

SOVIET GOTHIC-FANTASTIC:

A Study of Gothic and Supernatural Themes in Early Soviet Literature

A Dissertation Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by Muireann Maguire

Jesus College, University of Cambridge, October 2008

I declare that this dissertation is the result of my own work, and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration with others. Sections 2.iv of Chapter 2, 5.i of Chapter 3, 2.ii of Chapter 4, and 2.iii of Chapter 5 are rewritten versions of material originally used in my MPhil dissertation, 'Sudorogi krematoriia: Gothic Rereadings of 1920s Soviet Fiction' (University of Cambridge, 2004).

This dissertation does not exceed 80,000 words in length.

Если есть, кроме того, какие-либо духи, или домовые, то о них подробнее, с их названиями и делами. Множество носится между простым народом поверий, страшных сказаний, преданий, разных анекдотов, и проч. и проч. и проч. Все это будет для меня чрезвычайно интересно.

If, in addition, you know something about ghosts or house-demons, tell me all about them in detail, what they are called and what they do; there are lots of superstitions, terrible tales of ancient times, legends, etc., etc., etc., that are still current among the peasants. All this will be of the greatest interest to me.

– Nikolai Gogol, from a letter to his mother, April 30th 1829¹

¹ The Russian text is taken from Nikolai Gogol, *Pis'ma*, ed. by V.I. Shenroka, 2 vols (St Petersburg: Izdatels'tvo A.F. Marksa, 1901), I (1901), p. 120. The English translation is by David Magarshack from his *Gogol: A Life* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), p. 49.

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PREFACE

Much gratitude is due to the many people who have helped me during my three years' research. I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, Dr Aleksandr Etkind, for helping me to fine-tune my definition of Gothic and for exhaustive close reading. Dr Emma Widdis generously gave up her time to offer extra advice, positive criticism and moral support. I also thank Professor Simon Franklin for much good advice and for his role as an inspiring Head of Department. I would like to extend particular thanks to staff in the many libraries I have used, especially the Reading Room and West Room staff in Cambridge University Library, the staff of the Gosudarstvennaia Biblioteka imeni V.I. Lenina in Moscow, and, not least, Dima in the Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva (RGALI), Moscow. Special thanks are owed to the staff of Jesus College Library, Rhona Watson, Chris Barker and Alex Perkins, for every kind of support, from the provision of coffee to the purchase of misleadingly titled academic volumes. I thank Dr Jeremy Smith of Birmingham University, for organizing the original 2006 postgraduate expedition to Moscow's archives, which was an invaluable introduction to research in Russia. Siobhán Carew, the MML Graduate Administrator, has been a rock in times of bureaucratic confusion. I am grateful to Vladimir Orlov for proofreading my Russian text, and to Nadine Meisner for encouragement and subversive griping. I sincerely thank my friend Vitalina Smirnova and her family for providing wonderful Russian hospitality during my last research trip to Moscow in March 2008. Last but not least, I thank Daley, for silent companionship in many libraries.

I dedicate this dissertation to Colin Higgins with all my love, for making this
(and much else) possible.

I declare that this dissertation is the result of my own work, and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration with others. Sections 2.iv of Chapter 2, 5.i of Chapter 3, 2.ii of Chapter 4, and 2.iii of Chapter 5 are rewritten versions of material originally used in my MPhil dissertation, 'Sudorogi krematoriia: Gothic Rereadings of 1920s Soviet Fiction' (University of Cambridge, 2004).

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses the persistence of Gothic-fantastic themes and motifs in the literature of Soviet Russia between 1920 and 1940.

Nineteenth-century Russian literature was characterized by the almost universal assimilation of Gothic-fantastic themes and motifs, adapted from the fiction of Western writers such as E.T.A. Hoffmann, Ann Radcliffe and Edgar Allen Poe. Writers from Pushkin to Dostoevskii, including the major Symbolists, wrote fiction combining the real with the macabre and supernatural. However, following the inauguration of the Soviet regime and the imposition of Socialist Realism as the official literary style in 1934, most critics assumed that the Gothic-fantastic had been expunged from Russian literature. In Konstantin Fedin's words, the Russian fantastic novel had “умер и закопан в могилу”. This thesis argues that Fedin's dismissal was premature, and presents evidence that Gothic-fantastic themes and motifs continued to play a significant role in several genres of Soviet fiction, including science fiction, satire, comedy, adventure novels (*priključenskie romany*), and seminal Socialist Realist classics.

My dissertation identifies five categories of Gothic-fantastic themes, derived jointly from analysis of canonical Gothic novels from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and from innovative approaches to the genre made by contemporary critics such as Fred Botting, Kelly Hurley, Diane Hoeveler, Elaine Showalter and Eric Naiman (whose book *Sex in Public* coined the phrase ‘NEP Gothic’). Each chapter analyses one of these five Gothic themes or tropes in the context of selected Soviet Russian literary texts. The chronotope of Gothic space, epitomized in the genre as the haunted castle or house, is readdressed by Mikhail Bulgakov as the ‘*nekhorošaja kvartira*’ of *Master i Margarita* and by Evgenii Zamiatin as the ‘*drevnyi dom*’ of his dystopian fantasy *My*. Gothic gender issues, including the subgenre of Female Gothic, arise in Nikolai Ognev's novels and Aleksandra Kollontai's stories. The Gothic obsession with dying, corpses and the afterlife re-emerges in fictions such as Daniil Kharms' “Starukha” (whose hero is threatened by an animated corpse) and Nikolai Erdman's banned play *Samoubiitsa* (the story of a failed suicide). Gothic bodies (deformed or regressive human bodies) are contrasted with Stalinist cultural aspirations to somatic perfection within a utopian society. Typically Gothic monsters – vampires, ghosts, and demon lovers – are evaluated in a separate chapter. Each Gothic trope is integrated with

my analysis of the relevant Soviet discourse, including early Communist attitudes to gender and the body and the philosopher Nikolai Federov's utopian belief in the possibility of universal resurrection.

As my focus is thematic rather than author-centred, my field of research ranges from well-known writers (Fedor Gladkov, Bulgakov, Zamiatin) to virtual unknowns (Grigorii Grebnev and Vsevolod Valiusinskii, both early 1930s novelists), and recently rediscovered writers (Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii, Vladimir Zazubrin). Three Soviet authors who explicitly emulated the nineteenth-century Gothic-fantastic tradition in their fiction were Mikhail Bulgakov, Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii and A.V. Chaianov. Many mainstream Soviet writers also exploited Gothic-fantastic motifs in their work. Fedor Gladkov's Socialist Realist production novel, *Tsement*, uses the trope of the Gothic castle to dramatise the reclamation of a derelict cement factory by the workers. Nikolai Ognev's *Dnevnik Kosti Riabtseva*, the diary of an imaginary Communist schoolboy, relies on ghost stories to sustain suspense. Aleksandr Beliaev, the popular science fiction writer, inserted subversive clichés from the Gothic narrative tradition in his deceptively optimistic novels. Gothic-fantastic tropes and motifs were used polemically by dissident writers to subvert the monologic message of Socialist Realism; other writers, such as Gladkov and Marietta Shaginian, exploited the same material to support Communism and attack Russia's enemies. The visceral resonance of Gothic fear lends its metaphors unique political impact. This dissertation aims at an overall survey of Gothic-fantastic narrative elements in early Soviet literature rather than a conclusive analysis of their political significance. However, in conclusion, I speculate that the survival of the Gothic-fantastic genre in the hostile soil of the Stalinist literary apparatus proves that early Soviet literature was more varied, contradictory and self-interrogative than previously assumed.

NOTES ON REFERENCES

All Russian quotations in the text are given in Cyrillic characters. Transliteration of titles, etc., follows the Library of Congress system throughout. I have given the titles of short stories in double quotation marks and italicized the titles of all novels and novellas. *Povesti*, which fall between categories, I have generally classed as novellas.

In the course of the text, full details of every source are given at first citation. Thereafter they are referred to by author's name only (or by author and an abbreviation of the title if more than one work by the same author is used). Online resources and archival materials accessed are listed in individual sections of the Bibliography, following a full list of primary and secondary sources.

Archival materials from RGALI (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva), Moscow, are referenced in full throughout.

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

1. Framing the Soviet Ghost

This thesis analyses the persistence of Gothic-fantastic themes and motifs in the literature of Soviet Russia between 1920 and 1940. Gothic-fantastic writing, defined as Gothic themes and motifs potentially augmented by supernatural elements, first spread to Russia in the late eighteenth century. The genre took root in nineteenth-century prose, inspired by translations and imitations of foreign examples such as the British Gothic novel, the French ‘roman noir’ and the stories and novels of the German writer, E.T.A. Hoffmann. Most of Russia’s major nineteenth-century writers exploited Gothic-fantastic characters, plots or devices at least once during their careers. Gogol, Pushkin, Lermontov, and Dostoievskii were especially prolific exponents of supernatural motifs.¹ During the first two decades of the twentieth century, Symbolist writers, including Andrei Bely, Aleksandr Blok and Valerii Briusov, sustained the use of supernatural imagery in both poetry and prose. However, in the aftermath of the 1917 Revolution, the Gothic-fantastic lost its prominence in Russian prose. Relatively few writers continued to publish fiction in this genre. Within Soviet Russia, realism and optimism became the order of the day. In the course of the 1920s, this shift towards realism was consolidated by selection patterns practised by censors, publishers, and Party ideologues. After the formation of the Writers’ Union in 1932, this semi-official policy crystallized into the doctrine of Socialist Realism. By the first All-Russian Soviet Writers’ Union Congress of August-September 1934, a consensus of Soviet writers reformulated the goals of Russian literature as *ideinost’*, *narodnost’* and *partiinnost’*. Future Soviet fiction would depict reality not only as it was, but as it ought to be. At the same congress, the novelist (and later Writers’

¹ I am referring to Gogol’s Petersburg tales, Pushkin’s “Pikovaia dama” and “Grobovshchik” among other stories, Lermontov’s “Shtoss” and many of Dostoevskii’s works, including *Khoziaika* and “Bobok”.

