrorist-sect underground's love of evol u-u-u tion and revol u-u-u tion.) This howling song of revolution blows through the Petersburg streets intermittently through the novel, and, a few scenes later, Lippanchenko is seen and heard singing it once more. The rhinoceros's horn is a transparent reference to Apollon Apollonovich's coat-of-arms which depicts a knight – Ableukhov, presumably – getting impaled by the horn of a rhino (chaos impales order). Paradoxically, the gorilla reference unites the bodies of Lippanchenko with his orderly adversary Apollon; there is a brief scene when the narrator himself compares the image of statesman to the skeleton of an old gorilla. The description of the wallpaper refers to a hallucination that Dudkin experiences regularly: a giant yellow Mongolian head that surfaces from his wallpaper – a symbol that also conjures Dudkin's mention of the 'Mongol blood in all Russians,' the memory of the Battle of Kulikovo, and philosopher Vladimir Solovyov's notions

[118] Ibid., 207: "Сочетание внутренней хилости с носорожьим упорством -- неужели это вот сочетание в Александре Ивановиче и сложило химеру, а химера росла -- по ночам: на куске темно-желтых обой усмехалась она настоящим монголом."

'Pan-Mongolism' and 'Yellow Peril' which predicts a bloody second coming of the Asiatic invaders into Europe.[119] And, as if the image was not already overdetermined enough, Dudkin gets a glance at the creature's back and gathers a new set of impressions. The creature's back is jutting out unnaturally and: "a deep skin-fold in [his] neck, between his back and the anterior side of his head, was pushed out in the form of a faceless smile […] as if in the chair a monster sat with a completely nose-less, eye-less face; the neck fold providing its open toothless mouth."[120] The emphasis on the protruding back recalls Lippanchenko's round, gaseous expansiveness and Nikolai's description of the exploding spine as Dionysian torture – a symbol used several times in the novel for the infinitely expansive, chaotic dematerialization of the body into a vaporous, atomized state akin to death. It is as if that Dionysian element of pure chaos assumes flesh to smile facelessly at Dudkin, his unwilling – or, better, unwitting – servant.

I should hope that the image of Lippanchenko as presented across only a few paragraphs will serve as a particularly stark example of that breed of 'sublime grotesque' I conceptualized earlier. I foresee the argument that if the symbolic meaning can be unpacked as I have done here, in the space of a single paragraph, then it hardly meets the standards of 'incomprehensibility' and 'magnitude' required by the sublime. However, the list that I've provided only gives an impression of the overwhelming diversity of symbolic connections, but it is hardly a complete set. Moreover, this list does not even begin to explore the *significance* of the diversity of symbolic cohabitations in the single image, nor does give one an idea of the weight or scale of even one of these connections taken individually. It does not attempt to

[119] Ibid., 34, 75.

[120] Ibid., 208: "Вдруг безликой улыбкой повыдавилась меж спиной и затылком жировая шейная складка: точно в кресле там засело чудовище; и представилась шея лицом; точно в кресле засело чудовище с безносой, безглазою харею; и представилась шейная складка -- беззубо разорванным ртом."

resolve the paradoxes involved in the clashing of conceptually incompatible symbolic nodes. If I may offer a peculiar analogy: presenting the information in this way is like presenting a satellite image of the Alps to demonstrate the sublimity of nature; the sublime arises in the contact with a phenomenon in its context, so deconstructing its substantive parts, especially incompletely, and revealing them from a different perspective necessarily alters the reception. When it is encountered in the novel, the symbolic ties to the other pages and to external phenomena wash over the reader so quickly that flashes of intuition are all that one has in their mental arsenal to attempt to truly comprehend them. One might also argue that, despite the rapid-fire inflow of symbols, the image can simply be understood as an embodiment of *Petersburg's* chaos discourse, and that the individual details are not materially significant to the whole impression. Though the interrelated symbols in the chaos system serve to help the intuition along, propelling *apprehension,* the full symbolic weight of the image will still exceed immediate *comprehension*. Moreover, a reductionist reading like this clearly undercuts one of the most profoundly unique elements of the text, washing out all meaning into its simple bifurcated order/chaos dyad. Another might say that the novel's 'boundedness' does not allow for a (largely self-referential) symbolic system to ascend into the 'boundlessness' of the sublime. The symbolic systems do, I argue, exceed the bounds of the text in their referentiality to history, geographies, abstractions, philosophical concepts, various personages etc. and, even conceptually, exceed the individual's ability to grasp them.

However, while I am convinced that the symbolic systems reach significantly outside the text, even if the premise that they do not is admitted, then there is still recourse in Kant's terminology. Specifically, if one has truly grasped the plurality of meanings, associations, contradictions etc. made possible by various permutations of each symbol and their relations,

then the imagination will intuit the impossibility of a 'bound,' 'circumscribed' interpretation that will capture the whole. Otherwise, I argue, the reader is suffering from a failure of imagination of another kind: a failure to grasp the magnitude of the potential meanings in *Petersburg's* symbolically loaded images.

The grotesque manifestation of Lippanchenko described earlier binds numerous monstrously abnormal physical deformations, each with its own symbolic value, into a single body. Given the sheer number of integrated symbols, the body must become impossibly mutilated; the more thoroughly the symbolic landscape is molded within the body, in theory, the more grotesque it becomes. The symbolic landscape of the mutilated 'bound' body also begins manifesting itself outside the body in a flurry of associative linkages that defies the finality of comprehension. The result, I repeat, is the sublime grotesque.

Petersburg's symbolic tension between order and chaos sees an equally symbolic – though ultimately unfinalizable – resolution with the death of Lippanchenko. Fittingly, it is also embodied and grotesquely performative. Dudkin, in a moment of clarity after his terrifying encounter with the monster from the previous scene, finds that he has long been under the manipulative spell of Lippanchenko. Taking in copious amounts of tobacco smoke, spirits, and the green bacilli-filled water from the waterways – all elements of *Petersburg's* symbolic linkages signaling 'chaos' – Dudkin has invited the dissociative and irrational *into* his body, clouding his mind. However, in one of his final hallucinations, the Bronze Horseman himself, in an 'entropic' green coat of patina, crashes into Dudkin's life. Suddenly, the feverish revolutionary recognizes himself as a contemporary instantiation of Eugene, the tragic soul from Pushkin's *Bronze Horseman.* Under the white-hot light of the moon, that metal copy of Peter, the Westernizer undergoes a metallurgic metamorphosis from the patina-green (chaos) to a pure

white (order) of melted metal – and pours himself into Dudkin's veins. Once the prince of chaos, Dudkin now has the negentropic might of Petersburg's founder coursing through his body. In his final act, crazed by pure order as he was by pure chaos, the Peter-infused Dudkin sneaks into the house of the unsuspecting Lippanchenko and kills him. The final image of this saga is suffused with symbolic power and grotesque weight: "In the morning, they came in: but Lippanchenko had already disappeared; there was – a puddle of blood; there was – a corpse; and – a figure with a laughing white face; he had a mustache; it twitched; strange: the man was mounted on top of the dead; he squeezed a scissors in his hand; he stretched his arm out, and, along his face – across his nose, along his lips – the scuttling speck of a cockroach."[121] In their final moments, the two men – chaos-incarnate Lippanchenko and the unlikely harbinger of order Dudkin – freeze in a pose that brings to memory the image of the Bronze Horseman monument that opened this chapter, and the image that defined Puskhin's seminal poem.

In the opening, I discussed the steed's great moment of indecision, teetering on its hinds and threatening to *leap* out of balance – launching Russia into an apocalyptic struggle between chaos and order, East and West. Lippanchenko, the would-be terrorist and conspirator who tried to plunge Russia into chaos, is now the subordinate image of the steed pacified by the ordering hand of Peter in Dudkin's flesh. Pale white – the color of the novel's sterile and stately world of order – Dudkin stretches out one arm as Peter does in *The Bronze Horseman*: "The idol with outstretched arm / sat atop the bronze steed."[122] However, even with Peter's scalding essence in his body, Dudkin does not totally lose his connection to Evgenii. Evgenii's madness, driven by

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[121] Ibid., 283: "Когда утром вошли, то Липпанченки уже не было, а была -- лужа крови; был -- труп; и была тут фигурка мужчины -- с усмехнувшимся белым лицом, вне себя; у нее были усики; они вздернулись кверху; очень странно: мужчина на мертвеца сел верхом; он сжимал в руке ножницы; руку эту простер он; по его лицу -- через нос, по губам - уползало пятно таракана."

[122] Pushkin, "Mednyi vsadnik," 518: "Кумир с простертою рукою / Сидел на бронзовом коне."

the post-traumatic stress of his fateful encounter with Petersburg's deluge mythos – the tragic expression of the chaotic forces of nature – finds its analogue in Dudkin's sub-plot with Lippanchenko. In this final scene, it becomes apparent that the spirit of *The Bronze Horseman's* frightened protagonist still dwells within Dudkin. Though Dudkin squeezes a pair of scissors, the murder weapon in his hand, in Pushkin's poem we witness his double squeezing an object of another kind during the flood: "Mounted on the marble beast, / Without a hat, his hands / squeezing a cross, / sat the motionless, fearfully pale / Evgenii."[123]

The plurality of symbolic value, at once indeterminately paradoxical and overdetermined, resists a final interpretation of this scene. One can identify the different references, but how does one do the arithmetic to find out what it all means? Dudkin's triumphant mounting of the slaughtered Lippanchenko is simultaneously an image in itself – but not only. It represents an image of Peter the Great's outstretched arm reigning triumphant once again over a manifestation of chaos, while also representing the image of Evgenii cowering on the marble lion in the flood with the clutched cross in his hand. It is almost as if Bely applies a modernist spectroscopic lens that allows him to split the single visible image – Dudkin and Lippanchenko – into a spectrum of the symbolic ordered and chaotic potentialities that every being, with varying degrees of expression, embodies.

This final image of Dudkin and Lippanchenko is the ideal embodied grotesque paradox to end the discussion on Bely's great modernist novel. As I have argued, *Petersburg* depicts a world where the constant incongruities of chaos and order play out in the bodies of each individual. The bodily distortions that accompany this struggle are far more than a series of

[123] Ibid., 517: "Стоят два льва сторожевые, / На звере мраморном верхом, / Без шляпы, руки сжав крестом, / Сидел недвижный, страшно бледный / Евгений."

hallucinations serving as projections of metaphoric and/or symbolic value. Although many of these images are generated by the perceptive faculties of various characters and the narrator himself, there is nothing beyond this subjectivity to ground the text in something more 'real.' Unlike in *The Petty Demon* there can be no recourse to a narrator providing a realist vision in *Petersburg*. It is not as if the realm of empirical phenomena is *just as real* as the individualized subjective expressions of these phenomena; it is no longer clear that there is any distinction between the two. Recalling Apollon Apollonovich's reactions to the intrusive 'mind play' that removes him from the boxy geometric order of his cranium, his irritation presumably stems from the destruction the pernicious mythology of realist 'truth.' And his hesitancy to engage with this new proliferation of individual 'truths' is not just an expression of Apollon's crotchety brand of conservatism. The non-monistic world, transformed by the expressionistic impulses of the mind, destroys the calming illusion of a shared truth – making reality into a domain of the unfamiliar, the strange, the frightening, and the grotesque.

Edmond Burke, in his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful,* writes: "Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling."[124] Repeatedly in *Petersburg,* the reader bears witness to the exploding expansions of the chaotic body, ripped into pieces and spread across the cosmos. This terrible fate, the bound body often reacting violently to its unbinding, is intimately connected to the sublime grotesque's penchant for self-obliteration. As Burke

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[124] Edmond Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful,* in *Works of The Right Honourable Edmund Burke in Twelve Volumes* (London: Nimmo, 1887). 1: 111 Project Gutenburg Ebook.

continues, “Without all doubt, the torments which we may be made to suffer are much greater in their effect on the body and mind, than any pleasures which the most learned voluptuary could suggest, or than the liveliest imagination, and the most sound and exquisitely sensible body, could enjoy.”[125] And indeed, the striking depictions of mutilations of the body in Bely’s explorations of chaos-made-flesh, combined with the ungraspable complexities of meaning inherent in his implementation of the symbolist method, create the exceedingly rare conditions for the sublime grotesque to arise.

The Petty Demon took a careful step away from realism into the realm of modernist subjective mode and unveiled the danger latent in the self-seeking vulgarity and subconscious of the crude provincial dweller like Peredonov. Bely leaped into the modernist mode, showing that the ticking timebombs of violence and chaos are not just in the ‘unrefined’ expanses beyond capitol city life, but inside the city itself – out below the smoke-stacks and haze of the workers’ factories, hidden behind raised collars, in our homes, and in ourselves. He identified the split, polar horrors of ‘order’ and ‘chaos,’ placing the individual in the tragic struggle between the Apollon realm of meaningful, but ultimately deceiving appearances, and the Dionysian descent into pure chaos. Bely sought ways to aesthetically resolve this tragedy by experimenting with the word in flesh: ““The word of consciousness should have flesh. Flesh should have the gift of speech. The world should become flesh. Word become flesh is a symbol of creativity and is the natural order of things. […] Extant forms of art lead to the tragedy of the artist: the victory over the tragedy is the transubstantiation of art into the religion of life.”[126] The result of this ‘religion

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[125] Ibid.

[126] Bely, Simvolizm, 388-389: “Слово сознания должно иметь плоть. Плоть должна иметь дар речи. Слово должно стать плотью. Слово, ставшее плотью, — и символ творчества, и подлинная природа вещей. […] Существующие формы искусства ведут к трагедии художника: победа над трагедией есть пресуществление искусства в религию жизни.”

of life' is a fleshy, yet transcendent aesthetic, ever seeking to save man from the terrors of the polarities of order and chaos.

Evgenii Zamyatin's At World's End

In the first of a series of lectures on the technical elements of writing at Lebedyan University in September of 1918, Evgenii Zamyatin attempted to summarize the innovations and aesthetic achievements of prerevolutionary Russian literature. His argument places *The Petty Demon* and *Petersburg* into a new category of literature, 'novorealism,' taking the aesthetic insights from symbolism and applying them to the corporeal realm. His assessment of the literature, and the affinity between his 'novorealism' and 'grotesque modernism,' is valuable in itself.

Zamyatin's 'novorealism' was subsumed into a more general movement of 'neorealism' in Vsevolod Keldysh's book *Russian Realism of the Early 20th Century (Русский реализм начала XX в., 1975).* Keldysh explains the factors leading to the genesis of 'neorealism' as follows: "[Neorealism was a result of] the necessity to make sense of the principally new condition of the world" and "the heightened sense at that time of the exhaustion of previous artistic forms and the search for a new language of expression."[127] Furthermore, he argues, a number of historical factors came into play. According to Keldysh, Neorealism "is doubtlessly the result of negative socio-historical conditions, birthed by the political reactions of 1908-1910, and arriving on the heels of the First Russian Revolution" and was also the product of "quickly changing perceptions of the relationship between the individual and the conditions he lives

[127] Keldysh, V. A, "Realizm i 'neorealizm'," in *Russkaia literatura rubezha vekov (1890-e – nachalo 1920-x godov)*, edited by V. A. Keldysh, Moskva: IMLI RAN, 2001), 1:259.

in."[128] Although Zamyatin's lecture goes into little detail about how the political and cultural situation influenced his writings, Keldysh's comments are consistent with the conditions I described as giving rise to grotesque modernism. In the course of my analysis of perhaps Zamyatin's most scandalous novella, I will attempt to use his comments on 'novorealism' – informed by Keldysh's framing of 'neorealism' – to bolster certain claims about 'grotesque modernism' in general, and to illuminate the devices that inform Zamyatin's distinctive expression of it.

At World's End is set on the periphery of Russia, far from city life, within a military post in the Far East. As the title suggests, the peripherality of the novella is central to its message. Motivating the move away from the satanic charms of the Petersburg cityscape, Zamyatin writes: "Big-city life is analogous to life in a factory: it depersonalizes, makes people somehow identical, factory-pressed, mechanical. And in the attempt to offer the liveliest images, many of the Novorealists turned from the big city to the backwoods, to the provinces […] Here the Novorealists find not only 'the everyday' [*byt*], but 'the everyday' concentrated, withstanding the centuries, unyielding, tilted at 90 degrees."[129] Though *Petersburg* did have an exceptionally diverse cast, Zamyatin's comment finds resonance in the novel's depictions of the 'human centipede' of commoners on Nevsky Prospect: "There is no end to the human centipede; though all of its links are interchangeable, it is always that same whole; its head bent behind the train station, its tail thrust down Morskaya, and all along Nevsky shuffle those anthropoid legs. Scolopendra in the flesh!" (Bely 194).[130] Zamyatin's analysis might be taken to mean that life

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[128] Ibid.

[129] Zamiatin, Evgenii. *Na kulichkakh.* In *Povesti i rasskazy.* Edited by Aleksei Dmitrenko and Elena Petrovna (Sankt-Peterburg: Vita-Nova, 2018), 27-28: "Тут новореалисты находят не только быт -- но быт сконцентрированный, устоявшийся веками, крепчайший, 90-градусный."

on the periphery is livelier, less faceless than that of the interchangeable linkages of bodies in Petersburg. His novella encourages a more nuanced view.

Before I analyze several central characters in *At World's End,* a few details about the atmosphere that reigns in the Far East military post will help set the stage. The land itself speaks of death: "The earth – frozen, dull, naked – lay like an undisposed corpse."[131] And later, when it warms slightly, it still exudes hostility to life: "Great Lent, damp, warm. The mud smacks underfoot – smacks as though it will swallow a man."[132] And it is as if this constant presence of death is somehow infectious: "Ridges, tangled with forest, blackened to the right, and below them was a foggy valley. And seven stilted wooden crosses wavered in the fog and stood beside the road like beggars. […] 'Seven young officers each decided to… And not long ago, only about eight or nine years ago… All in one year, as if from a virus'."[133]

The rank-and-file soldiers that populate the outpost are often portrayed as disheveled, drunk and uncivilized. Zamyatin's inspiration for their stylization comes from a 'club' – the Lancepoupe Club – that developed in Vladivostok in the late nineteenth century to create a sense of community among those stationed there. The real men of the Lancepoupe Club participated in a number of extreme drinking games: including 'cuckoo' – a man would 'cuckoo' and two others would try to shoot at the noise – and another called 'little star' – men sitting all around a

[130] Bely, *Peterburg,* 194: "Нет такого предела у людской многоножки; и ничто ее не сменяет; ее звенья меняются, а она -- та же вся; где-то там, за вокзалом, завернулась ее голова; хвост просунут в Морскую; а по Невскому шаркают членистоногие звенья. Совсем сколопендра!"

[131] Zamiatin, *Na kulichkakh,* 135: "Земля – мерзлая, тусклая, голая – лежала неубранным покойником."

[132] Ibid., 160: "Чавкает под ногами грязь, -- так чавкает, что вот-вот человека проглотит."

[133] Ibid., 166: "Вправо чернеют вихрястые от леса увалы, под ними туманная долина. И в тумане шевелятся, стали у самой дороги, как нищие, семь хромых деревянных крестов. […] Семь офицеров молоденьких. И не очень, чтоб давно, лет, что ли, восемь или девять... Все -- в один год, как от заразы."

cauldron of alcohol would drink till they passed out, becoming one of the cauldron-star's rays. In Zamyatin's novella, a few of the club's most notorious legends were repurposed.[134]

These spare details are representative of the tragi-comic elements of *At World's End;* the soldiers' reaction to the misery of the atmosphere is to do what they must to put it out of mind. The rational, serious mind which entrenches itself in 'the real' is at risk, while the irrational, drunken mind is, at least temporarily, free. Despite Zamyatin's comments about the depersonalization of the city, the remote outpost of his novella also depicts a dehumanization of a different kind. The cost of their mental detachment is significant; the decay of their humanity makes them look like comic buffoons at one moment, like soulless wanderers at another, and like senseless killers at the next.

The reader encounters Zamyatin's Far East fringe along with Andrei Ivanych Polovets, a failed candidate of the musical conservatorium who prioritized piano practice less than the practice of another kind with his bright-haired, beautiful instructress. Looking for a fresh start, Andrei Ivanych travels to the edge of the world to revitalize himself, gain life experience, and collect material for a book.[135] Andrei's giant forehead, an embodiment of his sometimes misguided, 'high-minded' pursuit of divine Beauty in art and women, is the only distinct feature endowed to him in creation by a God too lazy to finish the rest of the job. His forehead is a sign

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[134] For example, *At World's End* fixates a slightly modified version of a story about the Club, taken from a certain A.P. Budberg's memoirs, which describes an unexpected visit from their military ally, the French. The encampment was in shambles and they didn't know what to do with "the soldiers who, from their constant work in the forest and in the brick factory, lost all signs of their militaristic image" (see footnotes for pages 157-163 listed on 445-447 in Zamiatin, Evgenii. *Na kulichkakh* (Sankt-Petersburg: Vita Nova, 2018). Delaying the French admiral, they managed to tidy up and the visit seemed to be going over well – that is, until a Russian soldier whose face was smeared with clay and whose clothes were in tatters happened to cross paths with the admiral and his Russian guide. Thinking on his feet, the guide explained that the man was actually the member of a local tribe of natives called the 'Lansepups'. The admiral bought the story, and the situation was saved. Zamyatin mirrors this story, altering a few minor details. The symbolic value of the French is captured in their graceful, white – think Bely's orderly white – ship that resembles the grace of a swan.

[135] If this brings to mind the young Isaac Babel heading out to be 'among people' at the behest of Maxim Gorky, then it situates expectations for *what will be found among people* with accuracy.

of an exaggerated *high*-mindedness that places him on the polar end of the 'high and low' scale in favor of rationality, beauty, sobriety, humanity etc. Although as the plot develops, his 'high-oriented' polarity will serve him poorly in the irrational environment he has landed in, it would be a mistake to assume that it would serve him well in a more rationally-minded society. After all, his failure in his life before the Far East was predicated on his constant chasing of the nearest, most immediate 'high.' As the plot unravels, it is important to keep in mind the effects this polarization has on his fate among the officers of the outpost. On arrival, Andrei and his "god's yawn" forehead find the military post filled with an anthropomorphizing population and an oppressive fog: "[The fog caused] a thick, fuzzy murkiness – like a drowsy hangover – in his head; and in come crawling some kind of senseless inhuman creatures, too frightening to fall asleep, impossible: the creatures are nearby."[136] To counter the effects of the interpenetrating, mind-numbing, choking fog, Andrei Ivanych sets out to find "at least one human voice" among the post's population.[137]

And that 'one human voice' proves unusually difficult to find. It isn't heard in the incoherent babbling of his fish-eyed assistant, Neprotoshnov: "Oh C-Christ… In his village [Neprotoshnov] was, probably, first among the accordionists, and now – fish eyes."[138] Nor can it be found in the general's assistant with "not a face, but a polished bronze samovar," round and glimmering, that does not speak per se, but instead starts boiling and rattles out words in a bubbling agitation. Nor with General Azancheev himself, whose "bare, bulging-eyed frog head"

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[136] Zamiatin, *Na kulichkakh,* 94: "Густой, лохматый, как хмельная дрема -- муть в голове -- притчится какая-то несуразная нелюдь -- и заснуть страшно: закружит нелюдь. Хоть какого-нибудь человечьего голоса захотелось."

[137] Ibid., 94.

[138] Ibid.: "О, ч-чорт... Ведь вот: был, наверно, в деревне -- первый гармонист, а теперь -- рыбьи глаза."

compliments his “pregnant paunch” that, if one could see beneath his cooking apron, would be covered in “speckled, white-green spots.”[139] Nor with the incoherently babbling wife of the general who, after losing her first child shortly after birth, “lost herself in thought – and lost she stayed.”[140] Nor with local den-mother Nechyosa, plump wife of a certain captain Nechyosa, whose nine-child brood looks suspiciously like a miniaturized cast of the novella’s main men. And on and on.

Understanding these characters in Zamyatin’s novella requires that one have an idea of the most bread-and-butter technique in Zamyatin’s technical arsenal – i.e., his method of metaphorical depiction. Andrei’s early encounters with the outpost’s dwellers highlight this trick, a trick which Zamyatin sees as central to both his work and the prerevolutionary ‘Novorealist’ output: “An author, using a comparison, does not say ‘like,’ ‘as if,’ or ‘as though’ […] For a Novorealist [the comparison] is already not ‘seems like,’ for him it is not ‘as if,’ but *in reality.*”[141] This statement might be suspiciously underwhelming if it is taken to mean ‘the Novorealist privileges metaphor over simile.’ Although metaphors, by definition, part with ‘like’ and ‘as’ in favor of more direct comparison, they nevertheless denote *comparison*. Zamyatin’s formulation puts an equal-sign between two disparate phenomena – this is *actually* that, recall: “not a face, but a polished bronze samovar.” Or, when used most potently, this device may refrain from drawing attention to the original referent at all. The following image of a crowd seen through a smoke-filled interior serves as an example: “And all went silent. In the fog, swaying and flickering, were human lumps: red faces, noses, glassed-over eyes.”[142] By

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[139] Ibid., 95.

[140] Ibid., 100: Задумалась она тогда -- да так вот задуманной и осталась.”

[141] Ibid., 25: “Новореалисту это уже не кажется, для него это не "как будто", а реальность.”

dispensing with 'like' or 'as', and by avoiding a weaker alternative that calls attention to the absence (their bodies) allows the image to land with a punch. The 'reality' of the image – in this case, of the human lumps' connection to bodies – behind the subjective modernist glaze is readily inferable from the context. The reader is meant to see directly, even if he only half-believes his eyes. This technique is a break from the traditional modernist formula, in a way, because it shuns the empirical 'thing' and focuses on the 'other,' the 'beyond,' exclusively. Although Baudelaire warns about only capturing the 'beyond' element without its empirical anchor for fear that the artist will "tumble into the abyss of an abstract and indeterminate beauty," the nature of Zamyatin's physical and earthy 'novorealist' mode frees him from this concern. In fact, he compares the method to 'peering at the skin through a microscope' in that the skin looks alien, and yet it is perhaps *more real* than our perception of it with our imperfect human eyes.

Though it may only be a terminological squabble, I'd like to address Zamyatin's self-diagnosed impressionism, and why I refrain from referring to him as an impressionist. In his description of the embodiment device described above, Zamyatin claims that the author captures the 'impression' given off by a character or any other empirical phenomenon in his own work. He then "infects the reader with a belief in that impression." And then proclaims: "The image becomes bolder, more brazen, more prominent. This manner of writing is called 'impressionism'."[143] To my mind, Zamyatin is committing a terminological error. He writes about 'impression' as if the characters exist independent of their author-creator, who then

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[142] Ibid., 120: "Замолчал. И все примолкли. Качались, мигали в тумане человечьи кусочки: красные лица, носы, остеклевшие глаза."

[143] Ibid., 25: "И вот этой верой во впечатление -- автор заражает читателя. Образ становится смелей, дерзче, выпуклей. Эта манера писания называется импрессионизмом, от французского impression, впечатление."

observes them and records his impressions. Zamyatin provides an example of his 'impressionism,' taken from another of his works, about a lawyer whose deep inner-contradictions reveal themselves as he walks. He walks with a limp, and so Zamyatin writes in his characteristic style that 'his whole body winks' with every step. The wink-walking is a constant reminder of the character's inner discord. Instead, I would contend that Zamyatin is describing 'expressionism.' The limping is a *device* employed by the author to *express* a quality about his creation. He embodies the lawyer with an outer-dualism so that the body itself becomes the medium to an understanding of his inner life.

In *At World's End* and elsewhere, the literal embodiment of metaphor is a straight path to estrangement not only because it significantly alters the image of the body, but also because it requires a reader to reconceive the mechanics of a character's physiology. As the samovar-faced general's assistant demonstrates, recognizable human processes become subsumed by the features of the applied metaphor. Consider, for example, the scene when he first meets Andrei Polovets: "The general's assistant had not a face, but a polished bronze samovar: round as can be, as shiny as can be. He was a stalled-out samovar, but then suddenly he started to bubble up, to boil: 'Polove-ets? Oh-h bo-oy!'"[144] In this case, the mechanics of the assistant's speech are supplanted by the process of boiling which has untrivial effects on the way the reader perceives the assistant's communicative behavior. Instead of the responsive start-and-stopping possible with typical human speech, the imbedded boiling metaphor implies a kind of laggardly momentum-building that must precede each speech act. Then, when the assistant-samovar finally gets itself boiling, then the words begin to spew out of him in an uncontainable

[144] Ibid., 95: "У денщика генеральского -- не лицо, а начищенный самовар медный: до того круглое, до того лоснится. И был себе самовар заглохший, а тут вдруг начал пузыриться, закипать: Полове-ец? Ах-и-батюшки."

cantankerous eruption. The implications of these embodied metaphors necessarily extend beyond their own bounds; the lagged delay in the assistant-samovar's reaction suggest a mental inadequacy which is confirmed by the gushing of raucous phonemes. Implanted in the body, the samovar comparison begins to spread to other physiological systems.

The same is true of metaphorical metonymies; the 'fish-eyed' conjuration of Neprotoshnov implies a certain 'fish-brainedness' as well. The general Azancheev's frog-like features also imbue him with an implied irrationality and perhaps even a layer of slime that foreshadows his sleazy character. In short, these embodied metaphors, due to the interconnectedness of human physiology, infect the body and estrange its processes (and, of course, the subject as a whole). Moreover, they create internal incongruities between standard notions of the image and/or innerworkings of 'man', and the properties of the implanted metaphor.

Therefore, the estrangement and incongruity caused by the embodied metaphor, more often than not, result in the grotesque. The results of Zamyatin's device tend to polarize his characters to one end of the 'high and low' scale. As I discussed, Andrei's '*high*-brow' tastes tend to pull him blindly to the moment to moment phenomena that titillate his brain. However, as will become clear, it renders him totally incapable of dealing with the irrationality that surrounds him among the anthropomorphized creatures in the outpost. Azancheev, who will emerge as the novella's primary antagonist, polarizes to the 'low' of animalization and chaotic organization. As the top dog of the outpost, he emanates that atmosphere of disorderliness that dominates among his officer-compatriots and soldier-lackeys. Pulling everything – including, as demonstrated above, the environment itself – into a polarized chaotic sphere of being, the outpost has no chance of ever achieving that sought-after harmonious hybridization of order and chaos.

Andrei is relatively unique in his longing for a human voice; the others seem to be managing amongst themselves just fine. However, there is one other notable member of the troupe that fares poorly amongst these creatures. Though his yearning is less for interpersonal contact and for more escapism in the annals of human Rationality, a notable exception to the troupe of animalized servicemen is the Kant-loving, Schopenhauer-reading Tikhmen'. Looking for a way to steel himself against the surrounding 'senseless inhuman creatures,' Tikhmen' retreats to philosophy, and treats the division of noumena and phenomena as a kind of conceptual shield: "there were 'things-in-themselves' which Tihmen' never cared to associate with, and there the 'reflections of things' in Tikhmen' which were submissive and under his control"[145] However, this protective philosophical spell becomes disenchanted when, in jest, the others convince him that lady Nechyosa's newest *sproutling* grew from a *seed* that he drunkenly planted. And the truth of the claim is not out of the realm of possibilities. If Tikhmen' has a sober, celibate, Kantian Jekyll, then his Hyde is a dog-like drunk with an unhealthy appreciation for the captain's wife. The sober Tikhmen' spends the majority of his time trying to figure out if he really is the father, and drunk dog-like Tikhmen' decides to ask Captain Nechyosa himself. The understandably angry Captain can nevertheless provide no answer and Tikhmen', in his deep drunken melancholy, ends his own life.

At last, Andrei finds his feminine ideal in the figure of Marusia, the wife of the sharp-featured, self-disciplined Captain Schmidt. Marusia and Schmidt are something of an anomaly for the outpost; they've been married three years and still love one another. "Let God punish for her pride," as den-mother Nechyosa says.[146] Their spousal idyll is interrupted when Schmidt, the

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[145] Ibid., 151: "Раньше было все так ясно: были "вещи к себе", до которых Тихменю никакого не было дела, и были "отражения вещей" в Тихмене, Тихменю покорные и подвластные."

local treasurer, scolds General Azancheev about mismanagement of funds and the poor state of the outpost's infrastructure. Azancheev does not take kindly to the insubordination, and insults Marusia: "Just wait, little one, she'll soon be passed around like the rest of them."[147] Schmidt slaps the general and, while he is put in a holding cell, Azancheev sends Marusia a letter threatening Schmidt's life if she does not come by and *somehow* convince him to show mercy. Marusia sacrifices her marital faithfulness at the altar of the frog-general, and Andrei falls deeper in love ostensibly with the idealization of the classic Russian female martyr. On the other hand, the now even sharper-featured Schmidt cannot bear the thought, and his expressions of 'love' with his wife become infused with a passionate, self-obliterating sadism. Andrei's desire to play the chivalric knight leads him into a confrontation with Schmidt that ends in a missed shot from Schmidt's revolver. To maintain his honor, Schmidt issues a duel so Andrei can square them up by also firing a shot. Andrei refuses. Now, with tarnished honor, convinced that his wife will never believe in his love again, the ever-tightening spring in Schmidt's head finally gives way; Schmidt shoots himself in the head. Azancheev, who had left to the city to avoid Schmidt's revenge, now returns to the outpost, "and [gives] such a remembrance speech that he himself even shed a tear."[148] Marusia breaks all contact with Andrei for refusing the duel. Captain Nechyosa, seeing Andrei's sorrow at the memorial, advises that he have something to drink, "and Andrei Ivanych drank, obediently drank. Inebriation, that old friend, is affectionate one: when you've got nowhere to lay your head, inebriation will take it, stroke it, and cheer it with a lie…"[149] And the antidote works. In the final scene, Andrei starts to dance with an ecstatic

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[146] Ibid., 104: "Бог-то ее за гордость накажет..."

[147] Ibid., 116: "Погоди-ка, миленок, будет она по рукам ходить, как и прочие наши."

[148] Ibid., 186: "И такую поминальную Шмиту речь двинул, что сам даже слезу пустил."

cheer as Nechyosa looks on: “That’s how it’s done! Oh, he’s one of ours, that Andrei Ivanych! […] What did I tell you, brother - drink, I said. One of ours!”[150]

Even in this cursory synopsis, the pattern of the destruction of strong-willed and intellectual men reveals a very basic truth about Zamyatin’s text: the qualities of rationality and humanity that are often construed as man’s defining features are not only useless here, but profoundly harmful. *At World’s End* ostensibly depicts a domain where holding on to Enlightenment ideals is functionally a death wish. Andrei loses the ability to contain his grief without alcohol, Schmidt is destroyed for his stand against Azancheev’s disorderly rule, and Tikhmen’ ends his life when he gives up on finding truth.

In fact, poor Tikhmen’ is a great point of departure for a thematic discussion of *At World’s End* because he serves as a locus for its most central conceptual incongruities. His embodied splitting is the result of several interrelated conceptual fractures that are central for the text as a whole: sober, cynical, rational, human vs drunk, idealistic, irrational, animal (dog). Moreover, his case highlights a discursive strategy, fundamentally Gogolian, that mixes discourses of the tragic and comic to trivialize the suffering of a character at their lowest moments. For Tikhmen’ and the rest of the outpost, alcohol serves as a symbolic switch which not only gets them drunk, but also transfers them from one set of concepts to the other (i.e., turns Tikhmen’ from sober, cynical human in a tragedy to drunk, idealistic dog in a comedy). The failure of his sober rationalization is the reason he drinks himself to his ‘dog mode’ for the last time: “Tikhmen’ was still entirely sober and therefore looked at everything with skepticism: ‘All

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[149] Ibid.: “И пил Андрей Иваныч, послушно пил. Хмель-батюшка -- ласковый: некуда голову преклонить, так хмель ее примет, приголубит, обманом взвеселит...”

[150] Ibid.: “Вот это так-так! Ай да наш, ай да Андрей Иваныч! -- закричал Нечеса одобрительно, -- я говорил, брат, пей, я говорил. Ай да наш!”

of this is, of course, a lie. But it shines, yes. And since the only truth is in death, and since I still am living, then I need to live in falsehood, superficially. […] I need to be empty-headed… But practically? Ah, today I cannot seem to think straight…'"[151] This scene reflects Tikhmen' before the Russian-French ball; here he plans to confront Captain Nechyosa about the true father of his wife's latest child. And he drinks. With the alcohol in his body he becomes brave enough to confront the captain, but, in this devil's deal, loses the ability to discern whether or not he actually should: "Capta-ain, you tell me h-honestly […] who is Petyashka's father? My heart, understand? My hea-art aches! – I'm dying: is Petyashka mine or, um, not mine… / You're the last hope I have, hm! hm!"[152] Nechyosa stares at his tear-streaked nose, and, when he finally processes the information: "Nechyosa, overtaken by some higher power, snugly grabbed Tikhmen' by the nose with two fingers and started to lead him back and forth. And Tikhmen's surprise was so great that he stopped his sniffling and obediently, with a little curiosity even, followed the lead of the captain's hand."[153] In the next scene, Tikhmen' pulls himself out of a window and falls to his death.

Although Tikhmen' contains both the elements of order and chaos, one may wonder why he is unable to achieve a successful internal hybridization. The answer, again, lies in the notion of polarities. As the above-mentioned passages exemplify, Tikhmen' never attempts to find a balance between his orderly and chaotic side, but rather uses alcohol to switch from one polarity

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[151] Ibid., 166: "Все это, конечно, ложь. Но это блестит, да. А так как единственная истина -- смерть, и так как я еще живу, то и надо жить ложью, поверхностно. Значит, правы Молочки, и надо быть пустоголовым... Но практически? Ах, я сегодня что-то путаю..."

[152] Ibid., 169: "Капит-тан, скажи ты мне по с-совести, ну, ради Господа самого: чей Петяшка сын? С тоски -- понимаешь, с то-ски! -- помираю; мой Петяшка или, вот, не мой... […] Последняя ты у меня надежда, хм! хм!"

[153] Ibid.: "Влекомый высшей силой, Нечеса крепко взял двумя пальцами Тихменев нос и начал его водить вправо и влево. И столь это было для Тихменя сюрпризом, что перестал он хныкать и покорно, даже с некоторым любопытством, следовал за капитановой рукой."

to the other. In either case, his image is clearly grotesque. On one hand, his rational side is hopelessly naïve and unable to mentally cope with the irrationality of those around him. On the other, his 'dog-like' drunkard-self escapes all rational grounding and loses sight of the material consequences of his actions leading to the potential impregnation of Nechyosa's wife and, consequently, his own suicide.

In the seminal essay "How Gogol's Overcoat was Done," Boris Eikhenbaum discusses clashes between the ironizing narratorial jokes at Akaky Akakievich's expense and the very real tragedy of his situation. When these discourses of the comic and tragic meet, Eikhenbaum argues that the comic elements tend to detract from the tragic with a result that is distinctly grotesque in character. The same can be said about Tikhmen' here, who is on the verge of suicide and yet gets literally 'led by the nose' – a Russian idiom meaning 'to mislead, or lead someone astray,' which is quite an ironic gesture given the question *who deceived whom here?* suggests a role-reversal. Although this scene is the most poignantly tragi-comic in the text, it is reflective of the *At World's End's* ability to put a glaze over its violence, abuses of power, rape, murder etc. etc. with moments that conjure up the drunken jolly absurdity of the carnivalesque. It would be a mistake to tow the strictly Bakhtinian line, looking for an expression of the joy of relativism in these passages. The military post of bestialized Russian soldiers, headed by the frog-like General, is entrenched in falsehoods so profoundly that these falsehoods become the local truth; this is why Tikhmen' concludes before the ball that, for one trying to maintain their moral human face in these conditions, 'to live in truth is to die.' Instead of Bakhtin, I see an echoing of the expressions in *The Petty Demon* and *Petersburg* that show the kind of heinous unraveling of sustainable human life sustained when the grand scale of 'order and chaos' tips too far off to the right.

When surveying the fates of all these characters, it becomes clear that hyper-rationality and hyper-irrationality are both pathological states of mind. Just as the grotesque arises in extreme embodiments of 'high and low' values, so too does it come about from the psychological extremities on display in *At World's End.* The result is a kind of '*psychological grotesque'* that permeates the novella. Just as extreme order imposed on the material world causes a tyrannical authoritarianism to the detriment of the people living within it, so too does pathologized psychological orderliness lead to a despotism of the self. Best seen in the sub-plot of Schmidt, the 'screw' of internally-enforced rationality continues to tighten in the officer's head until he cannot bear it anymore and offs himself. His sadistic treatment of his wife is also predicated on the tautness of thought that cannot cope with his wife's act of martyrdom, most likely construed as an act of betrayal at the hands of Azancheev. At the polar opposite end, there are characters like the general himself and many of the anthropomorphized minor characters who contribute to the psychotic chaos of the Russian outpost. Being on the traditionally 'low' end of the scale, perhaps the destructive power of irrationality requires less explication, but nevertheless it is important to underline for the nth time that polarities of any kind rarely result in any positive outcomes. The chaotic nature of their minds reduces these characters from man to animal, forcing them to embrace their vulgar and base instincts as a matter of course. As I discussed in the context of Khlebnikov's *Crane,* on one polar extreme one may find a manifestation of the opposite extreme. In the case of *Crane,* the orderliness of the city's industrialized infrastructure hid a pernicious element of chaos within it. In *At World's End* the pathologically chaotic nature of Azancheev's approach to leadership leads to an authoritarian chaos, a chaos that is imposed upon the dwellers of the outpost. In many ways, it is this tyrannical imposition of chaos that necessitates the mental embrasure of a polarized irrationality, if only to survive in such disorder.

However, it goes without saying that the 'psychological grotesque' does not exclude Zamyatin's embodiments of these same polarities of 'high and low.' Similarly to Bely's work, Zamyatin's metaphorical embodiments also serve as an effective mechanism to imbue characters with certain symbolic values. The examples, even excluding the animalistic hybridizations, in *At World's End* are numerous. The 'god's yawn' height of Andrei's forehead is reflective of his appreciation of 'higher things': literature, music, and idealized Beauty. It looks to be a wall that protects Andrei from the outpost's irrational impulses until it finally gives way in the last scene. Schmidt's continually emphasized sharp features and cutting gaze are initially a sign of his self-discipline and rational impulses, but then come to symbolize the violence and cruelty he is capable of. (The final snapping of the compressed spring in his head may be read as a censure against 'pure order,' restricting interpretations of *At World's End* being a cautionary tale about 'chaos and irrationality' in general.) Perhaps the most developed of these tropes is the trait of 'roundness,' 'circularity,' and cyclicality that, upon careful reading, can be found dotted throughout the text.[154] Azancheev appears in the first scene with his round paunch wrapped tightly in an apron. Though the impression roundness strikes harder when, as Marusia arrives to make her awful sacrifice, the frog-general gleefully runs over: "His paunch took off in front of him – it looked like the general was rolling it along in front of him on a cart."[155] The brood-mother Nechyosa, another of the novella's less likable cast, is always accompanied by a description of her soft feminine 'roundness.' In either case, it can be interpreted as a

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[154] The artistic legacy of Bely can be spotted all over Zamyatin's Far Eastern outpost. The height of Andrei's forehead contrasts with the small-brow of Lippanchenko, and the expansive bloat of Azancheev's stomach is reminiscent of his gaseous paunch. A choking yellow fog is seen moving about outside, echoing Bely's symbiology of color and weather. And the very conceptual fracture of order and chaos / rationality and irrationality is ostensibly inspired by *Petersburg.*

[155] Zamiatin, *Na kulichkakh,* 104: "Побежал, засеменил. Брюхо побежало впереди -- выходило, будто катил его генерал перед собой на тачке."

formlessness – of character, perhaps – that is contrasted with Schmidt's idiosyncratic sharpness. The theme finds development in a popular song among the soldiers – 'The pope had a dog…' – which has an infinitely elliptical structure allowing it to be sung forever. This nauseating senselessness of constant repetition infects Andrei and, at several points in the narrative, the song pops into his head when he becomes overwhelmed with the conditions at the outpost. The scene of the ball, the very same Tikhmen' calls a 'lie', is full of circles, spinning, repetition. Schmidt with Nechyosa's wife: "Schmidt spun with the round wife of Nechyosa, spun lithe and severe." Andrei with Marusia: "With clamped teeth he pulled her along, and spun again – oh how good it would be to spin like this to death…"; the narrator adds: "Here, by the way, heads weren't spinning as much from the waltzes, as they were from the downed spirits"[156]. Zamyatin uses this chain of associative symbols to add a symbolic atmosphere of nauseating dizziness to the already hostile setting. The spins are existentially stomach-turning, bringing together the round physical shape as a marker of ontological formlessness, the inane buzzing of the song without end, the spin-till-death dancing, and the whirlwinds of confused, drunken thoughts.

What, then, distinguishes the symbolic systems and grotesque embodiments of Bely and Zamyatin? Though he does imbue his novella with limited symbolic systems, Zamyatin's use of the symbol is significantly less intricately constructed and significantly more constrained. The constant overdetermination of meaning in Bely – his complex systems that encourage the conceptual and symbolic connections between phenomena as impossibly distinct as intestinal gas, the unbounded steppe of Russia, and cosmic entropy – is largely absent in Zamyatin. *Petersburg* is suffused with the fracturing caused by entropy's unending battle with negentropy;

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[156] Ibid., 168: "И со стиснутыми зубами повлек, опять закружил -- ах, до смерти бы закружиться…" / "Тут, впрочем, не от вальсов больше головы кружились, а от выпитых зельев."

this theme is explored in the individual, in the nation, and in the cosmos. On the other hand, Zamyatin's symbolic systems of a similar sort ground themselves largely in the physical, the material, and the earthly. He is concerned with the stability of rationality in the face of irrationality, the struggles of man against the impulses making him animal, physiological experience without an explicit metaphysical expression. Even his system of circle and spinning tropes are aimed at the head and the gut. That is not to say that *At World's End* does not gesture towards a metaphysics of its own, but rather that it is muted in the text's absorption in physical life.

Zamyatin's understanding of his role in the 'novorealist' pantheon of pre-revolutionary writers (i.e., his focus on the body and his observation of its features as if through a microscope, making the familiar territory of one's outer facade look alien) is certainly applicable to his novella. However, the metaphor of the microscope may suggest that Zamyatin's aestheticizing gaze is only skin-deep. On the contrary, however, his surface-level physiological transformations have far broader psychological consequences than may be initially expected. The competing axiologies of 'order and chaos,' as we have seen in the other examples of prerevolutionary modernist grotesque, lies at the center of the majority of these scenes. As exemplified in Bely's work, Zamyatin's characters cannot thrive when they embody – either directly or psychologically – only one side of the dyad. Although the ideal balance of these forces is never achieved in *At World's End,* it is clear that Zamyatin privileges a psychic structure that can incorporate the presence of order and rationality while still allowing for the irrational and chaotic impulses of nature and man. What are we to make of the persistence of this pattern in prerevolutionary grotesque modernist literature?

Conclusion

This chapter's focus on the order and chaos dyad is deceptive if it implies a persistent preoccupation with an abstract, conceptual problem. Conceptual dyads are concretized through their localization in the 'site' of the body and mind; it is the human being and their sociocultural environment that is primary to the period's grotesque literature. Whether it be the narrative of industrial-progress-turned-meatgrinder in Khlebnikov's *Crane,* or the horrific byproducts of subjective co-construction of the world in Sologub's *The Petty Demon,* or Bely's sublimely meaningful eviscerations of the body across space in *Petersburg*, or Zamyatin's psychologically infectious metaphorical embodiments, it is the psychology and physiology of man that is primarily at stake in these texts.

The grotesque's bipartite structure makes it an ideal aesthetic tool to explore incongruity in times of paradigm crisis. If it is this bipartite conflict that *makes* something grotesque, then perhaps one might assume that, to resolve the incongruity, one must try to side with one component of the dyad and dispense with the other. There is, after all, a kind of 'unity' in this theoretical one-sidedness. However, in text after text, the literature itself suggests that this way of thinking is a fallacy

It appears impossible for an individual to adjust himself to one position in a dyad, the extreme end of a value structure; although traditional 'highs' and 'lows' of human axiologies may persist in culture and politics, these texts' embodied manifestations of 'pure' values often cast doubt on their supreme efficacy.

Perhaps, then, our authors are trying to suggest that incongruities might find a resolution not in all-or-nothing investments in one or another value in an axiological system, but in a kind of balance within the conceptual dyad. However, these configurations are often just as tortured;

Bely's steed temporarily preserves a kind of balance, but there is nothing resembling stability. So no, this is not quite right either. In fact, there seems to be something wrong with the way the question is being posed.

Polarization and Hybridization – Two Representational Strategies

To understand how the grotesque is being used in pre-revolutionary Russian grotesque literature, one must dispense with the assumption that textual incongruities populate texts in order to be 'resolved,' or made congruous again. One ought to ask a better set of questions: why pursue a grotesque representational strategy in a work of literature? What kinds of grotesque representational strategies are possible, and what are each of these representational strategies effective at portraying? Why do these particular grotesque representational strategies become so widespread in Russian modernist literature?

At least one answer to the question "why pursue a grotesque representational strategy?" has been long apparent: modernist literature moves away from the more grounded 'realist text,' and benefits from devices that help create non-monistic worlds, concepts, objects, and symbols. Narrators like Sologub's in *Petty Demon* – who suggest that they are able to delineate a clean line between 'how the phenomenon is perceived' and 'how the phenomenon really is' – all but disappear in the other texts in my project. Because the grotesque captures both sides of a conceptual dyad, it is particularly effective in creating phenomena that resist easy explication. Trying to 'solve' the indeterminacy before understanding what the indeterminacy is doing within the text misses the point. Recall, for example, how Bely's symbolic systems are capable of creating images so overloaded with meaning that they are, by design, all but impossible to explicate fully. He is not interested in privileging order over chaos, or chaos over order in his vision of the Bronze Horseman that opens the chapter. Rather, he is interested in the

indeterminacy itself, in creating a whole world of flickering but unstable meanings. The grotesque creates images and phenomena that are at odds with themselves, and so it is no wonder that Bely finds it attractive as a representational strategy in his unstable symbolist poetics.

In my further research, I will continue to try and understand what different grotesque representational strategies are useful for, how they work to complement the motifs, themes, and meaning of the texts under review.

Interestingly, a potentially new analytical distinction emerges if one reviews not only the core incongruities in the literature, but also the relationality between the incongruous values in each of them. Before discussing the pattern, I should explain what is meant by 'the relationality between the incongruous values.'

Take Khlebnikov's "The Crane." The core incongruity was between 'order' and 'chaos.' What is the relationship between 'order' and 'chaos' in the text? Extreme order, the poem posits, *is simultaneously cataclysmic chaos*. This enantiodromial quality of Khlebnikov's image polarizes the two values – the desire to segregate Petersburg from the forces of chaos creates a situation in which order and chaos coexist simultaneously in extremity. The values coexist but are *polarized* – they resist one another, but paradoxically coexist.