Union secretary) Konstantin Fedin announced that the Russian fantastic novel had “умер и закопан в могилу”².

Fedin's choice of a strikingly Gothic phrase to announce the death of Gothic-fantastic prose betrays an innate inconsistency in the Soviet rejection of Gothic fiction. As this thesis will show, not only did censors fail to expunge Gothic and supernatural motifs from popular genres such as adventure fiction and scientific fantasy, even orthodox writers of Soviet prose continued to use Gothic tropes. In addition, a number of dissident writers explicitly imitated the Gothic-fantastic tales of Hoffmann, Gogol, and others in various politically significant, if frequently unpublished, fictions. This thesis will argue that Gothic-fantastic tradition continued to play an integral role in Soviet literature, whether used for rhetorical impact or to enhance plotlines and character description.

In fact, Marxist and Soviet ideologists had cited Gothic-fantastic motifs for propaganda and even self-definition since the late nineteenth century. Karl Marx combined a Gothic topos, deferred retribution, with supernatural cliché in his famous statement that communism was ‘a spectre haunting Europe’.³ By associating the proletariat, unjustly deprived of their rights, with a ghost seeking supernatural vengeance, Marx used the inevitability of Gothic plot to imply the inevitability of social change. Recognising the ambiguity of Gothic-fantastic metaphors, Marx also used negative or sinister images from the genre – such as animated, predatory corpses – to caricature the cultural values of the bourgeoisie.

...A whole series of inherited evils oppress us, arising from the passive survival of antiquated modes of production, with their inevitable train of social and political anachronisms. We suffer not only from the living, but from the dead. *Le mort saisit le vif*!⁴

Lenin, speaking in 1918, used the Gothic metaphor of a rotting corpse to argue the potential effect of ideological destabilisation produced by the remnants of Tsarist society:

² Konstantin Fedin, cited in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 23 August 1934, p. 2.

³ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. by David McLellan (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 2.

⁴ Karl Marx, ‘Preface to the First German edition’, in *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Productions*, 2 vols (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), I (1954), pp. 7-11 (p. 9).

И когда наступает революция, дело не происходит так, как со смертью отдельного лица, когда умерший выносится вон. Когда гибнет старое общество, труп его нельзя заколотить в гроб и положить в могилу. Он разлагается в нашей среде, этот труп гниет и заражает нас самих.⁵

Marx and Lenin's exploitation of Gothic imagery (vampires, corpses, vengeful phantoms and their ilk) to attack capitalism was more than a rhetorical flourish: it was, according to one critic, recognition of a 'larger historical irony'.⁶ The stylized tropes of Gothic-fantastic aptly expressed Marx' point that, in ridding the world of medieval superstition, modern capitalist methods had created an atmosphere of repression and suffering exceeding the most extravagant Gothic nightmare. 'Capitalist reality had indeed surpassed the hyperbole of myth, but only by using its vaunted enlightenment and rationality to convert the modern world into the equivalent of a medieval nightmare'.⁷ Like the usurper in a Gothic novel who ignores supernatural warnings, politicians and industrialists failed to anticipate their downfall in the stirrings of the proletariat. Marx and Lenin used Gothic metaphor to argue that capitalism was a failed ideology, inherently Gothic: that is, bloodsucking, enfeebled, and ultimately doomed. Thus, industrial advancement implied social degeneration; new urban landscapes were haunted by dystopian nightmares; even the well-fed bodies of the middle classes were internally corrupt and unclean. By abusing the proletariat, the bourgeoisie had produced their own gravediggers.⁸

Yet, by admitting Gothic-fantastic horror as an ideological concept, Lenin and Marx exposed Communism to the same historical irony. Were the proletariat truly righteous heirs to the industrial revolution – or were they simply a new generation of usurpers, doomed in their turn to supernaturally orchestrated overthrow? What warnings from beyond the grave had they overlooked? Who were the vampires and living corpses within Soviet Russian society? Gothic-fantastic rhetoric was re-used to frame these questions during the ideological collisions of NEP society and the political repression of the Stalin era. Key Gothic myths

⁵ V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 55 vols (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1967-1970), XXXVI (1969), p. 409. For further analysis of Marx and Lenin's Gothic rhetoric in the context of Soviet politics, see Eric Naiman, *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* [hereafter *SP*] (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 158-160.

⁶ Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity and Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001), p. 121.

⁷ Baldick, p. 122.

⁸ Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 16.

from the *Communist Manifesto* and other revolutionary texts – the undead corpse, the supernatural warning, the lurking spectre, the bloodthirsty vampire, even the inadvertent gravediggers – recurred as ideologically problematic images in Soviet fictions. The genre's interpretative flexibility meant that Gothic imagery could be used with equal effect by writers on opposite political sides. Soviet writers from Gorky to Gladkov compared their ideological enemies to vampires; equally committed émigré authors argued that the Bolsheviks were in league with 'нечистая сила'. The playwright and novelist Mikhail Bulgakov, the economist Aleksandr Chaianov and a few others wrote in Gothic-fantastic style, generally from aesthetic rather than political motivations. Their explicitly unrealistic fictions were destined for obscurity within the authors' lifetimes and posthumous notoriety, when later critics struggled to read political meanings into their Gothic tropes.

As self-professed exponents of the Gothic-fantastic tradition, Bulgakov's and Chaianov's fiction was largely unpublishable in their lifetimes. But, as this thesis reveals, a significant proportion of ideologically 'correct', successful Soviet writers used Gothic-fantastic tropes and narrative mechanisms in otherwise realist work. These writers include some of the most well-known figures in the canon of Socialist Realism, including founders of the genre such as Maksim Gorky, Fedor Gladkov and Vladimir Zazubrin. Gothic-fantastic themes penetrated different genres, appearing in children's fiction, the Red adventure novel or *krasnyi pinkerton*, science fiction, and even cinema and drama. The stereotypical characters and settings of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic fiction – monsters, demons, haunted castles, deformed bodies and reanimated corpses – were resurrected in new forms relevant to Soviet society. Gothic villains and victims re-populated mainstream Soviet prose.

By analysing a wide range of prose and some drama from the two decades following the Revolution this thesis aims to prove that Gothic-fantastic themes and tropes survived Fedin's premature announcement of their death. It also suggests that the inherent ambiguity of Gothic made this mode uniquely suited to Soviet writers engaged in producing new fiction to suit a new world. The infinite suggestiveness and multiple perspectives of Gothic narrative – not to mention the genre's obsession with truth, justice and possession – provided Soviet authors with conceptual space to interrogate and even contradict the tenets of Communist society. If Russian Gothic-fantastic literature had truly been 'закопан в могилу', as Fedin stated, it would prove an unquiet corpse. The spectre of Gothic-fantastic would rise many times to haunt the Soviet novel.

1.i. Spectres of criticism

The continuing centrality of Gothic fiction to contemporary scholarship is proven by a number of recent critical studies from specialists (including Fred Botting, E.J. Clery and David Punter), collections of academic essays such as *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (2002) and the issue of new anthologies of generic fiction, including *American Gothic: An Anthology, 1787-1916* (1999) or *The Picador Book of the New Gothic* (1991). The genre's popularity is possibly enhanced by its reputation for cliché-ridden and sensational plots. In their 2006 catalogue, the British publishing house Wordsworth Editions issued a new series entitled 'Mystery and the Supernatural', consisting of reprints of rare nineteenth- and early twentieth-century English Gothic-fantastic fiction. Such enterprises demonstrate the enduring appeal of Gothic topoi such as the ghost story and the haunted house mystery.⁹

Since *perestroika*, the Russian reading public has also rediscovered its penchant for Gothic fiction, whether historical, ironic, or literary. In the first category are several reissues of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Russian Gothic-fantastic stories by Orest Somov, Aleksandr Pushkin, A.K. Tolstoi, and others.¹⁰ Ironic Gothic refers to postmodern reprises of the genre by novelists such as Boris Akunin and Viktor Pelevin.¹¹ The third category includes self-conscious transposition of Gothic narrative to modern situations, as in Petr Aleshkovskii's novel *Vladimir Chigrintsev* (1997), a trend comparable to Western neo-

⁹ The definitive study of Gothic literature in English is David Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, 2 vols (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1996). Helpful shorter guides are Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) and Andrew Smith, *Gothic Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press: 2007). Other useful works are Markman Ellis' *The History of Gothic Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000) and *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. by Jerrold Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). E.J. Clery's *Women's Gothic: From Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley* (Tavistock, Devon: Northcote House, 2000) is an excellent guide to early Female Gothic, while other highly relevant perspectives on the Gothic genre include Robert Miles, *Gothic Writing 1750-1820: A Genealogy*, 2nd edn (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002) and Peter K. Garrett, *Gothic Reflections: Narrative Force in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2003).

¹⁰ Examples include *Russkaia gotika: Beloe privedenie*, ed. by A. Karpov (St Petersburg: Azbuka-Klassika, 2006) and *Polnoch', XIX vek*, ed. by A.S. Gulyi (Moscow: Sombra, 2005).

¹¹ Pelevin's *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2006) and *Empire V* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2007) deploy the tropes of were-creatures and vampires, respectively, in contemporary Russia. Many of Akunin's novels and short stories use Gothic or supernatural motifs; see especially his *Kladbishchenskie istorii* (Moscow: KoLibri, 2005). For more on the ironic use of the supernatural by Russian postmodern authors, see Mark Lipovetsky, *Russian Postmodernist Fiction: Dialogue with Chaos*, ed. by Eliot Borenstein (London and Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1999).

Gothic fiction by Angela Carter and Patrick McGrath.¹² The revival of Gothic-fantastic fiction parallels the success of other genre fiction such as detective novels, military adventure and women's prose.

Serious academic studies of Russian Gothic by both Western and Russian scholars have not lagged behind. Vadim Vatsuro's posthumous monograph *Goticheskii roman v Rossii* (2002) is regarded as the definitive assessment of the assimilation of Western European Gothic-fantastic fiction by Russian writers between 1790 and 1830. A recent anthology of critical essays, *Goticheskaiia traditsiia v russkoi literature* (2008), focuses primarily on nineteenth-century Gothic-fantastic fiction, although articles on Briusov and Nabokov represent the twentieth century. This volume is a useful Russian sequel to a previous anthology of essays by mostly Western scholars on the same topic, *The Gothic-Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature* (1999). Both anthologies re-examine Gothic motifs in prose by authors from Karamzin to Chekhov, including relatively neglected authors like A.A. Bestuzhev-Marlinksii and Nikolai Gnedich.¹³

In studies of twentieth-century Russian, Gothic and supernatural prose N. Bogomolov's survey of supernatural elements in Symbolist and Modernist poetry and prose and Gennadii Obatnin's interrogation of occultism in Viacheslav Ivanov's works are both relevant.¹⁴ Eric Naiman's monograph *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Soviet Ideology* (1999) experiments

¹² For criticism of neo-Gothic and new occultism in Russian literature, see Valentina Brougher, 'Werewolves and Vampires, Historical Questions and Symbolic Answers, in Peter Aleshkovskii's *Vladimir Chigrintsev*', *Slavic and East European Journal*, 3: 45 (2001), 491-505, and also Valentina Brougher and Helène Wolff, 'The Demonic in the Short Stories of Grigorii Petrov, Anatolii Kurchatkin, and Oleg Ermakov', *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 41 (1999), 143-156.

¹³ Vadim Vatsuro's *Goticheskii roman v Rossii* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2002) is primarily concerned with individual writers (both European and Russian) and their influence on, or contribution to, the emergence of Russian Gothic literature. Both *Goticheskaiia traditsiia v russkoi literature*, ed. by N.D. Tamarchenko (Moscow: Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Gumanitarnyi Universitet, 2008) and *The Gothic-Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature*, ed. by Neil Cornwell (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1999) pursue this author-focussed approach. For an overview of the development of Gothic-fantastic writing in Russia from its beginnings to the early twentieth century, see Neil Cornwell's essay in the latter volume, 'Russian Gothic: An Introduction', pp. 3-22.

¹⁴ See N.A. Bogomolov, *Russkaia literatura nachala XX veka i okkultizm: issledovaniia i materialy* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1999), and Gennadii Obatnin, *Ivanov-mistik: Okkul'tnye motivy v poezii i proze Viacheslava Ivanova (1907-1919)* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2000). Rachel Polonsky's *English Literature and the Russian Aesthetic Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) examines the influence of the American Gothic writer Edward Allen Poe on Bely, Briusov, Balmont and other leading Symbolists.

with the use of tropes from the eighteenth-century Gothic novel, especially the sub-genre of ‘Female Gothic’, to analyse discourses of alienation and misogyny in NEP Russia. Naiman coined the phrase ‘NEP Gothic’ to describe the ideologically motivated propaganda prevailing in this period.¹⁵ Some of the articles collected in *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Fiction*, edited by Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, discuss the persistence of occultism in the early Soviet period, while Nadya L. Peterson’s monograph *Subversive Imaginations: Fantastic Prose and the End of Soviet Literature, 1970s-1990s* identifies political resonances in late Soviet magic realism and Gothic-fantastic novels.¹⁶ One Russian scholar even uses modern horror fiction, chiefly Sergei Lukianenko’s popular vampire thriller *Nochnoi Dozor* (1998), to contend that contemporary Russians perceive their society as fundamentally Gothic.¹⁷

The many analyses, assessments, uses and occasional abuses of the literary term ‘Gothic’ in both Western and Russian critical studies, as listed above, reiterate the enduring relevance and the continuing reinvention of Gothic thematics in international literature. This dissertation is, however, the first detailed analysis in any language of the persistence of Gothic motifs in Russian fiction during the first two decades of Soviet government. My aim in this dissertation is, firstly, to list and categorize the primary Gothic tropes, characters and motifs in early Soviet literature. Secondly, I aim to contextualise Soviet Gothic writing within the international tradition of Gothic literature and criticism. In the following sections of this introduction, I will define and justify my interpretation of the terms ‘Gothic’ and ‘Gothic-fantastic’, outline the structure of the dissertation, and venture a close reading of that apparent oxymoron – a ‘typical’ Soviet Gothic text.

¹⁵ See Eric Naiman, *SP*, especially Chapter 4, ‘Behind the Red Door: An Introduction to NEP Gothic’, pp. 148-180.

¹⁶ See Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Fiction* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1997) and Nadya L. Peterson, *Subversive Imaginations: Fantastic Prose and the End of Soviet Literature, 1970s-1990s* (Oxford and Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997).

¹⁷ Dina Khapaeva, in her *Goticheskoe obshchestvo: morfologia koshmara* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2007), defines the Gothic as an aesthetic characterized by return to pre-modern political models, individualism, consciousness of the perceived failure of humanism, and ultimately, nihilism. She believes this aesthetic has led to an intellectual crisis in contemporary Russia. However, Khapaeva’s definition of Gothic is fatally flawed by her incorrect association of works of fantasy (including J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* (1955)) with the Gothic literary tradition, among other misapprehensions.

2. What is Gothic?

Despite the abundant critical literature on Gothic outlined above, there is surprising disparity between definitions of the Gothic novel. Critics differ between historical, aesthetic, generic, typological and narratological definitions. Each necessarily implies omissions and exclusions. This conflict of opinions may derive from the genre's refusal to confine itself to a discrete historical epoch or literary trend. At many stages in its evolution, Gothic narrative has penetrated into different genres or degenerated into self-parody.

The first British Gothic novels were approximately coeval with new genres like Sentimentalism, Romanticism and French freneticism; Gothic trends also emerged in drama and poetry. Even at this formative stage of the Gothic novel, a typological paradox is found: namely the fact that two disparate literary styles were referred to as archetypal Gothic novels.¹⁸ The first style, epitomized by Ann Radcliffe's Sentimental Gothic novels, prioritizes emotion and personality. Supernatural elements are deployed only to titillate the reader and are ultimately resolved as natural phenomena. The second variant, represented by M.R. Lewis' *The Monk* (1796), emphasizes supernatural horror, melodrama and tragedy. It is closer in tone to the French *roman noir*. Both styles influenced the Russian Gothic tradition; Karamzin's Gothic stories owe an obvious debt to Radcliffe's sentimentalism, while Pushkin, Bestuzhev-Marlinksi and other later authors integrated violence or horror into their works.

The heyday of the original Gothic novels began with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and ended with Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), to be succeeded by Victorian Gothic, which emphasized physical and mental degeneration. During the nineteenth century, the mechanism of terror in Gothic fiction underwent a shift from the supernatural to the psychological, as demonstrated by many of Edgar Allen Poe's short stories, Henry James' novella *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) and Pushkin's *Pikovaia dama* (1833). In all of these examples, the presence of the supernatural is suggested but never proven. In the twentieth century, the popularity of film has increasingly blurred the distinctions between Gothic as a fictional genre, and cinematic horror. The term 'Gothic' has been widely misappropriated by various cultural trends and mistakenly identified with horror and fantasy, which are conceptually different genres. Modern critics have admitted multiple subdivisions of the

¹⁸ See V.A. Malkina and A.A. Poliakova, "'Kanon" goticheskogo romana i ego raznovidnosti', in *Goticheskaiia traditsiia v russkoi literature*, pp. 15-32 (pp. 16-24).

genre, cultural and geographical, such as Female Gothic, Irish Gothic, American Gothic and Colonial Gothic. In short, no single, unitary definition of Gothic as a genre is possible.