Now see Zamiatin's *At World's End*. Here, too, we have an example of a conceptual polarization embodied in the figure of Tikhmen'. The core incongruities of the text – humanity/animality, rationality/irrationality – exist within him. He does not try to integrate the two facets of this incongruity; he is not interested in *conforming* to the animality of the rest of the camp. Therefore, he *resists* integrating the rational and irrational elements of his personality; he segregates these two internal impulses, trying to eradicate his drunken idealism with rational, philosophical affirmations. However, his effort to do so fails, and the split in his personality

drives him to suicide. (Not to mention a similar dynamic at play with Nikolai Ableukhov, who tries to eradicate all elements of order within himself to dispense with any lingering trace of his Apollonian father – a resolution that nearly kills him.)

The attempt to *integrate* the incongruous self (or the incongruous phenomenon) is '*grotesque polarization*.' It is a representational strategy that emphasizes resistance, that refuses conformity – one that is nearly ubiquitous in the grotesque modernist texts covered in this chapter.

The notion of 'grotesque polarization' implies the existence of an alternative model. What is 'the relationality between the incongruous values' in this alternate case, and do we see any examples in the literature under review? Polarization is created in phenomena that resist integration, avoiding conformity – so the inverse implies a willingness to conform, a lack of resistance. What might we call this?

For an example, recall all the characters in *At World's End* who do not engage in Tikhmen's resistance project, who are more than willing to conform to the animality of the outpost. The case of the initially 'highbrow' Andrei Ivanych provides the clearest example. Though he *resists* the animalizing influence of General Azancheev and the others, he begins to sense that the strategy of resistance is going to destroy him like it destroyed Tikhmen. Therefore, he eventually gives in, drinks himself to irrational oblivion, and engages in the raving dance that signals his conformity: "That's how it's done! Oh, he's one of ours, that Andrei Ivanych! […] What did I tell you, brother - drink, I said. One of ours!" Andrei Ivanych allows himself to become *a hybrid*, a monstrous blend of humanity and animality like all other people in the outpost who lost the will to resist and let themselves conform to the bestial encampment's culture. Though this *grotesque hybridization* signals a strategy opposite to that of Tikhmen's

grotesque polarization, each strategy is still a mode of grotesque representation. Moreover, both *grotesque polarization* and *grotesque hybridization* help the artist – the grotesque modernist author – construct their non-monistic artistic worlds, sets of images that resist simple interpretation.

Moving forward, I will be analyzing various works of postrevolutionary grotesque modernist literature. Each chapter will be a close reading of a single text within the postrevolutionary grotesque modernist corpus at a more granular, more detailed level than offered in this introductory chapter. Nevertheless, the exploration of these several prerevolutionary modernist texts have established the conceptual groundwork needed to execute those close readings. I will attempt to show how the two modalities of grotesque representation – polarization and hybridization – continue to help authors create their non-monistic textual worlds after Red October. However, it will become clear that – though there are similar representational strategies undergirding pre- and postrevolutionary modernism – the kinds of core incongruities that concern authors become much different when the Soviet project emerges in earnest. Although the cosmic struggle of order and chaos undergirding many of these prerevolutionary texts represents a conceptual incongruity applicable to many pieces of grotesque modernist literature directly after 1917, my emphasis will be on texts that were written a decade or more after the Russian Revolution, when the effort to create an ordered Soviet state was already well underway. Even then there was no shortage of sociocultural contradictions, no lack of the profound incongruities capable of inspiring works of grotesque literature.

On the Emergence of Post-Revolutionary Literature

The endeavor to focus on works belonging to the grotesque modernist tradition in post-revolutionary literary production raises the question: when does post-revolutionary Russian

literature formally arise? The revolution did not instantaneously catalyze the birth of a league of new writers, pre-equipped with a distinctly post-revolutionary poetics. Literature that could be called *post*-revolutionary – not in strict chronological terms, but in the sense of 'having an origin in the conditions of post-revolutionary life' – would come significantly later. In his 1918 lecture on pre-revolutionary literary production in Russia, Evgenii Zamyatin's describes the impossibility of truly post-revolutionary literary production emerging so soon after the October Revolution:

> You have reached a *mountain*. You climb. The mountain is in clear view: a rock, a bush, a worm crawling along that bush. The mountain is in clear view – and still, when you stand like this on the mountain, you don't see it, you cannot feel its true dimensions, you cannot determine all its contours. And only from far away – travelling at a distance of ten versts, when that rock, that bush, that worm, and all the other finer details of the mountain have receded – only from far away do you see the mountain itself.
>
> The monumental events of past years – the World War, the Russian Revolution – are that very same mountain. For now, all we see is the bush, the worm, and the rock. And we'll only be able to see the mountain having journeyed on by a decade. Only then can there be genuine fictional literature about the World War and the Revolution (Zamyatin).[157]

Though Zamyatin's ten-year formula is not an exact science, his forecast is not an unreasonable one. Though there were works that managed to capture those early years with striking fidelity – works like Blok's *The Twelve*, or Mayakovsky's *Mystery-Bouffe* – Zamyatin would likely argue that this is still a vision of the revolution's 'rocks, bushes and worms.' The historical meaning of

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[157] Evgenii Zamyatin, "Ocherk noveishei russkoi literatury," *Teknika khudozhestvennoi prozy* (Moskva: RIPOL klassik, 2018), 6: "Вы подошли к *горе.* Вы поднимаетесь. Вам прекрасно видно гору: камень, куст, по кусту ползет червь. Вам видно прекрасно -- и все-таки, когда вы стоите так на горе, -- вы не видите ее, вы не можете почувствовать ее размеров, не можете определить ее очертаний. И только издали, отъехавши на десяток верст, когда уже далеко будут камень, куст и червяк, все подробности горы, -- только издали вы увидите самую гору. Громадные события последних лет -- мировая война, русская революция -- та же самая гора. Пока мы видим только куст, червяка, камень, а гору увидим, *только отъехавши на десяток лет*. И только тогда может появиться подлинная художественная литература о мировой войне и революции."

the October Revolution would not come into focus 'as a mountain in all its contours' until later. This prevented no one from trying to 'feel its true dimensions' in the intervening years.

However, since I am trying to articulate the nature of a genuine post-revolutionary grotesque aesthetics, I have generally opted to select texts for this project that were written about a decade or more after the 1917 Revolution. The problems that preoccupy each of these texts do have their genesis in postrevolutionary Russian life; the incongruities and conceptual fractures at the heart of these texts' narrative concerns can all somehow be traced back to Russia's great paradigm crisis. Nevertheless, readers will observe how the same representational strategies utilized by prerevolutionary modernist writers continue to serve postrevolutionary authors in their representation of paradigm crisis and in their creation of non-monistic artistic worlds. In this way, the epoch of Russian grotesque modernism after the October Revolution is a *evolution* of the prerevolutionary period, not a sharp break.

The following four chapters on postrevolutionary grotesque texts are not sequenced chronologically and are not meant to present a linear narrative of grotesque modernism's development through the 1920s and 1930s. First and foremost, this project is concerned with exploring the grotesque as an artistic tool. Historical or sociocultural events are important to the inquiry, but only to the extent that they inform, provoke, or catalyze the grotesque images being evoked by those writers seeking to represent them.

In order to do justice to these priorities, I sequenced the postrevolutionary chapters to accentuate the two modalities of the grotesque identified in the prerevolutionary chapter – polarization and hybridization.

CHAPTER TWO:

Can't Live with Him, Can't Live Without Him – Evgenii Shvarts's *The Shadow*, Grotesque Polarization, and Tragicomic Double

Introduction: The Double and Grotesque Polarization

To engender an appreciation of the practical differences between the two grotesque modalities, it is not enough to describe them theoretically, as if abstracted away from any given work of literature. One needs to observe each being used in a work of art: both to see *how* – from a technical perspective – artists generate these modalities in their work, and *why* they would gravitate to them at all. As modalities of the grotesque, polarization and hybridization are, by definition, going to be used as tools to create and represent dramatic, estranging incongruities in art. Each grotesque modality is uniquely suited for different types of incongruities. For the remainder of this dissertation, I will be analyzing various artistic devices utilized in grotesque modernist literature that operate using the modalities of grotesque hybridization or grotesque polarization.

The grotesque's affinity with hybridization seems to be more intuitive than polarization. After all, it is the monstrous, chimeric, 'hybridized' creatures – like those taken from Hieronymus Bosch paintings or Dmitri Prigov's Bestiarii Series – that, I suspect, denotes *what the grotesque is* to the non-specialist. Therefore, in order to help the intuition along, I will begin my analysis by clarifying polarization – how it 'works,' and why it resonates with the definition of the grotesque that undergirds this project. Once the notion of polarization clearer, it will be much easier to show how it differs from hybridization and how both modalities constitute a mutually complimentary pair. The example I have chosen to represent grotesque polarization –

the trope of the double (the doppelganger, the shadow) – is one of the the purist, simplest, and most expressive manifestations of the modality in the grotesque modernist corpus.

This chapter is designed to explain several important concepts. First, it explores how the doubling trope works, the structure of the trope, how this structure resonates with our definition of the grotesque, and, more specifically, how the double is an instantiation of 'grotesque polarity.' Second, I offer a close reading of romantic doubling texts to demonstrate how the double operates in 19th century romantic literature, and then to explain how its use transforms in the modernist period. Then, I test my theory with a comparative analysis of Hans Christian Andersen's romantic fairytale "The Shadow," and Evgenii Shvarts's modernist adaptation, *The Shadow*.

The comparative analysis is not possible without a substantial grounding in the structure and history of the double trope. The significance of the grotesque to this history will be made increasingly apparent as the chapter, and especially the comparative reading, develops.

The Trope of the Double

The trope of 'the double' in literature has an extensive history, but nowhere is it so pronounced as in the Romantic tradition and the literature it inspired through the end of the nineteenth century. To understand the trope's essential qualities, one must first look to its canonical expressions in this era: the unholy transfigurations of the Capuchin monk Medardus in E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Elixirs of Satan* (1815), the conscience-haunted protagonist of Poe's "William Wilson," (1839) the paranoid projections of Dostoevsky's Golyadkin in *The Double* (*Двойник,* 1846), and the archetypal dualism of Stevenson's *Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). These depictions of the double reveal a small terminological paradox, one that makes the term something of a misnomer. In each of the aforementioned works, the literary doubles are not

simple copies, reflecting the appearance and behavioral patterns of the original one-to-one. After all, what does the debauched character of Poe's protagonist William Wilson have in common with his moralizing counterpart? Only their name and appearance correspond. Should we conclude that the similarities of doubles are only superficial? But then how might one justify the sinister Edward Hyde as a double of the upright Doctor Jekyll, who differs dramatically from his counterpart in both name and appearance? These questions belie what is obvious to the intuition: the double is a double because striking differences between *the original* and the *alter ego* are always interspersed with the similarities; the trope is a play between the different and the identical, of the unfamiliar and the familiar, of duality and singularity. And yet, this is only a common denominator among doubles, and does not represent a comprehensive formula by which to define or classify them.

The double trope's versatility makes it difficult for the theorist to circumscribe all its possible variations and their corresponding functions, and yet Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky – well at home in the grotesque modernist tradition – has attempted to do just as much in the fourth chapter of his *Philosopheme for the Theatre* (Философема о театре, 1923) titled "The Double and the Twin" ("Двойник и двойня"). As the title suggests, Krzhizhanovsky makes a distinction between two sub-types of the double. Within Krzhizhanovsky's system, the implementation of the 'двойник' trope describes a formal movement from duality to singularity: "In the opening of the work, two are given. In the conclusion it is discovered that the two are one."[158] To exemplify this principle, he describes the psychological movement of the hero, 'torn' by two internal impulses, finally overcoming his indecision with an action that makes him

[158] Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky, "Filosofema o teatre," in *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh,* ed. Vadim Perel'muter (Sankt-Peterburg: Symposium, 2006), 4:75: "В завязке темы даны двое. Развязка обнаруживает: двое – одно."

'whole' again. Krzhizhanovsky further explains that the story of the fated lovers is also an instance of the 'двойник' plot: "In the opening of the play the two figures think that they're really two; love reveals their mistake: the **two** turn out to be **one**."[159] And, he adds, for their failure to recognize their mutual unity, one of the fated lovers must perish, necessarily bringing with it the death of the other. The conclusion Krzhizhanovsky offers is characteristically brazen: "All tragedies, despite the differences in their fabula, are all of one theme: their departure from the theme of the double is illusory."[160]

The counterpart to the *двойник* [double] is the *двойня* [twin] trope, which signals a movement from singularity to duality: "The theme of the 'twin' is formulated like this: an illusory 'one' splinters into two."[161] In contract to the tragic '*двойник*,' the '*двойня*' trope generates a comic outcome: "When one is expected and two are born, or when a multiplicity triumphs over the likeness of similarity, the comic arises: whether in life or on the stage, it's always the same."[162] The most common expression of this 1-to-2 doubling is – like the term *двойня* suggests – in the archetype of the twins and the twin comedy. The twin archetype is subdivided into *twins of the body* – pairs who share physical appearance – and *twins of the spirit* – pairs of similar character, demeaner or general persuasion. Krzhizhanovsky takes note of the intuitive antipodal principle of the double trope, writing: "When constructing a comedy, the more similar their spirit, the more different their bodies will be; or the greater the similarity in appearance, the sharper the internal difference. In the absence of that inverse proportionality of

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[159] Ibid.: "В завязке пьесы двое думают, что их двое; любовь раскрывает ошибку: **двое** оказывается **одним**."

[160] Ibid., 76: "Все трагедии, при разнообразии их фабул, однотемны: отход их от темы-двойника – мним."

[161] Ibid., 76: "Тема о двойне формулируется так: мнившееся одним расщепляется на два"

[162] Ibid., 76: "Когда ждут одного и рождается двое, то есть когда множество торжествует над неким подобием единства, возникает комическое: в жизни ли, на сцене ли -- все равно."

similarity and difference, comedy loses its intrigue and all its resonance."[163] He completes his system by offering a synthesis, suggesting that the 'twins of the spirit' trope is often a mix of the двойник and the 'двойня' impulses, generating the genre of tragicomedy: "The 'fear' of tragedy and the laughter of comedy are conjoined into one [in 'twins of the spirit'], most often forming a social or (petty)bourgeois drama. The drama develops like this: two consider themselves one (a mistake), organize their lives around their relationship, but end up disconnected from each other: or rather one transforms into two, but each individual 'one' then doubles, i.e., one's internal feeling becomes estranged from their external [actions]."[164]

Krzhizhanovsky's framework reveals several important qualities that will prove useful – at least hypothetically – in developing a deeper understanding of the intricacies and potentialities of the double trope. Doubling in Krzhizhanovsky's model is defined by the relationality between singularity and dualism, built on both comparison and contrast, dependent on the *correspondence* between the original and 'double,' and on elements of *divergence* from that correspondence. Krzhizhanovsky takes this formal relationship between dualism and singularity, which may initially appear to be a characteristic of secondary importance and repositions it as the double's definitive property. The various sub-types of the double trope, then, are defined by the nature of the relationship between the two and the one, determined by underlying formal change between 'twoness' and 'oneness' occurring with specific characters in the course of a work's plot.

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[163] Ibid., 77: "При построении комедии, чем больше сходство душ, тем разительнее разница тела; или чем больше совпадения в наружности, тем резче внутреннее несходство. При отсутствии этой обратной пропорциональности сходств с несходствами, комедия лишается интриги и всех своих ресурсов."

[164] Ibid., 78: "Страх' трагедии и смех комедии соединились в ней в одно, давая чаще всего бытовую или мещанскую драму. Развивается она так: двое считают себя одним (ошибка), перестраивают для этого свои жизни, но оказываются отъединенными друг от друга: то есть одно превращается в два, но каждая единица двоится, внешнее в ней делается чуждым внутреннему."

Furthermore, Krzhizhanovsky's detection of the correspondence between various modes of 'doubling' with tragic or comic stylistic modes suggests tremendous conceptual potential. Even without sufficient information to make a final determination as to the veracity of his claim, one begins to wonder whether different types of textual doubling might really be generative of various stylistic registers or genres with any degree of reliability. Admittedly, there is a temptation to view Krzhizhanovsky's reconceptualizing of tragedy and comedy into sub-types of doubling tropes as a radical oversimplification of the structural dynamics of these genres. But if one loosens Krzhizhanovsky's categorical assertions, treating his tragic 'двойник' and comic 'двойня' instead as identifiable tendencies, or rather vectors, within the double tradition, the utility of his work – initially concealed behind his implausible, all-encompassing schematizations – begins to emerge.

While these considerations will come to influence the conception of the double grounding this section of my work, the more immediate concern of the double trope's relationship to the grotesque must be addressed first. Fortunately, Krzhizhanovsky's schema makes the formal correlation between the grotesque and the double trope intuitive. The grotesque shares the bivariate structure observed in the double and relies on the same dissonance between singularity and duality as demonstrated by the incongruity [*невязка*] of its dual constituent elements encapsulated within the single *site.*

Are we to assume, given this structural correspondence, that all doubles are grotesque? If we allow the double trope the conceptual breadth suggested by Krzhizhanovsky, then no. The appearance of the grotesque requires that all its formal features be manifested, and the concepts of *двойник* and *двойня* allow for permutations of the double that fall outside of the bounds of grotesque aesthetics. For example, the case of the fated lovers – serving as Krzhizhanovsky's

example *par excellence* of the tragic 'двойник' trope – involves the failed unity between two subjects, who are secretly one, because of their failure to recognize their inherent compatibility. Both because of the lovers' failure to come together, and because of their hidden unity – ready to express itself if only they achieved their union – there can be no fundamental incongruity [*невязка*] that is characteristic of the grotesque.

Non-grotesque doubling can also be found in some manifestations of the 'двойня' conception, though these comic doubles tend to result in border cases between the comic grotesque and the simply comic. For instance, consider Gogol's implementation of the 'twins of the body' trope – a purely comic manifestation in Krzhizhanovsky's framework – found in the figures of Dobchinsky and Bobchinsky in his *Inspector General.*[165] Gogol shapes these characters to be comic compliments to one another; they are superficially similar enough, from name to appearance, as to appear silly and a touch frivolous, but their slight differences in spirit or character– are perhaps just enough to distinguish them, keeping them from feeling frightful or *uncanny*.[166] Though if Gogol's stage notes calling for a marked difference in their behaviors are played down, allowing the performers to deemphasize the differences between the pair while augmenting their similarities, in practice they may transform into something grotesque like the

[165] Taken from the introductory stage notes of the play: "Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky are both short, squat, very curious little fellows; they are incredibly alike one another; each with modestly sized paunches; both speak in tongue-twisters, frequently helped by flailing arms and gestures. Dobchinsky is a wee-bit taller and more serious than Bobchinsky, but Bobchinsky is a little more relaxed and livelier than Dobchinsky." Nikolai Gogol, *Revizor* in *Sobranie Sochinenii*, ed. Andrei Nemzer (Moskva: Vremia, 2009).

[166] For illustrative purposes it bears mentioning that Krzhizhanovskian "twins of the body" trope can enter the realm of the grotesque, doing so when it coincides with a simultaneous doubling of "spirit." For example, the famous twin girls, the Grady twins, from Kubrick's rendition of *The Shining* become grotesque only when the similarity of their appearance coincides with a complete synchrony of action and speech – their iconic call to "come play with us." Expectations of a natural human autonomy of expression are at odds with their strange, robotic, synchronous behavior.

Tweedledum and Tweedledee of the Russian stage. In any case, the grotesque double is only a subset of the doubling trope as a whole.

To determine which permutations of the double do give rise to the grotesque, pursuing this line of the uncanny – a well-established concept in the psychoanalytic tradition of aesthetic theory – provides a compelling starting point. Sigmund Freud's analysis of E.T.A. Hoffmann's work in the essay "The Uncanny" (1919) contains the canonical explication of the term's aesthetic function and its formal properties. As per Freud's interpretation, the uncanny is generated through the paradoxical dual presence of the *heimlich* [the familiar] and the *unheimlich* [the unfamiliar] in a single figure. In other words, the uncanny relies on the principle of one element [*heimlich*] paradoxically becoming its opposite [*unheimlich*], or, to use the term coined by Heraclitus and popularized by Jung, on the principle of *enantiodromia*. As Freud writes: "[*H*]*eimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops towards an ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich. Unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of *heimlich.*"[167] Freud's formulation of the uncanny maps easily onto the structure of the grotesque. In the language of the grotesque, the familiar – the privileged (+) facet – is suddenly undercut by the perception of something deeply unfamiliar – the unprivileged (-) facet. The deeply familiar and the deeply unfamiliar paradoxically coexist, compromising the comfort of familiarity, making the familiar strange again.[168] The antipodal nature of the familiar and the unfamiliar, their mutual irreconcilability, means that the sudden appearance of the latter element

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[167] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," trans. Alix Strachey, TSS Publishing (July 2017), 4. https://theshortstory.co.uk/the-uncanny-by-sigmund-freud/

[168] The grotesque nature of the uncanny is not only supported by its structure, but also by 'the uncanny valley' phenomenon. The 'uncanny valley' describes a flood of negative emotion experienced when a subject recognizes a humanoid figure failing to replicate normal human behavior. The 'valley' refers to the steep drop in subject's reported emotional comfort to a figure as its appearance approaches, but does not match, that of a human. Once the object more completely emulates the look of the human, the reported likability of it improves once again.

in that which was previously known territory creates a jarring effect that makes the uncanny subject fundamentally strange. The uncanny's enantiodromial quality and its distorting, estranging effect places it among the devices of grotesque polarization.

Freud's article is written in dialogue with another essay exploring the conjunction of psychology and aesthetics put forth by E. Jentsch, who also proposed the psychological import of the uncanny in literature, describing E.T.A. Hoffmann's affinity with uncanny aesthetics in his seminal work *The Sandman (1817)*. Jentsch suggests that Hoffmann's use of the automaton – specifically, his attempts to create uncertainty about whether a particular figure is a real being or a mechanical replica – is the source of the story's uncanny spirit.[169] While Freud agrees with Jentsch's description of the uncanny nature of the automaton trope, he finds a much more potent source of the uncanny elsewhere in the text: in the fantastic figure of the Sandman himself and in his frightening 'doubles,' who haunt the protagonist Nathaniel from childhood into his adult life. Although much of his analysis focuses on Hoffmann's *The Sandman*, Freud continues this logic more explicitly with another work. He analyzes the expression of the uncanny as it relates to the double trope in Hoffmann's novel, *The Elixirs of Satan*. Following the work of his student, the psychoanalyst Otto Rank, Freud argues that doubling can represent the expression of primary narcissism, a tendency to project one's thoughts and needs into the outside world, to confuse the 'other' and the self. In his words:

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[169] The use of the automaton in literature is also grotesque, based on the internal ambivalence of the 'natural' human animacy and unnatural robotic inanimacy of the simulacrum. Though this project will not explore the automaton trope in greater detail, it is worth noting in brief that Russian literature offers a number of examples of grotesque automatons. For example, Saltykov-Shedrin's *The History of a Town* (*История одного города, 1870*) contains an episode where a certain tyrannical mayor Brudastyi turns out to be an automaton with a little mechanical organ in his head endlessly repeating two phrases: "не потерплю" (I won't tolerate it) and "разорю" (I'll bring it to ruin). This text had an important impact on the grotesque modernist tradition, evidenced by Platonov's Soviet reinterpretation of the book's themes in his *City of Gradov* (*Город Градов, 1927*), and in the renewal of the automaton trope with the empty-suit functionary in Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*.

> These [uncanny] themes [in the *Elixirs of Satan*] are all concerned with the idea of a "double" […] Hoffmann accentuates this relation by transferring mental processes from the one person to the other—what we should call telepathy—so that the one possesses knowledge, feeling and experience in common with the other, identifies himself with another person, so that his self becomes confounded, or the foreign self is substituted for his own—in other words, by doubling, dividing and interchanging the self. […] It is not difficult to judge, on the same lines as his theme of the "double," the other forms of disturbance in the ego made use of by Hoffmann. They are a harking-back to particular phases in the evolution of the self-regarding feeling, a regression to a time when the ego was not yet sharply differentiated from the external world and from other persons. I believe that these factors are partly responsible for the impression of the uncanny, although it is not easy to isolate and determine exactly their share of it.[170]

Freud's understanding of the role of the uncanny within the theme of the double relies on a subject's disorientation between the (*heimlich*) ego, the insular, the self, and the (*unheimlich*) outside, the external, the other. However, this definition is incomplete. His comments on *The Elixirs of Satan* are influenced by the fact that the novel's doubling occurs between two separate individuals, between the monk Medardus and his lunatic half-brother. The projection of Medardus's ego has an object that is wholly outside of himself, so the distinction between the familiar self and the unfamiliar other remains clear. And while this approach suits Hoffmann's novel, it does not make room for those common instances of doubling involving a split in one's mind, where the separation of self and other is ostensibly indistinguishable. Freud offers a solution to this conundrum, arguing that the *higher* subsystems of the psyche (the superego or conscience) are capable of othering its *lower* components (the ego and/or id):

> The idea of the "double" does not necessarily disappear with the passing of the primary narcissism, for it can receive fresh meaning from the later stages of development of the ego. A special faculty is slowly formed there, able to oppose the rest of the ego, with the function of observing and criticizing the self and exercising a censorship within the mind, and this we become aware of as our "conscience." In the pathological case of delusions of being watched this mental institution becomes isolated, dissociated from the ego, and discernible to a physician's eye. The fact that a faculty of this kind exists, which is able to treat the rest of the ego like an object—the fact, that is, that man is capable of self-

[170] Freud, "The Uncanny," 9.

> observation—renders it possible to invest the old idea of a "double" with a new meaning and to ascribe many things to it, above all, those things which seem to the new faculty of self-criticism to belong to the old surmounted narcissism of the earliest period of all.[171]

Does this theory apply more generally to literary doubles in the Romantic and neo-Romantic works? Another recognized Romantic master of the doubling trope, Edgar Poe, provides a test case with his famous short story "William Wilson." Early in his life the titular protagonist, a profligate who sees himself as a victim of his temptations, meets a boy with the same name and appearance. Wilson's double can only speak in a whisper and seems to pursue the protagonist everywhere just to discourage his debauchery with sobering advice. Although the 'original' Wilson angrily rejects his double's guidance at every turn, he never manages to deter his moralizing doppelgänger and cannot escape him no matter where he goes. Wilson finally loses patience with his pursuer when the latter stops him from seducing a married woman; he forces his reluctant double into a swordfight, and, just when he lands the killing blow, Wilson realizes that he has just killed himself.

What does this story describe if not a man pursued by his own conscience? The doubling arises as an externalization of the internal struggle between Wilson's basest desires and his moralistic superego, who attempts to redeem his host or at least stop him from slipping further into depravity. Wilson's distain for his double is a product of the narcissistic impulse – the desire of the ego to escape the conscience's harsh judgment – as described by Freud and Rank. The uncanny force behind Poe's prose is generated by the protagonist's uneasiness with his double, who shares his name and appearance but feels like a foreign and judgmental other. The grotesque, too, arises out of this same paradox. Furthermore, a considered look at the structure of "William Wilson" reveals it to be an expression of Krzhizhanovsky's *двойник* concept: there

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[171] Ibid., 10.

are two, who don't realize they are really one, and their failure to manifest their unity results in the death of one, necessarily bringing with it the death of the other. And, as Krzhizhanovsky suggests, the outcome of this movement is tragic.

A survey of the appearances of the double in the canonical texts of the Romantic period suggests that the tragic *двойник*, in the aforementioned uncanny Freudian tenor, is its dominant mode of expression. And the trend of the tragic double continues well into the nineteenth century, in literature described as neo-Romantic, influencing both Russian and world literature. In the latter case, Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* becomes the archetypal expression of the dualism of man, embodied. Dr. Jekyll's life slips out of his control after he discovers a substance that can separate the forces of his psyche: his base desires become unmoored from his reflex for moral action. Without this latter reflex – a manifestation of the Freudian superego to regulate his id – his violent and sexual impulses are free to commandeer his behavior. As a result of his constant indulgence in his desires while living as Mr. Hyde, Dr. Jekyll creates an internal imbalance that binds him ever tighter to his base nature, making it increasingly difficult to return from his Mr. Hyde persona. Jekyll, in a rare moment when he possesses his self-reflective reflex – retaining the ability to turn his moralizing eye onto the heinous acts of Mr. Hyde – realizes he must kill himself before he becomes trapped in his debased, near-bestial form.

In the Russian context, the tradition of the tragic double continues with Dostoevsky's *The Double.* In many ways, Dostoevsky's Golyadkin draws from the Romantic tradition. The author positions Golyadkin against the manifestation of a more assertive, ambitious part of his psyche, simultaneously strengthening the fearful, uncanny nature of the text by highlighting the expression of the protagonist's manic persecution complex. However, already in Dostoevsky's

work one is able to catch a glimpse of the evolution in the double plot that will become defining for the coming modernist epoch: the strengthening of the comic element. While there are comic moments in the works of the Romantics, especially in Hoffmann's doubling texts, it is always a side attraction, decentered from the main uncanny encounter with the double.[172] Golyadkin's descent into madness is caused by the same fracturing of the psyche found in the Romantic literature; but, although his fate *is* tragic, the severity of the tragedy is undercut at every step by the ridiculous protagonist. The effect calls to mind Eikhenbaum's comments on the grotesque mix of the tragic and comic discourses in Gogol's "The Overcoat"; not for nothing is *The Double* widely regarded as Dostoevsky's most Gogolian text.

What does the introduction of the comic element do to the effect of the Romantic double? To some extent, it disrupts the fearful, disorienting impression the uncanny doubling leaves on the reader. The more the comic impulse is integrated, the more difficult it becomes to relate to the unraveling of the protagonist's subjectivity with a straight face. If Dostoevsky was attempting to elucidate a moral conundrum arising from man's inner dualism, why would he choose a figure like Golyadkin to transmit it? Thomas Mann once wrote that Dostoevsky's *The Double*, "by no means improved on Edgar Allan Poe's "William Wilson," a tale that deals with the same old romantic motif in a way far more profound on the moral side and more successfully resolving the clinical [theme] in the poetic."[173] Joseph Frank, in his book of lectures on Dostoevsky, worries that the introduction of the comic element may have undercut the gravity of

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[172] For example, in *The Elixirs of Satan* the jolly barber, Peter Schonfeld, creates stretches of comic relief between the local climaxes of action, the tense bouts between the protagonist with his double. He serves as the comic counterpoint to Medardus, dreaming up a debauched alter ego for himself by the name Pietro Belcampo. However, he is a character on the periphery, and does not factor into or undercut the uncanny relationship between Medardus and his alter ego; he is absent in the novel's most frightening scenes.

[173] Thomas Mann quoted by Thomas Meyers in *Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Legacy* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 1992), 287.

the work. Addressing Dostoevsky's concerns that his *Double* was a failure in its form, Frank speculates that Golyadkin's physical double, "used primarily for external comic effect[,] […] thereby again weaken[s] the seriousness of the conflict that Dostoevsky wishes to convey. One could argue that Dostoevsky, at this point, was still too much under the influence of Gogol, imitating his playfulness and avoiding psychological probing."[174] Had Dostoevsky indeed been attempting to replicate the same Romantic double, then Mann and Frank's impressions would truly be well-aimed critiques. But perhaps something else is happening in his treatment of the double; one cannot help but feel that Dostoevsky is too deliberate in undermining the seriousness of the uncanny Romantic motif for the novel to be just another permutation of this outmoded trope.

Exploring this problem does not start and end with Dostoevsky's work, though he may have been the catalyst for the innovation that the double trope would see in the years after his death. The comic element of his *Double* is a premonition of a literary phenomenon that evolves into a full-fledged aesthetic breakthrough in Russian literature's modernist period. In fact, several of the works covered in the chapter on pre-revolutionary Russian modernism – Sologub's *Petty Demon,* Bely's *Petersburg*, and Zamyatin's *At World's End* – contain scenes or whole subplots built around the comic double. Near the peak of his madness, *The Petty Demon's* Peredonov believes that his companion Volodin is trying to replace him at his wedding ceremony; to ensure his bride and others can tell the two apart – though they look nothing alike – he fastidiously scribbles the letter 'P' (for Peredonov) all over his body.[175] His gruesome

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[174] Joseph Frank. *Lectures on Dostoevsky* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 41. https://doi-org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.1515/9780691189567.

[175] See Fedor Sologub, *Melkii bec* in *Sobranie sochinenii,* edited by T.F. Prokopov (Moskva: Intelvak, 2001), 2:212): "Then, locking himself in the bedroom, [Peredonov] decided to mark himself so Volodin could not replace him himself. On his chest, on his stomach, on his elbows, and on other places still, he streaked ink in the shape of

stabbing of Volodin in the last few pages of the novel plays out the tragic end of the traditional Romantic double plot, but the sheer absurdity of Peredonov's persecution mania creates an effect very different than the climax of, say, Poe's "William Wilson." If there is a moral injunction here, what is it? Bely's Nikolai Apollonovich attempts to play out the double-life of the mysterious suitor in a Romantic masquerade plot, disguising himself as the Red Domino and sending dangerous letters to his love, Sofya Petrovna. A far cry from the tangle of intrigue in a proper Romantic text – Lermontov's *Masquerade*, for example – others see through his performance because he executes it so awkwardly. Nikolai Apollonovich's failed attempt to project the Romantic homme fatale persona renders him a harmless clown in the eyes of Sofya. *At World's End* manifests the double trope in the figure of Tikhmen'. When he is sober, he projects the ideal Schopenhaurian cynic, convinced that he needs nothing in life but the strength of will to shape the world around him, but, when drunk, he turns into the sappy, affected white knight ready to save and ravish the princess no matter the cost. Before his tragic suicide, committed out of drunken despair, his ludicrous duality is the target of laughter; can he possibly be interpreted as an expression of the hazards of human dualism like *Jekyll and Hyde* often are?

The uncanny double trope – playing out in its tragic register – that once dominated the Romantic and neo-Romantic traditions starts to take a new form in the modernist literary landscape.[176] The severe, serious quality of the Romantics' attempts to explore the darker element of human nature gave the moral messaging a seriousness that fades away as the trope develops into the twentieth century. Are Mann and Frank correct in insinuating that the

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the letter 'P.' 'I should have marked Volodin, too, but how would I go about it? He'll see and wipe it off', – Peredonov thought sadly."

[176] And if the uncanny double is found, it's more than likely to be in a neo-Romantic text, like Alexander Chaianov's novella *The Venetian Mirror* (*Венецианское зеркало, или Диковинные похождения стеклянного человека,* 1923). The work, by and large, is a simple restaging of Hoffmann – a fact that Chaianov directly acknowledges – and it's difficult to position it in the context of the modernist tradition in any way but chronologically.

tragicomic double is simply a weak rehashing of the Romantic variation's moral force? And, if that's not the case, what does the comic element do for the traditional double narrative to compensate for the tragic gravitas lost in its desire to provoke the reader's laughter?

In practice, the structural dynamics of the modernist double narrative differs from that proscribed by Krzhizhanovsky, though his theory of *двойники* and *двойни* nevertheless can help clarify how these tragicomic texts are working. In the beginning of the narratives, they show the protagonist as a whole, a unity, and exploit the comic potential of the *двойня*, of two appearing where one expects to find only one. Compare this to "William Wilson," *The Elixirs of Satan*, and *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, where the doubling has occurred already before the narrative begins, and where the presence of the double is anything but comic. This is in contrast to Dostoevsky's *Double*, Sologub's *The Petty Demon*, and Zamyatin's *At World's End* where the narrative relishes in tracking the characters' slow disassociation from themselves, and exploiting the appearance of *the two* from *the one* for its full comic potential. But, as suggested by the explosive and violent moment of revelation that often punctuates the end of the tragicomic doubling narrative, the comic *двойня* doubling turns out to indicate an illusory presence of two. The jarring ending reinforces the notion that the doubled characters have always been only themselves – that the comic split was artifice – snapping the narrative back to the tragic *двойник* mode. Therefore, it is the combination of these two Krzhizhanovskian modes of doubling that perhaps define the narrative movement of the Modernist tragicomic double – from the one, to the two (comic), back to the 'one' (tragic).

Hans Christian Andersen: The Individualistic Double of the Romantic Era

The surest way to test this conjecture is through comparative analysis, and post-revolutionary Russian literature contains one text in particular that presents a promising opportunity for just such a comparative case study: Evgenii Shvarts's *The Shadow* (1939), paired with Hans Christian Andersen's fairytale of the same name (1854). Andersen's tale is a conventional, though instructive, case of the tragic Romantic-era doubling plot, providing grounds to continue the exploration of the double's affinity with psychoanalytic theories and the uncovering of psychological insight. The work accommodates Freud's uncanny and Rank's intuition about the narcissistic root of the double, but also Jung's theory of the unconscious 'shadow.' As an explicit reimagining of the fairytale, Shvarts's play is the Modernist-era analog to Andersen's take on *The Shadow.* A comparative analysis of their narrative structures and the double's role therein will lead to a hypothesis on the nature of Shvarts's reappropriation of the Romantic trope, and on the nature of the Modernist tragicomic double. Each of these texts will elucidate the connection between the double trope and the phenomenon of *grotesque polarization,* revealing how their interrelation is altered when the trope enters into the tragicomic literature of the Modernist era.

Freud and Rank's work on the psychoanalytic meaning behind the double concept is significant for Andersen and Shvarts, but Carl Jung's work on the role of 'the shadow' in the psyche offers an even more specific framework through which to understand these texts. Jung's shadow is conceptualized as a *negative* and unconscious force: "By shadow I mean the 'negative' side of the personality, the sum of all those unpleasant qualities we like to hide, together with the insufficiently developed functions and the contents of the personal

unconscious."[177] Jung understands the shadow as a human universal, a manifestation of the personal unconscious, and an element of the psyche that can only be recognized and integrated into one's conscious understanding of themselves, but by no means dispensed with. Despite the shadow's negative content, Jung does not advocate a repressive attitude towards it, nor does he think the shadow is explicitly *bad* for an individual. This is not least because the shadow is not something that can be destroyed, and repressing it only leads to a lack of self-knowledge and an escalation of the danger that it will emerge in the other through psychological projection. The manifestation of the shadow outside of the self is a product of the polarization catalyzed in the process of repression. The pervasiveness of shadow repression is perhaps one of the best explanations for the prominence of the double trope in art. If an individual integrates their shadow into their conscious understanding of self, Jung sees an incredible positive potential in it: "When seen from the one-sided point of view of the conscious attitude, the shadow is an inferior component of the personality and consequently repressed through intensive resistance. But the repressed content must be made conscious so as to produce a tension of opposites, without which no forward movement is possible. […] Life is born only of the spark of opposites."[178] And finally, Jung's theory makes the role of perspective for the double explicit; opposing "the one-sided point of view of the conscious attitude" to the opposing shadow position, Jung creates the theoretical possibility that a single psyche can house more than one viewpoint. This echoes

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[177] Carl Jung, *On the Psychology of the Unconscious*, in *Collected Works of C. G. Jung: Two Essays in Analytical Psychology* , translated by R. F. C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 7:66, footnote 5.

[178] Jung, *On the Psychology of the Unconscious*, 53-54. In other words, the integration of the shadow does not resolve the inner-contradictions of the individual's psyche, but simply trains the individual to accept contradiction as a fundamental part of the self. Jung argues that these contradictions are advantageous to the individual, that they provide the individual with a life-giving energizing dynamism. The successful integration of the psyche's shadow will prevent the psychological repression and projection, which catalyzes the manifestation of an externalized shadow other (making it also the catalyst for the grotesque double trope). If the antithetical shadow element of the psyche is made conscious and integrated, it will not trigger the affective disgust that is characteristic upon the unexpected appearance of repressed psychological content in 'the other.'

Freud's assertion that the superego can treat the ego like an object or an *other,* and vice versa; this conceptual separation of psyche into distinct perspectival positions, externalized and performed through art, is the basis of the polarization of the uncanny double. Moreover, given that each individual perspective possesses its own value structure, the grotesque nature of doubling narratives will theoretically change based on what part of the psyche is 'looking.'[179] Jung's theory offers a potential model for the psychological undergirding of each version of *The Shadow*. Although Jung's influence on these texts is not direct, his shadow is understood to be archetypal because, as he claims, it has mythological origins and universal significance. However, the degree of correspondence between Jung's framework and the stories of Andersen and Shvarts remains to be seen.

Andersen's *Shadow* fits in among the other Romantic-era doubling stories, largely corresponding to their formal and narrative propensities. The tale follows the so-called learned man, a young and intelligent traveler who has come to a foreign land of sweltering heat so that he may write about the good and the beautiful he hopes to experience there. During his stay he becomes enthralled by a stunning maiden whom he often sees on the balcony opposite his hotel room. One night, as the learned man is beginning to drift off to sleep, he sees that his shadow is being cast across the street to her balcony. Unable to get to the woman's room himself, he jokingly asks his shadow to slip into her room and report back about what he finds. The next morning, he discovers that his shadow has really gone missing and, later, when he decides to

[179] For example, recall the horror with which Dr. Jekyll, temporarily identifying with his more noble instincts, regards the embodiment of his base id impulse. And, in contrast, recall how the protagonist of "William Wilson," identifying himself closely with his id, experiences his superego not as a virtuous, benevolent force of good, but as a frightening, judgmental pursuer. The element of perspective cannot be removed from a coherent theory of the grotesque.

return to his homeland, he has already resigned himself to growing a new one.[180] The learned man lives on for many years forgetting about the incident with the shadow until a mysterious emaciated figure shows up at his door, dressed in fine clothes and covered in jewelry. It is his shadow, who has returned transformed as if into a man, to regale his former master with stories of his adventures. As instructed, he parted with the learned man to visit the woman across the balcony, who turns out to have been the embodiment of Poetry, and the shadow's encounter with her beautiful brilliance initiated the shadow's transformation into man. Nevertheless, he retains his shadowy nature and sets out to continue his transformation into man by learning more about the 'real' world. Able to creep into humanity's private spaces undetected, he bears witness to the side of man hidden from outward appearances. The shadow finds out many things about mankind that contradict the learned man's writings on the beautiful and good. In his own words: "I ran here and there, looked through the highest windows into the rooms, and over the roofs. I looked in, and saw what nobody else could see, or indeed ought to see; in fact, it is a bad world, and I would not care to be a man, but that men are of some importance."[181] Setting out to attain the air of significance inaccessible to him in his old form, the shadow concentrates on gathering those superficial traits that elevate a man in the eyes of his peers: fitting himself with expensive clothes and jewelry, growing a thick beard, and putting on weight. As more time passes the learned man's health declines as he begins to doubt the utility of his work on the good and

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[180] At this moment in the story, Andersen – through his learned man – explicitly evokes the tradition of shadow narratives: "And it certainly did vex him, not so much because the shadow was gone, but because he knew there was a story of a man without a shadow. All the people at home, in his country, knew this story; and when he returned, and related his own adventures, they would say it was only an imitation; and he had no desire for such things to be said of him. So he decided not to speak of it at all, which was a very sensible determination." The other "story of a man without a shadow" is a reference to Adelbert von Chamisso's *Peter Schlemihl* (1814). This quote is then adapted by Shvarts into an epigraph to his play.

[181] Hans Christian Andersen, "The Shadow," in *Stories and Tales*, trans. H. W. Dulcken (London: Routledge, 2002), 383.

beautiful – discouraged, in part, by the shadow's devaluation of his work. He eventually agrees to travel with his counterpart to a spa town, all expenses paid, if he himself plays the role of his shadow's shadow. At the spa town they meet a princess suffering from "sharp-sightedness," or the ability to uncover the hidden flaws of those she meets at an instant. Before the shadow and the princess have had time to be properly introduced, she recognizes that the shadow is unable to cast a shadow of his own. The shadow counters that she must be recovering from her 'disease' because she failed to recognize that the learned man is, in fact, *his* shadow. The shadow expresses interest in taking the princess's hand in marriage, but her commitment rests on whether or not he can pass a test of intelligence to prove his worth. The princess asks him a difficult question, and the shadow – though secretly ignorant of the answer himself – counters that a man as great as himself even has a shadow smart enough to pass the test. The learned man, in turn, answers her question and speaks to her about the beautiful and the good; the princess is convinced that the shadow would make a suitable groom, after all: "what a man that must be, who has such a clever shadow."[182] Once the marriage between the shadow and the princess is all but settled, the learned man decides he is done playing the shadow and threatens to expose the lies of his doppelganger. However, his change of heart comes too late; the shadow uses his newfound royal influence to declare the learned man insane and has him put to death on the same day that the shadow weds the princess.

To a degree, the struggle between the learned man and his shadow looks like a traditional tale of good versus evil; the genuine good-and-beautiful-loving learned man and the opportunistic, exploitive, evil shadow represent two sides of the dualistic individual morality. Though, if Andersen set out to tell a morality tale, why would the work end with the learned

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[182] Hans Christian Andersen, "The Shadow," 386.

man's execution? Either it is an exhibition of extreme moralistic pessimism, or he is up to something else.

If, however, the text is read through the lens of Jung's theory of the shadow, many of the strange narrative elements of Andersen's fairytale attain a definite, internally coherent significance. Although the learned man is intelligent and strives towards the good, he lacks the requisite motivation and strength of will to reach his ideals. He seems to lack the willingness to expose himself to the bad, ugly, and dangerous elements of the world, preferring to stay in the shelter of his hotel room. He is enchanted by the woman on the opposite balcony – the embodied spirit of Poetry – but the foreign land's heat renders him helpless, leaving him to project his shadow towards that ideal. As an embodiment of the learned man's opposite, the shadow is not depicted as having the same hesitancy to explore the world's hazards, or to experience reality apart from the beautiful and the good, 'as it really is.' Unlike his counterpart, the shadow undoes his naiveté by exposing himself to the bad; his curiosity prompts him to confront the *shadow side of life,* of mankind's hidden motivations and behaviors. He loses all illusions about man's essential goodness. And what good is the learned man's knowledge and idealism if his model of the world is incomplete?

Because the shadow in Andersen's work is willing to confront the world, there is a greater ambivalence in his role than a reading of him as 'the embodiment of human evil' would suggest. As in Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde,* the unlocked alter ego does not accept its subordinate role, forcing the 'original' into a competition for dominance. Herein lies the principal danger of the shadow. Andersen's depiction of the shadow is not negative *per se*. It embraces that which people desire in secret or even those elements of life containing an unarticulated or sub-rational importance to all men. The shadow is negative in the sense that he

is a negation of the learned man's values, but that does not mean he is without his own virtues. On some level of his understanding, the learned man seems to recognize the advantage and attraction of the shadow's approach to life, even exhibiting a hesitant willingness to subvert himself into the secondary shadow role so he might travel alongside him. However, the learned man is ultimately unwilling to integrate qualities of the shadow into himself, repressing the difficult lessons the shadow could teach him about the world's concealed qualities. As Jung wrote: "The shadow becomes fatal when there is too little vitality or too little consciousness in the hero for him to complete his heroic task."[183] The lack of vitality Jung speaks of characterizes the learned man, and – though his aims are good, perhaps even heroic – his one-sided and rather lethargic idealism foretells his tragic end.[184]

To understand the nature of the grotesque elements of Andersen's fairytale or of any other doubling narrative requires a knowledge of the role of subjectivity and perspective in the psychoanalytic approach, and it is worth dwelling on it again for a moment here. There is a strangeness in discussing different perspectives when speaking of a trope like the double, which describes the relationship of the psyche to itself. However, this aspect of the double was anticipated by Freud's description of the psyche's ability to treat itself like an 'object'; the different subsystems of the psyche – for Freud: the ego, the superego etc. – can be understood as

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[183] Jung, "Symbols of Transformation: Part Two," paragraph 393.

[184] There is danger in using the Jungian model of analysis too literally without considering the content of the story itself. For example, the scholars Tatyana Bushueva and Ol'ga Korkunova analyze a number of texts with 'shadows' though a Jungian lens and come to the following conclusion about the meaning of Andersen's work: "The 'learned man,' with his consciousness, entered into battle with his unconscious, and his unconscious turned out to be stronger than his conscious mind. The conclusion itself speaks to the fact that the conscious aims of the protagonist were a flop, and therefore the Shadow gained strength and achieved success." Although the shadow may be related to the unconscious, interpreting the shadow as nothing beyond the unconscious itself misses Andersen's attempt to imbue it with a specific content, and thus undermines any specific (non-derivative) interpretations that could be drawn from his tale. See: Ol′ga Vladimirovna Korkunova and Tat′iana Ivanovna Bushueva. "Rol′ teni kak strukturnogo komponenta lichnosti, *Logos et Praxis,* 16.2 (2017): 27, doi: 10.15688/lp.jvolsu.2017.2.3.

if they are separate beings capable of pronouncing subjective value judgments on one another. This abstract principle is demonstrated more concretely in a number of doubling narratives. For instance, in Poe's "William Wilson" the protagonist grounds his identity with his ego's pursuit of immoral pleasures, rejecting the moral guidance of his superego. Unable to escape the judging eye of his embodied conscience, the narrator develops a persecution complex that ends in tragic murder-suicide. Poe's decision to ground the narrative perspective with the pleasure-seeking 'ego' allows the reader to gain insight into the affective terror of being hounded by superego's inescapable judgment. Because of the narrative position, the grotesque in Poe's story is generated *from the perspective of the ego.* Using the language of Freud's uncanny, the incongruity of the familiar and unfamiliar is generated from the narrator's perspective; the superego doppelgänger appears to the narrator – and the reader by extension – as a defamiliarized distortion of the narrator's 'familiar' name and features. In Andersen's *Shadow* the narrative dynamic is inverted. The learned man identifies with the more noble impulses of the superego, priding himself on his affinity with the beautiful and the good. For him, then, the existence of the shadow – embodying vanity, superficiality, and mankind's (or, perhaps, his own) instinctual, base, or inarticulable desires – is perceived as a threatening force of moral and aesthetic degradation. As the shadow develops his plan to subjugate the learned man, the collapsing of boundaries between the two figures – their roles reversed – is perceived as grotesque from the perspective of the superego. The fact that the Romantic doubling narrative ends tragically regardless of perspective underscores the fundamental interdependency of protagonists and their doubles that is only logical given its underlying psychological component.

The antipodal tension between the protagonist and the double, the symbolic significance of the double for the individual's psyche, and the tragic outcome of the double's struggle for

supremacy (among many other narrative and aesthetic traits) aligns Andersen's text with the major Romantic doubling plots, Hoffman's *Elixirs of Satan*, Poe's "William Wilson," and Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

Evgenii Shvarts and the Politization of the Tragicomic Modernist Double

Since the formula of the Romantic doubling narrative possesses a proven stability, any deviations from the tradition in Shvarts's play have a heightened significance. Shvarts's work justifies a comparative approach, not least because the pair of epigraphs to the play indicate that the author sees himself in dialogue with Andersen's work. The second epigraph is the most explicit about Shvarts's intent to experiment with the artistic legacy of the shadow trope. It primes the reader to approach the work as something new, not completely beholden to past intentions and meanings associated with the appropriated plot: "…it is as if another's plot has entered into my flesh and blood, I created it anew and only then released it into the light."[185] But what is the nature of Shvarts's transformation of Andersen's fairytale, and does his vision of the shadow align with the tradition of the modernist double trope observed in the pre-revolutionary period?