What critics do agree on are the narrative elements characteristic of Gothic novels. Botting identifies Gothic literature with 'the writing of excess... fascination with transgression and the anxiety over cultural limits and boundaries'.¹⁹ The 'stock features' of Gothic fiction include 'tortuous, fragmented narratives', highly ornamented prose and emotion-driven aesthetics, mysterious or supernatural villains, landscapes which are 'desolate, alienating and full of menace', and standard loci such as the castle or the old house.²⁰ The Russian critics Malkina and Poliakova isolate similar topoi in their definition of the Gothic novel: an ancient castle or other ruin, an exotic, possibly medieval setting, the potential activity of supernatural forces, and the presence of a secret ('обычно – страшная').²¹ Robert Miles defines the Gothic as 'a discursive site... a series of contemporaneously understood forms, devices, codes, figurations, for the expression of the 'fragmented subject''.²² Therefore Gothic literature can be envisioned as an encoded library of buried terrors, whether individual or cultural. The supernatural is a framing device for the expression of secret guilt, unspeakable anxieties, and private terrors.

David Punter's strategy, failing a conclusive definition of the genre, is to investigate Gothic '*narratives*, insofar as it is possible to isolate them from the surrounding culture' (Punter's italics).²³ Among these leading Gothic narratives are paranoia (metonymic for many forms of madness and the fear of madness), barbarism (including the fear of genealogical degeneration), and taboo (the unclean or unholy). My strategy in this dissertation, as will be seen, is methodologically similar both to Punter's approach and to Katarina Clark's in her investigation of Socialist Realist narrative archetypes, discussed below.²⁴

¹⁹ Botting, *Gothic*, pp. 1-2.

²⁰ Botting, *Gothic*, pp. 2-3.

²¹ Malkina and Poliakova, pp. 24-26.

²² Robert Miles, *Gothic Writing 1750-1820: A Genealogy*, 2nd edn (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 3-4.

²³ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, II, p. 146.

²⁴ Katarina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 3rd edn (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000).

2.i. Defining the Gothic-fantastic

The role of the fantastic in Gothic is problematic. While Gothic plot exists independently of fantastic effects, the Gothic novel relies heavily for narrative suspense on the *suggestion* of the supernatural. Gothic novels also typically produce scenarios which are liminal between the realistic and the fantastic (for example, the creation of Frankenstein's monster in Mary Shelley's 1818 novel is an achievement ascribed to scientific skill but actually completely fantastic). Tzvetan Todorov defined the fantastic as 'duration of uncertainty' in the mind of the reader over the possibility of events in a given text, 'a dividing line between the uncanny and the marvellous'.²⁵ In 'uncanny' fiction, according to Todorov, the reader's belief is suspended, but eventually resolved when the supernatural events or situation are rationally explained. This category includes the 'explained supernatural' of some Gothic novels, including Radcliffe's. In Todorov's second category, the 'marvellous', the supernatural is predicated as part of the fabric of reality, as when Bram Stoker assumes the existence of vampires in *Dracula*.

Neil Cornwell, following Todorov's criteria, defines 'the fantastic Gothic' as writing 'characterized by hesitation over the supernatural'.²⁶ By this interpretation, Pushkin's short story "Pikovaia dama" is Gothic-fantastic because the apparition of the dead Countess can be interpreted ambiguously, either as an hallucination or as a genuine supernatural manifestation. But to follow Todorov's criteria too narrowly means to exclude the marvellous, which is an essential element of Gothic fiction, from the definition of Gothic-fantastic. This would rule out the inclusion of A.K. Tolstoi's *Sem'ia vurdalaka* (1839) or Bulgakov's *Master i Margarita*, since neither work allows the reader scope for hesitation: both texts require unconditional suspension of disbelief. This definition also excludes William Godwin's novel *Caleb Williams* (1794), which includes all three of Punter's Gothic narrative tropes without any supernatural element. Yet *Caleb Williams* is usually classed as one of the first major Gothic novels.²⁷

²⁵ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. by Richard Howard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), pp. 25-27.

²⁶ Neil Cornwell, 'Russian Gothic: An Introduction', in *The Gothic-Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature*, ed. by Neil Cornwell (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA.: Rodopi, 1999), pp. 3-22 (p. 7).

²⁷ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, I, pp. 118-124.

To resolve these contradictions, my definition of Gothic-fantastic is predicated primarily on the Gothic. In the context of Gothic fiction, I define the fantastic as any form of the supernatural, therefore including all three of Todorov's categories – the uncanny, the marvellous and the fantastic – in my interpretation. The term 'Gothic-fantastic' will be used in this dissertation to refer to fictions which are typologically Gothic and which may include aspects of the supernatural, whether of the 'supernatural explained' (the uncanny) or the 'supernatural accepted' (the marvellous), in Todorov's terms.²⁸ This definition covers both realist narratives featuring Gothic elements or themes (Gladkov's *Tsement*, Bulgakov's "No. 13: Dom El'pit-Rabkommuna") and fantastic narratives with Gothic plots (Beliaev's *Chelovek-amfibii*, Valisvinskii's *Bol'shaia zemlia*). My primary interest is the persistence of Gothic motifs in Soviet literature. However, due to the interpenetration between the Gothic and the fantastic, it is impossible to fully explain the Gothic without referencing the latter. My definition necessitates the revision of some genre assumptions. Although most science fiction novels are classified as fantastic, some incorporate Gothic narrative devices – such as Aleksandr Beliaev's novel *Golova professora Douella*. I interpret such works as Gothic-fantastic.

2.ii. Gothic narratives

Like Punter's, my definition of the Gothic is thematic, based on three narrative themes characteristic of almost all volumes in the original Gothic canon. In order to avoid confusion arising from the multiple interpretations of Gothic literature in the twentieth century, I have set the boundaries of the canon between 1764 (the publication date of the first Gothic novel, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*) and approximately 1900. Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) and H.G. Wells' *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896) are two of the latest examples. Early Gothic novels such as William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786), Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* (1777) and Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) established the Gothic's close association with issues of property, inheritance and legitimacy.

The relatively explicit sex, murders and other gruesome features of M.R. Lewis' *The Monk* (1796) and Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya, or the Moor* (1806) created the Gothic novel's reputation as a purveyor of erotic horror. Nineteenth-century Gothic prose witnessed a

²⁸ Todorov, p. 40.

‘progressive internalization and recognition of fears as generated by the self’.²⁹ Gothic authors responded to industrial and technological progress with fantasies of destruction and degeneration. Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) has been widely interpreted as a parable of scientific arrogance. The mutated bodies and grotesque monsters in late nineteenth-century fiction by R.L. Stevenson, H.G. Wells, Arthur Machen and other British authors are widely interpreted as a response to the emergence of new scientific disciplines such as criminal anthropology and evolution theory.³⁰ These and other works from the Gothic canon will be revisited in the pages of this dissertation for comparison with and contextualization of Soviet Gothic texts.

I identify the three definitive themes of Gothic narratives as liminality, regression, and revelation. The first category, liminality, refers to the Gothic fascination with transgressing limits which are traditionally taboo, such as those between human and animal bodies or between life and death. In Gothic fiction, characters may participate in both conditions simultaneously. Vampires and ghosts blur the distinction between life and death; artificial monsters challenge the distinction between human, animal and machine bodies; androgynes shatter gender assumptions.

The second major Gothic preoccupation is regression, individual or social. I define this as any form of reversion to a more primitive state, from the atmospheric dilapidation of a ruined building to evolutionary degeneration. Retrogression may also be psychological, including moral decay and emotional infantilism. Gothic is an incorrigibly recidivist genre. In its striving to recreate or return to superseded states of being, it poses an ideological challenge to Soviet (and Enlightenment) themes of transcendence and transformation. Dale Peterson, defining Bunin’s novella “Sukhodol” (1912) as a Gothic text, claims, ‘The power of the past to command a repeat performance... is what Gothic story is all about’.³¹ In Gothic narrative,

²⁹ Rosemary Jackson, *The Literature of Subversion* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 24.

³⁰ See Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c.1848-c.1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), esp. Chapter 6, ‘Fictions of degeneration’, pp. 155-175, Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), and Robert Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History’s Nightmares* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) for more on the influence of anthropology and the social sciences on late Victorian Gothic horror.

³¹ Dale Peterson, ‘Russian Gothic: The Deathless Paradoxes of Bunin’s Dry Valley’, *Slavic and East European Journal*, 1: 31 (1987), 36-49 (p. 38).

the structures of a forgotten past re-assert themselves by deforming the lineaments of the present.

The third and most crucial generic preoccupation of Gothic is revelation: the involuntary but irresistible return of memory upon reality. This theme coincides with Freud's concept of the uncanny.³² For patients undergoing psychoanalysis, this signifies the cathartic recognition of repressed memories. In literature, this process signals the traumatic reassertion of buried familial secrets, the righting of ancient wrongs, or the restoration of property to its legitimate owners. The theme of return contains within itself the previous themes of liminality and regression. Whether the thing repressed is a secret (a hidden will, a rumour of illegitimacy), a person (a lost heir, a wronged woman), an emotion (fear, lust, guilt) or a tangible object (a house, a murdered body), it will inevitably be publicly revealed. However, these buried secrets and wrongs are not guaranteed to rebound only on the perpetrators of injustice: they are at least equally likely to affect the wrongdoers' innocent and ignorant heirs. 'The revisiting of the sins of the fathers upon their children' is an essential trope of Gothic experience.³³

2.iii. Gothic: a negative of transparency

The primary function of Gothic prose is to 'invade, uncover and display':³⁴ the central tropes of Gothic are return and repetition. Because of this expository function, many critics categorize Gothic as a transgressive, potentially destructive genre. Freudian critics read the vortices, labyrinths and assorted monsters of Gothic fiction as representations of the fragmentation of the individual psyche. Robert Miles, for example, sees the Gothic as the literature of the self 'dispossessed in its own house, in a condition of rupture, disjunction, fragmentation'.³⁵ However, David Punter reads Gothic prose as the self-diagnosis of a wounded collective unconscious, a 'discourse of alienation' between individual and society.³⁶ Punter argues that Gothic's subversive effects may express historical issues rather than

³² Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' (1919), in *The Penguin Freud Library*, ed. by James Strachey, 15 vols (London: Penguin, 1985-), XIV (1990), pp. 339-376.

³³ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, I, p. 46.

³⁴ Naiman, *SP*, p. 163.

³⁵ Miles, p. 3.

³⁶ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, II, p. 214.

personal angst. Edmund Burke used tropes of Gothic horror – bloodshed and chaos – to decry the barbarism of class struggle in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Yet some critics castigate Gothic authors for failing to instigate political or societal change.³⁷

Michel Foucault compares the Gothic novel to the principle of the eighteenth-century Panopticon, a structure designed to place imprisoned criminals under constant surveillance. Like the Panopticon, the Gothic novel appeared to be ‘a whole fantasy-world of stone walls, darkness, hideouts and dungeons’ while, in fact, it delimited and enclosed this dangerous space. Although marketed as ‘the negative of the transparency and visibility which it is aimed to establish’, the Gothic novel served ‘to paradoxically create a space of exact legibility’.³⁸ Fred Botting’s discussion of Gothic transgression suggests that the genre may begin by challenging limits and hierarchies, but ends by confirming them.³⁹ Rosemary Jackson alleges that nineteenth-century Gothic fiction ‘in many ways reinforces a bourgeois ideology’.⁴⁰ Gothic voices the unspeakable by framing images of horror, perversion and fear. Simultaneously, it functions to locate and contain these anxieties. It is a safety valve for class anxiety rather than an initiative for social change. Gothic tends to indulge in radical brinkmanship, exploring the edges of permissibility, yet never overrunning them.

Gothic tropes interrogate the anxieties of one class or generation, as in Charles Crow’s analysis of American Gothic fiction:

American writers understood, quite early, that the Gothic offered a way to explore areas otherwise denied them... If the national story of the United States has been a story of our faith in progress and success and in opportunity for the individual, Gothic literature can tell the story of those who are rejected, oppressed, or who have failed... If the national myth was of equality, a society in which class (like race) does not matter, the Gothic could show, in stories about brutes, the real class anxiety which existed in periods of emigration and economic flux... If the dominant national story was about progress, and a part of this set of values was faith in science and technology to improve everyone’s

³⁷ See Napier, Elizabeth R., *The Failure of Gothic: Problems of Disjunction in an Eighteenth-Century Literary Form* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

³⁸ Foucault, Michel, ‘The Eye of Power’, trans. by Colin Gordon, in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. by Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), pp. 146-66 (pp. 154-5).

³⁹ Botting, pp. 6-13.

⁴⁰ Jackson, p. 122.

life, then the Gothic can expose anxiety about what the scientist might create, and what threats might be posed by machines, if they escape our control.⁴¹

During the period covered in this dissertation, Soviet fiction also assimilated national myths of equality, technology and progress. Gothic-fantastic motifs were a natural strategy to interrogate (and not necessarily to subvert) this process.

The fact that Gothic tropes can be used with equal effect to promote or challenge the *status quo* reveals the deep-seated historical, and situational, contingency of the genre. Gothic prose may be subversive, but the subject of subversion is not constant. Or, in the words of one critic, Gothic cannot be ‘*inherently* subversive... [because] the political force of particular discourses is contingent upon their interaction with others in the process of reading. The meanings and significance of texts change continually as they are read in new contexts’.⁴² This statement chimes with Katarina Clark’s observation that ‘in the Soviet novel many of the formulaic tropes have, over time, changed or at least been modified in their meanings’.⁴³ Both the Gothic-fantastic and Socialist Realism are genres whose interpretation is historically relative. Even such a universally terrifying legend as the *oboroten*’, or were-beast, can shift from malignancy to benignity over the course of a century. In the Soviet director Konstantin Eggert’s 1926 film *Medvezh’ia svad’ba* (co-written with Anatolii Lunacharskii), a were-bear symbolizes the brutality of aristocratic landowners. Almost seventy years later, Viktor Pelevin’s “Problema vervolka v srednei polose” (1993) suggests that werewolves fighting on the Bolshevik side were instrumental in the White Army’s defeat.⁴⁴ Gothic-fantastic tropes cannot be used as Aesopian subtexts (the nineteenth-century method of using animal fables to slip seditious messages past the censors) because their meaning is not historically fixed. Over time, the symbolism of Gothic-fantastic metaphor changes gradually, but radically.

3. Methodology and structure

In her invaluable study of Socialist Realist fiction, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, Katarina Clark organizes the major narrative preoccupations of the typical Soviet ‘production

⁴¹ Charles Crow, ‘Introduction’, in *American Gothic: An Anthology, 1787-1916* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 1-2 (p. 2).

⁴² Jacqueline Howard, *Reading Gothic Fiction: A Bakhtinian Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 4.

⁴³ Clark, *Soviet Novel*, p. 11.

⁴⁴ Viktor Pelevin, “Problema vervolka v srednei polose”, in *Russkii rasskaz XX veka*, pp. 483-519.

novel' into a list of characteristic tropes. These tropes include the machine, the garden, the family, the positive hero, and ritual sacrifice. Analysing the same temporal period and, in some cases, the same texts as Clark, I have adopted a similar methodology. In accordance with my narrative-based approach to Gothic, I isolate five major principal tropes of Gothic literature and allot each a separate chapter. In each chapter, I explore the persistence of these tropes in Russian literature between 1920 and 1940. Of necessity, I include much posthumously published material (especially by Bulgakov and Krzhizhanovskii). Historical details and biographical information about Soviet authors is included where relevant, to contextualise the ideological content of a specific work. The focus of this dissertation is not the lives or motivations of individual writers (although biographical details are included whenever they relate to the publication or non-publication of the work). My overall focus is the correspondence between many aspects of Soviet fiction and the paradigms of the Gothic novel.

3.i. The chapters

Each of the five chapters of this dissertation discusses one of five Gothic tropes: the Gothic body, the generic obsession with death, monsters and ghosts, Female Gothic, and haunted space. These tropes were chosen for their significant role in the majority of narratives from the original Gothic canon. It is worth noting that the canonical Gothic novel may include more than one, and indeed all, of the listed tropes. After correlating critical analyses (Western and Russian) of each trope, I present my own reading of its significance in the context of early twentieth-century Russian culture. The bulk of each chapter consists of close reading and analysis of the Gothic-fantastic aspects of selected Soviet texts, primarily fiction, although two plays are included. Almost all the works I discuss were written (although not necessarily published) between 1920 and 1940, and almost all the authors were then resident in the Soviet Union; all wrote in Russian.

The first chapter, 'Gothic Bodies', develops the theme of physical retrogression endemic in Gothic literature. I borrow the phrase 'Gothic bodies' from the American scholar Kelly Hurley to describe the manifestation of somatic anxiety in Soviet fictional bodies. Arguing from the premise that Soviet ideology required the creation of an ideal human form, or 'utopian body', to inhabit a future socialist utopia, I suggest that writers signalled ideological unease by imagining less-than-perfect prototypes of the utopian body. Part-bestial bodies such as Bulgakov's dog-man Sharikov in *Sobach'e serdtse*, the shark-man in Aleksandr

Beliaev's novel *Chelovek-amfibiia*, or the cat-capitalists in Marietta Shaginian's *Mess-Mend*, among other examples, use tropes from evolutionary theory as well as distorted accounts of surgery and endocrinology to present experimental transformations of the human prototype. Thus, the irony of these grotesquely liminal bodies is that they are frequently the unintended results of the quest for human physical perfection. This chapter explores how the Soviet preoccupation with self-transformation – into the utopian body – all too often produced deformation, or the Gothic body.

My second chapter, 'Dead Bodies', focuses on tropes of death in Soviet fiction. The corpse, the cemetery, and other visual concepts of human mortality are all important constituents of canonical Gothic plot. This chapter introduces the idea of 'mortality myths' – counter-narratives of despair and decay that undermine the Soviet master narrative of progress and optimism – which contrast bitterly with the so-called 'immortality myths'⁴⁵ propagated by *fin-de-siècle* Russian philosophers and certain Soviet scientists and ideologues. Boundless early twentieth-century optimism led to suggestions, even within senior Soviet and scientific circles, that science would soon succeed in reversing or preventing death. The 'mortality myths' discussed in this chapter are an ideological riposte to this breed of utopianism. Read literally, as in Daniil Kharms' "Starukha" (1939), mortality myths function as pseudo-scientific epistemologies of death. Read figuratively, mortality myths rebound destructively on the restrictions of life under the Soviet regime or suggest new symbolic values for death. Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii's short story "Avtobiografiia trupa" (1925) represents life in Soviet Russia as living death, while Nikolai Erdman's play *Samoubiitsa* (1930) suggests death is the only free statement a citizen can make. In Aleksandr Beliaev's popular novel, *Golova professora Douella* (1937), a wicked scientist's plan to cheat death by resurrecting corpses is negated by the circular nature of Gothic plot.