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[185] Evgenii Shvarts, "Ten' (skazka v trekh deistviiakh)," in *Golyi korol',* eds. Aleksei Dmitrenko and Elena Petrova (Sankt-Peterburg: Vita Nova, 2019), 193: "…чужой сюжет как бы вошел в мою плоть и кровь, я пересоздал его и тогда только выпустил в свет." The first epigraph is a coy intertextual reference from Andersen's *Shadow* and Chamisso's *Peter Schlemihl* (see footnote 23). Shvarts expresses a tongue-in-cheek anxiety about a readership approaching the work as derivative instead of seeing the thematic evolution contained within it. In Chamisso's novella, the titular character sells his shadow for an ever-replenishing bag of riches, but quickly comes to understand that he's let go an integral part of himself that is no longer retrievable. He's unable to achieve any happiness in love, unable to retain the respect of other men because they consider him irredeemably compromised without a shadow. Realizing he cannot regain the unity now that it has been lost, he nevertheless rejects the riches that tempted him into selling his shadow, abandons all hope of attaining love, and lives out the rest of his days in poverty as repentance. The shadow, the double proxy, is something essential to the unity of a man, a piece of himself that must be integrated in order to live a normal and respectable life. By invoking Andersen's reference to Chamisso, Shvarts is positioning himself squarely within this tradition of shadow-based doubling narratives.

Shvarts's *The Shadow* begins with the arrival of the young scholar Christian-Theodor, a nod to Hans Christian Andersen and Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann, to a small hotel in a land where fairytales are sewn into the fabric of reality. There he meets Annuntsiata[186], the daughter of the hotel owner, who tells him of the land's king who – disappointed by a series of immoral, opportunistic ministers – has given up ruling and left the country's fate in the hands of his daughter, the princess. In his will, he encourages the princess to marry a kind-hearted commoner who will rule honestly; she, in turn, will disguise herself among the townsfolk until the day she discovers the man who will inherit the throne. Later, Christian-Theodor sees a beautiful woman on the balcony across from his room and wins her favor by speaking in lofty language about love. After their conversation, he guesses that the woman is the princess and jokingly encourages his shadow – cast over the street separating their balconies – to go into her room to profess his love. The shadow unexpectedly severs himself from the scholar, causing the latter to become severely sick. The rest of the town learns of the scholar's love interest along with the identity of the princess. The ill-willed among them hatch a plan to interfere with the princess's relationship so that they may have her, and the power she holds, for themselves. Two among the malevolent, high-placed ministers, worry that Christian-Theodor will be hard to undermine or blackmail as a naïve, straightforward, honest man. However, the scholar's shadow appears to them with the promise that he – as the one who knows Christian-Theodor's deepest vulnerabilities – will take care of their problem. The shadow convinces Christian-Theodor, who does not see his double's nefarious intentions, that by signing a commitment to abandon his aims with princess in exchange for riches, he can misdirect his pursuers long enough to plan his escape with her. The shadow takes the document, signed with great reluctance by the scholar, to

[186] From the Latin word 'annunciate' or 'to foretell, herald.'

the princess as if proof of Christian-Theodor's shallow, cowardly, and materialistic nature; the shadow, with the inverted name Theodor-Christian, then professes his love to her, and manages to win her favor by appealing to her hidden desires. Though the scholar attempts to condemn Theodor-Christian's deception and explain himself to the princess, she refuses to listen and proceeds with her plans to be married with the shadow. The scholar travels to the palace during the wedding celebrations to expose Theodor-Christian as a shadow to the court, but, when he tries to bring the truth to light no one believes him, and he is sentenced to beheading for his insolence. However, just as execution is carried out and the scholar loses his head, so too does the shadow. The royal palace, in a panic, sends for 'living water' to revive the scholar in order to save the shadow along with him. Once both the scholar and his shadow are brought back to life, the latter realizes his dependency on Christian-Theodor and tries to win back his favor. Christian-Theodor refuses to have anything to do with his shadow or the princess, leaving the land accompanied by its only other honest, kindhearted inhabitant, Annuntsiata. The shadow disappears, and the scholar senses that they will meet again, but vows to be more vigilant for those future encounters.

Given the explicit connection between Shvarts's and Andersen's *Shadow* it is not surprising that the correspondence between texts has received attention from critics. And yet a consensus has not arisen as to the meaning of each text and the nature of their correlation to one another. For example, Irina H. Corten presents each work as a commentary on the struggle of good versus evil: "An important difference between Andersen and Shvarts lies in their attitudes toward coping with evil. Andersen's story indicates that evil forces are so overpowering that

struggle against them is bound to end in defeat."[187] She sees Shvarts as a less pessimistic writer who presents his scholar as a spiritual leader: "The scholar's way of fighting evil, then, is the way of spiritual enlightenment. […] He chooses the slow and difficult path of travelling through the world and tracking down the elusive shadow – the symbol of darkness in people's hearts." Duffield White's analysis adds a measure of complexity and subtlety into the analysis of the conflict between the scholar and the shadow in Andersen and Shvarts, looking beyond the rhetoric of 'good and evil.' Moreover, though he does not engage with the psychoanalytical angle using Jung's thinking, he does recognize that the learned man bares part of the responsibility for his own undoing. Comparing Andersen's depiction of the relationship between the learned man and his shadow to that of Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, White asserts, "The ending of Andersen's *The Shadow* represents a stand-off between the idealist and worldly conceptions of identity. The scholar makes the idealist conception appear unfulfilling because he lacks boldness, while the shadow's life demonstrates that worldly power is based upon deception and aggression which derives from a weak sense of self."[188] He opposes the hopelessness of the ending in Andersen's work to Shvarts's transformation of it into a biblical test of faith, echoing the religious overtones of Dostoevsky's novels: "The end of Andersen's story encourages the reader to infer that the scholar dies in despair. If, in fact, he died with firm faith in his idealist values and their commitment to Truth, then he did not die in despair. […] In rewriting the story, […] Shvarts insists that, as in the story of Christ's crucifixion, spiritual faith can prove to be stronger than worldly power. When he

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[187] Irina H. Corton, "Evgenii Shvarts as an Adapter of Hans Christian and Charles Perrault," *The Russian Review,* 37: 1 (1978): 62, www.jstor.org/stable/128363.

[188] Duffield White, "Shvarts's The Shadow: The Andersen Story and the Russian Subtexts," *The Slavic and East European Journal*, vol. 38, no. 4 (1994): 639, www.jstor.org/stable/308419.

returns to the state after his execution and resurrection, Shvarts's scholar thinks only of how his faith has passed the test of dying."[189] And while each scholar's approach brings forth certain concealed meanings in both Andersen and Shvarts, they neglect to shed new light on the trope of the double, its literary history and function, and its role. This is a particularly conspicuous absence in the work of White, who draws perceptive philosophical parallels between Shvarts's work and Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment, The Idiot,* and *The Possessed*, and yet fails to mention *The Double*. A comparative discussion of Andersen's and Shvart's *Shadow* as part of the literary tradition of the double trope, then, ought to illuminate particular elements of each text that have largely been overlooked.

Though Shvarts's *Shadow* holds up apart from Andersen's fairytale, without a familiarity with the latter, a significant portion of the play's subtle intertextual play – especially the tension between its comic atmosphere and the teasing of its own tragic potential – will go unnoticed. Although the comic quirkiness of all the fairytale residents – including the corrupt leadership – is emphasized in Shvarts's play, there is an uneasiness in the laughter it generates. There is always a chance that the potential of the villains' threatening power will be realized, echoing the tragic ending of Andersen's work and retroactively casting all the scenes of comic, over-the-top nefariousness in a much grimmer light. Shvarts invokes the specter of Andersen's tragic ending to generate an abiding, ambient sense of peril in the text; on several occasions Annuntsiata reminds Christian-Theodor – the 'scholar' – that just because *The Shadow* is set in a land of fairytales does not mean that he can count on a happy ending: "[Adults] know well that many

[189] Ibid., 650.

fairytales have sad endings. And that's what I wanted to talk to you about. Be careful."[190] In another case, the play's doctor warns the scholar that he ought not to be so sure that his venture to win the heart of the princess will end in success: "In folk legends about the man who lost his shadow, in the monographs of Chamisso and your friend Hans Christian Andersen, it is said that…" But the scholar cuts him off, "Let us not recall what is said there. It will all end differently for me."[191] The conclusion of Shvarts's play reveals that his scholar does meet a different fate from that of Andersen's learned man, but what is the narrative and symbolic significance of this change? How are Shvarts's protagonist and antagonist different from their predecessors, and what is the impact of these changes on the meaning of the double trope?

The significance of the scholar and his shadow depends on the positive content they represent. Though the double trope is frequently conceptualized as a symbolic struggle between 'good' and 'evil,' these concepts do not have any specific content in and of themselves. To interpret them outside of their pure symbolic meaning, one must understand the axiological hierarchy of the work itself to determine what, in this specific narrative, constitutes good and evil. Speaking about *The Shadow,* Shvarts noted in an interview that the play is designed to express an optimistic conjecture about the world: "A careerist, a man without ideas, a functionary can defeat a man inspired by ideas and grand thoughts, but only temporarily. In the end, living life will prevail."[192] Shvarts's message can be integrated into a value structure, then,

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[190] Shvarts, "Ten' (skazka v trekh deistviiakh)," 202: "[Взрослые] прекрасно знают, что многие сказки кончаются печально. Вот об этом я с вами и хотела поговорить. Будьте осторожны."

[191] Ibid., 235: "В народных преданиях о человеке, который потерял тень, в монографиях Шамиссо и вашего друга Ганса-Христиана Андерсена говорится, что…" // "Не будем вспоминать о том, что там говорится. У меня все кончится иначе."

[192] Evgenii Shvarts, "P'eca-skazka 'Ten','" *Iskusstvo i zhizn',* no. 9 (1939): 46. http://lib.sptl.spb.ru/ru/nodes/9165-iskusstvo-i-zhizn-1939-9#mode/inspect/page/50/zoom/4: "Карьерист, человек без идей, чиновник может победить человека, одушевленного идеями и большими мыслями, только временно. В конце концов, побеждает живая жизнь."

to help create a rough mapping of the central conceptual distinctions of the play. Though Shvarts's comments are not an exhaustive inventory of the axiological structures of the play, at the very least they suggest that 'inspired thought,' 'big ideas,' and 'life' would track to the play's positive positions, or simply impulses of 'the good.' And indeed, these values are embodied by the scholar and his only loyal companion, the hotel owner's daughter Annuntsiata. On the other hand, the oppositional values, embodied by the 'shadow,' would track to 'careerism,' 'bureaucracy,' and, by implication, 'death.' The shadow himself is a ruthless careerist, sacrificing any semblance of moral virtue to attain rank, wealth and status; he is the shadow 'essence' embodied, a concrete manifestation of the abstract psychological temptation faced by the play's other figures. And all the play's villains – the two ministers, the cannibals i.e., the hotel owner Pietro, and the journalist Cezar Borgia – are cynical and ruthless careerists, or both; their indifference is implicit in their single-minded orientation towards personal gain and success. And while these values imbue the polarized 'good and evil' moral coordinates of the work with a more specific content, the play also invokes another trait that plays a central role in the value structures it explores: cynicism and indifference. In his first conversation with the princess, the scholar is shocked with her jaded attitude towards life, and her assertion that she cannot distinguish any specific coordinates in the moral landscape: "These people are right, and so too are those others, and, at the end of the day, it is all the same to me."[193] The scholar counters that to assume there is no distinction between conflicting sides, or to become indifferent to the world is among the worst of fates: "'It is all the same,' but that [attitude] is worse than

[193] Shvarts, "Ten' (skazka v trekh deistviiakh)," 219: "И те правы, и эти правы, и, в конце концов, мне все безразлично."

death!"[194] The focus on indifference sets Shvarts's play apart from its predecessor. In Andersen's fairytale, the narrative remains so fixated on the duality of the learned man and his shadow that there remains no narrative space for an exploration of indifference because there are no other figures in the story that can embody it. Shvarts, on the other hand, incorporates a number of additional characters with their own subplots, developed in parallel with the playing out of the scholar's rivalry with the shadow. The additional characters provide Shvarts with the opportunity to explore the dynamics of more complex value structures and embodied values – the analysis of 'indifference' chief among them. Although these additional figures do not have embodied 'shadows' of their own, their presence in Shvarts's reimagining of Andersen's fairytale does suggest that the significance of the 'the shadow' trope is somehow tied up in the unraveling of their stories.

In the analysis of the Romantic texts, including Andersen's work, the prototypical tragic double serves as the counterpoint to a *specific individual's* characteristics, and the narratives built on this trope centered on the fate of that individual. The Romantic double is suggestive of a universal applicability, but its universalism is sooner an implication following from its psychological nature. The shadow's implicit connection to the psyche (and the unconscious) is made explicit in Shvarts; as the play's doctor suggests, "Dreams and shadows are closely related, after all. They, it seems, are cousins."[195] Though the psychological element of the double hints at its universal quality, Shvarts brings the trope's applicability to the collective out as one of its central themes. Speaking to the princess, the shadow suggests that he is not only an antithetical

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[194] Ibid., 219: "Все безразлично, да ведь это еще хуже смерти!"

[195] Shvarts, "Ten' (skazka v trekh deistviiakh)," 253: "Да ведь сны и тени в близком родстве. Они, кажется, двоюродные"

manifestation of the scholar, but represents a part of her too: "People do not know the shadow side of things, and – more specifically – in the shadows, in the semi-darkness, in the depths hides that which intensifies all our sensations. In the depths of your soul – there am I."[196] If the Romantic doubling text staged the drama of an individual against their alter ego, then the shadow in Shvarts's play has an explicitly extended domain. He has both an individual specificity – as he claims, "I speak with everyone in their own language" – and a generalizable universality, localizing himself in every subject comprising the collective.[197] If the shadow is narratively significant as both universal and individual, then there ought to be evidence of its presence beyond its embodied manifestation in the figure of Theodor-Christian.

The character development of two figures in particular epitomizes the struggle between the play's antipodal moral coordinates - either towards moral virtue and or to the debased *shadow side:* the disenchanted doctor, and the near-sighted singer Yulia Julie. Yulia has the vanity of a famous performer, and has established a reputation as someone ready to trample others to raise herself up: "[Yulia] steps and steps on good people, on her closest girlfriends, even on herself – and she does it all to preserve her new shoes, her stockings, and her dress."[198] However, she is charmed by the virtues of the scholar, and, defying her self-interested nature, risks attracting the ire of her powerful social circle – especially her clandestine lover, the

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[196] Ibid., 251: "Люди не знают теневой стороны вещей, а именно в тени, в полумраке, в глубине и таится то, что придает остроту нашим чувствам. В глубине вашей души – я."

[197] Ibid., 243: "Я с каждым говорю на его языке." This distinction mirrors the Jungian distinction between the individual unconscious and the collective unconscious. The Jungian shadow archetype in its collective manifestation cannot be understood as an entity with specific and defined features that somehow inhabits the minds of all mankind. The archetypes are potentialities, and they are best understood structurally; 'the shadow' is the spirit of the antithetical within the psyche, and stands in contrast to the individual's structure of values. The way the shadow manifests itself varies for every individual in relation to their cognized and unconscious value structures.

[198] Ibid., 210: "[Юлия] наступает и наступает на хороших людей, на лучших подруг, даже на самое себя – и все это для того, чтобы сохранить свои новые башмачки, чулочки и платьица."

minister of finance – by warning Christian-Theodor of the plot to tear the princess away from him. She is herself surprised by the sudden change of heart: "Ah, you have ruined me over these past two weeks. Why did I ever come visit you! I have turned into a sentimental commoner."[199] However, her resolve to enact moral good is tested when the minister of finance tries to enlist her to bring the scholar to ruin. Taking note of her hesitation to participate in the plot, the minister threatens to launch a media campaign against Yulia designed to drum up false charges: crimes against the state for supposedly injecting subversive political messaging into her music. Her will to truth is tested against her instinct for self-preservation in the decisive moment when the scholar reveals to the royal court that Theodor-Christian is his shadow; when they do not listen to his warning the scholar turns to Yulia for a voice of support, but she betrays his confidence: "It is you who is the shadow!"[200] Moments later she stands before the royal court, singing a song about the virtues of indifference – titled "Don't Lose Your Head" – while the scholar is beheaded behind the scenes.

Like Yulia, the doctor sees a kind of charm in the scholar's naiveté and virtuousness. The doctor takes a liking to Christian-Theodor and tries to convince him to adopt a new mode of being to avoid getting into more trouble. The doctor's method of treatment is therapeutic, teaching his patients to embody indifference to endure the difficulties and injustices of life under the tyrannical ministers: "Yes, [the scholar] is well. But his affairs are going poorly. And they will get even worse until he learns how to look at the other way, until he learns to give up on it all, until he internalizes the art of shrugging his shoulders."[201] Though beyond this projection of

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[199] Ibid., 238: "Ах, вы меня испортили за эти две недели. Зачем только я навещала вас! Я превратилась в сентиментальную мещанку."

[200] Ibid., 272: "Тень – это вы!"

cynicism, the doctor conceals his own shattered ambitions from the days of his youth when he mirrored many of the scholar's virtuous qualities. The doctor confesses to the scholar that long ago he, too, had the will to fight for the world's betterment. Once he discovered a source of 'living water' that could revive the dead but was forced to lock away the miraculous substance because the minister of finance worried it would diminish the city's turnover: "I fought like mad with the minister – and then the functionaries all came after me. They are indifferent to it all. To life, to death, to great discoveries. And precisely for that reason, they prevailed. And I gave up on it all. And it became easier to live on this earth right away. Give up on all of it, and you'll live just like me."[202] Eventually, the doctor is also confronted with a test of his resolve to remain indifferent. Just after Yulia betrays the scholar in front of the royal court, the minister asks the doctor if the scholar has a contagious case of insanity, a diagnosis that would justify and legitimize his execution. The doctor chooses safe indifference over a dangerous expression resistance, confirming the minister's absurd diagnosis: "I was almost infected with his madness myself."[203] Though, after their public betrayals, it appears Yulia and the doctor are still experiencing pangs of conscience. To relieve her guilt, Yulia approaches the doctor about retrieving the locked-away 'living water' to revive Christian-Theodor once the execution is complete. However, the water's source is locked away and can only be opened with a key that belongs to the finance minister; the doctor insists there is nothing he can do, and Yulia rejects the suggestion that she ask the minister for the key – "[the doctor] wants to put all the responsibility

[201] Ibid., 234: "Да, [ученый] здоров. Но дела его идут плохо. И пойдут еще хуже, пока он не научится смотреть на мир сквозь пальцы, пока он не махнет на все рукой, пока он не овладеет искусством пожимать плечами."

[202] Ibid., 253: "Я боролся с министром как бешеный – и вот на меня двинулись чиновники. Им все безразлично. И жизнь, и смерть, и великие открытия. И именно поэтому они победили. И я махнул на все рукой. И мне сразу стало легче жить на свете. И вы махните на все рукой и живите, как я."

[203] Ibid., 273: "Я сам едва не заразился этим безумием."

on me. […] I did everything I could" –, and so both wash their hands of Christian-Theodor's beheading.[204]

Through characters like the doctor and Yulia, *The Shadow* explores the implications of a moral landscape where collective indifference and cynicism reign; and Shvarts's emphasis on the interrelatedness of the moral strength of the individual and the health of the collective leads to a reading of his shadow as a *political* force. The corrosiveness of indifference and cynicism as a political force is not only that it benefits the representatives of a corrupt power structure, but also that it transforms potential moral forces into passive, indifferent, submissive subjects. Jung himself often warned about the power of the collective shadow to subvert the individual: "[Man] never suspects that his own hidden and apparently harmless shadow has qualities whose dangerousness exceeds his wildest dreams. As soon as people get together in masses and submerge the individual, the shadow is mobilized, and, as history shows, may even be personified and incarnated."[205] Jung's insight explains the political success of the scholar's shadow in Shvarts's fictional universe; the 'light' of individual virtue is put out in its encounter with the collective shadow, and it is the shadow embodied that is best adapted to the environment ruled by the collective's unconscious impulses.

Furthermore, the indecision faced by Yulia and the doctor reflects one of the doubling principles described by Krzhizhanovsky in his treatise: the subtype of the *двойник* designating the indecisive figure who faces a deep inner division which they hope to resolve by making a choice between two incompatible options, thereby restoring unity to themselves. The figure of

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[204] Ibid., 278: "[Доктор] хочет все свалить на меня. […] Я сделала все, что могла."

[205] Jung, "On the Psychology of the Trickster-Figure," *Collected Works of C.G. Jung,* edited and translated by Gerhard Adler and R. H. C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969) 9:267.

the indecisive hero described in Krzhizhanovsky's theory represents too broad a category to call a double in all cases. However, in Shvarts's play, the indecisiveness of the doctor and Yulia, the gravitation towards indifference and self-preservation, is a mirroring of the play's shadow motif, which itself makes the connection far more explicit. Their siding with 'indifference' does not constitute a choice in and of itself; it is the absence of choice. Thus, they remain divided, denying themselves internal, curative unity and rendering them morally impotent subjects.

The scholar, on the other hand, is one of very few protagonists of doubling narratives from any era who manages to resolve the problem of the alter ego. His shadow is not destroyed, for if it does have its ontological basis in the psyche it simply cannot be, nor is it repressed. Instead, the scholar vows to remain vigilant, suggesting that the solution to the problem of the shadow is to understand that it is a constant threat, and to be ready for it in whatever form it appears: "He hid away only to appear before me on my journey again and again. But I will recognize him, I will recognize him everywhere."[206] But what significance does the scholar's victory carry? To experience the full weight of the ending, one ought first to understand its significance both in psychological terms and in terms of the political and collective spirit of the work.

Built on the antipodal principle of doubling, Shvarts's play contains the structural qualities generative of grotesque polarization like its Romantic-era counterpart. However, as a work built to unconceal the relational dependency of the individual and the collective, the grotesque element of the work spills out into the political sphere. As Freud's theory of the uncanny suggests, the grotesque double is often a result of the familiar suddenly transforming

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[206] Shvarts, "Ten' (skazka v trekh deistviiakh)," 285. "Он скрылся, чтобы еще раз и еще раз стать у меня на дороге. Но я узнаю его, я всюду узнаю его."

into the unfamiliar. The logic of this transformation is straightforward in the individual who suddenly is confronted with a part of his psyche he has repressed; the self ought to be the most familiar thing of all, and the shock and revulsion accompanied by an estrangement from the self is understandable from a psychological perspective. If the aim is to understand the logic of the grotesque in the double's collective sense, though, the utility of Freud's theory is rather limited.

Wolfgang Kayser, and his theory of the grotesque as 'world estrangement,' and Mikhail Bakhtin, with the grotesque elements of his notion of the carnival, propose competing conceptions of the grotesque's function in collective contexts. Bakhtin's polemic with Kayser raises a theoretical debate that will prove useful in analyzing the grotesque nature of the collective shadow. Bakhtin's concise summary of Kayser's work is as follows:

> For Kayser, the most important thing in the grotesque world is "something hostile, alien, and inhuman." Kayser especially emphasizes the moment of alienness: "The grotesque is the world made alien [strange]." Kayser explicates that definition, comparing the grotesque to the world of fairytales. After all, the world of fairytales, if you look at it from the outside, can also be seen as alien and unusual, but it is not the world *made* alien. In the grotesque, that which for us was familiar and close suddenly becomes alien and hostile. It is precisely our world that suddenly transformed into an alien one.[207]

Because it relies on the principle of radical defamiliarization, Kayser's theory can be understood as complimentary to Freud's uncanny. Kayser's conception should be able to reveal something about the aesthetic utility of Shvarts's invocation of the collective shadow. The double, understood in the individualistic sense through Freud's uncanny, estranges the individual from himself; if Freud's theory were externalized from the individual and applied to the outside world,

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[207] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable i narodnaia kul'tura srednevekov'ia i Renessanca* (Moscow: Khudozhevstvennaia literatura, 1993), 56: "Для Кайзера же главное в гротескном мире – «нечто враждебное, чуждое и нечеловеческое». Особенно подчеркивает Кайзер момент чуждости: «Гротескное – это мир, ставший чужим». Кайзер поясняет это определение, сопоставляя гротеск с миром сказки. Ведь и мир сказки, если смотреть на него со стороны, тоже можно определить как чуждый и необычный, но это не мир, ставший чужим. В гротеске же то, что было для нас своим, родным и близким, внезапно становится чужим и враждебным. Именно наш мир превращается вдруг в чужой."

it describes the core of Kayser's theoretical framework. The importance of the principle of polarization for certain forms of the grotesque is also made explicit. The grotesque, as Kayser imagines it, is a potent aesthetic device, designed with the explosive power to alienate a subject from their surrounding environment. If this effect is to really be achieved, the artist must give their audience quite the jolt, and this is attempted by snapping their perception of the world between two antipodal positions, from the intimately familiar to the disturbingly strange.[208]

Especially given the prevalence of the fairytale motif in Shvarts, it is worth stopping for a moment to evaluate Kayser's distinction of the grotesque world – a world that *becomes* strange – and the fairytale world – a world that is already strange. In the typical fairytale, the action takes place in a hypothetical fantasy world hermetically sealed outside of the spatial boundaries of our own; the subject can experience a symbolic parallel that unites our world with the fairytale world, but – as Kayser suggests – the fanciful nature of these tales does not often make our world strange. However, Shvarts violates this principle, making the collision of the 'real' and the 'fairytale' worlds a central motif in his play. For example, in one of *The Shadow's* opening scenes the scholar claims that the two are much closer than one might expect: "You know, in the evening, after removing my glasses, I am ready to believe [that in your world fairytales are real]. But in the morning, leaving the house, I see something completely different. Your country – alas! – is like all the countries in the world. Riches and poverty, nobility and slavery, death and misfortune, reason and idiocy, sanctity, crime, conscience, shamelessness – all of it is mixed so thoroughly that it horrifies you. It will be very difficult to untangle it all, to parse it, and bring it

[208] Compare to the explosive effect generated by the aforementioned pre-revolutionary Modernist texts, pivoting from the comic mode to the tragic mode – sometimes in an instant. Because they highlight a defect in the reader's perception of the events they witnessed, these texts, too, have the potential to estrange the world in the way Kayser describes.

back to order such that nothing living is damaged in the process. In fairytales, everything is much simpler."[209] By breaking down this barrier, Shvarts attempts undermine any assumption that the strange people and events of his fairytale world have no bearing on outside reality. When this line appears in the early moments of the play, viewers and readers are unlikely to make much of the connection. However, as the play proceeds, Shvarts confronts his audience with a growing pile of evidence that his corrupt fairytale world – ruled by the collective shadow – is much closer to their familiar Soviet reality than initially meets the eye.

Written in the last years of the 1930s, Shvarts's rendition of *The Shadow* has a heightened moral urgency due to the connections it dares to draw with the repressions perpetuated by the Soviet State during the peak of Stalinist Terror. Several moments in the text are so transparent in their political relevancy that it is a wonder the play was allowed to be staged at all. For example, when Yulia hesitates to help the minister of finance bring the scholar to ruin, he threatens to arrest her, to initiate a media slander campaign, and to accuse her of undermining state initiatives: "Your refusal shows that you do not respect our whole system of government. Silence! Be quiet! To the bench with you! […] "Oh, Why Aren't I a Puddle!" [the name of Yulia's hit song], only now I understand what you mean by that title. You are suggesting that our farmers are not given enough land. Yes? And? Just you… I'll make you… Tomorrow the papers will tear apart your figure, your manner of singing, your private life."[210] In another chilling nod

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[209] Shvarts, "Ten' (skazka v trekh deistviiakh)," 203: "Знаете, вечером, да еще сняв очки, я готов верить [что в вашей стране сказки – правда]. Но утром, выйдя из дому, я вижу совсем другое. Ваша страна – увы! – похожа на все страны в мире. Богатство и бедность, знатность и рабство, смерть и несчастье, разум и глупость, святость, преступление, совесть, бесстыдство – все это перемешано так тесно, что просто ужасаешься. Очень трудно будет все это распутать, разобрать и привести в порядок так, чтобы не повредить ничему живому. В сказках все это гораздо проще."

[210] Ibid., 240. "Ваш отказ показывает, что вы недостаточно уважаете всю нашу государственную систему. Тихо! Молчать! Под суд! […] «Ах, зачем я не лужайка!» [the name of Yulia's hit song] Только теперь я понял, что вы этим хотите сказать. Вы намекаете на то, что у фермеров мало земли. А? Что? Да я вас…, да я вам… Завтра же газеты разберут по косточкам вашу фигуру, вашу манеру петь, вашу частную жизнь."

to the politics of the era, the shadow coerces the scholar to sign a concessional document under the pretense that doing so will save the lives of those he loves: "You are also a murderer! By refusing to sign this insignificant scrap of paper, you are killing yourself, your best friend, and the poor, helpless princess."[211] Subsequently, the shadow betrays his trust, using the document instead to slander the scholar to the princess, convincing her that he is just another careerist willing to sacrifice others for his own gain. In one of the known drafts of the play, the newly freed shadow, having made his pact with the ministers, proclaims: "Today I have come to understand the beauty and power of the chancellery. The most complex affairs of man look so simple with it. Two words on a piece of paper, and a man no longer exists."[212] One need not strain the imagination to determine why this line was subsequently removed. This steady stream of reminders that the dangers of Shvarts's fairytale world are those same dangers confronting his audience are all but designed to prevent the routine nature of anti-humanitarian excesses under Stalin from becoming familiarized banalities. By collapsing the distance between the fairytale and the real, Shvarts invites his audience to do the same, and – for the perceptive among them – reveals that the collective shadow is alive and well in their world, too.

Although Kayser's theory applies to the tragic elements of *The Shadow,* it is less effective in explaining its comic components. Bakhtin's critique of Kayser's theory suggests that it is "applicable to only a few manifestations of the modernist grotesque" and, since it does not have its roots in the carnivalistic worldview, is an inferior manifestation of grotesque aesthetics. Bakhtin is categorical about the role of laughter and liberating relativism in genuine expressions

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[211] Ibid., 246. "Ты тоже убийца! Отказываясь подписать эту жалкую бумажонку, ты убиваешь меня, лучшего своего друга, и бедную, беспомощную принцессу."

[212] Ibid., 510. "Только сегодня я понял красоту и силу канцелярии. Сложнейшие человеческие дела выглядят в канцелярии так просто. Два слова на бумажке, и нет человека."

of the grotesque: "The relativity of all existence is always joyful in the grotesque […] The comic principle and the carnivalistic worldview, lying at the foundation of the grotesque, destroy the limiting seriousness, all pretentions of timeless meaning, and the certainty of notions of necessity – freeing human consciousness, thought, and imagination for new possibilities."[213] If the practitioners of the modernist grotesque are distinguished by their resistance to the laws guiding the pre-Romantic grotesque Bakhtin loves to champion, then Shvarts is solidly positioned among their ranks. There is plenty of laughter in Shvarts's play, but it is a laughter of great uneasiness, accompanying many of the play's greatest evils. From the ministers, who can (literally) 'understand each other from half a word,' threatening to kill the scholar ("Надо его или ку, или у"), to the doctor whose medical treatment is encouraging moral people to 'look the other way,' to the running gag that half the city are cannibals working at the city's pawnshop ("Scholar: 'Annuntsiata, how many appraisers work in your city's pawnshop?' Annuntsiata: 'A lot'") to Yulia Julie singing her song "Don't Lose Your Head" as the scholar is being beheaded – Shvarts ensures the play's darkest moments are simultaneously its funniest.[214] But while laughter in the face of tragedy and death is Bakhtinian, it fails to meet one of Bakhtin's core criteria to be genuinely grotesque: it fails to celebrate relativism. More than that, moral relativity is perhaps the value that the play rails against hardest of all. For instance, the scholar recoils when the princess proclaims that, "these people are right, and so, too, are those others, and, at the end of the day, it is all the same to me." The audience is meant to understand that, within the

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[213] Bakhtin, *Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable i narodnaia kul'tura srednevekov'ia i Renessanca*, 58: "Относительность всего существующего в гротеске всегда веселая […] Смеховое начало и карнавальное мироощущение, лежащие в основе гротеска, разрушают ограниченную серьезность и всякие претензии на вневременную значимость и безусловность представлений о необходимости и освобождают человеческое сознание, мысль и воображение для новых возможностей."

[214] Shvarts, "Ten' (skazka v trekh deistviiakh)," 229, 210. "Уч: 'Аннунциата, сколько оценщиков в вашем городском ломбарде?' Ан: 'Много.'"

axiological framework of the text, holding this belief is an unforgivable manifestation of moral impotency. The grotesque in Shvarts's play, then, comes from the collective shadow – the spirit of lies and life wiped of any positive content – gaining sway over the fairytale land and its people. Shvarts's grotesque is not Bakhtinian because it advocates for the power of truth, rails against relativity, and believes that 'the beautiful and the good' are restorative forces in the world. There is little joy in the grotesque for Shvarts, for things are grotesque because the world is twisted by liars, bureaucrats, careerists and cannibals while the indifferent look on and habitualize themselves to the corrupted world.

The grotesque in *The Shadow,* then, is a negative state of exception, born out of the supremacy of the collective shadow, that ought to be blighted by representatives of the true and the good. The play mythologizes the kingdom's corruption and fall, and treats the scholar's arrival into the land like the coming of a savior and redeemer. Shvarts includes a short anecdote that serves as a symbolic depiction of the corruptive power of the shadow: "My aunt was a beautiful girl, and she got married to a scoundrel who only pretended that he loved her. And his kisses were cold and so repulsive, that the beautiful girl soon transformed into a cold, repulsive frog. […] They say that such things happen a lot more often than one might think."[215] Shvarts is fond of including small anecdotes that reflect the broader themes of his work, and so here. The myth of corruption serves as the play's constructive principle, applying to specific characters and the collective with equal validity. The beautiful maiden finds its parallel in the uncorrupted fairytale city, the cold husband – indifferent to his wife – stands in for the collective spirit of

[215] Ibid., 218: "[Т]етя моя была прекрасная девушка, и она вышла замуж за негодяя, который только притворялся, что любит ее. И поцелуи его были холодны и так отвратительны, что прекрасная девушка превратилась в скором времени в холодную и отвратительную лягушку. […] Говорят, что такие вещи случаются гораздо чаще, чем можно предположить."

careerism and indifference plaguing its political structures. The positive potential of the fairytale kingdom, having come into contact with the corrupting force of 'the shadow,' is warped into a nightmare where corrupt ministers and cannibals have seized power and where honesty is a crime punished with execution.

Conclusion – A Remedy for the Polarized Individual

Although the ending to Shvarts's play puts a positive spin on Andersen's tragic resolution, the message conveyed is not unproblematically optimistic about an individual's ability to act as a catalyst for goodness and truth in one's own culture. The collective shadow is by no means an impotent force, even if Shvarts is convinced that 'in the end, living life will prevail.' The case of Yulia Julie and the doctor demonstrate that harboring a spark of the good is not enough. Overcoming the temptation to become a silent collaborator requires a spiritual feat of good that can hardly be expected of the average citizen. The scholar is only able to secure victory over his shadow – and, symbolically, over the collective shadow – by standing up for truth to the death. The scholar accepts the possibility of his death, possessing a bravery that sets him apart from Andersen's passive learned man. Before risking his life to confront the royal court about the truth of the shadow's identity, the scholar externalizes his own philosophical approach to life onto a number torches that burn in the night: "I really love how these torches burn. […] And I love all the torches at once, and each torch individually. I know that by morning you will all be extinguished, my friends, but be not sad. For you still burned, and happily, too – no one can take that away from you."[216]

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[216] Ibid., 260: "Мне очень нравится, как горят эти фонарики. […] И я люблю все фонарики разом и каждый фонарик в отдельности. Я знаю, что к утру вы погаснете, друзья мои, но вы не жалейте об этом. Все-таки вы горели, и горели весело, – этого у вас никто не может отнять."

However, Shvarts's dramatic ending is not serving only to project a message of great moral import; it also works as an innovation on the tradition of the double in the way it lays bare the central paradox at the heart of doubling narratives (and the associated principle of grotesque polarization). Recall the dynamics of the pre-revolutionary modernist doubling narratives, analyzed through the lens of Krzhizhanovsky's *двойник* and *двойня*. On the surface, Shvarts's *Shadow* develops much like the pre-revolutionary Modernist tragicomic texts, though with its own significant differences. In this case, the narrative conflict begins with the scholar, suddenly splitting into two, mirroring the structural movement of Krzhizhanovsky's concept of *двойня*. As Krzhizhanovsky argues, the *двойня* trope ought to be comic, and the sudden division of the scholar into two is predicated by the scholar's localization within the fairytale domain, a circumstance which itself gives rise to the play's predominant comic element. Though already at this early stage of the work, Shvarts is tinkering with the structural formula: he preemptively problematizes the comic nature of the *двойня* and does so through the interventions of Annuntsiata and the doctor. As longtime denizens of the fairytale city, both are experienced 'readers' of doubling narratives and understand what the scholar's doubling foretells. However, despite their warnings and references to the tragic endings of Chamisso and Andersen, the scholar presses forward believing that the story will end differently for him. As if by inertia, the play's finale draws out the move to Krzhizhanovsky's *двойник* narrative mode, revealing that the protagonist and antagonist are really an interdependent, singular being. The moment of the beheading – when both the scholar and the shadow lose their heads in tandem – is ingenious because it lays bare the structural elements of the shadow trope that give rise to its central dramatic paradox. Both scholar and shadow lose their heads because they are fundamentally interconnected and interdependent (highlighting their oneness), and yet they still cannot unify

with one another because their natures are antipodal (emphasizing their 'twoness,' and the fundamental *невязка* separating them). The image of the individual left by these endings are oppressive, pessimistic, and – yes – grotesque. These texts reveal man to be the embodiment of the principle of polarization: he is divided by antipodal, contradictory, and fundamentally irreconcilable impulses. Attempts to ignore or repress the double exacerbates the individual's internal polarization, leading to a dangerous dysphoria with the self. And the double cannot be harmed or dispensed with without harming or destroying the self along with it. In other words, the traditional doubling narrative only leaves the reader with a problem but does not present a positive solution.

Shvarts recognizes the severity of the problem at the heart of the traditional doubling narrative, but his reappropriation of Andersen's fairytale logic – his invocation of 'living water' – allows him to justify a few fantastic scenes where the scholar and his shadow come back to life and reflect on the nature and meaning of their connection. (Whereas the traditional doubling narratives end concurrently with their final tragic twist, and – since both protagonist and antagonist are conclusively dead – these texts spend no time dwelling on the meaning of their deaths.) The 'living water,' then, is not simply a *deus ex machina* that allows Shvarts to salvage a happy ending from his otherwise tragic play, and instead represents an essential element in his reinterpretation of Andersen's tale and the double trope more broadly.

After the shadow and the scholar are brought back to life, they are both transformed by the execution and its significance. Though he once thought himself the dominant force of the two – able to dominate his counterpart through sheer force of brazenness, guile, and shameless deception – the shadow is humbled by the realization of his dependence: "I cannot live without

him!"[217] The scholar, in contrast to his groveling shadow – "Stay with me, Christian. […] Not one hair will fall from your head. […] I will leave the ruling [of the kingdom] to you – within reasonable bounds, of course" – is empowered by his triumph over the shadow and in no mood to be making compromises: "Be quiet. I went unto death […] For to prevail, one must go even unto death. And so – I prevailed."[218] In this light, it is worth revisiting the scholar's remarks about his inevitable future encounters with the shadow: "He hid away only to appear before me on my journey again and again. But I will recognize him, I will recognize him everywhere."[219] In the last pages of his play, Shvarts presents a positive alternative to the double narrative's classic polarized model of individuality – divided by fruitless repression of the antipodal double or shadow – propagated by so many of the play's influences. Not only sobered by his execution, but also empowered by his resurrection, the scholar is made to understand the power of his own will, motivating him to dispense with his blindness towards evil, and his own tendency to ignore or repress the base and vulgar instincts within him. Instead, he resigns himself to a life of living vigilantly, accepting the inevitability of the shadow's perennial return, and taking responsibility for recognizing it and grappling with it when the time comes. Though Shvarts's message is a powerful moral lesson for the individual – agreeing with prescriptions of the twentieth century's most prolific psychologists – it also serves as a timely reminder of the duties of the collective to resist the temptations of vulgarity, evil, and the narrowminded instincts of self-preservation at a time when twin totalitarianisms haunted Europe. Shvarts's answer to the problem of the double

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[217] Ibid., 284: "я жить без него не могу!"

[218] Ibid., 284: "Останься со мной, Христиан. […] Ни один волос не упадет с твоей головы. […] Я дам управлять тебе – в разумных, конечно, пределах." // "Замолчи. Но я пошел на смерть […] Ведь чтобы победить, надо идти и на смерть. И вот – я победил"

[219] Ibid., 285: Он скрылся, чтобы еще раз и еще раз стать у меня на дороге. Но я узнаю его, я всюду узнаю его."

is no trivial call to action for mankind – after all, who can be expected to manifest the tireless vigilance and fearless self-sacrifice of the scholar? – but, for all that, proposing a solution any less demanding would simply be naïve.

CHAPTER THREE:

Know Thy Author, Know Thyself – Konstantin Vaginov's *Goat Song*, the Art of Grotesque Self-Authorship, and Conformity as Grotesque Hybridity

A Conceptual Introduction to the Interrelation of Hybridity and Polarity

Goat Song is a hallmark piece of Russian grotesque modernism. Not only does it showcase the discontinuities of Russia's modernist age in a manner more vivid than most other novels of its era but demonstrates just how effective grotesque aestheticization is at expressing the meaning of those discontinuities for the individuals who must exist between them. Very little of substance can be written about *Goat Song* without at least passing reference to its abundance of phantasmagoric scenes, its coteries of abject characters, or the strange, desacralized objects polluting its pages. It is therefore of little wonder that many extant analytical treatments of the novel have grappled with the question of grotesque's role in its narrative. In M.A. Orlova's 2009 dissertation, "The Nature of Genre in Konstantin Vaginov's *Goat Song,*" the grotesque *is* framed as the defining principle of the text. Following Leonid E. Pinsky, she defines the grotesque as, roughly, 'the cohabitation of opposites' [взаимосвязь противоположностей] or 'the connecting of the unconnectable' [соединение несоединимого], seeing *Goat Song's* grotesque as a product of the collision of the principles [начала] of the comic and tragic.[220] She argues that the grotesque is the organizing principle of the artistic structure as a whole. Similarly, Igor Gulin, in his 2021 article "The Poet and his Author: The Tragedy of *Goat Song*" notes the "grotesque portraits of [Vaginov's] friends and acquaintances" and outlines some of the conceptual

[220] Mariia Aleksandrovna Orlova, "Zhanrovaia priroda romana Konstantina Vaginova 'Kozlinaia pesn','" (Sankt-Peterburgskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2009), 15.

oppositions that define its structure: "ecstatic escapism / banal reality; high art / kitsch; poetic intoxication / drunkenness; chastity / desire and sex."[221]

Given that the grotesque is implemented to such an excessive, aesthetically overpowering degree, there will be no shortage of individual grotesque 'things' to point to. But, of course, pointing to hideous things does not make an argument. As always, I am seeking to uncover the specifics of the text's constructive principle. As Orlova concluded – and what is of little surprise in a fount of grotesque imagery like *Goat Song* – the constructive principle here happens to be rooted in attempts to 'connect the unconnectable,' to explore the implications of when opposites are forced into uneasy cohabitations. The novelty of this chapter will be the insights that emerge when *Goat Song* is analyzed through the hybridity/polarity framework.

Goat Song is a challenging text to navigate as an analyst. It has a baroque, sometimes overwhelming level of detail: it is overstuffed with unqualified evocations of Vaginov's intricate self-made mythology, esoteric intellectual references, inside jokes only Vaginov's Leningrad milieu ever understood. Furthermore, *Goat Song's* protagonists are not easy to understand in isolation from its more minor characters. In fact, the difference between major and minor is often blurry. An analysis without a few stops to gaze at the ornamentation, or to dwell with the minor characters would be a betrayal of *Goat Song's* poetic and narrative strengths. However, I have tried to maintain a critical focus on the formal cornerstones and the most consequential

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[221] Igor' Gulin, "Poet i ego avtor: tragedia 'Kozlinoi pesni." *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 164 (April 2020): https://www.nlobooks.ru/magazines/novoe_literaturnoe_obozrenie/164_nlo_4_2020/article/22581/: "гротескные портреты друзей и знакомых автора," "экстатический эскапизм / убогая действительность (за «пиром в стране неизвестной» неизменно следует плевок в пионеров); высокое искусство / безвкусица; поэтическое опьянение / пьянство; целомудренный эрос / похоть и секс.

characters – only looking off course when the cost of losing a detail or ignoring a minor character is too steep to ignore.

I will argue that *Goat Song's* narrative engenders a slow shift from a paradigm of 'grotesque polarity' to a paradigm of 'grotesque hybridity.' Grotesque polarity is a prominent formal and narrative force in the novel. However, this analysis will be at its closest to the text's most important insights when it reaches its discussion of hybridity. To properly understand *why* Vaginov's move from polarity to hybridity is significant, one will need a fairly comprehensive overview of the novel's systems and structure – whether or not these details are 'grotesque' themselves. In certain sections, this will take us away from our discussion of the grotesque – sometimes for pages at a time – as I focus on specific textual structures and developments in the plot. However, all will eventually contribute to the ultimate goal of explaining the significance of Vaginov's implementation of a hybrid form of the grotesque.

If polarity relies on the internal forces of the 'site' pulling away from one another (a *segregation* doomed to fail), then hybridity is an expression of just the opposite – an attempt to *integrate* the incompatible internal impulses. Sometimes the attempt to integrate one's supposedly incompatible internal impulses can be successful, productive, and remedial – a hypothesis that defines Jung's injunction to 'integrate the shadow.' However, because successful attempts to find a synthesis are anything but grotesque (as the two successfully become one), they fall outside the bounds of the present inquiry. Grotesque hybridity arises when integration attempts fail. The tragedy of failed integration results from the fact that the incompatible impulses are still trapped within one 'site,' and so the 'site' must go on existing at odds with itself. Unsurprisingly, the domain of human psychology provides some of the most expressive

manifestations of the tragedy of the hybrid – and this is where Vaginov's talent for grotesque tragicomic drama in *Goat Song* reaches its peak.

Just as Shvarts' use of grotesque polarization in *the Shadow* demonstrated the self-interested benefits of blinding one's moral sense to totalitarian abuses of power under Stalin (and the steep price of contesting them), Vaginov's implementation of grotesque hybridization has much to reveal about the interplay of conformity and resistance for the intelligentsia in the Soviet 1920s. In fact, the underlying dynamic of each structure suggests their respective relationship to conformity and resistance. Cases of polarization, because they imply a refusal to integrate, suggest a state of constant confrontation; this is Shvarts' scholar, who is willing to die before he compromises with power. Cases of hybridization are much more amenable to conformity; they imply integration attempts that, for one reason or another, are unsuccessful. Attempts to integrate or attempts to conform may end in a successful fusing of the constituent parts. This happens exceedingly rarely in the case of 'grotesque' hybridization – for, if the constituent parts truly did complete the integration process, there would be no incongruity within the 'site.' Accordingly, grotesque hybridization in literary explorations of conformity is far more common in cases where the conformity is problematic, troubled, where it leads to unresolved or unresolvable internal conflict.

In postcolonial studies, Homi Bhabha, Nestor Canclini and others have popularized the use of the term 'hybridity' as a conceptual tool to describe subjects' attempts to mediate identity – especially, but not only, in colonized spaces where such mediation is fundamentally fraught.[222] Of course, there is some conceptual resonance, but 'post-colonial hybridity' and 'grotesque

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[222] See Néstor García Canclini's *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995) and Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004).

hybridization' will be misunderstood if conflated. There is a distinct risk of terminological confusion or logically fallacious equivocation if readers do not bear in mind several differences. First, my deployment of 'hybridization' is a narrowing of the very general notion of hybridity: it includes only 'sites' that explicitly move towards integration (and fail). Second, the 'grotesque' in 'grotesque hybridization' is not incidental to the formula. I do not contend that all hybrid forms or modes of being are *de facto* grotesque. Further, the grotesque does not exist independent of a perspectival vantage point, so there are no 'universally' or 'objectively' grotesque phenomena. 'Grotesque hybridization' is a narrowing of the category of 'hybridization,' a proper subset. To be clear, hybridization becomes grotesque to a given subject when that subject experiences the failed attempt to synthesize two incompatible properties in a given 'site' as estranging and profaning. What a given subject experiences as grotesque reflects something – you might even say *betrays something* – about the axiological positions of that subject. When an author intentionally portrays a subject or image as grotesque – by, for example, exaggerating its proportions or reshaping its image to create a sharp, estranging incongruity – they are imbuing it with a particular axiological structure that is left behind for readers to notice. Of course, this does not necessarily reflect something straightforward about the author's values; the axiological incongruities are a sophisticated, and often ambivalent means of creating meaning. Vaginov's penchant for grotesque distortions of people and spaces with deep personal meaning – his city, his milieu, and himself – makes his *Goat Song* a particularly compelling case study in the axiological ambiguity of grotesque distortion.

Goat Song: Overview

Konstantin Vaginov's *Goat Song* famously derives its name from the Greek word for tragedy, 'tragodia' – a compound of *tragos,* or 'goat' and *oide,* or 'song.' Hardly could Vaginov

have found a more fitting title. The novel is nothing if not a virtuosic attempt to strip tragedy of its elevation, leaving a profane, bleating comedy in its place.

Goat Song centers its narrative on two strange men in Leningrad in the mid-1920s. The first, Teptyolkin, is an erudite philologist suffering from a crippling fear of women and anxieties about his sexual virility. The second is the so-called 'unknown poet' [неизвестный поэт], an idealistic wordsmith whose work stirs the imagination of young student-enthusiasts and once-aristocratic widows. The novel follows these two men in their endeavor to carry the torch of 'genuine' culture through the barren intellectual desert of the early Soviet period. A cadre of minor characters join them in this lofty mission, including Kostya Rotikov – a collector of baroque art with a weakness for erotic kitsch – and Misha Kotikov – the tireless biographer of a recently deceased poet, willing to sleep with the dead man's widow to gain more intel on the subject of his future masterpiece. Although Vaginov's cast of intellectual misfits are often too blinkered to see their own faults, *Goat Song's* monstrous 'author' – a narrative presence haunting the text, and a character in his own right – ensures that the reader is never afflicted with this same blindness. As *Goat Song's* dominant narrative voice, he is most responsible for the comic profanation of the intellectuals' tragedy, and will become the focal point of the analysis further into this piece.

The publishing history of the novel is not as dry and inconsequential as the topic may suggest. *Goat Song* was written in 1926, and was published, abridged, in the October edition of the journal *Zvezda*. In August 1928, *Goat Song* first appeared as a separate book, without the abridgements, through the authoritative publisher Priboi. After 1928, Vaginov continued working on revisions to the text, many of which never made it to print until long after his death. Tinkering with the Priboi edition, Vaginov made dozens of alterations straight into to his

physical copy – adding (or, more rarely, deleting) phrases, inserting whole paragraphs, even writing new chapters. Vaginov also glued a few new typed sections straight into his book, or into books he gifted to others. Some of these miscellaneous alterations have made it into more contemporary editions of *Goat Song*, but no edition included them in their entirety until Saint Petersburg publisher Vita Nova released a comprehensive version in 2019. For this piece, I am referencing the 2019 edition and will be drawing both from the original text and Vaginov's later edits. Given that Vaginov's alterations never appeared in print during his lifetime, there may be some dispute over the canonicity of certain passages. There are, after all, three variants of the novel's ending included with the Vita Nova edition. With this in mind, I will make a note about the nature of Vaginov's alterations when referencing passages that would benefit from the additional context.

The bulk of the novel's events take place in the mid-1920s, though there are a number of sequences that portray the characters' lives before the revolution and the years directly following. The tragedy propelling the novel's plot – the plight of an erudite coterie of intelligentsia who feel hopelessly out of place in a new Soviet reality – is not a particularly unique approach to its historical epoch.[223] However, though *Goat Song* was not the first novel in its tradition, it is uniquely good at what it does. The novel is so singularly interesting, in part, because the aforementioned cast of characters all correspond, with varying degrees of verisimilitude, to real-life analogs in Konstantin Vaginov's intellectual circle. In this way, *Goat Song* has provided ample fodder for modern philologists to speculate on the under-documented relationships between cultural icons like the classical philologist Lev Pumpyansky (as

[223] Recall Marienhoff's *Cynics*, Bulgakov's *White Guard*, Fedin's *Cities and Years*, Babel's *Red Cavalry*, Leonov's *the Thief*, Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* among many others.

Teptyolkin), Mikhail Bakhtin (as 'the philosopher'), Vaginov himself (primarily as 'the unknown poet') and many others.

Nikolai Nikolaev's article "Teptyolkin and Others in Konstantin Vaginov's *Goat Song*" (2017) is currently the most thorough analysis of *Goat Song's* roots in reality – of Vaginov's literary circles, possible prototypes and biographical references, and the reaction of his contemporaries upon the novel's publication.[224] Much is made of these prototypes in scholarship on *Goat Song*, though my investment in the 'who's who' conversation is comparatively limited. I do find one of Nikolaev's comments particularly salient here: "Let's get something straight from the start. It is true that the prototypes for the protagonists of Vaginov's *Goat Song* were representatives of the Nevel School – Pumpyansky, Bakhtin, their friends and acquaintances. However, one couldn't make a bigger mistake than to think that the prototypes correspond with their protagonists, to think, for example, that Teptyolkin *is* Pumpyansky."[225] Nikolaev insists that Vaginov's prototypes are something of a loose approximation, but that understanding characters' real-life counterparts is not a 'key' to the novel's meanings. Each prototype undergoes major alterations in service of Vaginov's specialized narrative needs.

Teptyolkin and Philostratus: A Beginning in Grotesque Polarity and Vaginov's Personal Mythos

Teptyolkin – introduced with no name or patronymic – has *Goat Song's* most fully developed character arc. Although all the novel's leading roles have narrative fates that differ in ways meaningful to Vaginov's project, it is the story of Teptyolkin that best expresses the

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[224] N. I. Nikolaev, "Teptelkin i drugie v romane Konstantina Vaginova '*Kozlinaia pesn'*,'" *Literaturnyi fakt,* 4 (2017), 233-267.

[225] Nikolaev, "Teptelkin i drugie v romane Konstantina Vaginova '*Kozlinaia pesn'*,'" 234: Оговоримся сразу. Действительно, прототипами героев романа КП Вагинова были представители Невльской школы – Пумпянский, Бахтин, их друзья и знакомые. Однако не будет большей ошибки, чем считать, что прототипы совпадают с героями, то есть что Тептелкин это и есть Пумпянский."

generational tragedy that *Goat Song* sets out to capture. Singling out Teptyolkin accords with the attention paid to him in the novel, not to mention that he plays a central part of Vaginov's intricate personal mythology. Unwinding Teptyolkin's narrative thread will help to loosen up some of *Goat Song's* tangled chronologies and knotty prose.

To understand Teptyolkin's initial role in *Goat Song*, it is necessary to reframe one's thinking to mirror his idiosyncratic worldview. His character-defining demeanor, one that endures until a personal trauma midway through the book, is highlighted from the novel's first moments: "In the city lived an enigmatic creature – Teptyolkin. He could often be seen walking through the public dining room to fetch boiling water for his teapot, surrounded by nymphs and satyrs. To him, the fragrance of beautiful groves wafted through the foulest places, and posh statues – the inheritance of the 18th century – looked like magnificent suns made from Pentelic marble. Only on occasion did Teptyolkin raise those big clear eyes of his – and, in those moments, he saw that he was lost in a desert."[226] Teptyolkin lives in a dualistic universe of his mind's own making, but he hardly notices the dualism himself. Ensnaring his mind within the artistic and literary traditions he so dutifully studies, Teptyokin lives within the starry vault of his own cultural imagination. Though his daily life is polluted by a million little banalities, his mind – attentive only to itself, isolated from the outside world – projects a veneer of his imagination's making onto the outside before he has a chance to notice it. As the passage suggests, it is only when Teptyolkin makes a concerted effort to turn his eyes to the world that he *sees* that he exists within a desert, the Soviet everyday stripped of his projections.

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[226] Konstantin Vaginov, *Kozlinaia pesn',* ed. Aleksei Dmitrenko and Elena Petrova (Sankt-Peterburg: Vita Nova, 2019), 17: "В городе жило загадочное существо – Тептелкин. Его часто можно было видеть идущего с чайником в общественную столовую за кипятком, окруженного нимфами и сатирами. Прекрасные рощи благоухали для него в самых смрадных местах, и жеманные статуи, наследие восемнадцатого века, казались ему сияющими солнцами из пентелийского мрамора. Только иногда подымал Тептелкин огромные, ясные глаза свои – и тогда видел себя в пустыне."

Teptyolkin's failure to integrate his imagined, elevated reception of being with the prosaic vulgarities of the world depicted around him creates a sharp incongruity. Here already is a potential case of grotesque polarization – a hard division of the banal outside set against his hermetically sealed imagination. Is this the kind of psychological polarization that is present in doubling narratives?

But Teptyolkin is not safe yet, for he does have a strange, non-traditional type of double: a figure named Philostratus[227] who does not intervene in the events of the narrative so much as he haunts them. The 1928 Priboi version of *Goat Song* left the nature of Teptyolkin and Philostratus's relationship vague. In the opening chapter, Teptyolkin seems only to hear Philostratus speak an enigmatic phrase about a Phoenix dying and being resurrected again.[228] But, in his post-Priboi revisions, Vaginov adds an entire paragraph to this early scene that puts Philostratus's narrative role into focus:

> Do not let the reader think that the author does not respect Teptyolkin, or that he laughs at him. Quite the opposite, for perhaps Teptyolkin thought up his unbearable family name on his own to chase the reality of his being into it, so that no one who laughs at him will manage to reach past him to Philostratus. As is well-attested, one's consciousness can become split, and, perhaps, Teptyolkin suffered from just this kind of split consciousness, and who can tell who dreamed up whom – was Philostratus a projection of Teptyolkin, or Teptyolkin – of Philostratus.[229]

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[227] For reasons that will become clear, Vaginov's Philostratus ought not to be directly equated with the historical Philostratus, author of *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* – a book later referenced in the novel. More important is the position in history occupied by Philostratus. A representative of the 3rd century AD, the historical Philostratus stands between the decline of Hellenistic culture and the rise of Christianity. Moreover, his affinity with biography resonates with *Goat Song's* thematic obsession with memory, and the possibility of carrying one's cultural inheritance through an epoch where the values of the past are desacralized. Teptyolkin's Philostratus bears these meanings, but is more closely aligned with the philologist's attributes – lacking any other qualities, physical or otherwise, that would tie him directly to his historical analog.

[228] Vaginov, *Kozlinaia pesn'*, 22. 'Watch,' Teptyolkin thought he heard [Philostratus] say, "observe how the Phoenix dies and comes back to life." In the original: "Смотри, – казалось Тептелкину, говорил он, – следи, как Феникс умирает и возрождается."

What to make of these strange, unexplained signifiers: why invoke the 'Phoenix,' why Philostratus exactly? To get a better handle on the highly idiosyncratic web of signifiers woven into Vaginov's novel, I turn to two of the most authoritative voices on the life of the author and elaborate personal mythos he developed in the 1920s – Nikolai Chukovsky and Mikhail Bakhtin.

Firsthand Accounts of the Life and Mythology of Konstantin Vaginov

Mikhail Bakhtin's discussion of Vaginov and *Goat Song*, surviving as an interview transcript with V.D. Duvakin, contains insights about the novel that are informative, if a bit general. Bakhtin does not claim to have Vaginov's whole mythological system in memory like Chukovsky, so figures like 'the Phoenix' and 'Philostratus' are conspicuously missing from his interpretation. He frames *Goat Song* as a novel centered on Teptyolkin who he characterizes as, "a tragic protagonist who is… tragic and not tragic, funny and a bit eccentric, and awkward – and, at the same time, still deeply tragic. That's Teptyolkin." He continues: "Life does not accept him. And he himself doesn't accept the life that surrounds him. Only, he has nothing but genial feelings for that life, very genial, - he does not judge, no, a critical pathos is completely foreign to him." His summary praise for the novel seems to suggest that, in his reading, *Goat Song* is primarily a tragedy: "I would say that [*Goat Song*] is a totally distinctive tragedy in literature, a tragedy – here's what you might call it – the tragedy of a ridiculous man. A ridiculous man. The tragedy of an eccentric."[230] Whether *Goat Song's* primary affinity is for the

[229] Ibid., 22. "Пусть читатель не думает, что Тептелкина автор не уважает и над Тептелкиным смеется, напротив, может быть, Тептелкин сам выдумал свою несносную фамилию, чтобы изгнать в нее реальность своего существа, чтобы никто, смеясь над Тептелкиным, не смог бы и дотронуться до Филострата. Как известно, существует раздвоенность сознания, может быть, такой раздвоенностью сознания и страдал Тептелкин, и кто разберет, кто кому пригрезился – Филострат ли Тептелкину или Тептелкин Филострату."

tragic or the comic mode will be a question that is posed by the novel itself, so it is worthwhile to remember how Bakhtin casts his vote.

However, the most enlightening moments of the conversation come from Bakhtin's memories about Vaginov himself. For one, he provides another surefire confirmation that the intellectual attachments of *Goat Song's* protagonists are autobiographical, noting that Vaginov's adoration of Ancient Greece, Hellenism, and Italian baroque art was well-known to all. Bakhtin recalls the rare 17th century Italian tomes of poetry in the author's library, calling to mind the scene in *Goat Song* where Teptyolkin browses the antique book market.[231] If Vaginov's library and intellectual interests suggest that his primary allegiance is to his intellectual misfits, Bakhtin's insight about Vaginov's political positioning only strengthens the impression. Bakhtin recalls that Konstantin Fedin, who had once been open to helping Vaginov as a writer, grew frustrated with his refusal to adapt to Russia's new cultural conditions and so ceased collaborating with him: "Fedin's words were passed along to me, [saying] that, apparently, [Vaginov] 'has become detached from life, he doesn't want to walk in step with life – so what can be done about him.' Well, of course, at that time those phrases, 'detached from life,' 'does not walk in step with life' were very common. And 'life,' of course, was understood to mean the official line, which was then being inculcated in all using all available means."[232]

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[230] "Piataia beseda – 22 marta 1973 goda,"in *Besedy V.D. Duvakina c M.M. Bakhtinym*, ed. N. I. Kolyshkina (Moskva: Izdatel'skaia gruppa 'Progress,' 1973), 194-197: Да. Трагический герой, который... и трагичен и не трагичен — и смешон, и чудаковат, и нелеп — и в то же время глубоко трагичен. Это Тептелкин." […]"Не приемлет его жизнь. И он этой жизни, которая его окружает, не приемлет. Но только он очень добродушно относится к этой жизни, очень добродушно, — не осуждает, ему совершенно чужд пафос критический, — нет." […] Вообще это совершенно своеобразная, я бы сказал, в литературе трагедия, трагедия — вот можно так это назвать — трагедия смешного человека. Смешного человека. Трагедия чудака."

[231] Ibid., 188.

[232] Ibid., 199: "Мне передавали слова Федина, что он будто бы «отстал от жизни, не хочет идти в ногу с жизнью — что же можно с ним поделать». Ну, в то время, конечно, вот эти слова: «отстал от жизни», «идет

Nikolai Chukovsky's posthumously published reflections, titled *On What I Saw* [*О том, что видел*], offers a different account of Vaginov's political allegiance. Moreover, it includes an extended discussion of the nature of Vaginov's personal mythology – thereby making it possible to get a grounding in his mythos without rampant speculation. His invaluable recollections, gathered firsthand from Vaginov and his circle, provide a potential cypher to *Goat Song's* coded language – the Phoenix, Philostratus, and plenty of other details that will come into play later in the textual analysis.

Like Bakhtin, Chukovsky is an insider – he speaks with authority on Vaginov's milieu, even relaying an amusing anecdote about having to abandon Lev Pumpyansky's private French lessons. Evidently, Pumpyansky found it more important to preach about an occult sect of spiritualist philosophy, 'metapsychics,' than to teach him how to read Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil.*

As a privileged source of information, there is the distinct temptation to treat Chukovsky's description of Vaginov's mythology as an authoritative 'key' to the text. However, though his work is an invaluable starting block, I will admit only those elements of his account that have a clear evidentiary basis in *Goat Song* itself. This is particularly important given the friction between Bakhtin and Chukovsky's accounts – especially their conflicted portrayals of Vaginov's position on the significance of Soviet cultural development. Chukovsky's notes were written decades after Vaginov's passing and show signs of being influenced as much by his memory as by a recent re-reading of *Goat Song*. Furthermore, writing mid-century in the Soviet Union, he seems to take unusually great care to paint Vaginov's novel as a thorough denouncement of its cast of out-of-step intellectuals and of anything related to the petty

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не в ногу с жизнью» — были очень распространены. А под «жизнью» понималось, конечно, то официальное направление, которое в то время насаждалось всеми средствами."

bourgeoisie. I will stake out a position somewhere between Chukovsky and Bakhtin to argue that the novel itself is far more ambivalent in its relationship to the epoch. So, Chukovsky's conclusions are a great interpretive aid but they ought not to be treated as sacred writ.

According to *On What I Saw,* the rise and fall of civilizations and their cultural legacies became a central preoccupation for Vaginov in the mid-1920s. He saw the October Revolution's victory over Russia's 'old world' as a historical echo of the triumph of Christianity over Roman paganism. Vaginov understood these historical turning points as being caught up in a dialectic relationship between the advancement of social justice and the development of world culture. For example, though the fall of Rome advanced social justice by marking the end of "the Roman empire's slave-owning system," Vaginov lamented that it had the side-effect of bringing down the culture of antiquity with it. Culture, therefore, is a periodic victim in humanity's march towards more just forms of political organization, more equitably organized power hierarchies. The sacrifice of culture at the altar of social progress is necessary, but deeply tragic. However, in these moments of cataclysmic historical change, Vaginov thought that it fell on the shoulders of a few chosen ones – acting in secret and misunderstood by their age – to carry forward 'true' culture [подлинная культура]. Moreover, "[Vaginov] believed that when one religion took another's place, the gods of the former religion would become the demons of the new. Since his myth viewed the revolution as a change in religion, he concluded that all agents and defenders of the old culture would become devils in the eyes of the new culture's agents."[233] The chosen few – whether they be angels or misunderstood devils – lie in wait until the conditions are right for

[233] Nikolai Chukovskii, *O tom, chto ia videl* (Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia, 2005), 209: "Он утверждал, что при смене религий боги прежней религии становятся чертями новой. Так как революцию миф его рассматривал как смену религий, то он полагал, что все деятели и защитники старой культуры будут теперь в глазах новых людей чертями."

the Vaginov's Phoenix of 'true' culture to be reborn from the ashes. Thus, the significance of the mythological bird.

And Philostratus? "In Vaginov's myth, Philostratus is the lover of Psyche, (i.e., soul), […] Vaginov's soul, which is why it sometimes seems like Philostratus's persona overlaps with the persona of the author himself. Philostratus was doubtless a symbol of that ascetic humanist fated to clandestinely carry culture through the twilight of the new Middle Ages to the jubilant moment of the Phoenix's resurrection."[234]

However, Chukovsky claims that when Teptyolkin – a latecomer to Vaginov's myth – entered this intricate symbolic system, the tenor of the whole project, especially the importance of the Phoenix's resurrection, was radically changed: "Teptyolkin became the advocate of the idea that it is the revolution that represents the new Middle Ages, and that culture's intercessors should find a tower or in a cave to hide in while waiting for the Phoenix's resurrection from the ashes. […] Philostratus, in love with Psyche and treating Teptyolkin with the deepest antipathy, was the only figure from the whole myth who remained on Vaginov's side."[235]

In light of Chukovsky's explication of Vaginov's myth, does the meaning of Philostratus's appearance in *Goat Song* come into focus? Yes and no. At the very least, it becomes much easier to posit what Philostratus and his Phoenix might mean for the text. But we still do not know why he would appear as Teptyolkin's double in the novel. After all, Teptyolkin seems to demonstrate a noble urge to protect Philostratus, 'so that no one who laughs at

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[234] Ibid., 209: "В вагиновском мифе Филострат – любовник Психеи, т.е. души […] душа самого Вагинова, и поэтому иногда кажется, что образ Филострата сливается с образом автора. Тем более что Филострат был, разумеется, символом того самого подвижника-гуманиста, которому суждено втайне пронести культуру сквозь сумрак нового средневековья до счастливого мига возрождения птицы Феникс. […] На стороне Вагинова из всего мифа остался один Филострат, возлюбленный Психеи, относившийся к Тептелкину с глубоким презрением."

[235] Ibid., 209.

[Teptyolkin] will manage to reach past him to Philostratus.' Since it is Philostratus who is supposedly antipathetic to Teptyolkin, could we be seeing the kind of doubling narrative we encountered in Poe's "William Wilson" – where the elevated, but oppressive 'superego' casts judgment on the inferior 'ego'? Or could this just be a red herring from Chukovsky – not his error, but our fault applying his generalized articulation of Vaginov's myth to too specific a moment in one text? More textual data is necessary to resolve the problem. And, more generally, what to do with this knotty myth, how to understand its apparent role in *Goat Song,* and to what extent we can rely on Chukovsky's rendition of it are all questions that cannot be solved all at once.

A Further Investigation into Philostratus, the Phoenix, and Goat Song's Underlying Mythological Substrate

Is Philostratus a double of Teptyolkin or not? Curiously, Philostratus is not entirely attached to Teptyolkin; he appears to take on an existence of his own for other characters. Take, for example, a scene where 'the philosopher' is accompanying Teptyolkin and friends, lamenting the tragic nature of their cultural predicament: "A writer ought to have appeared who could have sung our praises, extoled our feelings." The unknown poet replies, "Philostratus is [that writer]" to which 'the philosopher' responds, "let it be as you say, we'll call the stranger who must appear 'Philostratus.'" And 'the unknown poet': "No doubt our names will be tarred, […] but Philostratus should portray us bright and radiant, and not as some kind of devils."[236] Here, Philostratus plays the role of narrative savior. He will deliver the coterie of friends from their

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[236] Vaginov, *Kozlinaia pesn',* 99: "Должен был бы появиться писатель, который воспел бы нас, наши чувства." […] "Это и есть Филострат" […] "Пусть будет по-вашему, назовем имеющего явиться незнакомца Филостратом." […] "Нас очернят, несомненно, – продолжал неизвестный поэт, – но Филострат должен нас изобразить светлыми, а не какими-то чертями."

unenviable fate with a pen powerful enough to express the timeless virtue of their cultural struggle. Unlike their contemporaries, who see them as the devilish incarnations of the old culture, Philostratus sees them for who they are: 'gods of the former religion,' and heralds of the coming resurrection of the cultural Phoenix. And – on a night of celebration that has them all feeling 'terribly young, beautiful, and good' – they have a collective vision of their would-be savior: "They all saw Philostratus clearly before them: a thin lad with spellbinding eyes […] And, wavering like a ghost, Rome rose up."[237] Philostratus, it would appear, is no traditional, individualized double haunting Teptyolkin alone. Rather, he seems to be a manifestation of a joint wish fantasy. This reading is reinforced several chapters later when *Goat Song's* narrative voice, the so-called 'author,' declares: "[…] my protagonists imagine themselves to be part of a certain Philostratus; they fall together with the last of the autumn leaves, crumble together with the houses on the shore, are annihilated together with the men of the past."[238]

In that case, is Philostratus a collective double? Perhaps this is not a wholly inappropriate description. However, something in it is lacking, for it suggests that Teptyolkin, 'the unknown poet,' and all the others are positioned in opposition to Philostratus. And, having reviewed the relevant passages, this is not strictly the case. Philostratus is united to Teptyolkin and his inner circle both as an ideal they all strive towards, and as an imaginary savior that has an existence of his own. Perhaps Philostratus can be oppressive like a superego-aligned double in the same way all ideals are oppressive – failing to live up to them will be painful. But this alone

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[237] Ibid., 100: "И все воочию увидели Филострата: тонкий юноша с чудными глазами, оттененными крылами ресниц, в ниспадающих одеждах, в лавровом венке – пел, а за ним шумели оливковые рощи. И, качаясь, как призрак, Рим вставал."

[238] Ibid., 139: "… мои герой мнят себя частью некоего Филострата, осыпающегося вместе с последними осенними листьями, падающего вместе с домами на набережную, разрушающегося вместе с прежними людьми."

is not enough to make him a true *Doppelganger*, especially in the classic, polarized sense. In fact, though Philostratus is indelibly bound up in *Goat Song's* sophisticated, ornate web of grotesque imagery – who or what isn't? – he is not anything like a *source* of the novel's storehouse of grotesque imagery. One must imagine that if Philostratus were to write a chronicle of Teptyolkin's generation, the grotesque would be far more understated – an unavoidable byproduct of Leningrad's masses looking murky and dim in contrast to the shining erudition of the cultural torchbearers. As a cornerstone of Vaginov's personal mythological project, Philostratus plays an outsized symbolic role – but his long absences often say more than his fleeting presence. Teptyolkin and his coterie never live to see the author that will paint them in 'bright and radiant' hues or exalt them for suffering their tragic cultural martyrdom.

Quite the opposite, in fact. Perhaps *Goat Song's* most vicious irony is that the seat of 'the author' – the narrative persona Vaginov inhabits while writing *Goat Song* – is exactly that author who sets out to portray the representatives of 'the old gods' as the devils of the new Soviet religion.

Konstantin Vaginov as 'the Real Author'

Vaginov starts augmenting the complexity of *Goat Song's* treatment of authorship from the very first pages. His stance is playful – if 'proto-postmodern' is fit to describe anything at all, one has to believe that *Goat Song's* rich authorial play qualifies. If readers hope to meaningfully engage with Vaginov's game of authorship, the only way to start is by reading the instructions. Enter the novel's three [!] forewords. Each of them announces a different authorial presence – and none of these 'authors,' should be unreflectively equated with Vaginov himself without further analysis.

However, already in the first foreword Vaginov tempts readers to do just the opposite. The descriptive title, "Foreword Written by the Real [*реальный*] Author on the Neva's Bank," suggests it is a transmission straight from Vaginov – as opposed to the 'appearing' [*появляющиеся*] authors of the remaining two forewords. The focus of the 'real' author's foreword is appropriately metatextual. He notes that a novel is alike to a big top tent [шатер]; viewers (readers) and the ring master (author) enter *together* and are each transformed by the novel's narrative performance. The entrance of both parties is preconditioned on their tacit agreement to participate in a fictional spectacle, one that depends on the cooperation of each side. Most pressing here is the foreword's implication for *Goat Song's* treatment of authorship. While the 'real' author appears confident in his ability to fulfill his role in the spectacle, he is less sure his 'viewers' are up to the task. They, he worries, may make a mess of fact and fiction.

> Remember, reader, that the people portrayed in this book are presented not in themselves, i.e., in the fullness of their being, which is impossible, but from a contemporary's point of view. The author in the following forewords, and in the book itself, is another one of the performers like all the other characters […] If your mind is predisposed to compare every literary work with life, like most readers, and not with [other] literary works, then find connections with the era, with [issues of] class; compare with anything you like, anything except with the real author – be civilized.[239]

The 'real' author's foreword has generally not been included in the novel – that is, until Vita Nova's comprehensive 2019 edition. According to that edition's extensive commentary by Dmitrii Bresler, Aleksei Dmitrenko, and Natal'ia Falikova, this short text was found in only two

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[239] Ibid., 12. "…читатель, помни, что люди, изображенные в этой книге, представлены не сами в себе, т. е. во всей своей полноте, что и невозможно, а с точки зрения современника. Автор в следующих предисловиях и книге является таким же действующим лицом, как и остальные […] Если же ум твой так устроен, что каждое литературное произведение ты соотносишь с жизнью, как большинство людей, а не с литературными произведениями, то соотнеси с эпохой, с классом, с чем угодно, только не с реальным автором – будь человеком воспитанным."

known copies of *Goat Song*, each handwritten by the author and glued into copies of the 1928 Priboi edition. One previously extant copy, gifted to sculptor L.A. Mess, has been lost. The other copy survives and was reproduced in facsimile by Vita Nova. It is difficult to say whether this foreword was supposed to be included in future revisions of *Goat Song* meant for the general public, or whether Vaginov only intended it for a particular group of friends. The problem is likely unsolvable because the history of the surviving copy's ownership cannot be traced past the 1970s, and it is unknown who might have been the original recipient.[240]

Since the 'real' author's foreword appeared only after *Goat Song's* official publication and the scandal it provoked, it is plausible that it is meant to carry a genuine didactic purpose – even if it is colored with Vaginov's irony, and perhaps even his irritation. The 'real' author just might be Vaginov himself, though his apparent vexation with his 'uncivilized' readers is rather comic. Could the ire Vaginov's friends directed at him for *Goat Song* – those who he turned into monstrous, corroded visages of themselves – really have taken the author by surprise?

But then, who is he purporting to remind about the distance between a 'real' author and an author's narrative voice? One may surmise that the general reader would benefit most from the warning. However, it is his close circle of contemporaries – intelligentsia like those lampooned in *Goat Song* – who would have known Vaginov's factual prototypes well enough to dwell on the parallels tying them to the author's fictions. If the foreword is meant as a kind of defense, then it is likely directed against this latter group of peers – even if they ought to know better than to make such conflations. The copy gifted to L.A. Mess, an artist doubtless aware of the distinction between authorial and narrative voices, seems to support this hypothesis. If this is

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[240] Dmitrii Bresler, Aleksei Dmitrenko, and Natal'ia Falikova. Commentary in *Kozlinaia pesn'.* ed. Aleksei Dmitrenko and Elena Petrova (Sankt-Peterburg: Vita Nova, 2019), 288.

indeed the case, the foreword's didacticism speaks to a kind of anxiety that arises *because* Vaginov's fictions so resemble his factual prototypes that the comparison would be irresistible. For his part, Chukovsky admits that the gossip and scandal were a significant part of the novel's appeal, and that the prototypes were concealed so incompletely that no one had the least trouble connecting the dots.

Can any reader believe that *Goat Song's* grotesque transmogrifications of the Leningrad intellectuals do not – a least somewhat – represent 'the people themselves,' or even Vaginov's private reception of them? He denies that anyone in the novel is portrayed "in the fullness of their being" [*во всей своей полноте*], but what does this strange claim even mean? Even if – as the foreword insists – he sought to portray people 'from a contemporary's point of view,' there is no denying that Vaginov's imagination still gave birth to all of them. Who exactly is this 'contemporary' and what vantage point do they take? If, in assuming the narrative position of 'the contemporary,' Vaginov means to relinquish his role as the knowing inside man, there is an amusing paradox here. The vantage point of the fictional 'contemporary' poses the narrator as an outsider, while the piercing specificity of his critique is only possible by the most intimate kind of inside knowledge. Vaginov's 'contemporary's point of view' is most coherently understood through one of our past insights, as another way of expressing that his narrator is writing on the side of the 'new religion' against the 'old world devils.'

In this way, Vaginov's project relies on the interpenetration of outside and inside perspectives. With this in mind, we approach the novel proper: going forward with the awareness that the 'author' is never 'Konstantin Vaginov,' without forgetting that it is the privileged knowledge of his mind and the caustic bent of his imagination that makes *Goat Song's* grotesque spectacle possible.

The Problem of 'the Author' and his Authorship

The second of *Goat Song's* three forewords, titled "Forward Pronounced by the Author Appearing on the Threshold of the Book," already finds us, readers, in the 'big top tent' with the performative narrative persona promised by the 'real author'. He introduces us to the defining topos of the novel – the hallucinogenic St Petersburg text: "For a while now, my Petersburg has been doused in a greenish color, blinking and flickering, a horrible, phosphoric color. A greenish ember wavers, giggling and sinister, on houses, across faces, in souls. A flash of the ember – and it's no longer Pyotr Petrovich before you, but a viscid vermin; the ember leaps – and you're now worse than a vermin yourself; and it is no longer people that stalk the streets: steal a glance under a bonnet – there's the head of a snake; take a good look at the old woman – it's a toad, sitting and tossing its paunch […] I do not love Petersburg, that dream of mine has perished."[241]

The author presents us with a montage: just as quickly as Petersburg's residents turned into nasty reptiles, the page turns to the third foreword – and we're no longer in Petersburg, but now Leningrad. In this final introductory text – titled "Foreword Pronounced by the Author Appearing in the Middle of the Book" – the author suggests it is not Leningrad that is of interest to him, but the dead Petersburg: "Now there is no Petersburg. There is Leningrad; but Leningrad is of no interest to us – the author is no cradle-builder, but rather a coffin-maker by trade. […] And he loves his deceased, tottering after them while they're still alive, shaking their hand and chatting with them, leisurely preparing the wooden planks, buying the nails, and picking up the

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[241] Vaginov, *Kozlinaia pesn',* 13: "Петербург окрашен для меня с некоторых пор в зеленоватый цвет, мерцающий и мигающий, цвет ужасный, фосфорический. И на домах, и на лицах, и в душах дрожит зеленоватый огонек, ехидный и подхихикивающий. Мигнет огонек – и не Петр Петрович перед тобой, а липкий гад; взметнется огонек – и ты сам хуже гада; и по улицам не люди ходят: заглянешь под шляпку – змеиная голова; всмотришься в старушку – жаба сидит и животом движет. […] Не люблю я Петербурга, кончилась мечта моя."

lace needed for the occasion."[242] These two texts paint a vivid diachronic scene of a shapeshifting Petersburg – first corrupted, then perishing – leaving Leningrad to spring up on its corpse. However, as 'the author' insists, it is less the cityscape that is his central concern, and more the living dead inhabiting it – the protagonists of *Goat Song*.

Aside from setting the thematic foundation and aesthetic tenor of the novel, these two small introductory texts offer a reworking of Vaginov's Philostratus mythos from the perspective of 'the author' – one that meaningfully departs from Chukovsky's variant. When Philostratus is confronted with the fall of Russia's 'old world' and the birth pangs of a new civilization, he elects to kindle the embers of the old world's 'Phoenix of Culture' until it is ready to rise from the ashes. Though he is deeply invested in the legacy of the past, his actions are oriented towards the future. Philostratus's function is to preserve the past's memory, and – most importantly – to facilitate its life and rebirth.

In contrast with Philostratus, *Goat Song's* fictional 'author' lives through Petersburg's decline, drenched in eerie light and populated by monsters, and subsists long enough to see it reincarnated as the new, Sovietized Leningrad. Like Philostratus, 'the author,' too, finds purpose in making contact with the past and its relics. However, the purpose of his mission is not to propel the past forward, but to bury it and seal it away. Philostratus's great talent is bringing the dead back to life, turning graves into cradles. 'The author,' not to be outdone, all but buries the living – sensing their impending death with enough of a lead to have a custom coffin at the ready for their final hour.

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[242] Ibid., 14: "Теперь нет Петербурга. Есть Ленинград; но Ленинград нас не касается – автор по профессии гробовщик, а не колыбельных дел мастер. […] И любит он своих покойников, и ходит за ними еще при жизни, и ручки им жмет, и заговаривает, и исподволь доски заготовляет, гвоздики закупает, кружев по случаю достает."

As a pair, Philostratus and 'the author' function as another of *Goat Song's* dualistic structures. Philostratus expresses a mode of authorship that exalts its subject, while 'the author' embodies an opposing mode that profanes everything it deigns to represent. However, though Philostratus and 'the author' create a dualistic structure, they are not strictly competing forces on the level of narrative: if they were, *Goat Song* might read as a battleground of Philostratus's sacralizing aestheticization of Teptyolkin's retinue and 'the author's' profanation. Here, though, 'the author' has sole dominion – he is the 'ring master' of Vaginov's big-top tent. Therefore, understanding Vaginov's implementation of the grotesque, and pinpointing the narrative function it serves, necessitates a deeper analysis of 'the author.'

The heart of the *Goat Song's* tragedy is that Teptyolkin and friends are never granted their Philostratus, that they are left with 'the author' instead. We need to ask: why do they never get their savior? Why must they suffer their 'coffin maker'? Is it just bad luck that no writer talented enough emerged to represent them, or are they being punished? If so, why – and for what?

The closest *Goat Song* ever gets to an answer is in the novel's most famous scene: 'the unknown poet' has a frightening vision of hell and must face a fateful 'last judgment' before a tribunal of literary titans. These authors are deliberately selected to represent history's greatest comic and satirical writers: Gogol, Dante, Juvenal, Horace, Persius. The tribunal demands to know what 'the unknown poet' did on Earth, and he responds that, though he did not offend any orphans or widows, he did something (presumably) much worse: "I gave rise to 'the author' […] I corrupted his soul and replaced it with laughter. […] I allowed him to submerge us in the sea of

life and laugh at us."[243] The tribunal wants to know whose laughter powers the soul of 'the author' – Gogol's laughter through tears, or perhaps Juvenal's satirical laughter? No, he answers – but the nature of the laughter in 'the author's' soul is never revealed, even as 'the unknown poet' is cast out of the titans' presence.

This scene raises more questions than it answers. How did 'the unknown poet,' embedded within the text, spawn 'the author,' the creator of the text? They share something like Philostratus and Teptyolkin's chicken-or-the-egg problem, so the uncertainty about who generated whom is at least a kind of pattern, even if its meaning is inscrutable. I will return to this question, but the other mystery here is the unknown nature of the laughter in 'the author's' soul. What kind is it?

To venture an answer to this riddle, one could contend that what Vladimir Propp calls *malevolent laughter* [*злой смех*] might be an approximate stand-in: "Malevolent laughter [causes] imperfections – sometimes even spurious, imaginary, fabricated ones – to be exaggerated, blown out of proportion and [gives] fodder to one's malevolent, inimical feelings and ill-wishes. The kind of people who generally use this laugh are those who do not believe in others' noble impulses, seeing everywhere only insincerity and hypocrisy. […] People who exhibit heightened sensitivities are, from their point of view, idiots or sentimental idealists who deserve nothing but mockery."[244] Framing 'the author' as embodied malevolent laughter has the

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[243] Ibid., 125: "Я породил автора, – отвечает он тихим голосом, – я растлил его душу и заменил смехом. […] Я позволил автору погрузить в море жизни нас и над нами посмеяться."

[244] Vladimir Propp, "Zloi smekh: smekh tsinichnyi," *Problemy komizma i smekha,* ed. I. V. Peshkov (Moskva: Labirint, 1999), 125: "При злом смехе недостатки, иногда даже мнимые, воображаемые и присочиненные, преувеличиваются, раздуваются и тем дают пищу злым, недобрым чувствам и недоброжелательству. Таким смехом обычно смеются люди, не верящие ни в какие благородные порывы, видящие всюду одну только фальшь и лицемерие. […] Люди с повышенной чувствительностью, с их точки зрения, — глупцы или сентиментальные идеалисты, заслуживающие только насмешек."

advantage of being intuitive; one of *Goat Song's* prerogatives does seem to be the humiliation of a generation of out-of-touch idealists. However, this formulation misses a defining trait of 'the author': he occupies a position that is not only external and hostile, but also one that is internal, even intimate in relation to Teptyolkin and friends. 'The author' is not simply an outsider, even if he engages in the malevolent mockery of one.

Several scenes in the text depict 'the author' like a friend to Teptyolkin, 'the unknown poet,' and the others. In several more, he describes himself almost like one of his own creations. 'The author' demonstrates a kind of fond possessiveness of them, echoing their interests, adorning himself with their possessions, and calling them 'my protagonists' [*мои герои*]. In the *Goat Song's* "The Appearance of a Figure" (Ch. XX), the author invites his troupe of misfits to dinner and wants to "treat them to wine [he] buried in the courtyard under the broad lime tree back in 1917."[245] Before they arrive, he all but inhabits their various roles: "Now I wrapped myself in [Teptyolkin's signature] Chinese robe. Now I look over my collection of kitsch [like that of Kostya Rotikov]. […] The book markets are still closed. Perhaps it is time to engage in numismatics and read a treatise on the connection between drunkenness and poetry [as 'the unknown poet does]."[246] Might it be that 'the author' – like Philostratus before him – is a projection of the protagonists themselves? This would explain why 'the unknown poet' confesses to the tribunal of comic writers that he 'gave rise to the author.

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[245] Ibid., 152: "Завтра я приглашу моих героев на ужин. Я угощу их вином, зарытым в семнадцатом году мною во дворе под большой липой."

[246] Ibid.: "Вот я и закутался в китайский халат. Вот рассматриваю коллекцию безвкусицы. […] Еще книжные лавки закрыты. Может быть, пока заняться нумизматикой или почитать трактат о связи опьянения с поэзией. Завтра я приглашу моих героев на ужин. Я угощу их вином, зарытым в семнадцатом году мною во дворе под большой липой."

Goat Song provides more evidence in a later chapter. We encounter 'the author' alone in his room, reflecting on his own image: "I am kind […] I have a beautiful soul like Teptyolkin. I possess the refined taste of Kostya Rotikov, the apprehension of the unknown poet […] I am made from the dough of my protagonists…"[247] If we can take him at his word – and, given that this proposition has significant explanatory power for the text, I argue that we can – then 'the author' is a true mirror of Philostratus: the mythological force of authorial damnation to the latter's authorial model of salvation.

Conclusions about Vaginov's Experiments with Authorship

Given the complexity of *Goat Song's* experimental approach to authorship, it is important to stop for a moment and reflect on what all of these conclusions can tell us at this juncture. This moment offers a chance to reevaluate Nikolai Chukovsky's articulation of Vaginov's mythology, and to make any adjustments that might be drawn from the evidence.

Goat Song's mythology depends on two main fictional authors: Philostratus, and the unnamed narrator – 'the author.' Both Philostratus and 'the author' create and are created by *Goat Songs* cast of characters. As narrative presences, Philostratus and 'the author' occupy a kind of mythological substrate above their characters and appear to have the power to shape their destinies. They serve as a kind of invariant duality that the novel's variant characters inhabit.

Understanding an author's top-down influence over their literary subjects is intuitive, but how does the bottom-up influence of Teptyolkin and friends work to shape the fate of their authors? We have already seen that Philostratus can be read as the projection of Teptyolkin and

[247] Ibid., 245-246: "Я добр, – размышляю я, – я по-тептелкински прекраснодушен. Я обладаю тончайшим вкусом Кости Ротикова, концепцией неизвестного поэта, простоватостью Троицына. Я сделан из теста моих героев…"

'the unknown poets' idealistic imaginations. When an ideal becomes strong enough, one has to assume it acquires a kind of being – very much like the presence of a person's conscience or their Freudian 'superego'. (Though reducing Philostratus to a 'superego' would strip him of all his distinctive qualities, so let this only serve as an illustration.) How does it work with 'the author,' who is in no way a projected idealization? He is still a product of the inspired literary imagination of 'the unknown poet,' but what part of the imagination?

Vaginov's first foreword suggests the answer: 'the author' seems to be an imaginary and judgmental 'contemporary.' This is not a stranger, but a viewer who sees things as if from the outside, but with all the knowledge of an insider. Following the logic of Philostratus as a projected ideal, 'the author' must be an embodied manifestation of all Teptyolkin and 'the unknown poet's' worst doubts and fears about themselves.

This framing has wide-ranging explanatory value. For instance, it explains 'the unknown poet's' penance before the tribunal for spawning the author – for this suggests that the poet knows he bears responsibility for 'the author's' existence. The author's malevolent laughter is really the unknown poet's laughter – caused by his own recognition of his milieu's shortcomings. Why else would he have the authority to claim: "I corrupted his soul and replaced it with laughter" and "I allowed him to submerge us in the sea of life"? Here, too, is an explanation of the author's great fondness for his protagonists, even as he paints them in the most unflattering colors.

Bottom line: in *Goat Song*, the protagonists and their mythological authorial projections are mutually co-creating. Vaginov's crew of misfits imagine their own, purely notional world – but then, simply by dint of the strong impression these notions make on the mind, they begin to

influence the misfits' relationship to reality. Then they become indistinguishable from the real – maybe even more real than real.

Goat Song contains passages that explicitly comment on this reciprocal process of cocreation between the imaginary and the real. For instance, in an early scene Teptyolkin notes how frightening it must be for Mar'ya Dalmatova, his less-educated love interest, to live life knowing so little – and thinks to himself: "We – the cultured ones, we explain and understand everything. Yes, yes. First we explain, and then we understand – words do our thinking for us. You start to explain something to a person, you listen closely to your own words – and it suddenly much becomes clear to you, too."[248] Putting aside Teptyolkin's comically misplaced paternalism, Vaginov appears to be expressing the narrative logic of *Goat Song* here. Though people have a semblance of control over their words in producing them, once they're out and alive in the world – they assume a life of their own, and have a power wholly different from that which created them. 'The unknown poet' shares a similar sentiment about the power of poetry: "It's a frightening sight, and a scary one: you take a few words, arrange them in uncommon ways [and several nights] you spend thinking about arrangements of words. And you notice: the hand of meaning stretches out from under one word and shakes the hand that's crawled out from under another word, and a third word offers its hand, and then a whole new world opening up behind the words swallows you up."[249] In a third scene, the most expressive on this theme in *Goat Song*, 'the unknown poet' reveals himself to 'the author' in a dream, showing 'the author' his

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[248] Ibid., 44: "Мы люди культурные, мы все объясним и поймем. Да, да, сначала объясним, а потом поймем – слова за нас думают. Начнешь человеку объяснять, прислушаешься к своим словам – и тебе самому многое станет ясно."

[249] Ibid., 143: "Страшное зрелище и опасное, возьмешь несколько слов, необыкновенно сопоставишь и начнешь над ними ночь сидеть, другую, третью, все над сопоставленными словами думаешь. И замечаешь: протягивается рука смысла из-под одного слова и пожимает руку, появившуюся из-под другого слова, и третье слово руку подает, и поглощает тебя совершенно новый мир, раскрывающийся за словами."

book: “No one suspects that this book arose from the arrangement of words. This does not contradict the fact that something reveals itself before every artist in childhood. This is the fundamental antinomy (contradiction). An artist is given something outside of language, but he – spreading words out and arranging them – creates, and only then comes to know his soul. In this way, arranging words in my youth, I came to know the universe, and a whole world rose before me in language and emerged from language. And, as it turned out, that world rising out of language was in surprising accord with reality…”[250]

Within *Goat Song’s* narrative logic, it appears that this principle is ‘key’ to a deeper understanding of how the novel mediates between fiction and ‘reality.’ Reality enters into a reflexive connection with art, or myth – or, to do justice to Vaginov’s apparent logocentrism, a connection with ‘the word.’ First, reality is primary – then, the word consumes reality, then the word and reality mediate one another’s existence.

Goat Song as a Spell Book

If reality and ‘word’ are as powerful a co-creative force as ‘the unknown poet’ believes, then – in some sense – *Goat Song* is a potentially dangerous, highly elaborate spell-book. To twist Nietzsche’s famous dictum: if you stare long into the book, the book stares back into you. This magical language captures the spirit of the co-creative process as it is depicted in Vaginov’s novel, but what does this mean in a more practical sense?

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[250] Ibid., 152: “Никто не подозревает, что эта книга возникла из сопоставления слов. Это не противоречит тому, что в детстве перед каждым художником нечто носится. Это основная антиномия (противоречие). Художнику нечто задано вне языка, но он, раскидывая слова и сопоставляя их, создает, а затем познает свою душу. Таким образом в юности моей, сопоставляя слова, я познал вселенную и целый мир возник для меня в языке и поднялся от языка. И оказалось, что этот поднявшийся от языка мир совпал удивительным образом с действительностью.”

In articulating a deconstructing, desacralizing stylistic register tailored to himself and his intellectual generation – their ideals, their sacred assumptions, their vision of history, their privately held fantasies – Vaginov instantiates a mental lens for himself and concretizes it for his readers. A mental lens, once rooted in the mind, is not something that can be freely worn or discarded. Instead, it forces the impressions of perception though itself – often automatically – and transforms the experience of passive reception. *Goat Song* provides a comic example of this dynamic in a scene where Teptyolkin is disgusted with his finger because it is vulnerable to Freudian interpretation: "Teptyolkin was sad. He walked home and thought about how a finger could be interpreted through Freud, thought about how such a revolting concept was created so recently."[251] Just as Teptyolkin is disgusted by the Freudian lens's ability to transform the outside world into an infinite gallery of phalluses, so, too, might Vaginov's contemporaries find reason to be anxious about what *Goat Song's* lens might do to them. At the very least, Lev Pumpyansky's decision to cut ties with Vaginov is a kind of real-life echo to Teptyolkin's Freudian revulsion. It is no wonder that Vaginov's debut served as the seed for his following novel, *The Works and Days of Svistonov* – a text about fictional impressions overriding reality, parasitic fictional characters pushing their real-life counterparts out of sync with existence.

The characters themselves are terrified of the transformative power of the word, for they have their image on the line. When their image is being assailed by the hostile 'author,' they duly react with revulsion at the idea that he will degrade it. The horror of the word's co-creative potential is felt in-text as characters realize that the narrativization of their lives is not simply an innocent act of writing, but a method of corrupting image and memory. Correspondingly, the

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[251] Ibid., 191: "Ептелкин был печален. Он шел домой и думал о том, что вот и палец можно истолковать по Фрейду, он думал о том, что вот омерзительная концепция создалась столь недавно."

intensity of Teptyolkin and friends' desire for a Philostratus to arise and tell their story is justified by the novel's implication that the narrative binds itself to the real. He would not only offer them narrative salvation from 'the author's' profanations, but a real redemption, too. They would live beyond their lives in the visage of cultural heroes, looking far more attractive in the story than they ever did in real life.

But why is hybridity so tightly aligned with *Goat Song's* constructive principle? In early revisions of the novel Vaginov provides a hint by granting 'the author' an explicitly monstrous body that can claim a kind of embodied affinity with the hybrid tensions he creates. Though Vaginov later dispenses with this image, once a reader sees it, it comes hard to shake the feeling that you can feel his presence hovering over the text – even in the later revisions: "I finished writing my novel, lifted my sharp-pointed head with half-closed yellow membrane eyes, and looked at my hands, deformed from birth: on the right hand, three fingers, on the left – four. […] I slowly undress, and walk naked to the table, open the window, look out at the pedestrians and the city, and begin to write…"[252]

One might well assume that Vaginov's hideous 'author' might create polarized counterpoints to his subjects, film-negative versions of them. However, this is not the case. 'The author' is not a slanderer; in his depictions of *Goat Song's* protagonists, he does not cast up images that are at complete odds with the truth. Vaginov divests 'the author' with the insight of an insider so that he can reveal them 'as they are.'

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[252] Ibid., 245: "Я дописал свой роман, поднял остроконечную голову с глазами, полузакрытыми желтыми перепонками, посмотрел на свои уродливые от рождения руки: на правой руке три пальца, на левой – четыре." […] "Я медленно раздеваюсь, голый подхожу к столу, раскрываю окно, рассматриваю прохожих и город и начинаю писать."

This is the great irony 'the author's' role: he often seems like the novel's great adversary, but he simply fixes what Teptyolkin and his friends are truly like into words and sentences. Could the fact that those words and sentences make Teptyolkin look so ridiculous be 'the author's' sin? Is it 'the author's' fault, for example, that it is funny and a little obscene to read about a group of grown celibates collectively imagining a little boy named Philostratus to be their savior? When these things are fixed in language, they presumably become so far removed from how they existed in the imagination. *What is a tragedy in the imagination is a comedy on the page*.

In the spirit of co-creation, the words do reach back out and make a claim on reality. The words begin to distort the unfixed image that existed in his protagonists' imagination, and so they must confront the narrative that unfolds on the page. And, crucially, Vaginov – the real author Konstantin Vaginov – is implicated in both of these practices: it is he who sincerely conjured the image of Philostratus as a serious symbolic touchstone in his poetry, and he who desecrates the very same image by lowering it into *Goat Song's* profane prose.

'The author's' corrosive influence is in his ability to bring comic elements of his subjects' lives into relief – tarnishing the purity of their tragedy, and making their cultural project look ridiculous. The fact that he does not have to lie to do this is a terrible problem for *Goat Song's* cast of characters. If Vaginov's protagonists were confronted with 'the author's truth' and became neurotic about trying to avoid ever seeing it again, that might give rise to polarization. But that is not what we see.

In the final section, a case study of Teptyolkin's character arc, I will argue that when *Goat Song's* protagonist is confronted by a desacralizing, long-overlooked though vital dimension of his life, he is all but forced to reconcile it with the idealized narrative undergirding

his sense of self. However, because Teptyolkin's whole temperament was formed by his idealism, because his identity crystalized around the supposed tragedy of his life, the attempt to reconform himself to a desacralized reality and to reconcile himself with 'comedy' is a doomed pursuit. I intend to highlight moments in the text where it is as if the comic and tragic narrative modes compete for interpretive supremacy of the given events. It will become clear that Teptyolkin himself is, after a critical junction in the text, suddenly made aware of these moments of comic / tragic superposition. And, in trying to mediate these incongruities in his life, he will have to invite the divide into his mind – his conscious interpretations of the events of his own life. The localization of the comic / tragic divide into the mind will be the cause of the grotesque hybridity I am most interested to explore.