'Gothic Monsters', my third chapter, probes the symbolism of the most sinister characters in Gothic prose: vampires, ghosts, doubles and Gothic villains in Soviet texts. Often used as political caricatures, these characters are a channel for satire and invective. Their targets may be individuals (such as Stalin) or an entire regime. In this chapter, I examine a range of monsters and villains from Woland, the demonic mastermind of Bulgakov's *Master i Margarita* (first published in 1966), to the patricidal *dvoinik* (or double) in Sigizmund

⁴⁵ Irene Masing-Delic's terminology. See her *Abolishing Death: A Salvation Myth of Russian Twentieth-Century Literature* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992).

Krzhizhanovskii's sinister "Fantom" (1926). A subsection is devoted to the symbolic function of ghosts, particularly in émigré Russian literature.

'Gothic Gender', my next chapter, examines the appearance of Female Gothic in Soviet texts from Aleksandra Kollontai's *Vasilisa Malygina* (1923) to Fedor Gladkov's *Tsement* (1925) is defined variously by critics as a 'symbolization of women's oppression'⁴⁶ and as its converse, the representation of female sexuality as inherently evil and destructive. This chapter explores both interpretations of the Female Gothic subgenre in relation to Soviet prose. Eric Naiman, Eliot Borenstein and other critics have shown that many writers of the 1920s experimented conceptually with the meaning of gender. The Soviet androgyne, the masculinised woman or feminised man, appeared in fictions by Platonov, Bulgakov, and Olesha among others.⁴⁷ This chapter suggests that a significant result of this gender flexibility was the emergence of a new 'male heroine' in Soviet fiction – a male character who, without compromising his sexuality, assumes the emotional characteristics of a traditional Gothic heroine. In the Soviet novel, ideological purity replaces the Gothic trope of sexual purity; however, the traditional topoi, including the obsession with sensibility and the constant threat from members of the opposite sex, remain constant. The schoolboy Kostia Riabtsev, in Nikolai Ognev's *Dnevnik Kosti Riabtseva* (1927), is my primary example of such gender role-switching.

My final chapter, 'Gothic Spaces', examines the reinvention of the Gothic chronotope in Soviet fiction. Traditionally conceived as the haunted castle or lonely monastery, Gothic space is in fact much more diverse, reproducing itself in different forms relative to different cultures and generations. I divide Soviet Gothic loci into two broad categories: properties with pasts (and therefore with ghosts) preceding the Revolution, and those built or inaugurated under the Soviet regime. The first category includes the Ancient House of Zamiatin's *My* (1921), a luxury apartment block unsuccessfully collectivized in Bulgakov's "No. 13: Dom El'pit: Rabkommuna" (1922), and an abandoned cement factory in Gladkov's *Tsement* (1925). All function as links to a vanished past which is inimical to the present and

⁴⁶ Garrett, *Gothic Reflections: Narrative Force in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 1.

⁴⁷ See Eliot Borenstein, *Men Without Women: Masculinity and Revolution in Russian Fiction, 1917-1929* (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 2000); Eric Naiman, *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); and Olga Matich, *Erotic Utopia: The Decadent Imagination in Russia's Fin-de-Siècle* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005).

future. The second category includes hauntings deriving specifically from the failures of Soviet ideology, such as the haunted collective apartment in Bulgakov's *Master i Margarita*, the fantastically expanding flat in Krzhizhanovskii's "Kvadraturin" (1926) and the eponymous foundation pit in Platonov's *Kotlovan* (1930). This chapter draws on Bakhtin's concept of the 'chronotope' as well as drawing comparisons with Western critical writing about Gothic space.

The Soviet Gothic novel is a chimera, but Gothic-fantastic narrative tropes, motifs, and other topoi are firmly embedded in many genres of Soviet fiction, including Socialist Realism. The task of this dissertation is to identify these Gothic-fantastic aspects and elucidate their often complex and significant relation with mainstream Soviet prose.

4. Russian and Soviet Gothic

'One of the better-kept dark secrets of modern Russian literature is its intimate attachment to the deathless, some might say ghoulish, mode of Gothic romance'.⁴⁸ The truth of this statement has been borne out by the popularity of the Gothic-fantastic mode in Russia since its inception. Ann Radcliffe's novels were all available in French, German or Russian translations by the late 1790's. Karamzin, Zhukovskii and Pushkin incorporated Gothic elements into their works; the opening of *Evgenii Onegin* ironically references Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820). Karamzin's "Ostrov Borngol'ma" (1793) and Odoievskii's "Prividenie" (1838) both adapt Gothic tropes of haunted space. Authors who specialized in the Gothic mode included Osip Senkovskii, Aleksandr Bestuzhev-Marlinskii and A.K. Tolstoi. The 'Gothic wave' of translations and imitations of Western models is placed by Vatsuro in the first half of the nineteenth century, but aspects of the genre persisted in later prose.⁴⁹ Dostoievskii's use of a Gothic form of 'fantastic realism' in his prose has been noted by critics.⁵⁰ Russian nineteenth-century Gothic was heavily influenced by the work of the German writer E.T.A. Hoffmann, whose works combined Gothic horror with fantastic and even comic interludes. Hoffmann's influence extends to the major Gothic-fantastic writers of twentieth-century Russia, including A.V. Chaianov, Mikhail Bulgakov and Sigizmund

⁴⁸ Peterson, untitled review, *Slavic and East European Journal*, 4: 31 (Winter 1987), 618-619, (p. 618).

⁴⁹ For a full account of the Russian reception of European Gothic fiction, see Vatsuro, *Goticheskii roman v Rossii*.

⁵⁰ Jackson, pp. 133-137.

Krzhizhanovskii. Not until the 1920s was this still-flourishing heritage suppressed in Soviet prose – although, as I shall show in Chapter 3, the Gothic-fantastic tradition persisted in émigré writing.

The Soviet suppression of Gothic-fantastic thematics was not untypical of the genre's reception in the twentieth century. In twentieth-century Britain, 'Fantasy has... often been suppressed or unacknowledged... The realism that prevailed in fiction from about 1850 to 1960 removed status from fantasy, even while much was produced'. The same critic concludes that the fantastic has been 'subject to continued cultural exclusion' by British critics and educators.⁵¹ If an aesthetic preference for realism resulted in the critical neglect of British fantasy, a similar reaction can be expected in the Soviet Union where ideological and political principles were also brought to bear upon literature. It should also be noted that the Soviet exclusion of Gothic-fantastic prose was historically relative: while new critical editions of works by Poe and Hoffmann appeared in Soviet Russia, new fictions in the same tradition by Bulgakov and Krzhizhanovskii were not allowed to be printed.⁵² This section will explore previous critical analysis of Soviet Gothic and examine the careers of the major Gothic-fantastic writers of this period.

4.i. Eric Naiman and NEP Gothic

Eric Naiman is the first scholar to associate Gothic fiction with Soviet Russia, arguing in *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* that the 'ideological envelope' of Soviet propaganda in the 1920s, the 'chief generic influence on and vehicle for NEP discourse', were the tropes of Gothic prose.⁵³ Naiman coined the concept of 'NEP Gothic' to characterize Soviet ideological discourse during the NEP period.⁵⁴ Drawing on eighteenth-century Gothic fiction to support his arguments, Naiman proposes two main typologies of the genre: historical Gothic and sexual Gothic. Both are defined by a combination of terror and attraction toward, respectively, the past and (usually female) sexuality. Gothic therefore

⁵¹ Colin Manlove, *The Fantasy Literature of England* (London: Macmillan 1999), pp. 2-3.

⁵² See Joan Delaney Grossman, *Edgar Allan Poe in Russia: A Study in Legend and Literary Influence* (Würzburg: Colloquium Slavicum, 1973) for more on the publishing history and influence of Poe in twentieth-century Russia.

⁵³ Naiman, *SP*, p. 151.