In this part of the analysis, the figure of 'the author' will recede. I have tried to use the previous section to highlight all the major sections of the book where 'the author' is foregrounded, so his presence as a narrator will still be detectable as an implicit rather than an explicit player in the narrative. Vaginov's game is more subtle than having Teptyolkin and friends constantly shaking his fist at 'the author's' spectral presence – those moments are there, but we've seen nearly all of them already. The author is still 'the author' on those pages where he isn't mentioned – and still he tirelessly works to transform 'the tragedy of the imagination into comedy on the page.'

Returning to the Case of Teptyolkin

Let's pick back up with Teptyolkin where we left him: in the novel's first scene, 'walking through the public dining room to fetch boiling water for his teapot, surrounded by nymphs and satyrs.' I suggested that his obliviousness to the Soviet everyday does not put him at risk for psychological polarization because of the inside / outside nature of the incongruity. (The

incongruity is not occurring within a single 'site,' to appeal to the formal explanation.) In *Goat Song's* opening scenes, Teptyolkin is especially insulated against the risk of polarization because he lives comfortably within his own imagination. He only rarely notices the dissonance at all, so it has no chance of becoming a mental incongruity. In contrast, recall the characters in previous chapters suffering from 'doubling' – Shvarts' scholar, Zamyatin's Tikhmen, Hoffmann's Medardus etc. In those cases, the protagonists who underwent doubling always become hyperattentive to their uncanny rival, which were nothing more than a manifestation of the deep incongruity within themselves. Even if they failed to realize that their doppelganger was another aspect of their mind, their focus was squarely on the embodied contradiction haunting them. A fixation on the incongruity – on one's double, in this case – drives the relentless neuroticism that almost always pushes doubling stories into the realm of tragedy. For Teptyolkin, the grotesque also cannot arise because he cannot detect the incongruity (*невязка*), even intuitively.

The reader, however, cannot help but notice it – we have access to 'the author's' text, after all. Because readers are privy to both the thoughts and fantasies that inhabit Teptyolkin's mind and the surrounding conditions he ignores, their attention is squarely fixated on Teptyolkin's absurd remove from reality. In other words, the 'site' of the grotesque is on the level of the text – in the incongruity between what we, readers, see Teptyolkin seeing, and what we see that he cannot. Only when the incongruity is finally noticed and attended to by Teptyolkin himself – causing it to enter his psyche's sphere of concerns – will grotesque polarity become a potential threat to him. And Teptyolkin *will* notice his remove from reality in a later scene. However, *Goat Song* does not become a typical doubling narrative – at least not through Teptyolkin. Rather than triggering a state of violent self-denial, Teptyolkin's encounter with the

incongruity of fantasy and reality will turn the conversation away from grotesque 'polarization' and towards grotesque 'hybridization.'

I emphasize the issue of attention not only because it sheds light on the importance of subjectivity in an individual's reception of the grotesque, but also because Vaginov himself weaves the motif of his characters' attention and inattention into the narrative. As the first chapter's characterization of Teptyolkin suggests, he rarely shifts his attention outside the confines of his imaginary projections. Vaginov's 'author' highlights a number of moments where Teptyolkin's obliviousness to the vulgarity of those around him reaches comic proportions. In one such scene, Teptyolkin arrives mid-conversation as the minor character Svechin, a pseudo-intellectual rapist, brags to a group of their mutual friends about raping Natasha, a close friend of Teptyolkin's love interest Mar'ya Dalmatova: "'Yesterday, while you were getting your kicks prancing around the city […] I cozied up with Natasha and…' [Svechin] performed the corresponding gesture." Walking up to the group while Svechin is still derogatorily thrusting his hips, Teptyolkin exclaims: "'Ah, my friends, so here's where you ended up,' […] 'You must be deep in a conversation about literature, no, no, go on, I won't bother you'."[253] Though a particularly egregious case of Teptyolkin's obliviousness, this is not an isolated incident. Much later in the book, Teptyolkin receives a whispered warning about the moral failings of his friends – one is supposedly a former drug addict, another lives with his mother and practices occultism, another is 'not indifferent to little dogs.' Here, though Teptyolkin stands up for his friends, we finally begin to see the vulgarity of the world around him seeping into his perception: "[Teptyolkin exclaimed]: 'My friends are among the chosen

[253] Ibid., 64: "Вчера, пока ты шествиями наслаждался […] я Наташу… Бывший артиллерийский офицер сделал соответствующий жест. […] А, вот вы где, друзья мои, – протянул им руки Тептелкин, – должно быть, о литературе говорите, не буду мешать вам, не буду."

ones; I'll never believe such slander. There's nothing greater than friendship.' But he began to notice that the young man […] truly kissed his mother a little too passionately. They would sit, sit, and suddenly their tongues would lock, and the tongues would be knotted up so strongly that both of them, son and mother, grew red from the strain. And he distinctly noticed that another of his acquaintances was speaking in an all too familiar register with unrespectable types […] But Teptyolkin nevertheless convinced himself that it was all empty nothings, and that there wasn't a thing on Earth greater than friendship. And here he rattled off a quote from Cicero."[254]

The push-and-pull between Teptyolkin noticing the moral defects in his acquaintances, and then explaining them away, allows him to go on without having a crisis of psychological polarization. Of course, the perceptual dissonance in these scenes reflects the tension between comic authorial narration and the mismatched perception of those events by Vaginov's characters. Again, the dissonance is grotesque to us, *Goat Song's* readers, but only because the 'author' is bringing the incongruity into such sharp relief in the text that it becomes unmissable, estranging, comic. But, ironically, the great philologist Teptyolkin does not notice what any competent reader of *Goat Song* could not miss. But the recursive process of character / author co-creation cannot begin until he finally has sufficient cause to reorient his attention.

This charade continues until Teptyolkin, one fateful night, has a direct encounter with the polarized aesthetic paradox that readers have been privy to since *Goat Song's* first pages. Fitting that the revelation occurs in the home of Kostya Rotikov, a collector of baroque and kitsch art. Kostya and his aesthetic taste are worth dwelling on for a moment: more than any other character

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[254] Ibid., 120-121:"'Мои друзья – избранники, никогда клевете не поверю. Нет ничего выше дружбы.' Но он стал замечать, что молодой человек […] действительно как-то слишком страстно целуется со своей матушкой. Сидят, сидят и вдруг язык с языком соединяется, и напряжение языков у них до того сильно, что оба они, и сын и мать, от натуги краснеют. И действительно заметил, что другой его знакомый с непочтенными людьми на «ты» […] Но все же убеждал сам себя Тептелкин, что все это пустяки, дружба выше всего на свете. И тут произносилась цитата из Цицерона."

in the book, he represents a kind of solution to the problem of living in the Soviet Union as an aesthete, a (perhaps not fully committed) torchbearer of the delights of Hellenistic culture, of the culture of the Renaissance. Shortly before the scene that catalyzes Teptyolkin's big revelation, Kostya's apartment is described as having two opposing walls covered in art: the first holds a display of baroque works, while the opposite wall is covered floor-to-ceiling in kitsch. Whereas the encounter with a more striking variation of this incongruity is what will undo the delicate sensibilities of Teptyolkin, Kostya Rotikov is completely unperturbed about having to live amid the supposed aesthetic contradiction in the most literal fashion. His artistic sensibility stretches across the whole gamut of aesthetic modes. His vision of what constitutes cultural production worthy of one's attention is unconstrained by classical notions of good taste. This 'answer' to *Goat Song's* problem of incongruent tastes also seems to suggest that – like an aesthetic enantiodromia – baroque art is not so different than kitsch. This is where the extreme 'high' and the extreme 'low' paradoxically meet.[255] Anthony Anemone's "Obsessive Collectors; Fetishizing Culture in the Novels of Konstantin Vaginov," argues that Kostya Rotikov's role as a 'collector' enjoins him to a motif that runs through all of the author's prose. "Collecting in *[Goat] Song*," he argues, "[is] a way of preserving the cultural legacy of the past."[256] He sees Vaginov as a "defend[er] of modern, free (and fetishistic) art from the imprecations of a repressive society moving toward totalitarian control of literature."[257]

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[255] A similar sentiment is explored in some detail in Susan Sontag's "Notes on 'Camp'." In general, *camp* is an interesting phenomenon for the theorist of the grotesque, specifically for its ability to invert grotesque aesthetic revulsion into a kind of aesthetic elation. The 'lower,' more ostentatious, more artificial the campy object gets – the more it is praised as 'good' camp. However, exploring this thread will take us too far afield of Vaginov's novel – especially given that a proper study of camp will necessitate a proper grounding in its queer cultural origins. A project for a more qualified scholar working with a different spectrum of texts.

[256] Anthony Anemone, "Obsessive Collectors: Fetishizing Culture in the Novels," *Russian Review.* Vol. 59, No. 2 (April 2000), 260.

[257] Ibid., 268.

In any case, after an evening gathering in Kostya's apartment, Teptyolkin is sent to his room to retrieve the coat of his (still platonic) love interest Mar'ya Dalmatova. While he gathers the coat, a gust of wind comes through an open window and disturbs a velvet curtain hung to conceal a collection of erotic art Kostya has hanging on the wall. Though Teptyolkin has remained stubbornly oblivious to the dualism between the fantasies of his internal life and the vulgarity of his friends and the reality outside his mind, a direct encounter with eroticism is what finally breaks through to him: "And here Teptyolkin saw that which he ought not have seen. He clutched at his bag, his mouth fell open, he sat down. 'What's all this? – he thought. – What on earth is all this! A man with such a refined taste and suddenly…' Above him the velvet now covered the wall, now again revealed dozens of naked male and female bodies in all imaginable positions. He felt that all was not right in this place. 'Oh, you nest of vipers,' he screamed, 'vipers!' – and ran headlong out of the room."[258] This episode is traumatic to Teptyolkin not only because it reveals the vulgar side of Kostya's aestheticism, but because it triggers a perception-shattering paradigm shift in the way he sees his friends, the world he inhabits, and his own position in that world. Going forward, Teptyolkin never returns to the mental innocence and naiveté that defined his character in *Goat Song's* earlier scenes.

In this moment, the grotesque incongruity that has long existed in on *Goat Song's* textual plane gets through to Teptyolkin's mind. This is a direct encounter with the grotesque, an encounter that is all the more threatening because the poor philologist cannot escape it – for he comes to realize that vulgarity has long been seeping into his cherished circle of chosen ones. He finally notices his own longstanding failure to notice. Here, too, it is as if Teptyolkin gets a glimpse under the velvet veil keeping him from seeing the profane, comic underpinning to the

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[258] Vaginov, *Kozlinaia pesn',* 137: "Змеи, – вскричал он, – змеи! – и бросился вон из комнаты."

story he is part of. Teptyolkin seems to understand there is no going back to the cradle of innocence, so he resolves to find a way to integrate himself into the Soviet world he ignored for so long.

The destabilizing affect of Teptyolkin's fateful encounter is not wholly unexpected given the polarization, experienced at a deeply personal level, confronts him with an insoluble subjective paradox. He experiences the full weight of the polarized grotesque's horrific explosive force, but, of course, we readers – long privy to the incongruity Teptyolkin encounters – do not. Teptyolkin will try to try to integrate *Goat Song's* prevailing sacred/vulgar dualism into his way of being. This attempt at integration, for reasons that will become clear, is doomed to fail. This failure, in turn, will give rise to the grotesque hybridity that ultimately shapes the image of a Sovietized Teptyolkin.

In any case, Teptyolkin's idealistic purity and naivete are tarnished by Kostya's wall of erotic art because the philologist has maintained a lifelong sexual innocence – prioritizing physical chastity for the good of culture. Yes, Teptyolkin is a voluntary celibate. Though he is deeply enamored with the young Mar'ya Dalmatova, he prefers to keep her at a physical distance – stowed away in his imagination. He opts to incorporate her into his platonic fantasies. Take, for example, an early fantasy of Teptyolkin's, one devoid of explicit erotic content: "Sometimes Teptyolkin was visited by a dream: he descends from his tower on high, [and] beautiful Venus stands amid the pond waters […] And he sees: Mar'ya Petrovna Dalmatova sits on a small bench and reads Callimachus [Ancient Greek poet, scholar, aesthetician, 3rd c. BC] and lifts her eyes, full of love. 'We live, - she speaks, – 'in the midst of horror and desolation'."[259] To sleep

[259] Ibid., 22: Иногда Тептелкина навещал сон: он сходит с высокой башни своей, прекрасная Венера стоит посредине пруда […] Он видит – Марья Петровна Далматова сидит на скамейке и читает Каллимаха и подымает полные любви очи. 'Средь ужаса и запустения живем мы,' говорит она.

with Mar'ya would be tantamount to betraying his role as the pure-hearted paragon authentic culture, lowering both of them into the 'horror and desolation' outside of his fantasies. Like a committed Romantic or Symbolist,[260] Teptyolkin so deifies the feminine that sex is an unthinkable physical manifestation of what ought to be a purely spiritual union. Teptyolkin seems to believe that, if he is to descend into the vulgar, physical world, his union with a woman must be the portal through which he makes his descent. In terms the Hellenized Teptyolkin might appreciate, a sexual encounter would be a *descent* down Plato's 'ladder of Diotima.' Though, if his soul is already floating alongside the true Beauty of the imagination's Forms, why tarnish such a contemplative life with the desire for another physical body, only an empty simulacrum of the beautiful?[261]

The notion that sex acts as a mechanism that compromises the purity of soul is in keeping with the move from Teptyolkin's polarized relationship to reality to one defined by hybridity – a hybrid stance that will increasingly come to define Teptyolkin's character from this moment onward. Instead of making the vain attempt to deny his corporeality – separating himself from the 'desert' of the world – sex offers Teptyolkin a way to embrace the body.

So, after the fateful night at Kostya's, Teptyolkin begins to wonder how to enact a ritual that will bind him to the vulgarity of the physical world. To this end, he desires Mar'ya's hand

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[260] Whether or not this is a biographical detail of Lev Pumpyansky is largely irrelevant – though, of course, Aleksandr Blok's infamously long refusal to consummate his marriage with Lyubov Dmitrievna is a clear reference point.

[261] Plato's *Symposium* does make a brief appearance in *Goat Song* at the end of Ch. XII – Bloom [Расцвет]. In accord with his idealistic Platonic philosophical leanings, Teptyolkin is an anti-Freudian thinker through and through (as was Pumpyansky): "Teptyolkin was sad. He walked home and thought about how a finger could be interpreted through Freud, thought about how such a revolting concept was created so recently" (191). *Goat Song's* 'author' seems to be having a laugh, imbuing Teptyolkin with all these sexual hang-ups and a sex drive that simultaneously acts as a kind of death drive. All this, against his most fervent wishes, seems to bind him as much to Freud as to Plato. For more on Vaginov and Freud, see D.M. Bresler's article on intertextuality Bresler, Dmitrii. "'Vot i palets mozhno istolkovat' po Freidu': pragmatika interteksta v romane K. K. Vaginova 'Kozlinaia pesn'." *Vestnik LGU im. A. C. Pushkina* 3, 1 (46-55): 46-55.

in marriage, a marriage anchored not in Platonic love, but sexual union. Teptyolkin cannot help but see that this union will compromise the chastity that had hitherto been a cornerstone of his identity. What if, in turning away from his role as Culture's devoted monk the intellectual gardens of his mind will be doomed to wither away? Moreover, what would he do if he turned out to be 'no man at all,' an impotent wretch? This conundrum is at the center of the novel's dramatic treatment of Teptyolkin's personal crisis – his very life depends on it:

> 'How is it that I,' - thought Teptyolkin, - 'will give in to temptation and get married? It could be that nature created me for something very different. I'll marry – and my memory will weaken, my dreams, marvelous and obscure, will fade away, and those morning hours of perfect clarity and those calm nights, too, will fade. Beside me a woman will grow old, and I will notice that I am aging as well. Yes, it's a difficult conundrum,' – Teptyolkin paced around his room. – 'Perhaps it will be beyond my power to marry, perhaps I am no man at all. Perhaps my body hasn't fully matured yet. Well then, I'd marry, and then – horror…'[262]

To remediate his fear, Teptyolkin attempts to verify that he is indeed a man, vowing to sow his oats with a prostitute. The attempt ends in failure when he tries to make her swear on a bible that she is not 'infected.' This scene's histrionic comedy expresses Teptyolkin's newfound drive to profanation of the self as it is born in his soul. The strange breed of conversion experience at Kostya Rotikov's apartment changed him. In *Goat Song's* textual system, sexual activity is almost exclusively a means of degradation. In the aforementioned scenes where Teptyolkin's inattentiveness is thematized, the things he fails to take proper account of are always sexual in nature – Svechin's vile reinvocation of his rape, the vague insinuations about Teptyolkin's

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[262] Vaginov, *Kozlinaia pesn',* 157: ''Как же я, – думал Тептелкин, – поддамся соблазну и женюсь? А может быть, природа совсем не для того меня создала. Женюсь – и ослабеет моя память, исчезнут дивные и неясные грезы, исчезнут эти ясные утренние часы и спокойные ночи. Рядом со мной будет стареть женщина, и я замечу, что я старею. Да, трудный вопрос, – заходил Тептелкин по комнате. – А может быть, я не в силах буду жениться, может быть, я не мужчина. Может быть, тело у меня несозревшее. Что ж, женюсь, а потом ужас…'"

acquaintances engaging in incest and bestiality, and, of course, Kostya's *Kama Sutra* of kitsch wall art.[263] Presumably, the unseen 'author' – an exhibitionist writing naked in his window – is especially keen on bringing these bawdy scenes into relief and into competition with Teptyolkin's tragic self-narrativization.

The importance of Teptyolkin's step *toward*, and not *away from* that which repulses him cannot be overstated – for here is the definitive step away from polarity and towards hybridity. Instead of a *segregation* of the incongruous impulses, Teptyolkin opts to *attempt an integration*.

To help underline the difference between these two modes, it is worth appreciating that Teptyolkin's reaction to Kostya's erotica could have been very different. If, for instance, he had chosen to insist on maintaining his own purity and on the purity of his fantasies, he could have cut ties with those friends and acquaintances whose tastes made them unworthy of being a hypothetical 'cultural torchbearer.' He could have withdrawn further into the self and rejected the outside world altogether. Perhaps he could have understood the choice before him as a Kierkegaardian either/or – choosing the life of a cultural torchbearer no matter the implications, rejecting any 'both,' any mediation, no matter how far it would drag him away from apparent reality. If one accepts that such a repression of reality *could have* occurred, then Teptyolkin's decision not to engage in polarizing, repressive mental strategies might even be understood as a step that will prevent a potentially explosive inner-conflict in the future.

Teptyolkin's choice highlights the fact that the difference between polarity and hybridity represents a strategic distinction in the way the philologist attempts to mediate the incongruity he

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[263] Moreover, even if Teptyolkin radically rejected marriage in favor of 'Philostratus' and the life of the mind, the choice would not guarantee him the image of chaste purity he desires. It is not lost on other characters that the intellectuals' obsession with the Greek Philostratus – a young boy of ideal beauty – is caught up in embarrassing pederastic implications. Teptyolkin is a committed Hellenist, after all. When 'the unknown poet' confesses that "many of us are haunted by a beautiful youth," his acquaintance Asfodeliev laughs, "Finally I've caught you. You're all degenerates […] that's why you're being chased by a pretty little lad" (139).

has discovered. If we recognize Teptyolkin's transformation as a rejection of polarity, then would we be justified in seeing his reconciliation with the world as a proto-Jungian attempt to 'integrate his shadow'? Perhaps, but there is a complication that prevents such a clean implementation of the psychological 'doubling' paradigm. Namely, that which Teptyolkin must reconcile himself with is not purely a psychological incongruity. As previously noted, the incongruity exists between the inside (the psychological) and the outside (a mixture of Soviet cultural reality, a milieu with questionable tastes and scruples, and the 'author's' textual hostility). In other words, Teptyolkin is not simply trying to reconcile himself to some other internal, psychological reality, but trying to put his mind in greater conformity with Soviet sociopolitical life, at least as he now perceives it around him. But is such a radical conciliatory project even possible for a man like Teptyolkin? And, if not, what happens if the project fails?

Vaginov depicts the transformation of Teptyolkin with a surprising degree of restraint, unfurling the changes slowly over many scenes, spacing them out with calculated temporal gaps. Teptyolkin does finally gather the courage to marry Mar'ya Dalmatova. We see that the philologist is not fated to lose touch with Philostratus and the cultural project that the young lad signifies for him right away: "After the wedding, Teptyolkin stood for a long time on the balcony and looked down at the city. But it was not five- and three-story buildings he saw, but rather narrow alleyways of pruned acacias and Philostratus standing on a small road […] and alongside the lad, deferentially bowed, he walked – Teptyolkin."[264] However, it isn't long before readers begin to witness Teptyolkin's turn away from certain values that once defined him: "Teptyolkin was already 37 years old. He was already bald and he already suffered from arteriosclerosis, but

[264] Ibid., 167: "После свадьбы долго стоял Тептелкин на балконе, смотрел вниз на город, но не видел пятиэтажных и трехэтажных домов, а видел тонкие аллеи подстриженных акаций и на дорожке Филострата […] и рядом с юношей, почтительно согнувшись, идет он – Тептелкин."

still he loved to read Pierre de Ronsard [sixteenth century French poet]. […] He had no more thoughts about the Renaissance. Submerged in household comforts […] and in his belated acquaintance with physical love, he subsisted in a kind of lethargy, all the time steeling himself from Mar'ya Petrovna's caresses. It cannot be said that he did not notice the deficiencies of Mar'ya Petrovna, though he loved her like an old widow loves the portrait of her husband, painted at the moment when he was still her bridegroom."[265] Already we see an emerging sketch of a Teptyolkin that is detaching himself from his former cultural loves and attaching himself to 'household comforts': though his interest in poetry is still alive, his thoughts center around his (still rather unusual) love of Mar'ya rather than the culture of the Renaissance. He is beginning to show the early signs of growing old despite his relatively modest 37 years, and the consolations of quotidian life with a loving wife look as though they are somehow enervating him. Though there is little in him that is explicitly 'Soviet' – the bulk of his transformation is yet to come – the increased personal investment in materiality signals a move away from his former spiritual, ethereal purity. Teptyolkin is now a man far more amenable to material comforts.

Along with the attempt to reconcile his cultural aspirations with family life, Teptyolkin engages in a parallel effort to make his peace with the 'new world' of 1920s Soviet culture. Though here, too, he finds it difficult to reconcile the emerging form of life with the life he feels he sacrificed: "'Even if,' thought Teptyolkin, 'the villages are shining bright with electricity, even if cows are mooing in exemplary sovkhozes, even if agricultural equipment is working in the fields, even if a life more beautiful than the Eifel Tower is unfolding before us, there still is

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[265] Ibid., 188-189: "Уже Тептелкину было тридцать семь лет. Уже он был лыс и страдал артериосклерозом, но все же он любил читать Ронсара […] Уже не было у Тептелкина никаких мыслей о Возрождении. Погруженный в семейный уют или в […] поздно узнанную физическую любовь, он пребывал в некоторой спячке, все время усиливающейся от прикосновений Марьи Петровны. Нельзя сказать, что он не замечал недостатков Марьи Петровны, но он любил ее, как старая вдовушка любит портрет своего мужа, изображающий то время, когда исчезнувший был еще женихом."

something missing from the new world."[266] And yet the narration still affirms that, "still, in the depths of [Teptyolkin's] soul, he believed in the coming peace and quiet, in the looming cooperation among peoples."[267] In another, more comic scene, the tension between old and new world pays out when Mar'ya Petrovna chides Teptyolkin for insisting on wearing his pince-nez: "No one wears a pince-nez anymore! […] Now people wear glasses!" Teptyolkin counters, "I don't give a damn! […] I'm a man of the old world and so I'm going to wear a pince-nez. I have nothing in common with new world garbage."[268] Remaining in a space of indecision between new- and old-world modes of being, Teptyolkin is scarcely able to find anything resembling peace.

Vaginov's textual alterations pose a particular difficulty for this passage in particular. Perhaps in the attempt to further draw out Teptyolkin's transformation, post-Priboi versions of the text reverse the last sentiment – reading: "in the depths of his soul, [Teptyolkin] *did not* believe in the coming peace and quiet…" Moreover, instead of 'thinking' the thoughts about the 'villages,' 'exemplary sovkhozes' etc., he 'speaks' these criticisms of the new world's inarticulable lack, prompting an interlocutor to retort: "Your Plato is an elegiac idealist. And your love for the forest is nothing more than a reflection of the interests of feudal nobility, who, fighting for control over large tracts of land, did not want to lose their hunting grounds…" (190). If anything, this vision of Teptyolkin is more tortured than in the earlier Priboi edition of *Goat*

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[266] Ibid., 189: "Пусть, – думал Тептелкин, – ярко освещены электричеством деревни, пусть мычат коровы в примерных совхозах, пусть сельскохозяйственные машины работают на лугах, пусть развертывается жизнь более красочная, чем Эйфелева башня, – чего-то нет в новой жизни». […] Но все же тихой музыкой билось сердце Тептелкина, все же в глубине души он верил в наступающие мир и тишину, грядущее сотрудничество народов.

[267] Ibid., 190

[268] Ibid., 192: "Плевать! – кричал снизу Тептелкин, – я человек старого мира, я буду носить пенсне, с новой гадостью я ничего общего не имею."

Song – even more reluctant to surrender his old ways, and even more hesitant about the prospects of the Soviet project.

Teptyolkin's capitulation to the ideology of Soviet life reach a turning point when he is asked to adopt a leading role in the local housing lease cooperative society [*жиищно-арендное кооперативное товарищество (жакт)*] – nominated for a position, ironically enough, because 'he's a cultured man, not a thief.' Especially now, saddled with explicitly Soviet responsibilities, he begins to worry that "the culture he defended was not his […] that he was not destined to do anything in the world, that he would pass on like a shadow and leave no memory of himself behind, […] that there was no great gap separating him from an accountant."[269] The thought of his indistinguishability from accountants, clerks, and commoners plagues him: "When it seemed to [Teptyolkin] that there was no difference between him and a whimpering philistine, he became disgusting to himself and felt nauseous, and he causelessly lashed out at Mar'ya Petrovna and sometimes even broke dinnerplates."[270]

Teptyolkin's anxiety about the cost of his hybridizing compromise reaches a crescendo in these moments – feeling himself merging with faceless clerks, with the indistinguishable masses. Effectively, he has now become a hybrid of old-world Hellenized Teptyolkin and new-world Soviet Teptyolkin. Each of these impulses coexist within him, though, try as he might, their mutual incompatibility prevents a true psychological or behavioral synthesis. Though Teptyolkin's attempt to conform parts of himself to Soviet reality may have saved him from

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[269] Ibid., 250: "Культура, которую он защищал, была не его […] что ничего ему не дано сделать в мире, что пройдет он как тень и не оставит по себе никакой памяти […] что нет бездны меж ним и бухгалтером."

[270] Ibid.: "Когда казалось ему, что нет разницы между ним и скулящим обывателем, тогда он делался сам себе противен и тогда тошнило его, и он беспричинно злился на Марью Петровну и даже иногда бил тарелки."

aggravating a dangerous psychological divorce from reality, eluding the polarization problem has led him to a situation that is hardly better.

Teptyolkin's increasingly hybrid cultural identity has led to his negation, his self-effacement – and he plainly experiences the transformation as a corruption of his being. Look no further than Teptyolkin's 'disgust' and 'nausea' at becoming a 'whimpering philistine' for evidence; these sickly feelings suggest that enough of his former ego subsists to level an aesthetic critique against his own slow transformation into a common nobody. He judges his situation unbearable, and himself – monstrous. This are the affective symptoms of the self-experiencing itself as grotesque. His disgust signals a painful cognizance of the incongruity within him – a departure from the oblivious bliss that once defined his inattentive orientation to the outside world prior to the incident with at Kostya's apartment. Could it have been possible to prevent all this, to return to the protection of his prior naiveté? No, there was never any practical means of reverting back to ignorance, not – at least – without resorting to constant willful self-deception. For Teptyolkin had previously avoided psychological polarization by not noticing the surrounding world, and, crucially, by not noticing his failure to notice. After his 'conversion,' going back to that effortless ignorance was an impossibility. And even if Teptyolkin tried resorting to self-deception and repression, it would take a great effort to continually 'not notice' as before, making the effort an exercise in futility. Could he have broken off all ties with his former friends and acquaintances in the hope of maintaining the purity of his cultural ambition? Perhaps, but the prospect of 'carrying true culture through the Soviet dark ages' becomes all the more improbable without the already limited number of imperfect allies he had. Teptyolkin's attempt to hybridize looks all but inevitable.

If he could completely resign himself to Soviet life, abandoning Philostratus for good, would living as he now lived become less nauseating? The text suggests its answer: "Teptyolkin sat near the stove and read one of his favorite books, but the reading went poorly. He listened close to what was happening inside of him. It was no good; it was painful. He began to understand that it was not the historical Philostratus […] he loved – and not the other one, the compiler of erotic letters to youths and hetaerae, and not a third either. And then he began to feel calm and clear right down in his soul. And it no longer horrified him that clerks experience the world just like him, that there is no gulf between him and an accountant."[271]

Banishing Philostratus from his sphere of concerns does, as it turns out, have a strong palliative effect on Teptyolkin, curing him – at least temporarily – of his 'nausea.' For a moment, Teptyolkin frees himself from his own hybridizing project – opting instead to simply do away with his cultural attachments. Could it be that the solution to Teptyolkin's conscious dilemma is to abandon the project of mediation and come to terms with the fact that the decision is one of 'either/or' but not 'both'? But is there not a problem here, too? Is it possible for Teptyolkin to simply dispense with the part of himself he exalted for so long? As it turns out, it is not so simple. He continues returning to his old reveries through the end of the novel; "in those golden minutes" when he is able to escape thoughts "of war, of the Revolution, of his own [creative] infertility and the infertility of his age" he finds himself once again occupying a world of "charming figures with horns and hooves, nymphs with eyes of unfathomable depth," where

[271] Ibid., 250: Он начинал понимать, что совсем не исторического Филострата, не придворного романиста времен Юлии Домны (и не другого – составителя эротических писем к гетерам и юношам, и не третьего), любил он. И стало на душе его спокойно и ясно. И больше не ужасало его, что конторщики так же чувствуют мир, что нет бездны между ним и бухгалтером.

he is "anything but alone" and where, together with these fantastic creatures, he can watch as one of humanity's great epochs fades into the past.[272]

Teptyolkin's final reflection on his hybridized psychodrama in *Goat Song* is revealed in a rather long, but thematically vital letter he wrote to 'the unknown poet.' 'The unknown poet,' like Teptyolkin, has gone through his own crisis and has abandoned the bulk of his cultural ambitions – though, crucially, he does not make the same capitulations to the new Soviet mode of life as his philologist counterpart. Teptyolkin tries to bring him to see that his compromise, Teptyolkin's, is the best way forward, or at least the most humane. To understand the letter, we must refer back to the mythological system Vaginov sewed into his text. Here, namely, that Vaginov saw in the decline of paganism and the rise in Christianity as a parallel to the end of pre-Soviet humanism and the rise of Soviet political and cultural influence. Therefore, when Teptyolkin calls 'the unknown poet' a pagan, he is aligning him with pre-revolutionary Russia, and when he praises Christianity, he is gesturing at Soviet reality. With this 'key,' the letter becomes far more decipherable, allowing Teptyolkin's reflections on the nature of his cultural capitulations to come into sharper focus. The emphasis added is mine.

> Dear friend, you are a paganist. This is a deeply negative trait of yours; you do not accede to Christian grace, **though you well could fuse Christianity with the belief in the delightful [pagan] gods** and enjoin yourself with the particular silence [особая тишина] of the world. After all, no matter what you've said, you love the sun, the warm morning sun, you love the morning birdsongs, and it is not only ornamentation, not ornamentation that attracts you to pagan religion, not the variety of deities, not the materialization of the forces of nature, but that distinct sanctity, that prized knowledge, which is born from contact with nature. You love the agony of that feeling, but is it not

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[272] Ibid., 254-257: В светлые минуты Тептелкин больше не сваливал ни на войну, ни на Революцию, ни на бесплодие свое и своего века. И тогда осенние листья для него шумели по-прежнему в самую яркую весну, в самое неумолимое лето. И из-за деревьев смотрели на него пленительные рожицы с рожками и копытцами, и нимфы с глазами непробудной глубины как пар поднимались над водой, и он слышал их речь внутри себя, пленительную и удивительную; и он думал, что вот из другого мира приходят к нему существа, что он вовсе не одинок, что вместе с ним отходит великая эпоха человечества.

> better to love its dawn? You love dying, but is it not better to love life? […] I have heard a rumor that you've disavowed yourself. My good friend, come to your senses, you are now terribly sick, return to paganism, but to an enlightened paganism, one without poisonous constituents, without snickering and without spite. After all, those nymphs and satyrs who appeared to us did not appear to others. Dear friend, why do you insist on slandering yourself? […] You were always striving for Rome, though Florence was always nearer to our hearts, dearer. You're living through a horrible crucible which I, too, survived. Remember your own words about us being transformed into devils. Now I understand life in all of its melancholy beauty. It was not our dream that was a lie. It was us. We were then unworthy of that which was revealed to us. I see our insufficiencies, but they do not frighten me. I know that we are weak, awfully weak, that we are depraved, that we are greedy, but I also know that we loved the spirit's sun [духовное солнце], and, who knows, perhaps even now we love it still.[273]

In Teptyolkin's mind, it is the fusion (hybridity) of paganism and Christianity that offers 'the unknown poet' a way out of his spiritual quagmire. The letter's use of natural signifiers is vital to its message, but their meaning is slightly opaque. Teptyolkin means to suggest that Christianity – and its analog, the rise of the Soviets – is that 'warm morning sun' and are those 'morning songs of birds.' The 'sun' of paganism – the cultural legacy of Russia's pre-revolutionary era – is on the decline. Teptyolkin recognizes that 'the unknown poet' finds something both agonizingly beautiful and terribly meaningful in falling below the horizon of

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[273] Ibid., 257: "Дорогой друг, вы паганист. Это черта глубоко отрицательная, вы не приемлете христианской благодати, между тем можно соединить христианство с верой в прелестных богов и ощущать особую тишину мира. Ведь, что бы вы ни говорили, вы любите солнце, теплое утреннее солнце, любите утреннее пение птиц, и не только декоративность, декоративность вас привлекает в языческой религии, не многообразие божеств, не материализация сил природы, а та особая святость, то сокровенное знание, которое рождается от соприкосновения с природой. Вы любите агонию этого чувства, но не лучше ли любить его рассвет? Вы любите умирание, но не лучше ли любить жизнь? […] До меня дошли слухи, что вы отреклись от самого себя. Дорогой друг, опомнитесь, вы сейчас тяжко больны, вернитесь к паганизму, но к просветленному, без ядовитых веществ, без смешка и без презрения. Ведь те нимфы и сатиры, которые являлись нам, не являлись другим людям. Дорогой друг, зачем вы так клевещете на себя? […] Вы всегда стремились в Рим, но ведь Флоренция ближе нам и дороже. Вы переживаете ужасное испытание, которое я уже пережил, вспомните ваши же слова о превращении нас в чертей. Теперь я принимаю мир во всей его горестной красоте. Не мечта наша, а мы – были ложью. Мы уже были недостойны того, что открылось нам. Я вижу наши недостатки, но они меня не пугают. Я знаю, что мы слабы, бешено слабы, что мы развратны, что мы алчны, но что мы любили духовное солнце, и кто знает, может быть, и теперь любим."

history together with the previous era's 'setting sun'. But, he counters: what if one can appreciate the beautiful dusk of one era while greeting the dawn of the next? His comment encouraging 'the unknown poet' to adopt a paganism without 'poisonous constituents,' 'snickering,' or 'spite' is presumably a call to embrace paganism's tragic elevation while rejecting its comic baseness – a plausible explanation given Teptyolkin's disdain for 'the author' and his comic interpretations and profanations of tragedy. His elevation of Florence over Rome is meant to be read as an elevation of one of the Renaissance's birthplaces, the Christian Italy of Florentines like Dante, Boccaccio and Petrarch, over the Greco-Roman pagan tradition represented by the capital city. The end of the letter is most telling. It suggests a rationalization on the part of Teptyolkin, claiming the poet's cultural revival project may have been possible, except that none of their coterie were worthy of it. Teptyolkin's betrayal of his values, then, looks like a realist's inevitable capitulation to reality.

So, despite all his personal wavering – a wavering, as I have tried to show, that is definitive of *Goat Song's* depictions of Teptyolkin – the philologist presents himself as unrepentant about his cultural capitulations. He is inviting 'the unknown poet' to follow his example. Why? His argument rests on the virtues of his hybrid mode of being. This endorsement of hybridity is particularly strange in light of Teptyolkin's agonizing struggle to reconcile himself with it. Given all Teptyolkin's irresolute half-measures in embracing this hybridity – a hybridity that, by his own estimation, effaced his historical significance and life's purpose, that made him no different than a common clerk, that made self-reflection into a confrontation with nausea and disgust – why does he seem so eager to suggest this course of action to a former friend?

The text gives no definitive answers, but one may surmise that his letter is as much an attempt to convince 'the unknown poet' as it is an attempt to convince himself. Or, perhaps, Teptyolkin earnestly believes the unstable peace he has acquired is better than the poet's principled, ascetic commitment to a disappearing past. Can one surmise that Teptyolkin has genuinely come to terms with his transformation? Has his attempt to bridge two cultural modes coalesced into a genuine synthesis – one that is capable of representing a stable, uncontradictory basis for his identity? Perhaps, if only for brief moment, one might argue that Teptyolkin has found something like inner tranquility. However, even if we put more of an interpretive stake into the letter than is likely reasonable, the moment is still transient. The text leaves little evidence for such an optimistic reading, especially in light of the ending.

Death of the Clerk's Muse

Goat Song ends on its most authentically tragic note with the death of Mar'ya Petrovna. Walking together in an Easter procession, both Mar'ya and Teptyolkin are lost in their imaginations – Mar'ya thinking about the necessity of esotericism for real religious experience, Teptyolkin calling to mind a scene from his childhood. Absentmindedly, they get separated, and, equally absentmindedly, Mar'ya falls into freezing Saint Petersburg waters. Teptyolkin panics when he realizes she is not with him, but does not find her again until she is brought back to their apartment by strangers. The shock of the cold water is going to kill her. Passing away, she wants to be held by Teptyolkin, twirled around by him like a groom holding his bride, wants for Teptyolkin to take her around their room so she can touch the most commonplace household objects. Teptyolkin is bereft, and yet this does not become a pure encounter with 'the real' free

from his fantasy. He thinks of Beatrice's influence on Dante[274], and then is bothered that his frame isn't ideally masculine, that he isn't muscular enough, that his face would be better if it has a more ascetic look, that he ought to wear an ascetic's fetters, that he would be better if he had a name other than 'Teptyolkin.' When the imminent widower is trying to sound himself out a new name, any invested reader will be disgusted with Teptyolkin for neglecting his wife in her last moments for such trifling thoughts. Only after the nth complaint about how "no one thought about the Renaissance, except me," Teptyolkin again 'fell back into reality' [провалился в реальность].[275]He realizes what terrible reality his fantasies are papering over with just enough time to implore 'don't leave me' and see her fade away.

Why end *Goat Song* with Mar'ya Petrovna's death? Understood in context, there something of Shakespearean tragic maximalism in her passing. Mar'ya Petrovna was the catalyst for Teptyolkin's move away from his dream of reigniting the 'cultural phoenix.' Mar'ya is the only thing in his life that supplied him enough meaning to make the betrayal of his ideals a potentially worthy endeavor. Just at the moment Teptyolkin seems to be coming to terms with the forfeiture of his former self's most prized ambitions, the reward for making that tremendous sacrifice is lost. Teptyolkin's senseless reveries in the moments before Mar'ya's death reinvoke the same tension between fantasy and reality (in Mar'ya herself) that has psychologically hounded him for most of the novel. Of course, Teptyolkin's confused priorities suggest that he is

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[274] Galina Zhilicheva cleverly invokes the famous scene between Paolo and Francesca in Canto V of Dante's *Inferno* in her work "The Narrative Strategy of K. Vaginov's Novels." Zhilicheva's observation brings *Goat Song's* reflections on narrative and salvation into relief. Recall that Francesca faults her and Paolo's reading of an enticing romance narrative that tempts them succumb to lust, and, ultimately, their own damnation. Is Mar'ya and Teptyolkin's love story, where the woman pulls the man out of his narrative haze, an inversion of this trope? Does Mar'ya's anti-narrative pull into reality free Teptyolkin from damnation or does it damn him all the same?

[275] Vaginov, Kozlinaia pesn', 261.

still hopelessly the hybrid, that his attempts at creating a more integrated selfhood failed. Even the impending death of his wife cannot keep his mind out of the realm of the imagination.

One might argue that Teptyolkin's failure to arrive at a synthesis is simply a lack of desire for change, a fact his eternal wavering betrays. However, Vaginov paints too many vivid scenes of Teptyolkin growing frustrated with himself for this to be the easy out. These scenes betray a genuine will to change and a genuine distress at his inability to do so. These final manifestations of Teptyolkin's inattention to life are so stark that I think it plausible Vaginov sees Teptyolkin's problem as an ontological one. Teptyolkin's tragedy has a strong psychological component, and much of his suffering is precipitated by the fact that his psyche is not infinitely moldable by his will. His psychological detachment, in other words, lends itself to a fatalistic interpretation: Teptyolkin was incurable from the start. Perhaps we're even meant to doubt that Mar'ya's death was an unavoidable tragedy. If Teptyolkin had somehow adapted, if he had been paying attention to the reality around him rather than to his childhood memories, could he have prevented disaster?

Conclusion

Is Vaginov's *Goat Song* a condemnation of Teptyolkin and his intellectualism? No, I doubt that Vaginov's goal has much to do with condemnation of mind or body, fantasy or realism, Christianity or paganism, pre-revolutionary Petersburg or Soviet Leningrad. Vaginov's conclusion has more to say about the nature of tragedy – the genuine mode of tragedy that is born of terrible inevitabilities and impossible choices rather than explicit acts of evil. The tragedy of Teptyolkin's psychological hybridity is the precipitated by the sociocultural conditions of his generation, not his alone. The post-revolutionary cultural shift was such a fundamental change that it *de facto* condemned those who were integrated in the old paradigm.

Goat Song presents two ways of dealing with this dilemma: one must either try to integrate oneself to the new paradigm or refuse to do so. Both are losing strategies.

Bakhtin's comments on Lev Pumpyansky and Maria Veniaminovna Yudina, the prototype of Mar'ya, are particularly telling at this juncture. In his conversations with Viktor Duvakin, Bakhtin explains that "since [Pumpyansky] was, of course, a very exceptional man, he simply had a huge influence on Maria Veniaminovna." This was true, as Bakthin explains, in many domains of their lives, though not in matters of politics. "Pumpyansky, at the end of his life, got deep into Marxism and Communism. Well, of course, he never did become a communist, and they would have never accepted him into the Party, but he did become an inveterate Marxist [заядлый марксист] and a Stalinist. But Maria Veniaminovna, of course, felt… I wouldn't say negatively, no, but, in a word, she didn't share this with him, didn't share his views."[276]

Especially in light of what was happening to so many of Pumpyansky's non-capitulating, fellow-travelling literary peers 'at the end of his life' in 1940 (liver cancer) when he apparently became a fervent Stalinist, the price of ideological capitulation becomes especially stark. The awkward naiveté of Teptyolkin appears much more sympathetic than the callousness of a Pumpyansky that cheers Stalin through the repressions.[277]

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[276] "Shestaia beseda – 23 marta 1973 goda," in *Besedy V.D. Duvakina c M.M. Bakhtinym*, ed. N. I. Kolyshkina (Moskva: Izdatel'skaia gruppa 'Progress,' 1973), 231: "И так как он был человек, конечно, очень незаурядный, то он оказал на Марию Вениаминовну подавляющее просто влияние. Она одно время — да и не только одно время, я бы сказал, это осталось, это влияние Льва Васильевича, до конца ее дней, до конца ее дней — кое-где, хотя они, так сказать, разошлись потом, и очень далеко были друг от друга, потому что Пумпянский в конце своей жизни ударился в марксизм и в коммунизм. Ну, коммунистом он, конечно, не стал, да его и не приняли бы никогда в партию, но он стал заядлым марксистом и сталинистом, вот. Но Мария Вениаминовна, конечно, к этому относилась... я бы не сказал, отрицательно, нет, но, одним словом, не разделяла этого, не разделяла его взглядов.

[277] Though *Goat Song* is not preoccupied with the image of Maria Yudina and Mikhail Bakhtin as with Lev Pumpyansky, it is worth adding a word about their strategies for navigating Stalinism – namely, that both rejected it.

This juxtaposition raises a troubling question: is Teptyolkin in the mid-1920s an embryonic precursor to a figure like late-1930s Stalinist Pumpyansky? After all, that same irreconcilable hybridity of mind seems to explain both types. As Bakhtin says, Pumpyansky would have never been accepted into the Party. Is it implausible to think that an opportunist's desire to appear untainted by pre-Soviet cultural thought would be a potent motivator to throw oneself behind the Soviet cause, any Soviet cause, with unflinching enthusiasm? I have argued that the hybridity of Teptyolkin is grotesque because it is unintentionally comic, mentally disordered, and self-effacing. However, with the example of Pumpyansky's troubled Stalinism looming over him, the psychological pathos of Teptyolkin's neurotic hybridity is invested with much more monstrous potential.

In light of all this, a passage from *Goat Song's* afterword formally concludes Teptyolkin's story with portentous sagacity:

> The author was always trying to save Teptyolkin, though saving Teptyolkin proved out of his power. After his renunciation, Teptyolkin did not live in anything like poverty. The place he occupied in life was no small nook, never did any self-doubt seize him, and never did Teptyolkin think that he had no claim to high culture. It was not himself that he considered a lie, only his dream.
>
> Teptyolkin became much more than a minor worker in a culture club – a prominent, though stupid official. And he harvested no garden in his yard, but, on the contrary, he shouted at poor functionaries and was terribly voluble and proud of the position he'd achieved. […] But now it's time to close the curtain.[278]

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[278] Vaginov, *Kozlinaia pesn',* 266: "Автор все время пытался спасти Тептелкина, но спасти Тептелкина ему не удалось. Совсем не в бедности после отречения жил Тептелкин. Совсем не малое место занял он в жизни, никогда его не охватывало сомненье в самом себе, никогда Тептелкин не думал, что он не принадлежит к высокой культуре, не себя, а свою мечту счел он ложь. // Совсем не бедным клубным работником стал Тептелкин, а видным, но глупым чиновником. И никакого садика во дворе не разводил Тептелкин, а напротив – он кричал на бедных чиновников и был страшно речист и горд достигнутым положением. […] Но пора опустить занавес."

The real monster in Teptyolkin emerges here. If it took some imagination to get from Teptyolkin, the lonely, grieving widower, to Pumpyansky, the Stalinist – here, it takes almost no imagination at all. Vaginov, too, seems to have sensed how susceptible Teptyolkin's hybridized psyche would turn out to be to political extremism.

Looking at Mar'ya and her husband as a simple body / mind dyad, one may have expected that the death of the wife, the grounded body, would send Teptyolkin back, untethered, into the realm of spirit rather than headfirst into Soviet officialdom. The psychological insight in *Goat Song's* non-adherence to this intuition seems to be that Mar'ya's 'grounding' influence was not so much about 'the body only,' and more about the body as a means of mediation. Though it was Mar'ya's marital bed that coaxed Teptyolkin away from a life of pure mind, her cultured manner played no small part in Teptyolkin's decision to marry. She was always something of a bridge between these impulses: a sexual partner, a grounded caregiver, but also an intellect in her own right. In fact, she can be read as a mostly successful[279] synthesis of the kind Teptyolkin fails to achieve – perhaps only falling short of Kostya Rotikov and his near-universal aesthetic open-mindedness in this regard. So, what exactly was it that Teptyolkin lost in Mar'ya's death? He loses the drive to moderation, a saint of the 'middle way,' a feminine telos of personal salvation that just might make Teptyolkin's evocation of Beatrice in Mar'ya's final moments a kind of explanatory key. Even if Teptyolkin's psychological hybridity was ontological and unfixable, she helped prevent it from completely destabilizing. It's true that Mar'ya's Teptyolkin often appeared grotesque to his own imagination, felt disgust and shame as he felt himself becoming more and more indistinguishable from a Soviet commoner. But Mar'ya's Teptyolkin was pitiable, possessed of an anodyne melancholy and a hapless tragicomic nature

[279] Only 'mostly successful' because her absentminded reflections (not her body!) lead to her death.

not devoid of its own idiosyncratic charm. Without Mar'ya, Teptyolkin devolves into caricature – his well-intentioned weaknesses replaced with pride, boastfulness, and a tyrannical spirit.

Ending on a terrible note of pessimism, Teptyolkin appears more well-integrated as a tyrant than he was as a 'clerk.' With Mar'ya dead, we witness an inversion of Teptyolkin's good will. *This* Teptyolkin appears to attempt an integration of his old and new psychological impulses on the basis of a much worse decision-making heuristic. Rejecting the humility of a small life with Mar'ya, Teptyolkin conjoins the grand egotism of his former immortality project with the meanspirited careerism of Soviet bureaucracy. Paradoxically, this 'better integrated' Teptyolkin is the most terrible monster of all. Perhaps his successful transformation into a Soviet bureaucrat helps him overcome his grotesque reception of self. However, readers will recoil at the vision of how a once-harmless vessel like Teptyolkin could become host to such a soulless political lackey.

A Failed Salvation and a Grotesque Cure

'The author' shows his face in these last moments to lament: "The author was always trying to save Teptyolkin, though saving Teptyolkin proved out of his power." Could it be that 'the author' had Teptyolkin's best interests in mind from the beginning? Did he really anticipate Teptyolkin's impending transformation into a tyrant and do everything in his power to stop it? If 'the author' is giving a truthful account, pulling off his jester's mask in the novel's final moments to rattle off a few tragic lines, the implications would flip the script of all of *Goat Song.*

The telos of Vaginov's narrative looked like it might be leading to a moment of self-reckoning for Teptyolkin, a successful synthesis of his pre- and post-revolutionary modes of being. The poorly mediated incongruity between the past and the Soviet present appeared to be the conflict that called out loudest for a solution. However, if 'the author' wrote *Goat Song* and

invested it with his laughter *in order to save Teptyolkin*, then perhaps he understood just how dangerous the pull of Soviet bureaucracy would prove to be for an ambitious temperament like his. Untethered from the single-minded pursuit of grand cultural achievement in pre-revolutionary life, Teptyolkin's one-track mind may have been fated for a scaling of the new culture's hierarchy with the same zeal. Could 'the author's' laughter have been a mediation strategy all along – an attempt to goad Teptyolkin into an uneasy hybrid mode of being that, despite the discomfort, offered the best of all possible outcomes?

If so, then it is strangely fitting that in *Goat Song* – among the most resplendent specimen of grotesque modernist literature – would prescribe a grotesque hybrid mode of being as the most onerous of all medicines: it's difficult to swallow, it's disgusting, it's bitter, but it just might save you from something worse.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Purple Prose or Red Karamzin – Literature's Absurd Future 'Exposed' in Mikhail Zoshchenko's *Michel Sinyagin*

Mikhail Zoshchenko: From Short Story to Novella

In the ten-year period following the revolution, perhaps no other author was more successful at constructing the image, modeling the voice, and capturing the attention of the new Soviet subject than Mikhail Zoshchenko. The author's satirical treatments of a newly emerging Soviet *byt* from the late 1910s through the 1920s offer abundant material for scholars of the grotesque. However, his literary production becomes significantly more vital to the study of pre- and post-revolutionary literature when he explicitly places these epochs and their traditions in opposition to one another in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The defining works of Zoshchenko's output during this period are the cycle of *Sentimental Novellas* (*Сентиментальные повести,* 1928) – recently translated by Boris Dralyuk as *Sentimental Tales* – and a separate but thematically linked novella *Michel Sinyagin* (*Мишель Синягин,* 1930).[280] The latter text, the 'last word' in Zoshchenko's series of sentimentalist novellas, can be read as the apotheosis of his years-long project to perfect the poetics of the cycle.

It would be a mistake to view the move to the novella – a departure from the comic short stories that defined the early phase of Zoshchenko's writing career – as a superficial formal

[280] Though "tales" is more elegant translation, I am preserving the Russian sense of 'povesti' as novellas because it's important to my analysis that the title *Сентиментальные повести* acts as a signifier for Zoshchenko's turn away from the short story genre that dominated his early-career output.

change. Zoshchenko himself insisted that the genre shift was motivated by details of the texts' content, by the kinds of characters that work most effectively in each form:

> In their outward form, my novellas are much closer to the forms of so-called high literature. There are, I would say, more literary traditions invested in [my novellas] than in my comic short stories. […] In my novellas (*Sentimental novellas*) I exclusively take cultured man as my subject. In the short stories, I write about a simpler kind of man. The form is dictated to me by the task I have set for myself, the theme, and the type of character I will depict.[281]

In Zoshchenko's explanatory framework, the delineation between novella and short story is straightforward: the short stories deal with the 'simple man,' – in practice, a primarily an un(der)educated post-revolutionary Soviet type – whereas the novella was adapted to allow for a more traditionally literary treatment of the intelligentsia. Is this distinction actually visible in his work? Or might Zoshchenko's experiments with the novella allow him to complicate the meaning and cultural critiques embedded in his work to a level beyond what he was able to accomplish in the short story? Given that *Michel Sinyagin* represents the acme of Zoshchenko's work on the sentimental novella, an analysis of this text in particular will help to seek out an answer to this last question.

The following analysis of Zoshchenko's *Michel Sinyagin* will focus on the author's use of parody and deconstructive 'overidentification,' both devices that play a central role in the text's composition. Making sense of *Sinyagin* through the lens of parody is not itself a new approach. My analysis will attempt to make a significant contribution not in its pointing to the

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[281] Mikhail Zoshchenko, "Michel' Siniagin," in *Sentimental'nye povesti, Michel' Siniagin, Fel'etony*, ed. Iu. Tsurikhina (Moscow: Knizhnyi Klub Knigovek, 2015), 2:9: "По внешней форме, повесть моя ближе подходит к образам так называемой высокой литературы. В ней, я бы сказал, больше литературных традиций, чем в моем юмористическом рассказе. […] В повестях ('Сентиментальные повести') я беру человека исключительно интеллигентного. В мелких же рассказах, я пишу о человеке более простом. И само задание, сама тема и типы диктует мне форму."

fact of parody, but in its detailed breakdown of the underlying textual structures that generate parody, and in its diagnosis of the novella's parodic idiosyncrasies and their *raison d'être*.

Furthermore, in contrast to previous critical work on the novella, I will argue that *Michel Sinyagin* is not merely a vehicle for critiquing the intelligentsia and its cultural production. Aside from the novella's more conventional parodic treatment of Sinyagin himself, it also contains a critique of the writing of the 'red Karamzins' being called for by Soviet cultural critics in the late 20s and early 30s. This critique is achieved using an even more complex technique with parodic elements, 'overidentification.' I will show how overidentification allows for Zoshchenko to stake out a position contra the Soviet narrator in many of the same moments that the intellectual Sinyagin seems to be in the novella's critical crosshairs.

I will argue that parody and overidentification are generated in structurally similar ways to the way grotesque imagery is – through the uneasy coexistence of incompatible, incongruous elements within a single 'site.' *Michel Sinyagin* features instances of grotesque hybridization and polarization – parody tending towards the former, and overidentification to the latter. Zoshchenko's turn to the novella imbues *Sinyagin* with the formal expansiveness necessary to execute such sophisticated structural play with parody and overidentification. By allowing *both* his 'red Karamzin' and his superfluous intellectual to undergo deconstructive critique within the same textual framework, Zoshchenko reveals his concern about a cultural crossroad facing Soviet culture at the advent of the 1930s. Reading through the lens of the two grotesque modalities will bring the novella's otherwise veiled conceptual clashes and axiological suppositions into sharp relief, allowing readers to better understand the connections between the nature of Zoshchenko's cultural critique and the devices he uses to represent it.

Michel Sinyagin: An Overview

For the uninitiated, the Sinyagin plot itself is rather conventional. His life story is told by a distinctly Soviet 'author' in the form of biographical – not autobiographical – 'memoirs':

Michel Sinyagin was born in 1887, and lived for three decades in a well-educated, noble family during Russia's Imperial period. The first part of his biography describes his attempts to emulate the behavior and creative output of a post-Romantic or Symbolist poet, his youth growing up on his rich aunt's estate, and his tragic, ill-fated love affair with the peasant girl Simochka. Leaving Simochka pregnant and heartbroken, Sinyagin travels to Russia's cultural capital to find himself as a poet and artist. When he arrives, however, he becomes disenchanted by the industrialized city that is nothing like the pre-revolutionary Saint Petersburg – a flourishing, bohemian cultural hub – he imagined and idealized. Without any skills, Sinyagin is only able to find work as a bottle-washer in a factory, but he finds the job far below his sense of dignity and quits. Instead, he prefers to live off his rich aunt's money. Soon, he falls in love with Izabella Efremovna, a classic femme fatale figure who encourages Sinyagin to pawn all of his aunt's property to pay for their life together. And once Sinyagin runs out of things to pawn, Izabella leaves him, and he is reduced to begging on the St. Petersburg streets. Fondly recalling the days of his love affair with Simochka, Sinyagin decides to return to her in the provinces to beg for her forgiveness and, perhaps, to raise the child he left behind. Upon his return, he finds Simochka and his child living with Simochka's new husband who graciously and somewhat paternally finds the former poet work. Sinyagin finally finds happiness working an honest job and living in this non-traditional family unit before he abruptly dies from the flu – bringing the memoirs down with him. The end.

A Mockery of Tradition: Parodic Intertextuality in the Life of Michel Sinyagin

Marietta Chudakova, in her detailed history of Zoshchenko's poetics, proposes a comprehensive explanation for the author's shifting creative priorities in the late 20s. In her *Poetics of Mikhail Zoshchenko,* Chudakova argues that *Sentimental Novellas,* with the addition of *Michel Sinyagin*, are the result of the author turning a polemical eye back to models of pre-revolutionary Russian literature. Zoshchenko, she claims, is interested in critiquing the use of outmoded formal features utilized by the prominent pre-revolutionary authors and reexamining the over-worn motifs and character types of the period.

In Chudakova's words, neither *Sinyagin,* nor the *Sentimental Novellas* can be understood "outside of their polemical parodic aspect" [*вне полемически пародийного их аспекта*].[282] Arguing that Zoshchenko became increasingly critical about both the failure of post-revolutionary writers to dispense with vestiges of pre-revolutionary form, and the period's equally vestigial motifs and character types, she evokes a polemical passage from the author's "Literature Ought to be of the People" ("Литература должна быть народной," 1936):

> In our literature, too much attention is given to 'anxieties' and 'the reconstitution' of the intelligentsia, and too little devoted to the 'anxieties' of the new man. The former tradition of the literature of the intelligentsia continues even now, a literature whose central artistic preoccupation is the psychological anxieties of the intellectual. We need to shatter that tradition, because we cannot write *as though nothing has happened in the country*.[283]

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[282] Marietta Chudakova, *Poetika Mikhaila Zoshchenko,* ed. Sergei Bocharov (Moskva: Nauka, 1979), 121.

[283] Ibid., 70: "В наше литературе слишком много внимания уделено 'переживанию' и 'перестройке' интеллигента и слишком мало 'переживаниям' нового человека. У нас до сих пор идет традиция прежней интеллигентской литературы, в которой главным образом предмет искусства – психологические переживания интеллигента. Надо разбить эту традицию, потому что нельзя писать так, *как будто в стране ничего ни случилось.*"

Calling this statement Zoshchenko's "list of demands of modern literature," Chudakova argues the formulation in his essay is central to a correct understanding of both the underlying logic of the novella, and the author's motivations for writing it. On the basis of Zoshchenko's apparent distaste for the 'former tradition of the literature of the intelligentsia,' Chudakova is keen to polemicize Zoshchenko's contemporaries. She notes that the novella is not so much directed against Sinyagin as it is against the pre-revolutionary tradition's central literary figures and its "arsenal of literary-rhetorical tools" [*арсенал художественно-речевых средств*]. In her words, "the goal [of *Michel Sinyagin*] is not the denunciation of its protagonist, as critics thought, but the denunciation of literature."[284] The details of what Chudakova had in mind when she speaks of the 'literary figures' and 'arsenal' of pre-revolutionary literature are left intentionally vague. They are, she claims, whatever Zoshchenko understood them to be: "the arsenal as construed by the writer's own understanding."[285] She does qualify that Zoshchenko is coming to terms with 'a whole literary epoch' – "from Lappo-Danilevskaya to Blok" – so, at the very least, we can assume that she sees Zoshchenko's parodic polemic limited in scope, directed in large part against pre-revolutionary literature of the twentieth century. A close reading of the novella, then, should reveal a parodic treatment of this same epoch of Russian literature. And, in fact, there are a number of details in *Sinyagin* that support Chudakova's thesis. However, if one takes careful inventory of the many literary references within the text, her delimitation of the scope of *Sinyagin's* parodic critique artificially constrains it – for it harkens back to literature as old as Karamzin.

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[284] Ibid., 121: "Задача [*Мишеля Синягина*]— не обличение его героя, как казалось критике, а обличение литературы"

[285] Ibid.: "[…] в аспекте самим же писателем сформированного представления об этом арсенале."

Zoshchenko's novella is not particularly subtle in establishing a connection to the pre-revolutionary literary in its opening remarks on the titular protagonist. The young Michel's temperament is described in broad brushstrokes, creating a portrait, bordering on caricature, of a young decadent intellectual coming into consciousness in the midst of the Silver Age: "Michel […] was a rather sad young man, tending towards a vague melancholy, and was a little exhausted by his poetic work…"[286] And, in his poetic pursuits, young Michel was especially, "under the influence of a poet of particular genius from that era, A. A. Blok."[287] Although the stilted language of the narrator may cast doubt on the veracity of his characterization of Michel, the language of the protagonist himself reinforces the novella's parodic engagement with Symbolist tropes and motifs. The following is one of Michel's poems, a rare glimpse at the genuine Sinyagin unmediated by the text's unreliable narrator:

> For this is why the unknown lady I admire. And when
> She our unknown lady becomes known to me,
> I do not want to look upon a familiar mien,
> I do not want to give her a wedding ring.[288]

His poetry is terrible. As Michel tries his best to emulate Blok's affected desire to pursue the 'unknown lady' – a female stranger as transcendental signifier – the incongruity between his high-minded orientation and his supreme lack of poetic giftedness is markedly comic. The poor emulation produces a mere parodic shadow of Symbolist poetics – one that is primarily denigrating to Michel himself (though Symbolism itself may appear sophistic when mobilized

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[286] Zoshchenko, "Michel' Siniagin," 186.

[287] Ibid.: Мишель […] довольно грустноватый молодой человек, склонный к неопределенной меланхолии и несколько утомленный своей поэтической работой…" […] "был под влиянием исключительно гениального поэта тех лет А. А. Блока."

[288] Ibid., 190: If successful, my translation should recreate the ham-fisted execution of the original: "Оттого-то незнакомкой я любуюсь. А когда […] Эта наша незнакомка познакомится со мной, […] Неохота мне глядеть на знакомое лицо, […] Неохота ей давать обручальное кольцо…"

without Blok's considerable rhetorical skill). The young poet's penchant for Symbolism, and for Blok in particular, imbues his character with a fixation on transcendence, which informs his axiological orientation to higher, unearthly things. Later in his life, this orientation will help to explain his insistence on staying aloof from materiality and physical labor. Blok's obsession with exalted femininity – his elevation of Liubov' Dmitrievna, in particular – will also provide a behavioral model that Sinyagin will find far too demanding for him in his own relationships.

While these details help to confirm Chudakova's thesis about the novella's orientation, they only reveal one of the text's many parodic dimensions. Shifting attention away from Sinyagin and onto the novella's relatively straightforward, though reference-heavy plot suggests that Zoshchenko's parodic impulse has a significantly more expansive scope.

One of the more transparent examples of the chronological breadth of Zoshchenko's parodic targets – recalling the tragic, sentimentalist romance of Karamzin's "Poor Liza" down to the details – is the love affair between Sinyagin and the young woman Simochka. Both Zoshchenko's Sinyagin and Karamzin's Ernst are more in love with the abstract ideal of 'woman' than women themselves. Ernst's early-stage idealization of Liza as his 'angel of purity' [*ангел непорочности*] finds its analogue in Sinyagin's Blok-inspired attraction to the abstract 'unknown woman.' Furthermore, just as Ernst's first sexual encounter with Liza makes it impossible to continue his abstract idealization of her,[289] Sinyagin's sexual encounters with Simochka render their relationship too 'earthy,' 'vulgar' and 'banal' for his sensibilities.[290] The post-coital disenchantment of Sinyagin and Ernst with their respective lovers precludes the

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[289] See Nikolai Karamzin, "Bednaia Liza," in *Pisma russkogo puteshestvennika, Povesti,* ed. P. Berkov (Moskva: Leningrad: khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1964), 616: С "Лиза не была уже для Эраста сим ангелом непорочности, который прежде воспалял его воображение и восхищал душу. Платоническая любовь уступила место таким чувствам, которыми он не мог *гордиться* и которые были для него уже не новы."

[290] Zoshchenko, "Michel' Siniagin," 190.

potential of true love, to say nothing of marriage. The fate of Liza, who drowns herself out of heartbreak after being rejected by the disenchanted Ernst, is tragic like an archetypally sentimentalist love story ought to be. If Zoshchenko's reimagining of the story was just an updated Soviet copy, we'd expect to see the same tragic end awaiting Simochka. She becomes pregnant after a sexual encounter with Sinyagin, prompting him to declare that their marriage is an impossibility. However, the betrayal of Simochka turns into a parodic farce when her energetic mother threatens to jump out of a window[291] until Sinyagin concedes to her wishes and agrees to an engagement. A comic diversion leads the narrative astray, away from the banks of a Karamzinian lake.

A cursory glance over some of the first episodes in *Michel Sinyagin* reveal that the elements of intertextual literary parody – stretching as far back as Karamzin and the sentimentalist tradition – are found on just about every page of the novella. For instance, the narrator highlights a small list of Michel's favorite poets – Fet, Nadson, Blok and Esenin. The precious little that we do see of the protagonist's poetry seems to suggest that his work is a derivative amalgam of these influences. The narrator conjures up a few images of his earlier work that, among other things, combines a 'civil melancholy' [*гражданская грусть*], likely attributable to Nadson's poetics, and a preoccupation with the beauty of nature – a calling-card of many among his influences. Furthermore, when the narrator announces that "everyday M. P. Sinyagin said that he hadn't the slightest intention of hanging about [in the province], and that at the first opportunity he would move away to Moscow or Petrograd," the attentive reader will recall Chekhov's *Three Sisters* and the perennial motif of the well-to-do family suffering from

[291] One can perhaps even see in the mother's threat of suicide an equally farcical transformation of the ending to Dostoevsky's "The Meek One."

over-education and ennui on their failing estate.[292] Moreover, the breadth of the literary allusions is even emphasized by Michel's aunt, Mar'ya Arkad'yevna, who claims to have met Nadson and Lev Tolstoy on multiple occasions, and by Michel's mother, Anna Arkad'yevna, who shares the name and patronymic of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina.* And, aside from these more or less direct references, there are a number of inversions on classic scenes from the Russian canon throughout the work. For instance, when Sinyagin finally arrives in Petrograd and is condemned to thankless, unskilled work at the labor office, he distinctively resembles Akaky Akakievich in status, income, and desperate appearance. Though, Michel behaves with the egotism and self-aggrandizement of Gogol's inversion of Akaky, the 'important personage' [*значительное лицо*]. And finally, Mar'ya Arkad'yevna, the rich aunt driven out of her mind by another's pursuit of her riches, appears to hearken back to Pushkin's "Queen of Spades," but Sinyagin is less Germann and more Lizaveta Ivanovna – being used by his conniving lover so that she may enrich herself by siphoning the wealth of the family matriarch.

Although these examples constitute only a few of the intertextual references from the first several chapters of Sinyagin's life, they are meant to demonstrate that Zoshchenko's fixation on parody does not concern only early 20th century prose. Instead, the focus of his work, and thus the target of his parodic transformation, is a literary tradition that stretches from Karamzin's sentimentalism to Blok's symbolism, and a swath of major movements and canonical figures in between.

In light of the chronological breadth of the stories that are used in *Michel Sinyagin's* intertextual play, it becomes even more interesting to consider Chudakova's observation that

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[292] Zoshchenko, "Michel' Siniagin," 188: "М. П. Синягин всякий день говорил, что он ни за что не намерен торчать здесь и что при первой возможности он уедет в Москву или Петроград."

Zoshchenko seeks to parody not Sinyagin himself – or, at least, *not only* Sinyagin – but a whole tradition of literary production. Although we started with the assumption that this tradition *includes* early twentieth-century literature, it is now clear that it encompasses well over a century of aesthetic developments. When the analysis turns to a more detailed breakdown of the novella's satirical treatment of this tradition, a number of examples – in addition to those already mentioned – will further evince the expansiveness of text's repertoire of parodied motifs, including those of 'intelligent uselessness' [*умная ненужность*] and 'the superfluous man.' If Chudakova's thesis about Zoshchenko's parodic deconstruction of literature itself is accurate, then it would seem that he has set out to strip down the most fundamental traditions of the Russian literary canon. But what is Zoshchenko's motivation for doing this in 1930? Is the author of *Sinyagin* embracing the task of parting with the aesthetic vestiges of Russia's Imperial past to carve out a new, fundamentally Soviet literary path? To find an answer to these questions, one must look to understand the nature of parody itself, its function and structure as a literary device. A formal definition of parody may then present the reader with a strategy to decode exactly how Zoshchenko is employing the parodic elements of his novella, and what he might have in mind in doing so.

One finds the most seminal definition of parody in the Russian tradition in the work of Zoshchenko's contemporary, Yuri Tynianov. Recall that Tynianov theorizes that parody is a two-tiered textual system that depends on the coexistence and interaction of incompatible discursive planes: "[Parody lives] a double life: behind the layer of the work lies another layer […] 'the parodied,' or 'the object of the parody.' In parody, there is always an incongruity [*невязка*] between the two layers, a slippage between them; the parody of tragedy will be a comedy (regardless of whether that happens through an exaggeration of the tragic element

[подчеркивание трагичности] or through a swap-in of the comic) – and the parody of comedy can be a tragedy."[293] In other words, the two planes that comprise it – 'the parodied layer' and the 'parodying layer' [*пародируемое* and *пародирующее*][294] – by its own definition cause an unresolvable polarization of two incompatible textual layers (described by Tynianov with his original term that – as described in the introduction – has application in the very theory of the grotesque itself: '*невязка*,' or, 'incongruity').

To illustrate his theory through a concrete textual example from *Sinyagin,* it will be instructive to return to the scene describing Michel and Simochka's love and analyze it as a parody of Karamzin's sentimentalism. One of the textual planes that comprises the parody – the 'tragic' plane – is derived from Zoshchenko's source material, Karamzin's "Poor Liza." For the parody to work as intended, this second textual plane – the parodied layer – must be recognized 'in the background of the primary plane' (i.e., Zoshchenko's comic reworking). Given that Karamzin's story is unarguably tragic – ending in the suicide of the titular heroine – those parts of Zoshchenko's text that invoke 'the parodied layer' must call to mind these same tragic elements. For instance, we hear in Simochka's expressions of love for Sinyagin an echo of Liza's fateful love for Erast: "She loved him, touchingly, passionately, though she well understood that she, a provincial girl, was no match for him."[295] This tragic textual plane,

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[293] Iurii Tynianov, "Dostoevskii i Gogol' (k teorii parodii)," in *Sistemy,* ed. Sergei Ushakin (Ekaterinburg: Kabinetnyi uchenyi, 2016), 533: [Пародия живет] двойною жизнью: за планом произведения стоит другой план, […] пародируемый. [В] пародии обязательна невязка обоих планов, смещение их; пародией трагедии будет комедия (все равно, через подчеркивание ли трагичности или через соответствующую подстановку комического), пародией комедии может быть трагедия."

[294] To avoid confusion arising from Tynianov's use of participles here, a clarification: 'the parodied layer' refers to the layer of the text that evokes the textual system that is the target of the parody. For instance, if Don Quixote can be understood as a parody of 'the chivalric romance novel,' then 'the parodied layer' of the text are those details that are evocative of the chivalric romance tradition. 'The parodying layer' refers to those parts of the text that subvert, mock, or jest with the traditions of the chivalric romance novel. One layer *is being parodied*; the other layer *is doing the parodying.* Both layers, of course, have to be supplied by the author.

inspired by Karamzin's original, does not totally fade away from the text; the element of tragedy must still be discernable to some degree. However, as Tynianov's theory dictates, the parodied textual layer – the *пародируемый* – must come into sharp juxtaposition to the 'parodying text' – the *пародирующее*. This juxtaposition is predicated upon the stylistic incompatibility of the two planes. And Zoshchenko's parody of "Poor Liza" offers the most common kind of parodic juxtaposition – the *tragic* elements of the original Karamzin story are forced into cohabitation on the page with the *comedic* elements of Zoshchenko's reworked scene in *Sinyagin.* It is precisely from the incompatibility between the coexisting tragic and the comic textual planes that give rise to parody.

Following the logic of Tynianov's theory, then, we shall analyze the manner in which the tragic and the comic interact in this scene of *Michel Sinyagin* to try to make sense of the precise impact – perhaps even the purpose – of Zoshchenko's parody. Since we already understand that "Poor Liza" serves as the tragic foundation of the parody, we must examine the precise nature of the comic elements introduced into the text. If *Sinyagin* was modeled perfectly after a Karamzinian sentimentalism, then one would expect Sinyagin to refuse to marry Simochka after her pregnancy and meet a bitter end not long after – likely a suicide catalyzed by her own excess of grief. However, Zoshchenko's scene unfolds differently because of the *comic intrusion* of Simochka's mother into the plot. Simochka's mother is described as an energetic widow, with 'something in the range of six daughters,' who would stop at nothing to marry off her children: "She was quite energetic and successful in arranging marriages, willing to resort to all sort of clever tricks, tricks, and even insults in pursuit of her goal."[296] The reader shall see the effect of

[295] Zoshchenko, "Michel' Siniagin," 191: "Она страстно и трогательно любила его, отлично понимая, что он ей, провинциальной девушке, не пара."

this intrusion: instead of distancing himself from Simochka consequence-free after deflowering her, Simochka's mother 'coerces' him into the marriage by threatening to commit suicide should he refuse. In the poetics of Karamzin-era sentimentalism, a figure like this – a squawking, pushy widow with a hysterical, take-no-prisoners approach – would simply be *incompatible with the tragic aesthetics of the text.* And, in fact, her counterpart in "Poor Liza" is not anything like what we see in Zoshchenko's text. Compare the reaction of Liza's mother when Ernst is heading away: "Perhaps my Liza will find herself a groom that suits her. How I would thank God if you were to come to her wedding. And when Liza has children, know, sir, that you ought to be their godfather!"[297] And when the reader detects the dissonance in tone between the prototypically tragic sentimentalist story arc and its comic inversion in *Sinyagin*, the device of parody is detected, or at least intuited, by the mind of the reader.

The structural elements of Tynianov's parody conform quite readily to the grotesque's structure: the two planes that comprise it – the parodying and the parodied – bring a marked incongruity into relief. Does it follow that all parody is grotesque? No, but it is the case that nearly all parody – or any parody done competently enough to meaningfully create a dialogic incongruity between 'parodied' and 'parodying' layers – has the potential to be received as a manifestation of the grotesque. There is no guarantee that the relationality between the two textual 'layers' will cause an axiological discrepancy strong enough to be estranging or profaning. Subtle genre parody might be mischievously charming, a little comic – but no more. But Tynianov's theory of parody reserves a special place for the interplay of tragedy and

[296] Ibid.: "Она довольно успешно и энергично устраивала замуж, идя ради этого на всевозможные хитрости, угрозы и даже оскорбления действием."

[297] Karamzin, "Bednaia Liza," 618: Авось-либо моя Лиза к тому времени найдет себе жениха по мыслям. Как бы я благодарила бога, если б ты приехал к нашей свадьбе! Когда же у Лизы будут дети, знай, барин, что ты должен крестить их!"

comedy, which is also a particularly common intersection in grotesque aesthetic play. When a tragic narrative archetype, or a tragic genre is undermined, mocked, and made to illicit humor – there's already a very high chance that this 'incongruity' will be received as an expression of grotesque profanation. Though it is perhaps less common, when parody is used to transform an otherwise comic narrative archetype into something suddenly tragic – here, too, are the conditions primed for the grotesque. Not for nothing does Tynianov's article focus on the work of Gogol and Dostoevsky, two of the most skilled engineers of tragi-comic inversions in the Russian literary tradition.

As a 'rather sad young man, tending towards a vague melancholy,' and a poet with ostensibly delicate sensibilities, Sinyagin seems wholly unprepared to face the aesthetic incongruity represented by Simochka's mother's intrusion into the otherwise well-worn sentimentalist tale unfolding in his life. Like a Russian Quixote, Sinyagin is modeling his behavior and shaping his thoughts according to Russia's classic literary models. He acts as if these models have something to teach him about how an intellectual's life ought to be lived in some timeless sense, ostensibly forgetting the need to adapt to the contemporary, post-revolutionary epoch. Most often, the intertextual moments in the novella come out of Sinyagin's attempts to embody classic literary scenes or pathoses in his everyday life. Recall, for example, his fascination with the 'unknown woman' and his practiced Chekhovian ennui. Parody arises in Zoshchenko's novella, then, when Sinyagin's literary performativity is confronted with figures and forces from 'real life' – an increasingly 'unliterary' reality, it would seem – who are incompatible with the young poet's mode of living. Fitting then, that Sinyagin agrees to marry Simochka because he 'gave his mother his word that he would': "Michel, a little out-of-sorts after all the recent events, stalked gloomily around the rooms, saying that, if he hadn't given his

word, he would abandon everything and travel away to wherever the road would take him."[298] The need to continue seeing himself as an embodiment of his chivalrous and hopelessly Romantic poetic predecessors locks him (temporarily) into a mode of behavior at odds with his other desires. After some time, however, a competing 'literary' desire – wanting to life a bohemian poet's life in St. Petersburg – overpowers his will to chivalry and causes him to leave poor Simochka anyway.

In other scenes in *Michel Sinyagin*, the parodic and the grotesque arise from incongruities between comic discursive tone and the personally tragic situations described in this tone. The scene depicting Sinyagin parting ways with Simochka's mother after agreeing, under great duress, to marry her daughter provides an especially lucid example of a mismatch between the protagonist's personal tragedy and a comic discursive rendering: "Michel was down in the dumps, not knowing what to say, what to do, or how to get himself out of his misfortune. He accompanied the widow to the door, and, subjugated by her will, found himself kissing her hand to his own great surprise. […] The widow, all gleaming and victorious, left the house in silence, preliminarily powering her face and touching up her brows which had slid to the sides of her face."[299] The effect caused by the distressed protagonist being caught in a comic textual wrapping is distinctly Gogolian. Although the situation has developed in a way that immediately seems to put Sinyagin's dreams for the future in jeopardy, his personal sorrows are not at all adequately reflected on the level of the novella's language. Compare Eikhenbaum's description

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[298] Zoshchenko, "Mishel' Siniagin," 195: "Мишель, несколько сконфуженный всеми делами, угрюмый ходил по комнатам, говоря, что если б не данное слово, он наплевал бы на все и уехал бы куда глаза глядят."

[299] Ibid., 193: "Мишель стоял как в воду опущенный, не зная, что сказать, что сделать и как выпутаться из беды. Он проводил вдову до дверей и, подавленный ее волей, поцеловал даже неожиданно для себя ее руку […] Вдова, торжественно и сияя, молча покинула дом, предварительно попудрившись и подрисовав сбитые на сторону брови."

of how the grotesque is generated in Gogol's prose: "[The narrator's] personal tone, with all the devices of Gogolian skaz, definitely works its way itself into the novella and takes on the character of a grotesque grimace or facial contortion."[300] Zoshchenko, like Gogol, utilizes the incongruities between narrative voice and the content that voice is expressing to generate moments of grotesque dissonance. In the *Sinyagin* quote above, the voice of the narrator only expresses the protagonist's tragedy through stilted, idiomatic language wholly inappropriate for the occasion, (i.e., "down in the dumps," from the Russian: "*стоял как в воду опущенный*"). The kind of language that conveys the poet's early-life trials is precisely that which Sinyagin would never use to express his own emotional distress. It bears mentioning now that there is a fundamental incongruity in the 'voice,' the mode of discourse, used by the narrator and the voice we hear from Sinyagin himself. The narrator's constant attempts to give expression to Sinyagin's misfortunes creates a constant discursive tension – a discursive 'невязка,' to be sure – that runs throughout *Michel Sinyagin* and proves to be a seemingly inexhaustible supplier of grotesque incongruity.

Now that the source and effect of Zoshchenko's parodic impulse in *Sinyagin* has been more clearly elucidated, we can perhaps complicate Chudakova's thesis that 'the goal [of *Michel Sinyagin*] is not the denunciation of its protagonist, as critics thought, but the denunciation of literature.' If Sinyagin is constantly in a state of literary performance, then in many ways 'the protagonist' and 'literature' are inseparable categories. What one can say, then, is that Zoshchenko's novella suggests the long, pre-revolutionary tradition of Russian literature no

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[300] Boris Eikhenbaum, "Kak sdelana 'Shinel'' Gogolia," in *Materialy,* ed. Sergei Ushakin (Ekaterinburg: Kabinetnyi uchenyi, 2016), 494: Личный тон, со всеми приемами Гоголевского сказа, определенно внедряется в повесть и принимает характер гротескной ужимки или гримасы."

longer has the utilitarian value that Sinyagin would like it to because it no longer provides viable behavioral models (on the very risky assumption that it ever did) in post-revolutionary life. More broadly, it is clear that Zoshchenko is warning readers against performing literature as a way of living life; he reveals the deep absurdity, the foolishness, and the danger of Sinyagin's initial excess of quixotic naivete. Perhaps there is even an implicit suggestion that there would, in fact, be some value to constructing a literary tradition that contained language and characters a little more in-line with contemporary life. However, there seems to be something more fundamental missing from any analysis that sees the parodic impulse of the text as exclusively directed against pre-revolutionary writers and those among the intelligentsia who are still holding on to their old-fashioned, outdated sensibilities. That something is the yet under-addressed narrator whose 'voice' echoes through each line of the novella, coloring every described event, for better or worse, with his half-baked inventions.

The Coming of Red Karamzin: Overidentification as Deconstruction of the Narrator

The novella is structured such that the issue of narration confronts the reader from the very first pages. Even before the Sinyagin narrative – bearing the title heading *Michel Sinyagin* – there is a foreword from the point of view of the narrator, who constantly refers to himself as 'the author.'[301] In this first foreword, in the opening sentence, the reader learns that the 'author' "continued running into [Michel Sinyagin] in the course of a number of years."[302] The meeting

[301] 'The author' that appears throughout the pages of *Sinyagin* is, of course, not to be construed as Zoshchenko himself. However, given that *Sinyagin's* narrator incessantly refers to himself as 'the author,' it is important to refer to him as the same to stress this role as the text does. For the sake of clarity, Zoshchenko will always be referred to by name when mentioned, while the narrator will be referred to as 'the author,' always in single quotes. The same is done for Konstantin Vaginov's *Goat Song*.

[302] Zoshchenko, 'Mishel' Siniagin," 177.

of 'the author' with the subject of his work is not an uncommon literary happening, though it functions as a method of materializing the former by explicitly bringing attention to his existence outside the intangible realm of the textual fabric. 'The author' is not an omnipresent narrative voice whose influence on the construction and detail of the narrative is hidden. Quite the opposite, in fact.

The first foreword utilizes a number of literary strategies designed to stress that 'the author' is going to play a role in shaping the novella and its meanings. Perhaps the most glaring of these strategies is 'the author's' habit of drawing attention to his subjectivity by referring to himself directly. The following are only a few of the examples, all contained within the page-and-a-half-long foreword: "the fate of this man surprised the author very much," "for the life of such people, in the author's opinion, are, at times, also rather curious and instructive in their own way," "the author isn't trying to say that, exactly…" etc. etc.[303] Moreover, unlike an omniscient narrator whose influence over the text is intentionally shrouded, *Sinyagin's* narrator trips over himself to inform the reader that he is likely to affect their reception of the novella. 'The author' is ostensibly afraid to disappoint his audience due to his own shortcomings and authorly inexperience, noting that "of course, as much as he could, the author did his best, but, for a totally polished descriptive sheen, he didn't have the – what would you call it – the necessary tranquility of spirit and passion for random little knick-knacks and worries [переживания]."[304] Much more might be said about these self-referential remarks and self-critical assertions in *Sinyagin,* but, at the very least, the reader is given to understand that 'the author' is one of the

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[303] Ibid., 177-8: "Судьба этого человека *автора* чрезвычайно поразила" […] "Причем жизнь таких людей, *по мнению автора*, тоже в достаточной мере бывает поучительна и любопытна" […] "*Автор* не хочет этим сказать"

[304] Ibid., 178: "Конечно, сколько возможно, автор старался, но для полного блеска описания не было у него такого, что ли, нужного спокойствия духа и любви к разным мелким предметам и переживаниям."

novella's *leading roles*. The remark from the first foreword of Vaginov's *Goat Song* – added to later editions to ward off readers who would ignore the author/narrator distinction – is especially apt for *Michel Sinyagin*: "A fictional work opens up like a big-top tent – and the creator and the viewer enter there together. […] In the book, the author […]is the same kind of active participant as all the others."[305] The figure of the author warrants explication, a character in his own right – in the 'big-top' along with his characters, performing his role from the very first lines of Zoshchenko's novella.

The importance of the performative aspect of 'the author's' role in *Sinyagin* is supported by Chudakova's analysis of Zoshchenko's edits on the novella's early drafts. She notes that these edits all work towards the purpose of adding dissonances to the text, and include "many insertions, and each one of [the insertions] are in pursuit of one of two goals (or both at once): first, to elongate the phrase, to make it more wordy, second, to create tautologies, repetitions, and various kinds of inconsistencies."[306] Drawing more from Chudakova's notes, it's easy to see what she means. Here, for instance, are a few examples (all the words in italics were added in the process of revision): '"A few of them simply even cried seeing a *superfluous* flower *in a flowerbed* or a little sparrow *hopping on a heap of dung*'; 'some kind of *type of such an* abnormality'; 'and the years she's got on her, they say, *her meaning that vase, if they're not lying*, are more than two thousand'."[307] These repetitions, tautologies, and sentence-elongators

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[305] Konstantin Vaginov, "Kozlinaia pesn'," in *Kozlinaia pesn',* ed. Aleksei Dmitrenko and Elena Petrova (Sankt Peterburg: Vita Nova, 2019), 11: "Художественное произведение раскрывается как шатер – куда входят творец и зритель. […] Автор […] в книге является таким же действующим лицом, как и остальные."

[306] Chudakova, *Poetika Mikhaila Zoshchenko*, 67-68: "Много вставок, и каждая из них преследует одну из двух целей (или обе): во-первых, распространить фразу, сделать ее более многословной, во-вторых, привести к тавтологии, повторам, разного рода несообразностям."

[307] Ibid., 120: "'А некоторые просто даже плакали при виде лишнего цветка на клумбе или прыгающего на навозной куче воробушка'; 'не которая какая-то такая ненормальность'; 'и лет ей, говорят, этой вазе чего-то такое, если не врут, больше как две тысячи.'"

are, by and large, superfluous to the literal meaning of the text. But, on the other hand, the constant dissonances have a cumulative effect that substantially shifts the reader's attention to the text away from the quasi-tragic content of Sinyagin's life towards the comic form of the narration itself. The narrative voice is tripping over itself in every sentence, and the authorial anxiety that saturates the foreword about being a sub-par writer – "the author was found wanting of unconventional wit and inventiveness" – is proved justified.[308] In each case, these additions and edits impede the novella's economy of prose, pulling the reader away from the story and displacing their attention to the buffoonery of the storyteller.

Because *Sinyagin's* 'author' is so prominent a performer – as Vaginov might suggest – in the 'big-top tent' with the rest of his characters, we must examine who he is and how he stands in relation to the protagonist, Sinyagin. Perhaps the richest source of information about 'the author' can be gleaned in the introduction to the Sinyagin memoirs proper, where 'the author' makes his second appearance to expound his worldview, his understanding of the past, present, and future to his readers.[309]

Many of 'the author's' idiosyncrasies – the qualities that differentiate him from Sinyagin – can be explained by a difference in age and the varying political and sociocultural conditions of their formative years. Sinyagin, born in 1887, lived for three decades in a well-educated, noble family during Russia's Imperial period, while the narrator, born ten years later, served in World War I at eighteen and witnessed the revolution when he was approximately a twenty-year-old. While the sources of Sinyagin's ideals are ensconced in canonized literature, 'the author' seems

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[308] Zoshchenko, 'Mishel' Siniagin," 178: "У автора не нашлось особого остроумия и изобретательностию."

[309] If there was any doubt, the text gives every indication that 'the author' of the first foreword, and 'the author' of the following sections after the title header are identical. In each section the authorial figure claims the same relationship with Sinyagin, they refer to themselves in the third person, continue on about their anxiety of authorship, and continue to employ the same circumlocutory writing style.

to derive his from Soviet ideology. Though not ideology as gleaned through the Soviet canon of great philosophers, not at all through the works of Marx, Engels, or Lenin. As he himself informs us, "the author doesn't command the art of dialectics so well and isn't familiar with various scientific theories and movements…"[310] Instead, he seems to gather his principles as though from an unofficial, perhaps even unarticulated collective (read: herd) understanding of Soviet ideology. And though he seems to desire to capture the spirit of the ideology, his judgments nearly always go awry.

One of the main features of 'the author's' poor judgment – appearing so frequently as to become thematized – is his inability to make feasible claims about time and history. In one instance 'the author' conjures up an image of Soviet society one hundred years into the future, a time when the revolution's goals have come to fruition, finally bringing paradise to earth. The concept itself is ostensibly in line with Soviet ideology, the hard work and sacrifices of today's worker promises to lead to a utopian future for the coming generations. As 'the author' notes about his generation, "many didn't have a so-called personal life – they gave over all their strength and all their will for their ideas and to pursue their [collective] goal."[311] However, when 'the author' articulates a vision of that 'goal,' that great promised future, there is something amiss in his vision. The Soviet denizens of coming days – bearing highfalutin names like Andreus, Theodore – lounge on couches, snacking on candies and reading mincing poetry: "In my window rocks a lily. / I am all in delirium. / Love, love, my Idyll. / I am coming to you…"[312]

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[310] Ibid., 185. "Автор не слишком владеет искусством диалектики и не знаком с разными научными теориями и течениями…"

[311] Ibid., 181. "Многие и не имели так называемой личной жизни – они отдавали все силы и всю волю для своих идей и для стремления к цели."

In other words, 'the author' imagines that the longed-for future – brought into existence by the struggles, sacrifices, and hard work of generations of Soviet citizens – will be a society of affected, estate-dwelling hedonists. But then, excusing himself for such an improbable 'transient supposition' [минутное предположение], the author adapts his vision: "Well, actually, it's more likely that they'll be a very, how would you say it, a very hearty, succulent generation."[313] Although 'the author' has presumably realized his vision of a vulgar, hedonist, quasi-utopian future is far from the Party's ideological line, his attempt to correct his mistake is equally vulgar. Perhaps having heard something of the 'New Soviet Man' or something akin to Trotsky's ambitions to generate a 'higher social biologic type' he summarizes these ideological ambitions – in his own daft way – by evoking another paradoxically anti-utopian utopian scene, now of the beefy, well-tanned denizens (загорелые здоровяки) of an unseen future.

And even if these ideologically problematic, borderline surreal projections of the future can be dismissed on the basis of a certain historical unpredictability – who knows what the future truly holds? – his visions of the past cannot. Again 'the author' ostensibly desires to make a pseudo-ideological claim, informed by something like hearsay Marxist-Leninism, that history was equally brutal until the coming of Russia's proletarian revolution: "In every epoch up until now it was equally easy, or rather equally difficult to live."[314] His ahistorical theory of historical development is, in part, predicated on his noticing a strange detail in the figures on a two-thousand-year-old vase at the Hermitage: "The author got a closer look and – sakes alive! Well, there's a spitting image of our prerevolutionary muzhiks. Right around from 1913 or

[312] Ibid., 178-9. The original Russian sells the absurdity of the author's representation of 'Soviet poetry of the future' particularly well: "В моем окне качалась лилия. / Я весь в бреду… / Любовь, любовь, моя Идиллия, / Я к вам приду…"

[313] Ibid., 179. "А скорей всего, напротив того, будет очень такое, что ли, здоровое, сочное поколение."

[314] Ibid., 181. "В каждую эпоху пока что было одинаково легко или, вернее, одинаково трудно жить."

thereabouts. Even their clothes were the same – those wide shirts, same belts. Long tangled beards."[315] And though he is taken aback by his discovery, he has his ideological framework to fall back on to explain the two-thousand-year historical stagnation of these workers: 'they were all busy – working on behalf of others.' The blame lies firmly upon the 'former caste of intelligentsia' [бывшая интеллигентская прослойка]. Moreover, he concedes his present day has its turbulence; people must still sacrifice their strength and force of will in the fight for one of 'the author's' bizarre visions of the future. Though, nevertheless, he counters that it is easier to live in his own epoch instead of, say, the 16th century when everyday life was just a never-ending carousel of duels and defenestrations. "And that was that. It was all just in the order of things."[316] 'The author' believes that history has been equally brutal in all its many permutations; each generation simply adapts to the trauma of its own time by developing its own adaptive psychological defense system. In his words, "Every epoch has its own state of mind."

Along with the 'the author's' attempts – catastrophic failures as they may be – to infuse a degree of Soviet ideology, of historicized 'class consciousness' into his work, he also preemptively defends his choice to write about a member of the intelligentsia like Sinyagin. And his defense is based on his peculiar understanding of time and history, his understanding of the *present* historical moment. Aware that his reader may "might well call the author a swine" for the focus on Sinyagin and his private concerns – after all, personal matters like this "do not even play a role in the complex mechanism of our day" – the memoirs are justified because they mark

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[315] Ibid., 185. "Автор поглядел поближе – батюшки светы! Ну, прямо наши дореволюционные мужики. Ну, скажем, тысяча девятьсот тринадцатого года. Даже костюмы те же – такие широкие рубахи, подпояски. Длинные спутанные бороды […] Заняты были – работали на других."

[316] Ibid., 181. "И ничего. Все в порядке вещей было." […] "Каждая эпоха имеет свою психику."

the conclusion of all the past epochs.[317] Given what is known about the narrator's conception of history, it would appear that the revolution marks the only event ever that has catalyzed a real potential for change. Present historical conditions have not yet fully risen out of the placid, near-eternal quagmire of history and the dimly imagined promise of future happiness has not yet been made manifest. But the author seems to think things are looking up, for if he lived at any other point in the past: "[The author] would have lived out his whole life behind locked doors, right up until our time."[318] Within the logic of his mental paradigm, one can – foggily, at least – understand 'the author's' motivation for saying so. If his conception of history seems vaguely dictated by the Marxist doctrine that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles," it is only recently, with the Russian Revolution, that humanity finally started the battle for a more equitable, classless society.[319] Who knows what horrible death he would have died in epochs past?

With these details of the historical consciousness of 'the author,' a more complete image of his 'type' begins to take shape. Though his words are constantly sound of a distorted Marxist slant, one cannot in good conscience call him 'ideologically informed,' or in any real sense 'ideologically motivated.' He is aware of the increasing ubiquitousness of Soviet ideology in literature, aware of a pressure to adapt his content to the principles of Marxist discourse. So perhaps, in a word, one might do 'the author' the favor of calling him 'ideologically aware,' or 'ideologically adaptive.' It is another issue entirely that he wields ideology awkwardly and

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[317] Ibid., 180. "[Читатель] может просто обругать автора свиньей" […] "[личные дела] даже и не играют роли в сложном механизме наших дней."

[318] Ibid., 182. "[Автор] бы всю жизнь и прожил бы взаперти, вплоть до нашего времени."

[319] Karl Marx, "Communist Manifesto" [1848], Marxists, Marxists Internet Archive. last revised 2010: 14, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf.

haphazardly. He has no sense of history, understanding the past with the same remarkable fogginess as he intuits the future; he is essentially moored in the present. And being that he is lost in time, he operates only on his own memory and is severely limited by its limitations.[320] It is no surprise, then, that he provides the reader with prose in the form of 'memoirs.'

Though imbued with inadequate authorial imagination and intuition, 'the author' is still an author. As demonstrated in the analysis of his protagonist Sinyagin, 'the author' tries to adapt his subject's life to the plots of the Russian classics. While Sinyagin is unequipped to face the modern world, relying on outmoded behaviors and knowledge frameworks from late-Romantic to Symbolist poets, the author – borrowing tropes from traditions as old as Karamzin's Sentimentalism – is perhaps even more hopelessly outdated in his appropriation of literary models. And though he all but plagiarizes whole scenes, his work is still demonstrably inferior to the originals by almost any parameter of quality imaginable. If Zoshchenko is merely trying to craft a satirical takedown of holdover post-revolutionary intellectuals with *Michel Sinyagin*, then why instill doubt in the legitimacy of his claims with such an unreliable narrative vehicle? Why invite the reader to dwell with the narrator for so long, and in such detail? Why obscure the trials of Michel Sinyagin scene by scene with 'the author's' linguistic and artistic infidelities?

Zoshchenko's description of his stylistic aims in "About Myself, Critics, and my Work"– published in Academia's *Masters of Contemporary Literature* series ("О себе, о критиках, о своей работе," Мастера современной литературы, 1928) – supports the notion that 'the author' in Sinyagin warrants such a detailed interpretation. Zoshchenko suggests that his narrators – those in the *Sentimental Novella* cycle – are manifestations of a parodic impulse.

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[320] Recall that 'the author' struggles to talk about Sinyagin's childhood and youth because he cannot remember any of it: "Поскольку автор был моложе М. П. Синягина лет на десять, то ничего такого путного автор и не может сказать об его молодых годах вплоть до 1916 года" (Zoshchenko, *Mishel' Siniagin*, 183).

This is an impulse similar to that which lay at the foundation of Sinyagin's portrayal. A similar impulse, but not an identical one. While the Sinyagin 'type' had been constructed from a system of literary motifs, dispositions, and behaviors, Zoshchenko explains that the 'type' of his *Sentimental-Novellas*-era narrators are figures that do not even seem to exist yet:

> The fact is that I am a proletarian writer. Or rather, with my work I parody that imaginary, though authentic proletarian writer whose existence is made possible by the current conditions of life and the current environment. Of course, such a writer cannot really exist, at least not now.[321]

Zoshchenko simultaneously calls himself a proletarian writer but adds that it would be truer to say that when he constructs his novellas, he becomes the parodic version of one. But further – and this is the most important detail – he claims to parody a proletarian writer *who does not currently exist*, who *exists only in the imagination*, but who very well could spring up given the contemporary conditions of life. On its face, the non-existence of this proletarian writer seems to defy the basic Tynianovian premise of parody – that there needs to be a 'thing that is parodied,' a 'пародируемый.' If the target of the parody is unrecognizable, then the textual layer doing the parodying itself, the 'пародирующий,' is doomed to fail. Furthermore, what does it mean that Zoshchenko's parodic narrators are based on figures that do not exist – or, put even more strongly, *cannot* exist at the current historical moment – but might still be considered 'genuine' or 'authentic'? And finally, if this type of writer does not exist, then what might serve as the basis for Zoshchenko's imagined features and characteristics of this figure?

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[321] Mikhail Zoshchenko, "O sebe, o kritikakh, o svoei rabote," in *Mikhail Zoshchenko,* eds. Boris Kazanskii and Iurii Tynianov (Leningrad: Academia, 1928), 11: "Дело в том, что я – пролетарский писатель. Вернее, я пародирую своими вещами того воображаемого, но подлинного пролетарского писателя, который существовал бы в теперешних условиях жизни и в теперешней среде. Конечно, такого писателя не может существовать, по крайней мере сейчас."

Since we know Zoshchenko is modelling a *proletarian* writer specifically, I will look to the era's active polemics surrounding the construction of a new proletarian culture, and a new generation of proletarian writers to join its ranks. What kind of writers were they calling 'proletarian'?

Trotsky provides an answer in his famous work of cultural commentary and criticism *Literature and Revolution* (*Литература и революция*, 1924). In it, he argues that those wishing to contribute to post-revolutionary Soviet culture ought to study from Russia's classics. Praising the approach of the poet Demyan Bedny, Trotsky makes his case for the classics-focused approach to new literature: "Demyan Bedny does not seek new forms. He even emphasizes the fact that he uses the sacred old forms. But they are resurrected and re-born in his work, as an invaluable mechanism for the transmission of Bolshevist ideas."[322] Trotsky was hardly the only influential cultural critic to hold this position as the 1920s rolled on, and as the demand for a plan of development for proletarian literary models increasingly became a cultural necessity.