⁵⁴ The Soviet Union's New Economic Policy, which promoted limited private enterprise, was in force from 1921 until 1929.

became the logical mode to express the newly created Soviet state's historical and sexual insecurities. Soviet ideologues were torn by anxieties over class legitimacy and terrified that the past will 'provide a conduit for contamination of the future'.⁵⁵ Even sexual desire, and by extension the female body, becomes a 'contaminating legacy from the capitalist past'.⁵⁶ These fears, projected into both media and government propaganda, are used to manipulate the public into ideological conformity. Naiman's NEP Gothic is both the defining ambience of the 1920s and a form of political spin.⁵⁷

While I broadly agree with Naiman's definition of Gothic, our analyses of Soviet Gothic differ profoundly. Naiman draws on a variety of NEP genres, including journalism, medical treatises, diaries and political testaments. Although he identifies Gothic tropes in fiction by Aleksandra Kollontai and Fedor Gladkov, he insists that the 'primary manifestations' of Gothic 'were not in novels'.⁵⁸ In sharp contrast, my analysis of Gothic is limited exclusively to prose fiction and drama. My primary interest is fictional narrative; Naiman's focus is ideological discourse. Our methodologies are also distinct. Naiman's approach to the Gothic genre is typological; mine is thematic. While we both rely on canonical Gothic texts for our definitions, Naiman limits himself to the eighteenth-century Gothic novel. My broader category of 'Gothic-fantastic' allows me to access a wider, more representative group of original sources. Perhaps thanks to my greater scope, I identify Gothic-fantastic narrative in Soviet texts from the 1930s, a decade when Naiman argues that Gothic narratives either disappeared or were subverted by self-parody.⁵⁹ Although Naiman's 'NEP Gothic' is an invaluable conceptual component of my own research, my methodology and subject matter extend beyond NEP. In addition, my thematic approach allows me to be simultaneously more literal and more inclusive than Naiman in my identification of Gothic-fantastic tropes in Soviet literature.

⁵⁵ Naiman, *SP*, p. 155.

⁵⁶ Naiman, *SP*, p. 161.

⁵⁷ See Naiman, *SP*, Chapter Four, "Behind the Red Door: An Introduction to NEP Gothic", pp. 148-180, for a full elucidation of Naiman's concept and methodological approach.

⁵⁸ Naiman, *SP*, p. 150.

⁵⁹ Naiman, *SP*, pp. 297-298.

4.ii. Soviet Gothic-Fantastic Writers

A tiny minority of Soviet writers adopted the Gothic-fantastic mode explicitly. However, overt use of the supernatural, such as ghost stories or characters with occult powers, was extremely rare in Soviet fiction. The majority of Soviet Gothic writers disguised their use of Gothic tropes as a stylistic device within a recognisably realistic narrative structure. I have outlined the careers and influences of the three major exceptions to this rule in detail below, since the following chapters will draw repeatedly on their works. In the period discussed by this dissertation, these exceptions were Mikhail Bulgakov, A.V. Chaianov, and Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii. Their choice of the Gothic-fantastic genre deprived them of the opportunity to publish many of their works during the Soviet period, although Bulgakov's unpublished writings were circulated posthumously as *samizdat* before the publication of his major novel *Master i Margarita* in 1966-7. Krzhizhanovskii published almost none of his stories and novels during his lifetime, and Chaianov's stories were privately published in tiny print runs.

Some other Soviet writers of this period published nominally 'fantastic' fiction (in Todorov's sense of the word), including Veniamin Kaverin and Aleksandr Grin (the pen-name of Aleksandr Stepanovich Grinevskii). However, their work lacked the specific characteristics of Gothic narrative as outlined above. In addition, in later life these writers distanced themselves from the fantastic genre. Grin even resisted the categorization of his works as fantastic prose. Grin's novella *Blistaiushchii mir* (1924), the story of a man able to fly at will without wings, probably inspired Aleksandr Beliaev's *Ariel* (1941), which will be discussed in Chapter 1. Yet when Iurii Olesha termed *Blistaiushchii mir* as a 'fantastic novel', Grin's reaction was hostile:

Он почти оскорбился. "Как это для фантастического романа? Это символический роман, а не фантастический! Это вовсе не человек летает, это парение души!"⁶⁰

Grin's stories are all rooted in reality: he intended fantastic motifs as symbols of aesthetic and moral values, rather than integral components of his plots. Grin distanced himself from the Russian Gothic tradition.⁶¹ The three writers discussed below did not share Grin's prejudice; instead, they promoted the intertextuality of Russian Gothic prose by deliberately revisiting

⁶⁰ Iurii Olesha, *Ni dnia bez strochki: iz zapisnykh knizhek* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1965), p. 232.

⁶¹ For analysis of Grin's aesthetic principles, see, I.K. Dunaevskaia, *Etiko-esteticheskaia kontseptsia cheloveka i prirody v tvorchestve A. Grina* (Riga: Zinatne, 1988).

nineteenth-century Gothic-fantastic themes. Chaianov owned A.K. Tolstoi's vampire legend *Upir* (1841) as well as works by Pogorel'skii and Odoievskii.⁶² Bulgakov's library certainly included works by A.K. Tolstoi, Chaianov, Hoffmann and Gogol, while Krzhizhanovskii's bibliophilia extended to all the major nineteenth-century Gothic-fantastic authors. Other Soviet writers reference Gothic tropes from the genre's canonical texts, but less blatantly. These three writers were unique in their adherence to the Gothic-fantastic tradition.

A.V. Chaianov

Aleksandr Vasil'evich Chaianov (1888-1937) lived a double life. As a leading Soviet economist, an expert on agricultural development, and an appointee to many Soviet committees, he was known (and protected by) Lenin and Bukharin. In his private life, he was a writer of Gothic-fantastic prose and of one utopian novel, an antiquarian and a historian of Moscow's architecture. Unfortunately for Chaianov, his agrarian policy, which prioritised the formation of co-operatives, ran counter to Stalin's project of collectivization. Chaianov was reviled by his colleagues as a 'neo-narodnik' – one of the worst insults in the contemporary Bolshevik lexicon. In 1930 Stalin gave a speech implicating Chaianov personally as a counterrevolutionary. Chaianov was subsequently accused of organizing kulak resistance and arrested with his colleague and co-defendant, N.D. Kondratiev. In 1932 he was sent into exile in Alma-Ata. He was re-arrested in 1936 and executed in 1937.⁶³ Following his rehabilitation in 1987, Chaianov's fiction has enjoyed a so-called 'чаяновский бум,' with literally millions of reprints appearing.⁶⁴

Chaianov's five Gothic-fantastic stories were written between 1917 and 1928. Set in Moscow, but often incorporating travel to other cities and European nations, their timescale ranges from the late eighteenth century ('Neobychainye, no istinnye priklucheniia grafa

⁶² See Aleksandr Bakhrakh, 'Moi priiatel' – Botanik X' in A.V. Chaianov, *Istoriia parikmakherskoi kukly i drugie sochineniia Botanika X* (New York: Russica, 1983), pp. 7-16 (p. 9).

⁶³ For detailed biographies of A.V. Chaianov, see V.N. Baliazin, *Professor Aleksandr Chaianov* (Moscow: Aeropromizdat, 1990) and V.A. Chaianov, *A.V. Chaianov: Chelovek, Uchenyi, Grazhdanin* (Moscow: [n.pub.], 1998). For English-language sources, see Basile Kerblay, 'A.V. Chayanov: Life, Career, Works' in *A.V. Chayanov on the Theory of Peasant Economy*, ed. by Daniel Thorner and others (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), xxv-lxxv, and Frank Bourgholtzer, 'Aleksandr Chayanov and Russian Berlin', in *Aleksandr Chayanov and Russian Berlin*, ed. by Frank Bourgholtzer (London and Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass, 1999), pp. 13-55.

⁶⁴ 'R.L.', review of V.A. Chaianov's *A.V. Chaianov: Chelovek, uchenyi, grazhdanin, Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 41 (2000), 396-398 (p. 398).

Fedora Mikhailovicha Buturlina”) to the early twentieth (“Venetsianskoe zerkalo”). Chaianov’s fiction challenges the laws of nature: women turn into mermaids, demons play cards for human souls, spirits are summoned with tobacco pipes. Gothic motifs such as doubles, monsters, and deadly secrets abound. Il’ia Gerasimov’s Jungian interpretation of the five stories contends that they offer a disguised record of the author’s reactions to the events of the period 1917-27.

Несмотря на очевидные и для него самого противоречия, эти тексты были столь важны для самого Чаянова, что он опубликовал их, причем в неприглаженном виде, возможно, именно так, как они пришли ему в голову.⁶⁵

Needless to say, although Chaianov wrote under various pseudonyms, these five stories (with his unfinished novel *Puteshestvie moego brata Alekseia v stranu krest’ianskoi utopii* (1920)) ‘would be instrumental in his downfall’.⁶⁶

Chaianov’s influence on the structure of Bulgakov’s *Master i Margarita* has been acknowledged by many critics. Bulgakov, who received a copy of Chaianov’s short story *Venediktov* as a gift from his friend N.A. Ushakova in 1925, was struck not only by the Woland-like title character but by the coincidence that the narrator was also named Bulgakov. Bulgakov collected all of Chaianov’s fiction in his library, with the exception of *Puteshestvie*.⁶⁷ The similarities between the two writers – their emulation of Hoffmann and Gogol, their shared themes of ‘нечистая сила’ and circus or theatrical performances, and their choice of Moscow for the location of satanic carnival – suggest that Bulgakov may have been strongly influenced by Chaianov’s five stories.⁶⁸

Mikhail Bulgakov

Mikhail Afanasievich Bulgakov (1891-1940), novelist and playwright, is an inescapable figure in any account of twentieth-century Gothic-fantastic literature. One critic compares the deliberate stifling of Bulgakov’s talents as a writer and director to Pushkin’s humiliating

⁶⁵ See Il’ia Gerasimov, *Dusha cheloveka perekhodnogo vremeni: sluchai A Chaianova* (Kazan: Anna, 1997), p. 10.

⁶⁶ Bourgholtzer, p. 36.