Another influential critic, Leopold Averbakh, one of the leaders of the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers or RAPP, also held that the proletarian writers that would replace their bourgeoise counterparts should 'study from the classics.' In fact, the phrase ('учеба у классики') became so central for RAPP that it became one of its principal slogans. And, in his *Contemporary Literature and Questions of the Cultural Revolution* (*Современная литература и вопросы культурной революции*, 1928), Averbakh goes further to clarify what it means for the proletarian writers to study from the Russian language's greatest artists: "For me, the classics

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[322] Leon Trotsky, "Literature and Revolution," Marxists, Marxists Internet Archive, Last revised June 2007, https://www.marxists.or g/archive/trotsky/1924/lit_revo/ch06.htm.

are those works whose meaningful ideas, reflecting the essence of their epoch, are refracted in living, breathing images in a psychologically deep and completely artistic manner."[323] Comparing Averbakh's formulation to the style of 'the author' of *Michel Sinyagin*, one finds the obvious parallel of the latter's version – at times bordering on plagiarism – of scenes of classical literature. What's more, 'the author' ostensibly does his best to accomplish these other goals as well. For instance, the author notes quite plainly that he hopes to reflect the essence of his own epoch, 'summing up life in the past' – and marking both the advent of the post-revolutionary vector of historical development through his description of Sinyagin's humbling transformation, and the end of his breed of intellectual.

In light of these correspondences between his own writing practice and Trotsky and Averbakh's influential ideals for the future of literature it would seem that 'the author' is – if good intentions count for anything – the ideal representative of an emerging generation of proletarian writers. So then why is he so patently absurd and comic in Zoshchenko's novella? The answer would seem to *arise from a persistent excess* that accompanies the narrator's every feature and every literary flourish. There is a need for proletarian writers to replace the bourgeoise intelligentsia? 'The author' embodies the former group in both class origins and language, not to mention subtly thematizing his own replacement of Sinyagin in the novella. The demand is for writers who have studied the prose of the classics, and *Sinyagin's* narrator has ripped scenes directly from them. Soviet culture demands its writers be focused on their own epoch, and the narrator is so deeply rooted in the present that he is literally incapable of

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[323] Leopol'd Averbakh, *Sovremennaia literatura i voprosy kul'turnoi revoliutsii* (Moskva-Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1928), 78, https://viewer.rusneb.ru/ru/000199_000009_008234822?page=5&rotate=0&theme=white. "Для меня классики – это те, кто значительные идеи, отражающие сущность их эпохи, психологически-глубоко и совершенно художественно преломляют в живых и живущих образах."

imagining the past or the future. The narrator has all the features he ought to, but – and this is essential – each of these features are expressed in excess which fundamentally alters the reader's perception of them.

Zoshchenko's Parodic Strategy

To understand the function and the effect of Zoshchenko's parody, and to continue to search for the meaning of his notion that he is 'parodying a genuine, but non-existent proletarian writer,' it seems that one first must make sense of this constant *excess*.

The theoretical tenants undergirding Zoshchenko's ostensibly paradoxical claims about the function of his parodic prose are quite similar to the elements of the parodic strategy called 'over-identification' as described by the cultural philosopher Slavoj Žižek. To understand the connection between Žižek and Zoshchenko, a short explication of the former's 1993 essay, "Why are Laibach and NSK not Fascists?" is necessary. Žižek is writing on the Slovenian music group Laibach who radically adapted their performative aesthetic to capture fascist, totalitarian, and nationalist tropes and motifs. They were explicitly seeking to eliminate any distance between themselves and the discourses they embody. Laibach sought to embody fascism as fully and faithfully as possible. Žižek wants to demonstrate that their approach is a form of criticism, and that this kind of approach is actually a better critique of fascism than those forms of criticism keeping an ironic distance from the discourse. (For this analysis, fascism is not the focus – but rather, the form of critique that tries to eliminate ironic distance.)

Žižek argues that political systems, and ideological systems more broadly, operate on a public, articulated, and/or written set of laws and rules that loosely circumscribe the public expression of the particular ideology. These public, articulated, written rules are not exhaustive, however, because the systems also have a secondary set of unwritten rules that are intuitively

divined by those living under the ideology through their understanding of the 'spirit' of that ideology. If the comprehensive logic of a particular ideological system is well-enough understood, its logic can be extended to derive new rules and behaviors that are all still within the 'spirit' of the system. Though these 'secondary rules' are not manifest in the system's official written set of rules, they are tolerated – perhaps even encouraged – precisely because they conform to the unarticulated 'spirit' of the ideology.

Because the secondary rules capture the ideology's 'spirit,' Žižek – thinking in psychoanalytical terms – labels them the 'superego' of the ruling ideology. Since an ideology's 'superego' can often reveal its most absurd, outrageous, morally damning, and unethical elements, acts that are expressive of this unarticulated ideological spirit are most often carried out away from the sight of the general public – at night, behind closed doors, only among coteries of likeminded individuals.

In the broader public forum – during the 'daylight hours' – the ideological system relies on the fact that its adherents observe the written law and maintain a certain distance from the potent and often absurd, obscene spirit – or 'superego' – of the ideology. He argues that a certain amount of distance from the dominant ideological discourse is simply part and parcel to the discourse itself. In his words, "What if this distance, far from posing any threat to the system, designates the supreme form of conformism, since the normal function of the system requires cynical distance?"[324] Žižek proposes that an elimination of this distance – embodying an ideology's superego in 'the light' or in a public forum – is far more transgressive because it is not accounted for by the system, and brings the ugly truth of the ideology's hidden face to the

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[324] Slavoj Žižek, "Why are Laibach and NSK not Fascists?" in *A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s,* eds Laura Hoptman and Tomaš Pospiszyl, 287, https://monoskop.org/images/b/b9/Primary_Documents_A_Source book_for_Ea stern_and_Central_European_Art_Since_the_1950s_2002.pdf.

surface: "The strategy of *Laibach* [i.e., the performance of radical fascism/totalitarianism] appears in a new light: it 'frustrates' the system (the ruling ideology) precisely insofar as it is not its ironic imitation, but overidentification with it – by bringing to light the obscene superego underbelly of the system, overidentification suspends its efficiency"[325]The individual performing 'overidentification' with an ideological system becomes the embodiment of a deep, often displeasing or even damning *truth* about the psychological underpinnings of the system itself. Often, the only visible difference between the ideological adherent and the 'overidentifying' performer is that the latter allows himself to manifest the ideology's unarticulated 'spirit' out in the open, 'in the light of day,' so that others may bear witness to it. The overidentifying performer can act as a mirror to ideological adherents and even whole societies living under these ideological systems, revealing an underside to the system much more absurd, dangerous, and/or irrational than the people are accustomed to seeing.

'Overidentification' is an extreme manifestation of the more general phenomenon of 'subversive affirmation,' or – as defined in Inke Arns's and Sylvia Sasse's seminal article on the technique – "an artistic/political tactic that allows artists/activists to take part in certain social, political, or economic discourses and to affirm, appropriate, or consume them while simultaneously undermining them."[326] In all forms of subversive affirmation, and especially in 'overidentification' – "the ultimate form" of the technique – "there is always a surplus which destabilizes affirmation and turns it into its opposite."[327] Given the simultaneous and paradoxical

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[325] Žižek, "Why are Laibach and NSK not Fascists?" 287.

[326] Inke Arns and Sylvia Sass, "Subversive Affirmation. On Mimesis as Strategy of Resistance," in *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe,* eds. Irwin (Cambridge: MIT Press / London: Afterall, 2006), 445, http://www.inkearns.de/wpcontent/upload s/2011/01/2006_Arns-Sasse-EAM-final-book.pdf.

[327] Arns and Sass, "Subversive Affirmation. On Mimesis as Strategy of Resistance," 448, 445.

presence of affirmation and rejection, it is important to recognize that the technique of 'overidentification' has the appropriate radical high/radical low structural incongruity to generate the grotesque in its polarized modality.

When the seemingly paradoxical nature of Zoshchenko's narratorial strategy is analyzed through the lens of Žižek's overidentification device, the answers to a number of the questions raised in the course of the textual analysis come into focus. Recall Zoschenko's self-diagnosed method: "I parody that *imaginary, though authentic* proletarian writer whose *existence is made possible* by the current conditions of life and the current environment."[328] Earlier, the question was raised about how a narrative parody might function if the target of parody [пародируемое] is *imaginary*. This strategy is possible precisely because the narrator that Zoschenko targets is not a product of pure imagination; as he says himself, it's a figure that very well could have arisen given the conditions of contemporary life. Not only could such a figure have existed in late 1920s, but, as seen in Averbakh's and Trotsky's manifestos, such a figure was actively being called for by leading Soviet cultural critics. The narrator Zoshchenko describes, then, is a figure projected into existence through an examination of the "current conditions of life and the current environment," his understanding of the direction culture seemed to have been heading. In other words, Zoshchenko's narrator is not taking the shape of any figure that exists *per se,* but instead exists – in Žižek's terms – as the embodiment of the 'obscene superego' of the contemporary Soviet ideological context. More specifically, he takes the logic of RAPP, embodies it through his narrator, and extends it uncomfortably far. This way it is entirely conceivable for his parodic narrator to be simultaneously '*imaginary, though authentic.'*

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[328] Zoshchenko, "O sebe, o kritikakh, o svoei rabote," 11.

False Choices and Grotesque Futures: The Implication of Sinyagin's Dual-Deconstruction

Conceiving of 'the author' as Zoshchenko's overidentification with the proletarian writer proscribed to the future begins to reveal the text's central concerns and contradictions, allowing the reader to finally get to the heart of the work's meaning. It has long been clear that the author is an inadequate storyteller. But, when he is read as the embodiment of an emerging cultural project built with the intention of instating the proletariat as the inheritors of Russia's cultural legacy, the theoretical consequences for the narrator's inadequacies increases significantly. Zoshchenko's parodic overidentification with RAPP's theory of the emerging proletarian writer – a figure of central importance to their cultural ambitions in the Soviet Union – places the feasibility of their entire project into question. After all, how can a group with an insufficient understanding of history and culture, not to mention precious little literary talent, carry forward the complex tradition represented by 'the classics'? The implication is, of course, that they simply cannot, and that all the theorizing about the proletariat's cultural hegemony emerging from a number of competing writer-enthusiasts with humble backgrounds who will finally – now freed from their labor bonds – emerge to take the throne away from giants like Karamzin, Chekhov or Tolstoy is simply that: empty theorizing.[329]

In that case, it might be tempting to turn back to Michel Sinyagin, to look at the dynamic between Sinyagin and 'the author' as representing a necessary choice between two possible behavioral models and models of cultural development. What of the fact that the literary production of the pre-revolutionary intellectual, not to mention their habits and rituals, look tragi-comically out of place in the new era? Recall both Sinyagin's awful post-Romantic/Symbolist poetry, and his absolute failure to adapt to the new conditions of life. Might

[329] Avebakh, Sovremennaia literatura i voprosy kul'turnoi revoliutsii, 80-90.

one still find them a better alternative to the uneducated, uncultured proletarian authors? Perhaps, but the choice between them – assuming the cultural movement to enthrone the proletariat writer could yet be rerouted – still remains a rather damning catch-22.

The grotesque is perhaps felt most palpably in *Michel Sinyagin* at this point, when the reader ostensibly faces an impossible choice both between two dismal cultural futures, and two unviable, unlivable behavioral models. Moreover, this opposition is no trivial feature of the novella, instead emerging as the very constructive principle of Zoshchenko's novella. The structural makeup of the book is divided between 'the author's' opening comments about himself, and the following memoirs centering Michel. Even on the level of the sentence – the tension between Sinyagin and 'the author' is unmistakable. It oscillates between the former's desire to express his post-Romanic and Symbolist heroes' rhetoric and manner of being, and the latter's attempts to shoehorn his memoirs into 'classic' literary forms.

Michel Sinyagin presents readers with two repelling images and presents no third. Sinyagin and the narrator are the representatives of two diametrically opposed modalities of behavior, literary style, authorship, and cultural development. As the reader ponders the advantages and disadvantages of the Sinyagin-intellectuals or 'the author'-esque proletarians, the vision of the future that faces them is not unlike the vision that emerged from 'the author's' imagination. Culture will either be – perhaps in the *best* case – in the hands of the mincing, affected, and utterly vulgar Michel Sinyagins of the new world. Or, in the other case, the grand Soviet cultural project will fall to the emerging proletarian writers as epitomized by the narrator, complete with no sense of style and a-historical imaginations. Zoshchenko ostensibly leaves the reader with no viable prospects for the future.

Conclusion: Finding the Grotesque in Parody and Overidentification

The bleak vision of emerging Soviet culture is a product of Zoshchenko's critique of Sinyagin and 'the author' as models of literary practice and behavior through the use of parody and overidentification. As I have suggested, both of these devices have the appropriate structural elements to generate grotesque literary affect. And, in this way, each device is capable of profaning and deconstructing its subject. Recall that Sinyagin becomes the target of Tynianovian parodic deconstruction when his performance of the classic Russian tragedies is interrupted by the insertions of aggressively 'non-literary' figures that cast the scenes in a comic light. The incompatible dual presence of the tragic and comic textual planes evokes a discursive grotesque effect, recalling Eikhenbaum's dissection of Gogol's work. And the narrator, as Zoshchenko's blatant overidentification with the 'proletarian writer' of the future, also undergoes a deconstruction. In being so excessively beholden to the theoretical principles predicating his existence, he becomes the embodiment of their unviability. Through the radical incompatibility of his simultaneous affirmation and negation of the future's 'Red Karamzin,' he emerges as another grotesque figure, another carrier of unfeasible ideological principles. The conflict of these figures, put forth as a theoretical choice between two absurd visions of the future, act as a broader, structural source of grotesque polarization within *Michel Sinyagin.*

Yuri Lotman's article '"A Man Like Many Others' and 'An Exceptional Personage'" ('Человек, каких много' и 'исключительная личность') offers a penetrating framework with which to analyze this seemingly impossible, theoretical choice for Soviet cultural development. Although Lotman is writing on the development away from Romanticism to Realism in the first half of the 19th century, his model grafts well onto the shift away from the very last vestiges of Late-Romanticism/Symbolism to the emergence of Socialist Realism around the time of *Michel*

Sinyagin's genesis. He writes that the process of cultural rejection of the romantic tradition often involved 'exposing' the tradition's hero by bringing him outside of literature and writing him into a situation more closely resembling 'real life': "A character led into reality continued to be imbued with the qualities of a creation of literature, unable to break out of the bounds of the imaginary and adequately react to reality."[330] The analogue in *Sinyagin* is, of course, the titular protagonist. Lotman suggests that this plot typically ends with one of two possible resolutions: either life is revealed to be vulgar and incapable of meeting the protagonist's high, idealistic standards, or these same ideals are shown to be worthless due to their baselessness in reality.

In Sinyagin's case, the second description can be applied wholesale. The trials of his post-revolutionary life – learning, for example, that he even is unfit to be a bottle washer – reveal the fundamental foolishness of trying to escape 'the real,' which grinds away Sinyagin's idealism until nothing of it remains. Although Sinyagin's unenviable fate hints at the benefits of having some basis in reality, one can also not say that 'realism' is an infinite good in the text's implied axiological system. Lotman suggests that the attempt to dispense with the 'literariness of literature' – marked in part by, as is extremely relevant for *Sinyagin*, a move from the figure of the 'writer' (and his fiction) to the figure of the 'memoirist' (and his memoirs) – is another telling moment in this break from Romanticism to Realism. He suggests that the literature most often suggests that attempting an 'escape from art' is futile and bound only to lead to the reaffirmation of the importance of art and 'literariness.' As one quickly realizes, life by itself is unable to reveal the true nature of its own qualities without its 'artistic double'.[331] And in this

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[330] Iurii Lotman, "Chelovek, kakikh mnogo' i 'iskliuchitel'naiia lichnost': *Problemy tipologii russkogo realizma,"* in *O russkoi literature,* eds. N. G. Nikolaiuk and O. N. Nechipurenko (Sankt-Peterburg: Iskusstvo, 1997), 743. Введенный в действительность персонаж оставался наделенным чертами создания литературы, не способного вырваться за пределы вымысла и адекватно реагировать на реальность."

[331] Lotman, "Chelovek, kakikh mnogo'" 745.

observation Lotman also proves insightful; the narrator's move to realism in his attempt to depict Sinyagin's life only leads him to lean more heavily on the literary models of the past. In this way, Lotman's analysis reveals that both life and art resist the imposition of polarization in their own way, and – more importantly – suggests that the theoretical choice underlying *Michel Sinyagin,* between the titular character's intellectualism and 'the author's' proletarianism, is a false, unrealizable one.

Given that grotesque modalities emerge in all of *Michel Sinyagin's* central literary devices, they appear to be not only thematized by Zoshchenko, but employed as the novella's constructive principle. In each of its permutations, grotesque polarization and hybridization produce bizarre, absurd, and outright grotesque results; it is not at all presented as an effective analytic, aesthetic or philosophical tool. In the analysis of pre-revolutionary grotesque literature, it becomes clear that polarized systems are unstable, and that maintaining their polarization often leads to absurd, dangerous, or even cataclysmic consequences when the system inevitably undergoes a correction. The same is true in Zoshchenko's fundamentally *post*-revolutionary novella. But while pre-revolutionary literature was entranced by the perception of an approaching apocalypse and accordingly fixated on the (dis)harmonization of 'order and chaos,' Zoshchenko's novella is much more interested in raising questions about *how things should be ordered, by which cultural or behavioral principles, according to which ideology.* In *Sinyagin,* Zoshchenko reveals that the personal and cultural temptation for polarized thinking still plagues contemporary political and cultural discourse, still presents the dangerous temptation for all-or-nothing thinking.

CHAPTER FIVE:

Producing Bodies / Consuming Bodies – Violence and the Sacred in Andrei Platonov's *Juvenile Sea*

Introduction

Andrei Platonov's *Juvenile Sea (Sea of Youth)* (*Ювенильное море* [*Море юности*], 1931) is a novella that tells a fictional account of life on Russia's far-eastern steppe in the early 30s. Written in later half of 1931 as part of a paid expedition to a sovkhoz in Srednevolzhsky Krai, *Juvenile Sea* – originally titled *The Steppe Affair* (*Степное дело*) – recounts the story of an impassioned band of workers trying to overcome kulak subversives and fix their dysfunctional, mismanaged collective farm on the periphery of the Soviet state. The deceptively simple premise conceals the complexity of the novella's rich network of images and its unmistakably Platonovian treatment of the era's political aims and pathologies. Even among Platonov's repertoire of strange books, *Juvenile Sea* stands out for its mutant vision of Soviet reality, a reality steeped in the Party's mythologies.

The majority of the novella's early reviews express a mix of appreciation of the writer's artistry and a bewilderment at the outlandish machinations of the plot. Though Platonov's stylistic talent earned him near-universal praise, its opaque political and ideological aims doomed his work to the drawer. The Vice-Chairman of the Society for Soviet Writer-Ethnographers, P. Skosireva, saw *Juvenile Sea* as plainly out of step with the almanac meant to carry it: "The [novella's] system of images allows one to pronounce *The Steppe Affair* an artistic success for Platonov. But nevertheless, it will be impossible to publish it in the [Writer-Ethnographers'] almanac. Above all, it lacks all the elements that constitute a genuine

ethnographic literary work [краеведческое произведение]."[332] Vsevolod Ivanov's private reaction to the novella was captured in a contemporary's memoir: "I've just read a new book. Platonov's. […] Again with the anarchism. It's done well, but what the hell. There's no Party, no Soviet state, just some sovkhoz..."[333] The critic O. Reznik wrote the most detailed and damning critique of them all:

> The novella is dedicated to one of the most important negative phenomena in our lives – opportunism. […] [However,] the novella reflects the usual mistake in the work of Platonov (in recent years). Isolated problems, ills of our apparatus, and negative phenomena in life are overemphasized to such an extent that they create the general impression of a thoroughly damaged system. All considered, the hyperbolism of his generalities and desecrations deleteriously generates the objectively slanderous character of the novella. It reads like a vile and false satire of reality.[334]

Given the tone of the novella's critical reception, it is perhaps unsurprising that *Juvenile Sea* was not released in Russia until 1986, appearing in the journal *Znamia.*

Reznik's note about the hyperbolic nature of the novella's images and its treatment of the era's political conditions already hints at exactly why Platonov's novella is such a lively Petri dish of grotesque imagery. My treatment of *Juvenile Sea* functions is an extended analysis of one of the text's most prominent grotesque forms, the grotesque body, including Platonov's idiosyncratic variations on the trope and its broader impact on the political messaging of the text.

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[332] Duzhina, N. I. and N. V. Umriuchina. Commentary to vol. IV-1 of *Sochineniia.* Edited by N. I. Duzhina. (Moskva: IMLI RAN, 2020), 592: " Система образов позволяет говорить о 'Степном деле' как о художественной победе Платонова. Но тем не менее печатать ее в альманахе нельзя. Прежде всего, она лишена всех элементов, образующих подлинно краеведческое произведение."

[333] Ibid., 591-592: "…Читал вот новую вещь Платонова. Анархизм опять. Талантливо, но черт те что. Ни партии, ни советской власти, совхоз какой-то…"

[334] Ibid, 195: "Эта повесть посвящена одному из важнейших отрицательных явлений нашей жизни—оппортунизму. […] …На этой повести со всей яркостью сказалась обычная для творчества А. Платонова (последних лет) ошибка. Отдельные недостатки и язвы нашего аппарата, отрицательные явления жизни столь выпячены, что в общем создают картину сплошной бракованности всей системы, Этот гиперболизм обобщений и нанизываний отрицательного создает в итоге объективно пасквилянтский характер повести."

But before any of those more specific concerns can be addressed, it's important to have clarity on the text's structure and plot.

Juvenile Sea: A Brief Plot Summary

Juvenile Sea begins when the melancholic, hopelessly idealistic electrical engineer Nikolai Vermo arrives at his assigned post in an underperforming meat-producing sovkhoz on the south-eastern Russian steppe. Vermo's utopian dreams of instrumentalizing electricity to terraform Earth into a fertile paradise, and his desire to catalyze a 'proletarian cosmogony,' are at odds with the retrogressive reveries of Umrishchev, the aging director of the sovkhoz. Umrishchev, who longs for the distant era of Ivan the Terrible, whose thoughts keep him out of the present, drifting either "a hundred years into the future, or just as many into the past," is the novella's hapless minor antagonist.[335] Though he is no evil genius, his self-professed 'opportunism' and anti-interventionalist approach – his catchphrase is 'stay out of it!' [*ne suisia*!] – are understood to be major obstacles standing between the sovkhoz and its hallowed meat-production quotas.

Juvenile Sea does feature more shrewd antagonists in the form of kulak subversives and their minions. These (almost cartoonishly) devious villains suffocate cattle from neighboring farms by lodging potatoes into their throats, or clandestinely swapping sick, starving animals from their own herds for the sovkhoz's hearty, healthy specimen. When a milkmaid, Aina, uncovers the subversives' plot and tries to report it to local Party officials at the regional center, she is caught, raped, and dragged back to the sovkhoz by the kulaks' inside man – Bozhev,

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[335] Andrei Platonov, *Iuvenil'noe more (More iunosti),* in *Sochineniia,* ed. N. I. Duzhina, IV-1:176 (Moskva: IMLI RAN, 2020): "на сто лет впереди или на столько же назад."

another of the novella's antagonists. Aina explains everything to her younger brother and hangs herself. Aina's suicide finally catches the attention of the local Party, who execute Bozhev and relieve the negligent Umrishchev of his directorial duties.

Even with Bozhev out of the picture, the sovkhoz is plagued by ongoing sabotage and material shortages preventing Vermo and the others from developing the infrastructure necessary to increase livestock production. Enter Bostaloeva, the novella's main heroine, imbued with the inexhaustible energy, the infinite appetite for pro-Communist undertaking, and the unabashedly sexualized materiality that defines a great many of Platonov's women. She travels to the regional center – penniless but impassioned – to procure the building materials necessary to achieve the sovkhoz's production quotas. Not only is Bostaloeva able to warm the cold hearts controlling the regional bureaucratic apparatus with her feminine charms and obtain the supplies, she also finds a dormant electric dynamo-generator to send back to Vermo to power his engineering wonderworks.

In Bostaloeva's absence, her elderly sidekick Federatovna – another impassioned battle-axe of a woman, lent a second lease on life by her fervent adoption of Soviet political ideals – is left to lead the sovkhoz. A glitch in the bureaucracy sees Umrishchev rehabilitated and assigned to a leadership role in the management of a neighboring cattle herd. But Federatovna, his aged ideological foil, manages to overcome his opportunistic incompetence – achieving victory over the remaining forces of kulak subversion that Umrishchev is too naïve or politically unconscious to notice. Of particular note is the death of one 'Comrade Sacred,' a monstrous envoy of the kulak class, who emerges from the shadows for a brief moment to take the blame for the sovkhoz sabotage before being killed.

When Bostaloeva returns from the regional center, the sovkhoz is unrecognizable after having undergone a technological and infrastructural facelift. With the help of Opredelyonov, Secretary of the Regional Committee, the sovkhoz is transformed into a paragon meat-processing factory outfitted with numerous miracles of technology. For instance, Vermo invents a humane cattle slaughtering tower that stimulates the animals with a strong electric current, titillating them to ecstasy before killing them. Vermo's maestro-level command over electricity also allows him to fire electric currents into the ground, conjuring up the long-buried 'juvenile' waters – a kind of mythical fountain of youth – from deep below the Earth's surface, reinvigorating the dry steppe.

Production Novel or Fairy Tale? – Synthesis of Two Perspectives

Recent scholarship on *Juvenile Sea* has focused on the question of genre: is it a proto-socialist realist production novel or something of a Soviet fairy tale? Both answers, in fact, have their own merit – and dwelling on each side of the debate foregrounds important elements of the text.

Juvenile Sea's composition in the latter half of 1931 means it appeared not long ahead of the official articulation of socialist realist principles at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934. While there can be no talk of *Juvenile Sea* being influenced by the Congress, the work does seem to bear many traits that would position it as one of many forebears of the socialist realist tradition. In his biography of Platonov, Aleksei Varlamov rejects scholar Mikhail Heller's idea, advanced in his 1982 monograph *Andrei Platonov in Search of Happiness*, that *Juvenile Sea* is a production novel. He counters: "It's much closer to a fairytale, a fantasy novel on the topic of Soviet agriculture."[336] It is most appropriate here to talk of a synthesis of

[336] Aleksei Varlamov, *Andrei Platonov,* (Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia, 2013), 255.

these scholars' assertions. Varlamov's analysis captures not only the morphological similarities between the plot of Platonov's Soviet agricultural fantasy and state myths, but also the sheer outlandishness of the novella's most striking images. However, Heller's treatment of *Juvenile Sea* ought not to be overlooked; achieving record-breaking production of meat does serve as the explicit telos motivating the main characters and the plot itself. And really, there is no reason why these two positions should be construed as fundamentally incompatible; *Juvenile Sea* is a kind of fairytale riff on the production novel. Each of these constituent elements play a critical role in the unfolding of the novella's narrative, though a little historical framing must be in place before the significance of their interaction can be properly appreciated.

The Juvenile Sea in its Historical Context

The Juvenile Sea is saturated with the political concerns of the Soviet Union in 1931, many of which serve as the individual vertebrae in the novella's narrative backbone. Varlamov and Heller's polemic is important to highlight early in my analysis of Platonov's novella because it emphasizes the work's vacillation between proto-historical socialist realist and mythological modes of representation. And to understand the text's mythological transformations of the historical concerns of early 1930s, one must first have a grounding in that history.

Of particular note is the Soviet campaign of political repressions against kulaks, which, by late 1931, was already supported by a collection of State myths about the effects of their subversion, and justifications for the brutality of the dekulakization process itself. It is enough to invoke Stalin's famous article "On the Question of the Policy of the Liquidation of Kulaks as a Class," written in early 1930 to get a sense of the ruthless singlemindedness of the dekulakization effort that Platonov borrows for his novella:

> In order to oust the kulaks as a class, it is not enough to institute a political strategy that limits or displaces particular groups among them. In order to oust kulaks as a class, we need to **crush** the resistance of the class in open battle and deprive it of the productive sources of its existence and development (free use of land, tools of production, rent, the right to hire labor etc.).[337]

In fact, Stalin's essay is in his collection, *Questions of Leninism*, that Vermo reads and admires after finding it among Bostaloeva's things late in *Juvenile Sea*.[338] The novella augments the kulak threat to a comically absurd degree. *Juvenile Sea's* first invocation of the kulaks occurs in tandem with the arrival of Vermo's love interest, the fleshy, markedly material – "because the body of a person contains their essence" – Bostaloeva.[339] Though, despite the narration's insistence on her materiality, when Vermo sees her, he is not free from the heady idealism of a lover looking upon his beloved, and cannot help but exclaim: "How boring it is to live on this earth!" And when asked to explain the meaning of his outburst, he responds: "[Living] is boring because our desires are never realized. […] You look at some face, even an unfamiliar one, and think: comrade, let me kiss you. But he turns away - the class struggle, he says, is not over, the kulak prevents our lips from touching…"[340]

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[337] Stalin, I.V, "K voprosu o politike likvidatsii kulachestva kak klassa," *Sochineniia,* ed. Institut Marksa, Engel'sa, Lenina (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1949) 12:183. Online. https://c21ch.newcastle.edu.au/stalin/t12/t12_12.htm: Чтобы вытеснить кулачество как класс, надо *сломить* в открытом бою сопротивление этого класса и *лишить* его производственных источников существования и развития (свободное пользование землей, орудия производства, аренда, право найма труда и т.д.).

[338] "Among Bostaloeva's things, Vermo found *Questions of Leninism* and began rereading that transparent book, in which the bedrock of truth seemed to be within reach, though actually it retained its depth, for the style was formed from a single mighty feeling of expediency, without any admixture of humorous ornamentation, and was clear to the very horizon, like a simple, well-lit stretch of land, extending to the ends of time and the world" (242).

[339] Platonov, *Iuvenil'ynoe more (more iunosti),* 183: туловище человека содержит его сущность.

[340] Ibid., 183: "Скучно оттого, что не сбываются наши чувства […] Смотришь на какоенибудь лицо, даже неизвестное, и думаешь: товарищ, дай я тебя поцелую. Но он отвернется — не кончилась, говорит, классовая борьба, кулак мешает коснуться нашим устам..."

Though the pair's kiss is described only a few lines later, it is clear that Bostaloeva represents both a personal and a political ideal for the engineer to attain. In Vermo's own logic, the desire for physical intimacy with Bostaloeva is inseparable from the political goal of eliminating kulak influence. It is clear that Platonov is coyly toying with the popular contemporary propagandistic line about the omnipresence of the subversive kulak's power and influence, extending their domain of control from the political to the deeply personal. Inflating the kulak danger, looming large over *Juvenile Sea's* sovkhoz, Platonov is not simply borrowing from early 1930s popular Soviet political discourse; rather, he is setting up an extreme reversal in the plot that will occur after the protagonists have dealt with the kulak threat. After all, if the problems generated by the kulaks really could penetrate into the most intimate parts of human life, while also bearing responsibility for the failures of the powerful Soviet state's development, what becomes possible when their subversive activity disappears? *Juvenile Sea's* portrayal of the explosive, magical potential of a kulak-free Soviet economy will be explored later in my analysis in greater detail.

Importantly, the kulaks remain in the shadows for the majority of the book. They serve as a kind of shadowy mythopoetic force – ambient and ever-present. Though their penchant for killing and stealing cattle is a repeated plot motif, no kulak criminal is ever caught in the act. However, we do encounter the vassals of the kulaks – the novella's direct antagonists – the so-called 'podkulachniks,' who willingly do their bidding.

The ongoing Party campaign against religion and its influence is a repeated textual motif – one that manages to be paradoxically overt yet understated. Though the topic of religion escapes the attention of both the characters and the narration, the narrative's two most prominent antagonists possess unmistakably religious names: Bozhev (from the Russian root *Bog*, or God)

and Svyashchenny (the Russian adjective meaning 'sacred'). While this conspicuous circumstance seems to go unnoticed by the protagonists, any reader will pick up on it without any trouble.

Both Bozhev and Svyashchenny are connected to the kulak subversives threatening the sovkhoz – a narrative detail that reflects the Party's attempts to forge connections between anti-religious initiatives and their dekulakization efforts in the late 20s and early 30s. In January of 1929, for example, the Politburo released a document, "On Measures for Strengthening Anti-Religious Work," that explicitly draws the connection:

> The agents of religious organizations are taking an active part in the anti-Soviet work of the kulaks […] [They are] against Soviet schooling, collectivization efforts, socialist reconstruction of agriculture, against the activity of the Party, […] our work among women and against other social and cultural undertakings of Soviet power and the Party.[341]

I will argue that Platonov is interested in revealing a kind of mythological substrate that lies behind the Party's stated historical and political concerns – and his analysis of the intersection between the desacralized religious figures and the dekulakization movement is especially important in this regard. Not only will this approach reinforce the synthesis between Soviet production novel and fairy tale that defined the Varlamov's polemic with Heller about *Juvenile Sea*, but it will also help to reveal how Platonov's implementation of the grotesque helps him achieve his narrative goals.

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[341] I.V. Stalin, "O merakh po usileniiu antireligioznoi raboty, "Archive: The Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, Fund: 17, Series: 3, File: 723. Document: 9-11. http://sovdoc.rusarchives.ru: "Деятели религиозных организаций принимают активное участие в антисоветской работе кулачества, […] [Они] против советской школы и мероприятий по коллективизации и социалистическому переустройству сельского хозяйства, против деятельности партии, комсомола, юношеского движения, нашей работы среди женщин и против других общественных и культурных мероприятий соввласти и партии."

The Sacral Overthrow of the Grotesque Body

Regardless of the veracity of the Party's historical claims about the kulaks, Platonov's invocation of the threat they posed – as it was presented in popular political discourse, that is – is at the center of the novella's conflict structure. Their clandestine sabotage operations make them especially dangerous; it is as if they are so slippery, they manage to elude the narrative spotlight with only the profane traces of their activity discovered by the novel's leading figures.

For this reason, it is especially important to take note when one of the kulak envoys steps into plain sight. I focus on the scene depicting the appearance and death of 'Comrade Svyashchenny,' that – in spite of its modest size – is one of the novella's pivotal moments, and easily among its strangest. Because the character of his name is so important, I will break from the trend of transliterating his Russian surname and call him by his name's meaning – 'Comrade Sacred.' Recall that he is of a pair with *Juvenile Sea's* first antagonist, the rapist Bozhev (God's One). And, in this sense, his significance can be partly understood as Platonov's engagement with the discourse of intensifying Soviet anti-religious movements of the early 30s. Though, besides their names, the reader is given no reason to believe that either figure actively practices a faith, or that either sees themselves as particularly pious. Their names are more emblematic of a kind of de facto villainy, achieving this effect by appealing to the reader's knowledge of contemporary Soviet political discourse. More importantly, while Bozhev was a figure of human passions and proportions, a cursory review Comrade Sacred's depiction will reveal that he is something of a different kind.

Comrade Sacred ought to be understood as the ultimate boundary breaker, dissolving the distinction between inside and outside. He is a force of unstoppable consumption, capable of eating – assimilating the outside inside his body – far more than the local environment is able to

produce: "he knew how meagre local conditions were, and how incapable they were of satisfying his life, ready to explode or wear itself out from excess and superiority. Puffing himself up, creating a commotion with his being, [Comrade] Sacred silently chewed that which he had in his pocket".[342] And, in this sense, he is a clear threat to the fragile order in the sovkhoz, which – by necessity – operates on principles of scarcity and austerity.

Moreover, Comrade Sacred bears a striking resemblance to the Bakhtinian 'grotesque body;' rarely do theory and art overlap so completely, especially given that there is no reason to suppose either image is mimetic. First, consider Bakhtin's depiction of the grotesque body in *Rabelais and His World*:

> The grotesque body is not delimited from the outside world, is not sealed off, not complete, not resolved, outgrows itself, escapes its own bounds. The accents lay on those parts of the body where it is open to the outside world, meaning where the world enters the body or bulges out of it, or where the body bulges out into the world. [In other words,] the accents lay on orifices, on bulges, [*на отверстиях, на выпуклостях*] on any protrusions or outgrowths: the open mouth, the organ of conception, breasts, phalluses, a fat stomach, a nose. The [grotesque] body reveals its essence as something growing, as extending beyond its own bounds…[343]

And now, Platonov's description of Comrade Sacred, the super-human force of consumption:

> Comrade Sacred sat on the bench to have respite from his own bulk, - though he was not fat, he possessed massive bones, with equally massive orifices and protrusions [*отверстия и выпуклости*], well-adapted for taking in everything in his vicinity. […] Even sitting, he lived in expedient disquiet, wishing, evidently, to seize something from the material world, to use everything palpable for his personal life [*для единоличной жизни*], to chew up any flesh [*мякоть*] and swallow it into his empty, anguishing body,

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[342] Platonov, *Iuvenil'noe more (more iunnosti)*, 228: "Он знал, как скудны местные условия и насколько они не способны удовлетворить его жизнь, готовую взорваться или замучиться от избытка и превосходства. Надувшись и шумя своим существом, Священный молча жевал, что лежало в его кармане."

[343] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable i narodnaia kul'tura srednevekov'ia i Renessanca* (Moscow: Khudozhevstvennaia literature, 1993), 33: "[…] гротескное тело не отграничено от остального мира, не замкнуто, не завершено, не готово, перерастает себя самого, выходит за свои пределы. Акценты лежат на тех частях тела, где оно либо открыто для внешнего мира, то есть где мир входит в тело или выпирает из него, либо оно само выпирает в мир, то есть на отверстиях, на выпуклостях, на всяких ответвлениях и отростках: разинутый рот, детородный орган, груди, фалл, толстый живот, нос. Тело раскрывает свою сущность, как растущее и выходящее за свои пределы начало […]."

> to embrace and enervate the living, to exhaust himself, to rejoice, to destroy, and to himself fall in death among the desolate world, fully consumed, no trace of it left.[344]

The one aspect of Bakhtin's theory that must be adjusted to fit Comrade Sacred is this: the 'grotesque body' creates (with the sexual organs of the lower-body, or with Logos through the mouth) and consumes (the mouth), while Platonov's Comrade Sacred only does the latter. He is open to the living world, but it only passes through him to die. There is nothing in *Juvenile Sea* to suggest that his consumption is compensated by any kind of creative impulse. Like a human black hole, all that he ingests is gone forever. Comrade Sacred, like all monsters, is a hybrid – and, more specifically, he is a hybrid of a peculiar sort that accords with his Bakhtinian grotesque body: his desire to ingest everything in his presence – and through his practice of doing the same – he breaks down the distinction between inside and outside. Though Sacred's monstrous collapse of inside and outside bears mentioning, this element of his monstrosity does not resemble a core incongruity within the text. *Juvenile Sea* does have a grotesque incongruity acting as its constructive principle, but it is not in Sacred's inside/outside hybrid nature.

Though the grotesque enormity of Comrade Sacred's infinite impulse to consume is foregrounded in all of Platonov's descriptions of him, it is less immediately clear what role he is meant to play in the narrative. After all, he is killed by a rather insignificant ox-driver only a few pages after his debut, and is not mentioned anywhere before his appearance, or after his death. Is

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[344] Platonov, *Iuvenil'noe more*, 228: Священный сел на скамейку в одышке от собственной тяжести, — хотя он не был толст, а лишь громаден в костях и во всех отверстиях и выпуклостях, приноровленных для ощущения всего постороннего. Сидячим он казался больше любого стоячего, а по размеру был почти средним. Сердце его стучало во всеуслышание, он дышал ненасытно и смотрел на людей привлекающими, сырыми глазами. Он даже сидя жил в целесообразной тревоге, желая, видимо, схватить что-либо из предметных вещей, воспользоваться всем ощутимым для единоличной жизни, сжевать любую мякоть и проглотить ее в свое пустое, томящееся тело, обнять и обессилить живущее, умориться, восторжествовать, уничтожить и пасть самому смертью среди употребленного без остатка, заглохшего мира.

he simply meant to be one of many passing oddities in Platonov's text? To understand his significance, one must address the mythological nature of the image of Comrade Sacred.

To explain Comrade Sacred's narrative purpose, I turn to René Girard – whose work provides among the most illuminating theoretical accounts of mythologized enemies and sacralized violence – and will attempt to tailor his theory of 'the scapegoat' to fit Platonov's treatment of the Soviet Union's kulak threat in the early 30s.

In brief, Girard's theory proposes that communities experiencing collective crises will often search for an outsider – the eventual scapegoat – that can be blamed for all of their shared problems. In order to justify placing so much blame on one individual or minority community, the people must collectively augment the imagined destructive potential of their victim to justify the persecution. And therefore, by necessity, they turn their victim into a mythologized monster capable of superhuman acts of sabotage. Once they have made their victim monstrous, killing them becomes an imperative; forgetting that this monstrous visage is artifice is part of the process. The act of killing takes the form of a kind of ritualized magic that – by purporting to dispose of the source of the community's problems – reconstitutes the identity of the community. And finally, only after the scapegoat has been killed, it "is made sacred by the community's reconciliation."[345]

To begin, it is necessary to engage with a common misconception that might arise at this early stage about the 'scapegoat' narrative. For, isn't the scapegoat meant to be innocent by definition? Can the same be possibly said about Comrade Sacred? No, if we account for the monstrous acts that are attributed to him in Platonov's mythologized narrative, there is no understanding of him as like an innocent lamb. But it is important to note that Comrade Sacred's

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[345] Rene Girard, *The Scapegoat,* trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press: 1986), 50.

image in the text is not meant to be a purely realistic one, and his textual representation cannot be treated like a figure that is somehow seated in history or reality. Girard himself is careful to distinguish between plainly literary or mythological texts and historical accounts of persecution – records of the Salem Witch Trials, for instance – though his theory applies to both. The innocence of the mythological villain is harder to establish because the victims are shaped by mythological imaginations. In Girard's words: "Myths […] are more difficult to decode because they contain greater distortions."[346] By necessity, one must reach from myth to history to establish their innocence. Comrade Sacred's grand proportions and grotesque, all-consuming body allow him to become the mythological representation of the era's quintessential historical threat: the greedy, monopolizing kulak saboteurs.

This point becomes especially clear when an ox-driver, a minor character and soon-to-be murderer of Comrade Sacred, comes to reveal the kulak sabotage to Federatovna – all in the presence of Umrishchev, the eternal opportunist, and Comrade Sacred himself. The ox-driver begins, "[the kulaks'] strategy is to beat down the sovkhoz and affirm the individual peasant farmer," and goes on to reveal the myriad crimes committed at the behest of Comrade Sacred: he has stolen countless cows, endlessly grinds up forcemeat for himself, and brutally puts down anyone who tries to stop him.[347] And, in a Bakhtinian inversion of high and low, mouth and phallus, Federatovna is also horrified to notice that Comrade Sacred is casually chomping on a severed ox penis – the very same one that was hacked off by unknown subversives in a previous episode. Shocked, she exclaims, "I thought the liquidation of the kulaks had been carried out

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[346] Ibid., 54.

[347] Platonov, *Iuvenil'noe more*, 229: "У них такая наука, чтоб бить совхоз и твердеть зажиточному одноличнику..."

here already? […] Who here is the most principal bastard [*samyj principial'nyj stervec*]?"[348] And the ox-driver responds: "'Here they are' – the ox-driver sluggishly pointed to Umrishchev and Sacred, - 'and under them are the affluent vestiges [*zažitočnye ostatki*] who are lining their pockets with the fat from your sovkhoz beef.'"[349]

As previously mentioned, the application of Girard's scapegoat theory in Platonov's text is complicated by the fact that all of the theorist's examples have real-world indices that nest the mythological within the real. Therefore, the leap must be made between Platonov's staging of the kulak crisis and its historical analog. However, this, I argue, is really no great leap; to divorce Platonov's mythologization of the kulak subversive from the contemporaneous political repression of the kulaks would be much stranger than to affirm the connection. That said, it is important to bear in mind that Platonov's mythological portrait of the kulaks – and of Comrade Sacred, more specifically – obfuscates a more historically grounded vision of their role within the Soviet state. The transformation of Comrade Sacred into a monstrous entity – a being so terrible that he can believably shoulder the weight of all the kulaks' supposed crimes – is a necessary step of the process. In the following passage, Girard makes the distinction between the 'historical' and the 'mythological' approaches to framing one's enemies; take particular note how Comrade Sacred's image as a terrible force of consumption resonates with the idea of the mythological criminal's 'ontological' identification with his crime:

> In historical persecutions the "guilty" remain sufficiently distinct from their "crimes" for there to be no mistake about the nature of the [transformation] process. The same cannot be said of myth. The guilty person is so much a part of his offense that one is indistinguishable from the other. His offense seems to be a fantastic essence or

[348] Ibid., 230: "Ведь здесь же была ликвидация кулачества […] Где же тут сидит самый принципиальный стервец?"

[349] Ibid.: "А здесь они, — вяло показал погонщик на Умрищева и Священного, — а под ними зажиточные остатки, которые жир наживают на твоей говядине с совхоза."

> ontological attribute. In many myths the wretched person's presence is enough to contaminate every thing around him, infecting men and beasts with the plague, ruining crops, poisoning food, causing game to disappear, and sowing discord around him. Everything shrivels under his feet and the grass does not grow again. He produces disasters as easily as a fig tree produces figs. He need only be himself.[350]

To reiterate, the killing of the scapegoat must be justified by an inflated image of the accused's capability for crime, for sabotage. "In the mythological monster the 'physical' and the 'moral' are inseparable."[351]

But is Comrade Sacred really the unstoppable juggernaut he is made out to be? Platonov – who has carefully constructed Comrade Sacred's image to accord with his 'ontological identification with his crimes' – employs a sudden reversal at the moment of his death that simultaneously reinforces and undermines the veneer of strength that defines his image:

> [Comrade] Sacred, barely moving, seized the driver of the fan-ox [*вентиляторного вола*][352] by the throat and began crushing his weak body to death, but the driver tapped him in the crown of his head with an insignificant strike [*незначительным ударом*] from his axe, and both figures fell into the furniture. […] Laying on the floor, Sacred was far from dead and broke his legs through the wall right into the street, sticking his extremities into the village, and he could not pull his legs back, for the ox-driver patiently hacked through the head of his enemy.[353]

The relative ease with which Comrade Sacred is dispensed is more than just a comic inversion of his monstrous strength; the scene adds to the general impression, unmistakable in

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[350] Girard, The Scapegoat, 36

[351] Ibid., 34

[352] The ox's strength is being instrumentalized for nothing more than to spin a fan for Umrishchev. Hence, the rather strange title of the ox-driver.

[353] Platonov, *Iuvenil'noe more (more iunnosti)*, 230: "Священный, чуть двинувшись, схватил погонщика вентиляторного вола поперек и начал давить его слабое тело до смерти, но погонщик стукнул его топором в темя незначительным ударом уставших рук, и оба человека упали в мебель. Умрищев, вообще не склонный к практике действий, обратил внимание Федератовны на полную неуместность происходящего факта. Тем временем лежащий Священный был далеко не мертвый и пробил ногами стену на улицу, высунувшись конечностями в деревню, но уже обратно он не мог подобрать свои ноги, потому что погонщик терпеливо дорубал голову своего врага."

the text, that everything in *Juvenile Sea* comes all-too-easily. Like many deaths in Platonov, Comrade Sacred's seems completely incidental, executed by the most peripheral of characters and almost in passing. And yet, given the physical evidence – the severed ox penis – and the ox-driver's detailed allegations, it is really he who bears responsibility for a great many of the ills that have beset the sovkhoz. With him dead, the longstanding conflict is suddenly resolved, and the sovkhoz soon becomes an electric-powered utopia. One cannot emphasize this enough: the improvement in the sovkhoz's conditions is abrupt, and extreme – nothing less than a magical transformation.

If Girard's theory is applicable to the murder of Sacred, one ought to see the death of the scapegoat acting as a mechanism for reconstituting the identity of the community, for reinvigorating it. Sure enough: his death does put an end to the sabotage, does allow the sovkhoz community to recuperate unhindered, and does break down the final barrier preventing the novella's protagonists from stepping into their happy ending. However, there is a slight problem with the way the murder of Sacred is carried out – at least in relationship to the scapegoat mechanism described by Girard. To be collectively galvanizing, the murder of a scapegoat is supposed to be collective. Platonov ironically individualizes the ritualized murder by having one character, the insignificant ox-driver, alone responsible for it. Interestingly, however, Federatonva seems to intuit this deficiency, and scolds the ox-driver for carrying out such an act by himself, absent the collective will of the Party: "Why'd you go and kill a man, rascal? – who do you think you are to take command of extraneous classes [чуждыми классами распоряжаешься] like that, the whole Soviet regime? By yourself, you're only one little

particle."[354] The censure for carrying out the murder alone reinforces its collective significance, not only for the local community, but for the whole republic-wide Party.

Aside from its resonance with the contemporaneous Soviet anti-religious movement, Comrade Sacred's name echoes serendipitously with Gerard's idea of the sacralized scapegoat. However, though the name is no insignificant detail, it is more important to understand that the monster-scapegoat actually possesses a sacred function within the narrative. Other critical dissections of the novella - though they have neglected to connect the transformation to the death of Sacred – almost never fail to note the magical transformation of the sovkhoz at the end of the story (after Sacred's death). For example, Hans Gunther, who foregrounds the novella's parodic treatment of the production novel in his book *Both Sides of Utopia: Contexts of Andrei Platonov's Work*, describes how the sudden transformation of the sovkhoz at the end of the book breaks with traditional proto-socialist realist production narratives:

> The successful completion of the construction task is integrated into a genre that has no place for science fiction, and that premise alerts one to the fact that the fantastically easy solution to the [construction] task in *Juvenile Sea* intentionally exaggerates the given schema [of the production novel]. The decreed optimism of the first five-year plan, parodied by Platonov, differs starkly from the genuine tragic utopianism of his earlier works.[355]

In other words, the plot of the prototypical production novel is meant to be grounded by the logistical difficulties of real industrial development, so *Juvenile Sea's* fantastic, borderline

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[354] Ibid., 230: Ты зачем, поганец, человека убил? — что ты — вся советская власть, что ли, что чуждыми классами распоряжаешься? Ты же сам — одна частичка, ты хуже электрона теперь?

[355] Khans Giunter, "'Iuvenil'noe more' kak parodiia na proizvodstvennyi roman," *Po obe storony utopii: Konteksty tvorchestva A. Platonova* (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2012), 89: Удачная реализация строительной задачи облекается в жанр, в котором нет места научной фантастике, и этот настораживающий факт говорит о том, что сказочно легкое решение задачи в «Ювенильном море» намеренно утрирует заданную схему. Пародируемый Платоновым декретированный оптимизм первой пятилетки сильно от личается от настоящего трагического утопизма его предыдущих произведений.

miraculous resolution of the impediments betray a kind of mocking non-adherence to the formula. Hunter's formula is also reminiscent of the polemic between Varlamov and Heller about whether the novella is a production novel or a fairy tale: as Hunter, too, suggests – it is effectively both, a mythologized production novel.

When a mythological monster is disposed of, the world becomes free not only of the beast, but also what it symbolically represents. So, what exactly is the sovkhoz gaining by disposing of Comrade Sacred, the all-consumer, a partial manifestation of the prototypical grotesque body? To answer this question, I will highlight Sacred's correspondence to a much more prominent character in the novella, Bostaloeva.

The Reconstitution of the Community Around the Creating Body

In a fundamental sense, Bostaloeva is much like Comrade Sacred in her uninhibited openness to the outside world – so much so that she functions as a kind of conceptual counterpart to the kulak monster. She is his antithesis, but – as I will argue – their shared ability to collapse the distinction between inside and outside marks them as a pair. Given that Bostaloeva's openness is of an antithetical nature to Comrade Sacred's, she is positioned to supplant his influence once he is killed; she becomes the mythological successor – the ideal Soviet woman – to lead the sovkhoz into its utopian phase after the elimination of the kulak threat.

I have already left a premonition of this turn in the argument with the quotation that captures Vermo's reaction to seeing Bostaloeva for the first time: "[Living] is boring because our desires are never realized. […] You look at some face, even an unfamiliar one, and think: comrade, let me kiss you. But [the face] turns away - the class struggle, it says, is not over, the

kulak prevents our lips from touching…"[356] Platonov explicitly puts the potential of their relationship flourishing at odds with the kulak class threat. But their conversation continues: "But it won't turn away," Bostaloeva asserts. "You, for example?" – Vermo asks. "Me, for example," Bostaloeva responds and allows Vermo to hold and kiss her. Bostaloeva's embrace of Vermo, the outsider, this act of extraordinary openness, is the gesture that integrates him into the community and allows him to feel that "the world in his imagination resembles reality, and the sorrow of life is nothing."[357] Bostaloeva's 'openness' is generative rather than destructive like Comrade Sacred's; her willingness to love selflessly brings Vermo, along with his engineering prowess, into the fold of the sovkhoz.

Bostaloeva's priceless contribution to the sovkhoz is her ability (and willingness) to instrumentalize her body, her warmth, and her openness to feed the hunger for affection – love, human touch, companionship, or sex – felt by so many of the men around her. By satisfying the men's desire for affection, her body is indispensable as a means of retrieving the materials needed to build the sovkhoz and reinvigorate life on the steppe. This motif is repeated with several variations throughout the text, though there are a few scenes in particular that capture it most succinctly. The first occurs during an extended digression from the main story, as Bostaloeva leaves the sovkhoz, travelling to the regional center in hopes of convincing the local Party to give her nails and an electric dynamo-machine to help along the industrial ambitions of 'Parental Yards.'[358] The nails she requires are tremendously scarce, and she is rebuffed when

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[356] Platonov, Iuvenil'noe more (more iunnosti), 183.

[357] Ibid.: "Но он не отвернется"; "Вы, например"; "Я, например"; "мир его воображения похож на действительность и горе жизни ничтожно."

[358] When Platonov was unable to publish *Juvenile Sea*, he tried to make Bostaloeva's adventure to the regional center to retrieve building materials into its own publishable story. The story does work as a self-contained episode.

she asks for more. Angry, she demands to see the construction plans for the surrounding area to find a superfluous project and salvage the nails that would be used to execute it: "Bostaloeva looked over the entire allotment of nails, and began to pity every construction project, because each project begged greedily, and to each of them very little was given, – she could not indicate who she would deprive of their share so that the sovkhoz would receive its nails."[359] Platonov's careful characterization of Bostaloeva places her in the role of mother, looking over the anthropomorphized construction projects who cry out to her like underfed children. Like any good mother faced with a group of starving, needy beings, she finds it impossible to choose who among them is most deserving of sustenance at the expense of the others. Fortunately, however, she spies a project that calls for metal wire and insists that the wire could be replaced by handmade straw woven together by her sovkhoz. But this immediately presents another practical problem that she must solve with her body, the only leverage she has: now she must convince another man to repurpose the metal wire into nails. She proceeds to a nail factory and asks the director to make the nails: "'Might you kiss me for the nails!' - smiled the director. 'Okay,' Bostaloeva agreed. […] 'And you won't get mad?' - asked the director. […] 'I won't' - Bostaloeva answered, 'Because I've gotten used to it… Last year I retrieved iron for roofing, and I had to get an abortion for it. But you probably won't be such a bastard…'."[360]

Bostaloeva is imbued with the generative qualities of the archetypal feminine body, the capability of creation, the mothering instinct – but, in a break from tradition, these creative

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[359] Ibid., 216: "Бостaлоева рассмотрела всю разверстку гвоздей, и ей жалко стало каждое строительство, потому что каждое строительство просило жадно и каждому давалось мало, — она не могла указать, кого надо обездолить, чтобы совхоз получил гвозди."

[360] Ibid., 217: "Разве поцеловать мне вас за гвозди! — улыбнулся директор. — Ладно, — согласилась Бостaлоева. […] А вы не обидитесь? — спросил директор, […]. — Не обижусь, — ответила Бостaлоева, — потому что я привыкла... Прошлый год я достала кровельное железо, мне пришлось за это сделать аборт. Но вы, наверно, не такая сволочь..."

capacities are oriented more towards the inorganic, the infrastructural. By explicitly emphasizing Bostaloeva's abortion – a consequence of a prior search for roofing steel – Platonov accentuates the fact that her body *is not* an instrument for the potential of organic children, but a means for procuring for the inorganic supply needs of the sovkhoz and the needs of the pitiable, underfed construction projects (her real children). In *Juvenile Sea,* she is made out to be the mother of the inorganic, the mother of infrastructure and industry.

Towards the end of the novella, Platonov reinforces the connection between Bostaloeva's body and its potential utility for industry in a striking variation on the previously developed theme. This time, her affinity with industrial materials is much more intimate, more closely integrated with her body. Vermo watches Bostaloeva walk away and imagines how her body might be turned into nails and other materials after her death.[361] Her body's instrumental function in life, in other words, is even carried over into her death – her affinity with infrastructure is ontological:

> Vermo looked on as she walked away and thought about how many nails, candles, copper, and minerals could be chemically acquired from Bostaloeva's body. 'Why build crematoriums?' - the engineer thought with gloomy surprise. – 'We need to build chemical factories for retrieving non-ferrous metals, gold, and various building materials and equipment.'[362]

Now that there is a foundation in place to understand Bostaloeva's role within the story, it is necessary to turn back to our discussion of the sacralized killing of Comrade Sacred. How does Bostaloeva fit within this narrative? It is no coincidence that Bostaloeva's return from the

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[361] Platonov was likely familiar with Nikolai Tikhonov's "The Ballad of Nails" (1922), which reads: "If only nails could be made from those people, / there wouldn't be stronger nails than those in all the world." (Гвозди б делать из этих людей: Крепче б не было в мире гвоздей.)

[362] Ibid., 234: "Вермо глядел ей вслед и думал, сколько гвоздей, свечек, меди и минералов можно химически получить из тела Босталоевой. 'Зачем строят крематории? — с грустью удивился инженер. — Нужно строить химзаводы для добычи из трупов цветметзолота, различных стройматериалов и оборудования.'"

regional center corresponds with Comrade Sacred's death. Once he is gone – and the influence of the kulak subversives along with him – the community can be properly reconstituted around her. But, again, the *fact* of the replacement is much less important than its *meaning*. What is the broader significance of this change?

Now we come to the establishment of the grotesque as the text's constructive principle. We have already witnessed a few instances of grotesque hybridity in Bostaloeva and Comrade Sacred's blending of the boundaries of inside and outside. Both figures are "cosmic," as Bakhtin would put it, "combined with the world," and also "with things."[363] However, to establish that the grotesque is not incidental, but central to the novella's narrative structure, there needs to be something deeper at play. The death of Comrade Sacred and the return of Bostaloeva sets up a transformational shift in the text.

The 'magic' of the sovkhoz's change can be demonstrated by a comparative, 'before and after' look at the novel's starkly shifting landscape – one image taken from the beginning, another taken from the end.

First is the sovkhoz from early in the novella, depicting the arid earth, devoid of all technology, with giant carved-out pumpkins that the denizens of 'Parental Yards' are using for extra housing. This is the state of 'Parental Yards' under the influence of Comrade Sacred and the kulak subversives: 'Parental Yards' was located in the bed of an ancient river which had dried up a thousand or so years ago. Two earthen dwellings made up the herdsmen's refuge in winter, and, as shelter from foul summer weather, massive, carved-out pumpkins lay throughout

[363] Ibid., 34. This attribute recalls Girard's assertions about a mythological villain's 'ontological identification with their crimes.' Figures like this are 'leaky,' they do not stay within their own borders and flow out into the outside world – forming it after their own image.

the local steppe.[364] Platonov reinvokes this landscape – now transformed – after Comrade Sacred has been killed, upon Bostaloeva's return from her quest to retrieve nails and the electric dynamo from the regional center. The 'magic' of the industrial transformation is not lost on her, as evidenced by her reaction:

> Nadezhda Bostaloeva returned to 'Parental Yards.' […] Having travelled all but two versts, Bostaloeva stopped. An unknown tower stood in the sovkhoz, by all appearances capacious and useful, although not standing so high. […] In the sovkhoz, aside from the tower, there was a wind turbine of massive power and size, that, moreover, now spun in the void of completely still air. Approaching even closer, Bostaloeva affirmed that the earthen dwellings in the sovkhoz were already gone, and also that there were no traces of the old attributes of 'Parental Yards' […] 'What's going on here?' – Bostaloeva asked frightfully. 'Where's my sovkhoz?'[365]

Bostaloeva also notices the absence of a number of the land's environmental assets that might compose the steppe's natural beauty. The area's characteristic trees, burdock, rocks have all disappeared: all that she sees is the towering infrastructure and "thick, churned up earth." 'Parental Yards,' in other words, echoes the same potential for life and pro-industrial growth that defines Platonov's depictions of Bostaloeva's body. It is no great surprise then that Bostaloeva, the mother of industrial growth, and Vermo, the engineering genius, finally unite at the end. With the kulak threat gone, they are now free to touch lips all they want.[366]

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[364] Platonov, *Iuvenil'noe more (more iunnosti)*, 184: "Гурт 'Родительские Дворики' находился в русле древней речки, высохшей лет тысяча тому назад. Два землебитных жилища составляли убежище гуртовщиков на зимнее время, а для укрытия от летнего ненастья лежали по окрестной степи громадные выдолбленные тыквы."

[365] Ibid., 232: "Надежда Босталоева возвратилась в 'Родительские Дворики' […] Не доезжая двух верст, Босталоева остановилась. В совхозе стояла неизвестная башня, емкая и полезная по виду, хотя и невысокая по размеру […] Кроме башни в совхозе был еще огромной силы и величины ветряк, при этом он крутился сейчас в пустоте совершенно тихого воздуха […] Подъехав еще ближе, Босталоева убедилась что землебитных жилых домов в совхозе уже нет, и также не было никаких других следов прежних обжитых 'Родительских Двориков' […] Что здесь такое? — с испугом спросила Босталоева. — Где же мой совхоз?"

[366] And perhaps, given the emphasis on corporealization in *Juvenile Sea*, it would not be too farfetched to speculate that Vermo's tower, or the electric drill that reaches deep into the womb of the Earth could be read through a kind of Freudian lens.

The final stage of the land's transformation occurs when Vermo uses the technology salvaged by Bostaloeva to drill deep into the ground – finding water, perhaps even the titular juvenile sea*,* 'the sea of youth.'

A Polarized Text: Two Halves Governed by Two Instantiations of the Grotesque Body

Why is this transformation so significant for the text, and how does it relate to its implementation of grotesque representational modalities? In her chapter on *Juvenile Sea*, I. Makarova argues that Platonov's text exaggerates the "enthusiasm of the workers of the first Five-Year Plan […] to the point of grotesque."[367] Though the excess enthusiasm of the workers does contribute to the text's grotesque impression, I believe the more fundamental problem is caught up in the work's tension between production novel and fairytale as described by Varlamov, Heller, and Günther. The sense that the text is transformed 'as if by magic,' arises because the change does happen through something very much like the mythological logic of the scapegoat mechanism.

Because Platonov's characters are ontologically tied to the land, one may speak of a transfer of mythological reign over the land that passes from the deathly Comrade Sacred to the mirthic Bostaloeva.

Moreover, the transformation in *Juvenile Sea* enacts a pattern of death and rebirth similar to a process Bakhtin describes in his discussion of grotesque bodies (though, I stress, that Platonov's novella is not mimetic): "One of the fundamental tendencies of the grotesque image

[367] I. Makarova, "Khudozhestvennoe svoeobrazie povesti A. Platonova *Iuvenil'noe more*," in Andrei Platonov: Mir tvorchestva (Moscow: Sovremennyi pisatel', 1994), 367.

of the body is to show two bodies in one: the one giving birth and dying, the other conceived, generated, and born. […] From one body a new body always emerges in some form or other."[368]

Just as Comrade Sacred had an affinity with the ultra-openness of Bakhtin's grotesque body, so does Bostaloeva. Her body, like Sacred's "grotesque body is not delimited from the outside world, is not sealed off, […] outgrows itself, escapes its own bounds."[369] But her openness is antithetical to Sacred's – a correspondence that justifies viewing them as a pair. While Sacred's extreme openness was predicated on consumption, devouring the outside, Bostaloeva's is predicated on the openness of love, the open expressions of intimacy to the men around her that are so starved for it. Her willingness to share the warmth and affection of her body with many men gives her a kind of universal quality that itself elevates her above the other women in the text.[370] Like Comrade Sacred, she becomes a kind of mythologized archetype, though, in this case, a warped, industrialized version a divine feminine creating force. Neither the tone of the text, nor any of its characters cast judgment on her openness, on the near universality of her intimacy, and the reader is implicitly encouraged to share in the vision of her ideal nature.

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[368] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World.* Translated by Helene Iswolsky. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 26.

[369] Bakhtin, *Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable i narodnaia kul'tura srednevekov'ia i Renessanca,* 33: "[…] гротескное тело не отграничено от остального мира, не замкнуто, […] перерастает себя самого, выходит за свои пределы."

[370] This is not to say that the other women lack their own archetypal foundations. Federatovna serves as the prototypical old woman, reinvigorated with the energy of youth by virtue of her adherence to the mores of the young generation. And Aina is the text's far more traditional sacrificial lamb, dying a martyr's death for her rebellion against the Bozhev – an emissary of the kulak subversives. In this way, her narrative role echoes the role of Pavlik Morozov – dying a "martyr's death (so young!) at the hands of the kulaks" – for State mythology as explored at several points in Katerina Clark's *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 177.

Bostaloeva's openness is *generative*, not destructive like Sacred's. If, the grotesque body is 'two bodies in one,' then she is something like missing half of Sacred's grotesque body – the *creating* half. While he embodied its destructive, consumptive mode, she embodies its mirthic side. If implying that Bostaloeva's body contains an element of the 'grotesque' appears to interfere with *Juvenile Sea's* clear idolization of her, consider that Bakhtin, too, means nothing derogatory by the term. Recall that he sees the energetic, joyful, life-giving, 'birthing' elements of the grotesque the redeeming qualities of its aesthetic paradigm, criticizing overly grim, fearful applications of the grotesque – like his conception of the 'Romantic grotesque' – as being betrayals of its core aesthetic principles. Though, of course, the mirth of Bostaloeva's body is not in its organic production – her abortion makes this abundantly clear. Rather, her body is always helping to procure material resources; its generative quality is in its ability to give rise to industrial growth. This is an innovation worthy of the production novel fairy tale if there ever was one. For this reason, when she returns it is the growth of industry that catches her attention first.

In Bakhtin's theoretical framework, the grotesque body has three simultaneous functions: "dying, birthing, and being born [*умирающее, рождающее, рождаемое*]."[371] Platonov's depiction of Comrade Sacred would seem to suggest a potential missing fourth function of the grotesque body, creating a quadratic parallelism: the killing/consuming function. But, in any case, Bakhtin asserts that the grotesque body incorporates the generative and withering impulses simultaneously, a body that, in his words, contains "two bodies in one" [*два тела в одном*].[372] In *Juvenile Sea* it is as if these two bodies are pulled apart and, separated, allowed to become

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[371] Mikhail Bakhtin, Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable i narodnaia kul'tura srednevekov'ia i Renessansa, 34.

[372] Ibid., 33.

embodied as two competing forces – one with an impulse towards destruction, another towards development, industrial 'birth'. What is this if not an instance of grotesque polarization? But, if the two bodies are separated, then what exactly is polarized? For, though they lose something of the life-and-death, development-and-decline microcosm of a more hybridized Bakhtinian ideal, Platonov's representation of these separated bodies allows them to function as independent symbolic emissaries – of creation and generation, of consumption and death.

Given that the novella opens as a bleak production novel and ends as a utopian Soviet fairytale, it is the text itself that is an instantiation of polarization.

Conclusion: A Hybrid Genre

With all of this information now on the table, the reader can draw back and begin to appreciate Platonov's implementation of his compound corporealized symbols.

When the killing of Comrade Sacred and the ascendency of Bostaloeva are placed in focus, *Juvenile Sea's* bipartite structure comes into view. When Sacred – and the other kulak subversives – retain their hegemonic position over the novella's first part, death and desolation rule over the land. As our reading of Platonov through Girard's and Bakhtin's models highlights, Comrade Sacred – both as the mythologized monster and as the killing/dying grotesque body – shares an ontological connection with the land around him. The land and the body are one – as a kind of mythological hybrid structure.

Comrade Sacred's death signals the end of the kulak threat, and Bostaloeva – as the mother of Industry, the generative side of the grotesque body – is able to ascend over 'Parental Yards.' Her corporeality and its qualities, as with Sacred, spills over into the outside world, and the miracles of infrastructural growth – her children – begin to sprout up throughout the sovkhoz. 'Parental Yard's' transformation from wasteland to technological wonderland happens as if

overnight, suggesting that the killing of Sacred functioned as something akin to a magic sacrificial ritual. The fruits of technology, made possible by Bostaloeva's inexhaustible energy, allow 'Parental Yards' to reach down to the reinvigorating 'juvenile' waters to help the land, too, spring back to life.

Perhaps, on the surface, the notion of a novella that tells the story of a sovkhoz's triumph over local kulaks, and its subsequent development into a quota-breaking meat-processing facility would sound like exactly the kind of work suited for publication in the Soviet Union in 1931. But, of course, *Juvenile Sea's* publication was roundly, unanimously rejected by all publishers who got their hands on the manuscript.

Both Platonov's contemporary critics and modern scholars intuited the reasons for the novella's lack of success with Soviet publishers: it warps reality and human behavior, it contains a great many "gross exaggerations," it pollutes the elements of the production novel with the fanciful qualities of the fairy tale. But was it really such a sin to engage in the Party's own mythologizing? After all, if *Juvenile Sea* treats the kulaks as the ultimate enemy, more than worthy of 'liquidation,' and the inspired builders of communism as the triumphant heroes, what is the harm? It seems to have its values straight.

The conflict is resolved without great struggle and so the triumph feels exaggerated, unrealistic, even grotesque. Hans Gunther's suggestion that the triumph feels like a parody is especially apropos. It is worth taking a moment to reflect on *Juvenile Sea's* parodic elements, for they lend the text another structural grotesque element and clarify something central in Platonov's poetics.

Abram Tertz's "On Socialist Realism" suggests an approach that may help clarify the nature of Platonov's parodic play. In his polemic with the notion of 'Socialist Realism,' Tertz

evokes the genre's official definition: "Socialist realism is the basic method of Soviet literature and literary criticism. It demands of the artist the truthful, historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development."[373] On the basis of this definition, Tertz asserts that if reality does evolve through Marx's dialectic, with Communism the inevitable 'end of history,' then devoted State writers ought to treat the idea of 'Socialist Realism' as a kind of tautology. In other words, reality 'in its revolutionary development' ought to be nothing other than reality as it really is.

Tertz, however, rejects the assertion that socialist art can be properly represented with realist representational strategies. In fact, it is precisely because socialist art is driven by 'teleological concepts' – because it is 'a purposeful, a religious art' – that it is incompatible with realist modes of representation. If 'socialism' and 'realism' are truly at odds, the whole project of socialist realist literature is doomed to end in a failed discursive synthesis. Or, in other words, instead of becoming a coherent, well-integrated aesthetic system, true Socialist Realism becomes a hybrid genre defined by incompatible impulses.

But, as Tertz – playing his deconstructive game – well understood, this is not how things happened in practice: socialist realist writers were perfectly able to portray state-sponsored visions of 'reality in its revolutionary development' without bringing excess attention to the supposed incompatibility between the aesthetics' core terms. Many authors demonstrated a knack for naturalizing socialist discourse and state myths with prose styles borrowed from classic Russian realism; there was, after all, the active promotion of Soviet 'Red Karamzins,' a fact that served as the basis of Zoshchenko's parody in *Sinyagin*. Whether or not 'socialism' is truly 'realist,' Soviet authors were more than capable of making this synthesis convincing.

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[373] Abram Tertz, *On Socialist Realism,* trans. George Dennis (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), 24

Platonov, on the other hand, did to his depictions of Soviet life what Tertz asserted that real Socialist Realists ought to: he created friction between the phenomena of Soviet 'real' life and its 'religious,' or mythological substrate. So, if the current widespread notion that much of Soviet literature contains this mythological basis, then Platonov's crime is that he brings it into relief. As soon as a reader detects these two textual planes – irrespective of the author's intentions – the synthesis of State myth and an imagined, though still fictional Soviet 'reality' dissolves and the specter of parody makes itself felt. The fanciful Soviet 'fairytale' elements in *Juvenile Sea* not discussed here are many, and – when they run up against its 'production novel' basis – create many of the novella's more minor appearances of the grotesque, and its passing comic moments, too. Moments like when the sovkhoz's animal scientist posits raising hyper-intelligent oxen to replace their human herders, or when Umrishchev stands against dialectics – figuring that reality is fundamentally monistic given that 'everything is made of electrons.'

However, the most striking fairytale element remains the wonderous transformation of the sovkhoz after the elimination of Comrade Sacred, the scapegoat of the kulak threat. The continued subsistence of the Party's class enemies remained a powerful explanation to help account for the difference between its utopian dream of Soviet Communist paradise and the dull drudgery of the actual building process. The year before *Juvenile Sea* was written, Platonov tried to write a more serious, pessimistic reflection on the difficulty of building Communism in his *Foundation Pit*, and was rebuffed, refused publication opportunities. So, he wrote what one might call the book's antithesis – the optimistic *Juvenile Sea*. But, in Platonov's hands, even this avowal of Party mythology looked like bitter mockery, a variation of 'subversive affirmation' that defined the work of authors more hostile to the party than he. What he would not do, for the

time being, anyway, was write in such a way to naturalize the disjointedness of history and mythology.

CONCLUSION

The grotesque modernist movement was born out of Russia's uniquely troubled confrontation with modernity in the early 20th century. It was not just one paradigm crisis that led to the proliferation of discontinuities and incongruities in modern life, but a whole series of them. The grotesque was an effective tool for artists looking to represent these incongruities. It is an aesthetics suited to images and characters that capture the ambivalence of the era, an aesthetics capable of creating images that resist monistic interpretation. The bipartite structure of the grotesque allows artistic representations to incorporate contradictory elements into a single 'site' – making it possible for characters, texts, styles, discourses, and more to embody and concretize the sociocultural tensions sweeping the country. The two grotesque modalities – polarization and hybridization – denote representational strategies used by artists to convey particular ideas about these sweeping incongruities through the images they created. Moreover, authors within the grotesque modernist tradition found the grotesque to be an essential tool in not just representing, but *creating* anti-monistic phenomena, anti-monistic artistic worlds.

The difference between polarization and hybridization is made manifest through a difference in the relationality of the two (or more) internal terms causing the incongruity in the grotesque 'site'. Polarization represents an intentional *segregation* of these two internal forces, rather than hybridization's attempted *integration*. Though they are abstract and "formalist" by themselves, these definitions come to life when they are translated into the language of sociocultural relationships. For instance, hybridization is often used as a representational mode to depict unsuccessful, or deleterious conformity projects: from Andrei Ivanych's drunken acquiescence to the irrational, bestial culture of *At World's End*'s Far-Eastern military outpost to Teptyolkin's transformation into a monstrous bureaucrat in *Goat Song*. Grotesque polarization,

on the other hand, is often used to express troubled – and often futile – efforts of the t intelligentsia to repress a mental discontinuity with the political regime or resist an undesirable sociocultural influence: from Nikolai Ableukhov's attempt to destroy all traces of his Apollonian father in himself to Shvarts's scholar's desire to detach himself from his morally corrupt shadow. However, polarization and hybridization are not limited to the sociocultural sphere – there can be polarized or hybridized incongruities represented on the level of the text: as seen in Zoshchenko's implementation of Tynianovian parody's textual *nevyazka* or in the magical (polarized) transformation of *Juvenile Sea*'s sovkhoz from desert wasteland to techno-utopia after Comrade Sacred's consuming body is supplanted by Bostaloeva's producing body.

Writers of the prerevolutionary era turned to the grotesque and its modalities to represent their vision of the discontinuities of a rapidly modernizing Russia. Velimir Khlebnikov's "The Crane" imagines the heartless brutality of early 20th century industrial progress as a colossal metal bird-monster, cobbled together from the ironworks of St Petersburg's factories and wrapped in the flesh of the risen dead, drunkenly ravaging the streets, and demanding human sacrifice from the populace. Though the industrial infrastructure appeared to be an element of rational 'ordering' Westernization, it turned out to be another manifestation of the inhuman, chaotic hostility characteristic of the northern capital since its foundation. Fyodor Sologub's *The Petty Demon* stages Russian literature's entrance into the modernist literary epoch by beginning as a squalid provincial drama – following the 'grotesque realism' of Saltykov-Shchedrin's *The Golovyov Family* or *History of a Town* – and ending in a distinctly anti-realist rendering of Peredonov's insanity in a boldly experimental, hallucinogenic paradigm. In part, the novel is an expression of horror at the author's discovery of the provincial unconscious – a storehouse of vicious, egotistic impulses that made the idea of a 'knowable' or purely rational subject almost

unthinkable. And yet, any modernization project will have to contend with just these people. Sensing Russia's increasingly fractured body politic, Andrei Bely's *Petersburg* represented the cosmic clash between order and chaos localized in the signifiers of the city and the people who inhabit it. Bely's integration of these grand, ever-competing cosmic forces into the fragile, flesh-and-bones bodies of individual people threatens to blow them apart – resulting in a grotesque paradigm that is uniquely, and terribly 'sublime.' Evgenii Zamiatin's *At World's End* – like *Petty Demon* and *Petersburg* – explores the grotesque, 'uncivilized' humans on the Russian periphery. However, Zamiatin's far-eastern military outpost is so far from civilizational centers that all its inhabitants have devolved into (non-metaphorical) animals. After Russia's unexpected loss to Japan in 1905, Zamiatin's novella implicitly offered readers a scandalous explanation for the defeat – with a country so big, the center can't hold; the 'civilizational' influence of Russia's West did not – and could not – magically radiate through the land without a much broader modernization effort.

Although the October Revolution was only one of many paradigm crises in early 20th century Russian life, it is not one among equals, but a cataclysm of much broader proportions than the others. Nevertheless, many of the incongruities represented by prerevolutionary grotesque modernist writers were exacerbated by rapid postrevolutionary political and sociocultural evolution, and so were repurposed by writers to reflect their specific expression in the post-1917 epoch. The sociocultural rifts propelling Russia's influx of grotesque literature continued to develop well into the 20s and 30s.

Evgenii Shvarts's *The Shadow* reappropriated the romantic-era trope of 'the double' to analyze the individual's struggle to maintain moral courage and fend off complacency under the tyrannical (Stalinist) state. Shvarts's scholar learns that to properly resist his ostensible polar

opposite, his shadow – an ego-centric, self-interested collaborator with state power – he must accept it as a component of the self, fend off its allure whenever it inevitably reappears, and be willing to fight it to the death. Konstantin Vaginov's *Goat Song* is a masterwork of tragicomic ambivalence and of troubled grotesque hybridity – both in the co-creative interplay of its narrator and characters, and in its exploration of conformity and troubled identity. The monstrous 'author's' wandering eye never fails to catch the small details – an overly saccharine or sincere turn of the phrase, a display of bad taste, a sign of sexual impotence – that trivialize the suffering of the novel's intelligentsia, offering something of a justification for the disappearance of their ridiculous way of life. Though when Teptyolkin tries to move away from his cultural roots and integrate himself into Soviet life, he is tortured trying to find a viable way to synthesize two incompatible modes of being. This impossible synthesis is only made possible by integrating the worst elements of his old and new self, turning him into a monstrous Soviet bureaucrat. Mikhail Zoshchenko's *Michel Sinyagin* attempts a paradox – a parody of a non-existent author. By portraying the life of Michel, a talentless, out-of-touch Symbolist poet, through the mutant, overly sincere sentimentalist language of a hypothetical 'red Karamzin' – the ideal Soviet writer in the minds of several leading Soviet thinkers – Zoshchenko manages to polemicize two modes of authorship at once. In his overperformance of this saccharine sentimentalist author, Zoshchenko manages a grotesque, exaggerated kind of 'subversive affirmation' of the type. If Russia's cultural project ends up in the hands of either of these authorial 'types,' the future of Soviet literature looks to be an absurdity. In Zoshchenko's hands, the grotesque becomes an aesthetic tool of negation; though no third way is proposed, *Michel Sinyagin* reveals the need for authors and theorists to develop a literary style that can capture Soviet life without resorting to old, outmoded templates. Andrei Platonov's *Juvenile Sea* pulls off a display of subversive

affirmation of its own – in this case, targeting the dekulakization campaign. The novella's monstrous Comrade Sacred becomes a Girardian scapegoat for all the kulaks' supposed crimes – a body of death, destruction, and infinite consumption. His death – a symbolic sacrifice – has a magical effect on *Juvenile Sea's* sovkhoz. The consuming body, Comrade Sacred, is replaced with Bostaloeva and her producing body, with its amazing ability to generate not organic life, but building supplies. Platonov's unrestrained optimism about the effect of the kulaks' destruction makes the whole project appear absurd. Bakhtin's creating/destroying grotesque body – 'two bodies in one' – is severed into separate pieces: the destroying (consuming) body dominates the novella's first half, before the text undergoes an inversion in polarity when the creating (producing) body reigns over the end. All the while, the text is operating as a strange, unsettled, grotesque hybrid of production narrative and fairytale.

Although the close readings in this project treat authors of differing ideologies and political positions, and inhabiting a variety of historical moments, it does not endeavor to present anything like a complete picture of pre- and postrevolutionary grotesque literature. As the chapter structure suggests, I did not intend to tell a chronological history of the grotesque modernist movement; sequencing was chosen to help accentuate the two grotesque modalities and their differences. A development of my work on grotesque modernist literature might benefit from a more chronologically linear approach, or an approach that centers a single historical moment (N.E.P., or the Collectivization campaign) and tracks the way various authors employ grotesque imagery to represent – and even create – 'the event.'

Furthermore, the choice to write about modernist texts tended to sway my attention to authors belonging to the intelligentsia, many of the so-called 'fellow travelers,' authors willing to risk the charge of 'formalism.' A more capacious look at the grotesque artistic production of the

period would examine a wider array of artists and integrate a broader array of ideological positions. An analysis in this vein might look for continuities between the 'grotesque realism' of 19th-century authors like Saltykov-Shchedrin, Dostoevsky, and Leskov and the work of more Soviet-aligned artists like Maskim Gorky, Leonid Leonov, Aleksey Tolstoy and others.

Moreover, a future project would benefit from a deeper exploration of the influence of 19th-century literature on early 20th-century grotesque modernism. Of special note is a surge of interest in the work of Nikolai Gogol. A number of authors responsible for the theoretical development of symbolism, and thus of Russian modernism, including Dmitrii Merezhkovsky ("Gogol and the Devil" [Гоголь и черт, 1906]*)*, Vyacheslav Ivanov ("Gogol's *Inspector General* and Aristophanes' Comedy" [*Ревизор* Гоголя и комедия Аристофана, 1925]), and Andrei Bely (*The Mastery of Gogol* [*Мастерство Гоголя*, 1934]) all refocus their attention on the influence of Gogol on the development of Russian literature in the first few decades of the 20th century. Many of the most influential Russian formalists (Tynianov, Eikhenbaum) also exhibited a desire to reevaluate Gogol's corpus, saving it from the overly rational interpretations that garnered popularity among critics and readers alike in the 19th century. In essays like Eikhenbaum's "How Gogol's Overcoat was Done" and Yakov Zundelovich's "Poetics of the Grotesque," Gogol's work served as the basis for a new wave of theoretical thinking on the nature of the grotesque and its formal properties. It would be a genuine contribution to the study of early 20th-century grotesque literature to situate this surge of scholarship on Gogol as a modernist phenomenon, and attempt to evaluate the extent to which Gogol's poetics may have influenced theoretical and practical approaches to the grotesque. The study of these and other works could help to recontextualize Gogol's legacy for the needs of the emerging grotesque modernist tradition.

Rather than connections with 19th-century literary classics, Socialist Realism represents a more complex challenge for the history of grotesque modernism in Russia. Socialist realism is not conducive to the grotesque's non-monistic, essentially conflicted mode of aestheticization. As Evgenii Dobrenko describes in his article "Socialist Realist Memesis, or 'Life in its Revolutionary Development,'" literature that continued to stage cultural conflict was theoretically problematic for the Party. He describes how a 'theory of non-conflict' began to proliferate in Soviet culture towards 1940: "In the second half of the 1930s, the new culture consistently and stubbornly expressed the idea that – according to the theory of the development of humanity from capitalism to communism – in the socialist phase 'not only could there not be antagonistic contradictions, but even non-antagonistic contradictions,' and that even the very 'possibility of contradictions and conflicts was excluded." He continues: "In the 1920s, the Party expected literature to stage conflicts between 'old and new,' between the prerevolutionary and the revolutionary. […] Under the new conditions of life, this conflict should have gradually become obsolete."[374] Dobrenko's insistence that literature is to be mimetic of Marxist-Leninist theory rather than 'life' is emphasized by Katerina Clark in her *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual.* She writes, "the Stalinist novelist must present a fictionalized account of reality and events, but these 'historical tales' must be based on something analogous to the 'divine plan of salvation' followed by the medieval chronicler, namely, on the Marxist-Leninist account of history. None of the discrepancies between theory and practice that give such headaches to the theorists […] needs to concern him, for he does not have to *prove* anything. As chronicler he

[374] Evgenii Dobrenko,"Sotsrealisticheskii mimesis, ili 'zhizn' v ee revoliutsionnom razvitii," in *Sotsrealisticheskii kanon,* ed. Hans Giunter and Evgenii Dobrenko (Sankt-Peterburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2000), 461.

merely *shows* how […] social and political contradictions work themselves out."[375] If there *ought to be* no conflict in theory, then Socialist Realism is obligated to be faithful to this *ought*.

Although the 'theory of non-conflict' alone provides a justification for the grotesque's disappearance in socialist realist literature, the genre contains a number of other features that resist grotesque aestheticization. In his article "Socialist Realism and Literary Theory," Gary Saul Morson, in collaboration with Katerina Clark, distils a 'catalogue of features' that are representative of the genre. Although Morson is well-aware that feature sets are precarious tools for deriving strict definitions and that his "will not characterize equally well all socialist realist novels," his list is nevertheless reflective of the genre's general characteristics. The elements of highlighted by Morson will demonstrate why socialist realism is resistant – but not immune – to grotesque aestheticization.

First, he notes the "two-dimensional psychology of its heroes, especially its 'positive heroes.'" He explains that, "Soviet novels usually depict the hero's quest for *im*personality, his struggle to 'become one with' his Marxist-Leninist role." Also of note is the "lack of irony" in socialist realist literature: "In possession of the Marxist-Leninist method for solving all problems, the socialist realist novel eschews the kind of ambiguity and limited or individualized point of view that readers of Western novels value and in terms of which they often *define* literary art."[376] Morson also notes the obligatory 'happy ending,' the genre's weakness for "political sermons, often in high-flown rhetorical language," and its "highly formulaic plotting and style."

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[375] Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, 159.

[376] Morson, Gary Saul. "Socialist Realism and Literary Theory." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 38, no. 2 (1979): 122.

In light of these features, the genre's resistance to grotesque aesthetic modalities is relatively easy to understand. Most notably, the 'lack of irony' in Socialist Realism belies the genre's insistence on building and representing a monistic artistic world with clearly delineated moral lines. The grotesque thrives in unresolved paradox or incongruity, but such a state of affairs is unlikely in a genre that is always moving towards resolution, towards its happy ending. Perhaps owing to the Hegelianism underlying the genre's predominant Marxist-Leninist worldview, there ought to be a possible synthesis beyond any conflict or incongruity in many works of socialist realist literature. Morson's note about the Socialist Realist hero's quest for 'impersonality' – for 'oneness with their Marxist-Leninist role' – is also instructive in this regard. The analysis of *Goat Song* reveals that the attempt to align oneself with a Soviet political identity can give rise to grotesque hybridity. However, a Socialist Realist writer would not portray a similar personal political project as so fraught, conflicted, and painful. To accord with the genre's propensity for 'happy endings,' the Socialist Realist hero is likely to successfully 'become one' with their Marxist-Leninist role – eliminating or resolving a duality essential to grotesque representation.

A more thorough inquiry into the relationality between the grotesque and Socialist Realism would be necessary to describe the situation with more nuance. One may find, for example, that the grotesque presented some utility in portraying the vestigial enemies of the Soviet hero. Nevertheless, given the genre's predisposition for monistic heroes and monistic discourse, its resistance to the grotesque is no great surprise.

One can garner a more complete picture of the explainations of the decline of grotesque aesthetics by analyzing the situation on a more granular level, and working towards the general principles that emerge from the data. The lives of writers tell a story of the political and the

personal. To this end, I will briefly track the trajectories of the grotesque modernists' writing careers – those included in this project, and those not. By singling out the reasons why each individual author ceased producing grotesque literature, one begins to see that a bevy of explanations exist to explain the appreciable waning of the movement after 1940. Although it constitutes a morbid kind of methodology, reconstructing this 'shifting landscape' often involves creating an aggregate picture of who died when, how, and why. The utility of this approach will clarify itself as patterns begin to emerge. What's more, a survey of the disappearance of grotesque modernism will provide an opportunity to explicitly name other writers and works that belong in the movement's pantheon.

The history of grotesque modernism's decline in the late 1930s and early 1940s is tragically tied to the history of the Great Purge and other manifestations of Stalinist state terror. Collectively, the OBERIU serves as a kind of microcosm for the kinds of forces that acted on practitioners of experimental literature – literature of the grotesque included – in this period. The group was all but destroyed in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and political repression was far and away the most significant factor in the group's dissolution. In 1939, enduring increasingly dire financial prospects and starvation, Daniil Kharms managed to finish his final masterpiece of grotesque literature, *The Old Woman* (*Старуха*). In August 1941 he was arrested for 'spreading defeatist and slanderous sentiments,' and died in February 1942 in prison during the Siege of Leningrad. Aleksander Vvedensky – author of the hallucinatory "Potets" (Потец, 1937) and the bizarre, absurdist play *Christmas at the Ivanovs* (Елка у Ивановых, 1938) – was arrested in September 1941 for 'counterrevolutionary agitation,' suffered an infection of pleuritis while evacuating from the German attack on Khark'ov, and died from the disease in December of that same year. Nikolai Oleinikov, a genius of poetic profanation, was executed in November 1937

on charges of 'counterrevolutionary activity' and 'Trotskyism.' Nikolai Zabolotsky was arrested for 'anti-Soviet propaganda' in 1938 and sent to a work camp. Though he wrote poetry later in life, he never returned to the same markedly grotesque estrangement that defined his early cycle *Columns*, and his Soviet-era long poems.

There were, of course, many more authors of grotesque modernist texts who became victims of political repression in the period. Isaac Babel was arrested in 1939 for 'terrorism and espionage' and executed in 1940. He left behind a catalogue of gruesome, but impossibly refined short stories – most prominently in *The Red Cavalry* (*Конармия,* 1927) and *Odessa Stories* (*Одесские рассказы,* 1931). Boris Pilnyak – who wrote *Naked Year* (*Голый год,* 1922) and *Tale of the Unextinguished Moon* (*Повесть непогашенной луны,* 1928), as well as lesser-known works of grotesque literature like *The Doppelgangers* (*Двойники,* 192?) – was accused of spying on behalf of the Japanese state and was executed in 1938. Vladimir Zazubrin, whose *Splinter* (*Щепка,* 1923) depicted Red Terror in shockingly bold, bloody and, certainly, grotesque detail, was arrested and killed in 1937. Leonid Dobychin, who wrote the enigmatic novel *City of N* (*Город N,* 1934), a view of Russian provincial life estranged through the eyes of a child, disappeared in 1936. His novel was relentlessly attacked by Soviet critics for its 'formalism,' and – though the reason for his disappearance was never officially confirmed – it is speculated that his disappearance was likely a suicide, perhaps catalyzed by the stress caused by such immense institutional pressure.

Though repression and top-down imposition of new 'Soviet' aesthetic norms played a large part in grotesque modernism's wane, a number of the movement's biggest names had passed away before 1940 for reasons unrelated (or, at most, peripherally related) to Stalin-era sociopolitical transformation.

The two futurist poets who briefly featured in this project – Velimir Khlebnikov and Vladimir Mayakovsky – both famously embraced grotesque aesthetics and both met tragic ends: the former dying of an unknown virus in 1922, the latter committing suicide in 1930. The other authors who featured in the prerevolutionary grotesque chapter had also passed away by 1940. Fyodor Sologub, Andrei Bely and Evgenii Zamiatin – each with a deep corpus of grotesque texts, many still understudied – all died of heart trouble, in 1927, 1934 and 1937, respectively. Konstantin Vaginov – who left behind four short novels, each as laden with grotesque imagery as *Goat Song* – passed away from tuberculosis in 1934. Mikhail Bulgakov died in February 1940 from kidney disease, leaving behind a bevy of grotesque masterpieces like *Eggs of Fate* (*Роковые яйца,* 1924), *Diaboliade* (*Дьяволиада,* 1924), *Heart of a Dog* (*Собачье сердце,* 1925), and *Master and Margarita* (*Мастер и Маргарита,* 1940). Ilf and Petrov's most prominent works of grotesque satire – *Twelve Chairs* (*Двенадцать стульев,* 1928) and *The Golden Calf* (*Золотой теленок,* 1931) – were already written by the early 30s. Ilya Ilf died in 1937 from tuberculosis, and Evgenii Petrov died in 1942 in a plane crash returning from an assignment as a war correspondent.

If even a few of these figures had survived through the 1940s or 1950s, the history of grotesque modernism may have taken on a significantly different shape. Although a large segment of writers producing grotesque literature in Russia in the early decades of the 20th century were gone by the 1940s, a few former paragons of the style remained – and several new writers appeared in the years following. A quick look at the strategies these authors pursued in order to continue writing – and, on occasion, publishing – grotesque literature will help to capture the changing shape of grotesque modernism's history after 1940.

Evgenii Shvarts, embodying the courage exemplified by the scholar in his *Shadow*, continued to write provocative plays well into the 1940s. Most notable is his 1944 classic, *The Dragon* (*Дракон*). The play's depiction of a fairytale nation's complacent relationship to tyrannical leadership inevitably led to its censorship. Shvarts continued to write plays through the 1940s and 1950s, though none so politically bold as these.

Andrei Platonov was another rare exception, managing to continue his writing career through the 1940s – shifting his attention towards film scripts, children's literature, and war stories. By 1940 Platonov had already written his most notable grotesque masterpieces – *Chevengur* (*Чевергур*, 1928), *The Foundation Pit* (*Котлован,* 1930), and *Juvenile Sea* among others. This is not to say, however, that the grotesque disappeared from his idiosyncratic poetics; his implementation of grotesque aesthetics in later work warrants further study.

Igor Bakhterev, one of the OBERIU's lesser-known members, lived until 1996. Like many others in the OBERIU, Bakhterev wrote children's literature alongside his more 'underground' experimental work. He was arrested along with Kharms and Vvedensky in 1931 for their participation in 'an anti-Soviet group of writers,' though Bakhterev was able to reinvent himself successfully and convincingly as an explicitly Soviet writer throughout the 1930s. In 1936, for example, he wrote an award-winning children's radio play, "Three Days" (*Три дня*) about Maksim Gorky's childhood, and, throughout the 1940s, Bakhterev collaborated with Aleksandr Razumovsky on a number of heroic war plays, *Commander Suvorov* (*Полководец Суворов,* 1938), *Russian General* (*Русский генерал,* 1944), and *Right at Midnight* (*Ровно в полночь,* 1945). The shift into positive depictions of Soviet martial history represents an ironic about-face for Razumovsky, who had screened his vehemently anti-war film *The Meatgrinder* (*Мясорубка*) at the OBERIU's famous 'Three Left Hours' in 1928.

Fortunately, Russian grotesque modernism did find an outlet in émigré literature. Though many of Russia's most prolific émigré writers produced grotesque masterpieces before 1940, many of them continued to explore similar aesthetic modalities in work in the decades beyond. Vladimir Nabokov, for example, wrote a number of notable grotesque pieces while living outside of Russia, especially his *Despair* (*Отчаяние,* 1934) and its doppelganger play, and the anti-utopian *Invitation to a Beheading* (*Приглашение на казнь,* 1936). The grotesque continued to be part of his aesthetic repertoire far later than 1940 in works like his other anti-utopia *Bend Sinister* (1946) or the tragicomic *Sinyagin*-esque *Pnin* (1957). Aleksei Remizov, who made contributions to both pre- and post-revolutionary grotesque modernism, lived as an émigré in Paris until 1957. The majority of Remizov's masterworks of grotesque modernism were written before he left Russia for Germany in 1921 – temporarily, or so he thought – for medical treatment. They include tragicomic novels and novellas like *The Pond* (*Пруд,* 1905), *Sisters of the Cross* (*Крестовые сестры,* 1910), or *The Fifth Ulcer* (*Пятая язва,* 1905). His novella *What Tobacco Is* (*Что есть табак,* 1908) is among the most profane works of pre-revolutionary Russian literature. Though the grotesque imagery in Remizov's output slowed in his postrevolutionary output, Remizov continued to draw from the aesthetic mode for many more of his postrevolutionary texts, including his *Akhru: A Petersburg Novella* (*Ахру. Повесть Петербургская,* 1922), the ornate memoir of the revolution *Rus, Upended* (*Взвихренная Русь,* 1927). Like Nabokov, he continued to develop these aesthetic modes past 1940 – especially in the phantasmagoria of his later work on dreams, *The Fire of Things* (*Огонь вещей,* 1954), and *Martyn Zadyeka* (*Мартын-Задека,* 1954), and in his attempts to integrate autobiography and ancient/Biblical literature as in his *Novella of Two Beasts, or Ikhnelat* (*Повесть о двух зверях Ихнелат,* 1950). Other Russian émigré practitioners of grotesque modernism include Gaito

Gazdanov and the doppelgänger-haunted novel *The Spectre of Alexander Wolf* (*Призрак Александра Вольфа,* 1948), Boris Poplavsky and his surrealist *Apollon Bezobrazov* (*Аполлон Безобразов,* 1932), and Ilya Zdanevich and his *Rapture* (*Восхищение,* 1930). Poplavsky did not live to contribute to post-1940 grotesque modernism, dying in 1935 in Paris from a drug overdose, but both Gazdanov and Zdanevich continued producing literature into the 1970s.

Émigré writers, as outsiders inhabiting foreign spaces, experienced a whole new set of incongruities abroad that could be captured by the grotesque modalities outlined in our project. I imagine that a more comprehensive survey of Russian grotesque émigré literature would be teeming with questions of conformity or resistance.

Many grotesque modernists came to prominence in the following generations of writers. Many of them adopted samizdat or tamizdat publication strategies and a significant percentage of them eventually emigrated – a sign that the Soviet literary establishment was fundamentally hostile to grotesque literature, as grotesque literature was to it. However, if one wanted to remain within Russia and did not mind the lack of professional or commercial remunerations for one's work – the underground provided another outlet.

There are enough late Russian grotesque modernist writers and works to justify a whole new project – or several. Although I cannot give an exhaustive account of this literary landscape, a few names and works should suffice to provide a general outline of grotesque modernism's history from the 50s through the 80s.

Yulii Daniel published his famous *Moscow is Speaking* (*Говорит Москва*) through tamizdat in 1959 – a provocative work about a government sanctioned day of murder. He refused to emigrate after the infamous 1965 Sinyavsky-Daniel trial. In the late 1950s, Andrei Sinyavsky himself wrote his own provocation "What is Socialist Realism?" – a bold, ironic

reframing of 'socialist realism' as a new breed of grotesque literature. His short story "Pkhentz" (Пхенц) is a masterwork of grotesque prose – a poignant exploration of extreme alienation and the bitter experiences that come out of trying to create a hybridized identity. In 1973, after serving time in a labor camp, Sinyavsky emigrated to France.

Yuri Mamleev wrote his terrifying *The Unsteady Ones* (*Шатуны*) in 1966 and continued producing some of Russian literature's most abject works in the underground until his emigration to France and the United States. Venedikt Yerofeyev deserves his place in the grotesque modernist canon, writing his prose-poem masterpiece, *Moscow to the End of the Line* (*Москва-Петушки*), in 1969. Sasha Sokolov wrote his *School for Fools* (*Школа для дураков*) in 1973 while still living in Russia, passed it around in samizdat, and then emigrated to Vienna (and then Canada) for the publication of his other two novels that deserve a place in the history of late 20th century grotesque modernism: *Between Dog and Wolf* (*Между собакой и волком,* 1980), and *Palisandria* (*Палисандрия,* 1985). Vladimir Voinovich has an extensive catalogue of grotesque literature – some works written while he remained in Russia, others after he had emigrated. Most notable is his *Life and Extraordinary Adventures of Ivan Chonkin* (*Жизнь и необычайные приключения солдата Ивана Чонкина*), the first part of which was written in 1963, and his satirical anti-utopia *Moscow 2042* (*Москва 2042*) appearing in 1986.

Although these are stand-out cases, this list – of course – is not meant to be exhaustive. Many other authors – Sergei Dovlatov, Fazil Iskander, and Vasily Aksyonov to name only a few – produced individual works or whole corpuses of texts that could be productively analyzed as part of the late Russian grotesque modernist movement.

My work offers a modest snapshot of a much longer, richer history. The history of the grotesque in Russia is a field worthy of study on its own – a field not at all peripheral, not niche, but one that is central to the history of Russian literature itself.

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