⁶⁷ A. Konchakovskii, *Biblioteka Mikhaila Bulgakova: rekonstruktsiia* (Kiev: [n.pub.], 1997), pp. 86-88.

⁶⁸ For further discussion of the thematic similarities between Bulgakov’s and Chaianov’s fiction, see A. Vulis, ‘Chto mozhet otrazitsia v zerkale?’ in *Voprosy literatury*, 1 (1987), 213-217.

status as Emperor Nicholas's *kammerjunker*.⁶⁹ Despite his talent and brief success, after 1931 almost none of Bulgakov's work was published or performed.

After training and briefly practising as a doctor, Bulgakov abandoned this career in 1920 to pursue his literary vocation. His first novel, *Belaia gvardiia* (1926) was serialized and produced as a stage play, *Dni Turbinykh*, which Stalin attended thirteen times. Bulgakov's Moscow apartment became a cultural salon for like-minded peers. But despite his initial success, Bulgakov realized that it was impossible for him to express his talents fully in Soviet Russia. His plays (including *Beg*) were rehearsed by theatres and never performed; early novels such as *Sobach'e serdtse* were refused publication. He repeatedly petitioned to be allowed to emigrate. Finally, in April 1930, Bulgakov received a personal telephone call from Stalin, during which the dictator evidently persuaded the playwright to remain in Russia. As a direct result of the call, Bulgakov was made an assistant director at MKhAT, the Moscow Arts Theatre.

However, the critical stonewalling of Bulgakov's work continued in the 1930s. Bulgakov found himself the target of power games played by the theatre's directors, Konstantin Stanislavskii and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko (satirized in Bulgakov's unfinished novel *Teatral'nyi roman*). Bulgakov increasingly found refuge in revisions of his major novel, *Master i Margarita*, the fourth and final draft of which was completed in 1938, shortly before Bulgakov's death from kidney disease. The Gothic-fantastic was Bulgakov's mode of choice for comic satire: *Master i Margarita* lampoons MKhAT's corrupt staff, the consumerist greed of Stalin's neo-bourgeois culture, the vanity of literary critics and the operation of the secret police, among many other aspects of Soviet society. Vampires, demons, and shape-changing monsters (including Begemot, the talking cat) throng the pages of Bulgakov's novel.

Bulgakov's earlier experimentation in the Gothic-fantastic genre includes some of the stories from his *D'iavoliada* collection, including the title story, "D'iavoliada", and "Rokovye iaitsa", which deliberately emulate Hoffmann and Gogol. *Master i Margarita* can be read as

⁶⁹ Violetta Gudkova, 'From Salon to *Samizdat*', in *Bulgakov: The Novelist-Playwright*, ed. by Lesley Milne (Luxembourg: Harwood, 1995), pp. 15-28 (p. 20).

the culmination of Bulgakov's investment in the genre, combining playful Gothic-fantastic motifs with religious symbolism and philosophical contemplation.⁷⁰

Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii

Sigizmund Dominikovich Krzhizhanovskii (1887-1950) was the most prolific writer of Russian Gothic-fantastic prose in the twentieth century, but during his lifetime he published only two short stories. His vast archive was eventually discovered in 1976 by the scholar Vadim Perel'muter, who subsequently undertook the project of editing and publishing Krzhizhanovskii's *oeuvre* in a five-volume series.⁷¹ Krzhizhanovskii's literary inspirations included Edgar Allan Poe, Gogol, and Hoffmann. Despite possessing supporters such as Isa Lezhnev, editor of the journal *Rossiia* until its closure in 1926, and the director Aleksandr Tairov, Krzhizhanovskii's efforts to publish his fiction were always frustrated by the opposition of internal critics or by simple bad luck. A short story collection was accepted for publication in 1941, but the project was abandoned when the German Army marched on Moscow. His death in 1950 was hastened by alcoholism and a stroke (which ironically deprived this virtual graphomaniac of the ability to write).

Krzhizhanovskii's stories abound in Gothic motifs, specifically the supernatural and the grotesque, with a strong emphasis on the inevitability of death. His cycle of short stories *Chem liudi mertvy* was conceived as a direct rebuttal to Lev Tolstoi's 1885 short story "Chem liudi zhivy", which expresses optimistic faith in human nature. Krzhizhanovskii's stories convey a deep-seated pessimism. "Kvadraturin" is a parable of the annihilation of individual personality under Soviet conditions; "Tovarishch Bruk" (1931) is a satirical tale of a pair of trousers who replace their deceased owner, a Soviet *chinovnik*, at his office without anyone noticing the difference; while "Most cherez Stiks" (1931) continues the idea, introduced in "Avtobiografiia trupa" (1925), of conflict between the living and the dead. Among his novellas, *Vozvrashchenie Miunkhgauzena* (1928) is another satire on Soviet life, while *Klub*

⁷⁰ Biographical studies of Mikhail Bulgakov include Lesley Milne, *Mikhail Bulgakov: A Critical Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) and Marietta Chudakova, *Zhizneopisanie Mikhaila Bulgakova* (Moscow: Kniga, 1988).

⁷¹ Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, ed. by Vadim Perel'muter, 5 vols (St Petersburg: Symposium, 2001-). All citations of Krzhizhanovskii's work in this dissertation are from this source. For more biographical information on Krzhizhanovskii, see Perel'muter, 'Posle katastrofy' in Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, 5 vols (St Petersburg: Symposium, 2001-), I, pp. 5-70. For critical analysis of Krzhizhanovskii's work, see Karen Link Rosenflanz, *Hunter of Themes: The Interplay of Word and Thing in the Works of Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskij* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

ubiits bukv (1926) reflects the impact of censorship on contemporary writers: a group of intellectuals meet to compose stories, without ever writing down a single word.

I have discussed the careers and influences of Chaianov, Bulgakov and Krzhizhanovskii in so much detail here in order to clarify their role in this dissertation. While they are indisputably the most significant Gothic-fantastic authors of the Soviet period, both quantitatively and in terms of engagement with the Gothic and fantastic genres, they are also critically over-exposed. There are relatively few fresh conclusions to form from rereadings of fictions already exhaustively analysed. My goal in this dissertation is to demonstrate that Gothic-fantastic themes and motifs were more prevalent in Soviet literature than previous critics have acknowledged. My chief focus, therefore, will be on writers who have not previously been apprised in the light of Gothic criticism, writers who are, in critical terms at least, *ingénues* of the genre. As a rule, I will devote significant space to fiction by these three writers only in order to focus on a hitherto neglected interpretation or literary parallel (for example, Bulgakov's *Sobach'e serdtse*'s function as a political allegory has been over-emphasized by critics at the expense of alternative interpretations). Bulgakov, Chaianov and Krzhizhanovskii established the twentieth-century parameters of Russian Gothic-fantastic, but they were not its only exponents. My analysis gives equal space to writers who are not normally ranked as contributors to the genre.

5. One Soviet ghost story: a case study

To illustrate how Gothic-fantastic tropes function within Soviet writing, I will analyse a single ghost story within an apparently orthodox text. The following example is taken from Nikolai Ognev's *Dnevnik Kost'i Riabtseva* (1927).

Например, стали рассказывать, что в прошлом году в Москве был такой случай. К доктору Снегиреву пришла какая-то девочка в розовом платье и говорит, что у ней больная мать и чтобы доктор пришел к ее матери. Оставила адрес и ушла. Только она ушла, как доктор захотел расспросить ее подробнее о болезни, чтобы знать, что из лекарств с собой захватить. Вот доктор зовет горничную и велит ей воротить девочку. Горничная говорит, что никакой девочки она не видела. Тогда доктор зовет швейцара снизу лестницы, но швейцар тоже говорит, что девочки не видал. Доктор, вне себя от удивления, едет по оставленному адресу и, верно, находит там больную женщину. Он начинает ее лечить, а женщина спрашивает, откуда он узнал ее адрес. Доктор тогда говорит, что ему сказала ее дочь. Женщина начинает плакать и говорит, что ее дочка вот уже три дня как умерла и что ее тело все еще лежит в соседней

комнате, потому что хоронить – нет сил. Доктор пошел в соседнюю комнату и видит, что верно: на столе лежит та самая девочка в розовом платье, которая к нему приходила.

Из этого рассказа выходит, что покойники могут разгуливать после смерти. Когда мне это рассказали, я только плюнул.⁷²

This extract is an unambiguously supernatural and contemporaneously relevant ghost story in Soviet literature. Its source was an early Soviet propaganda classic, once widely known and translated, now undeservedly neglected.⁷³ Kostia Riabtsev, the naïve and opinionated teenage diarist, describes the upheavals of the early NEP years from the viewpoint of an enthusiastic schoolboy. Kostia's journal-writing not only demonstrates 'a self-conscious striving for personality as an ethical norm' characteristic of the 'developed autobiographical consciousness of Soviet youth',⁷⁴ but recalls the use of the diary as a literary mode in many Gothic and Sentimental novels.⁷⁵ The formal realism of the diary is frequently challenged, as in Gothic fiction, by the interpolation of ghost stories and other macabre fragments. By telling each other ghost stories, Kostia and his fellow students indulge a timeless and international tendency to personalize and historicize classic supernatural formulae. Most Gothic fictions refer intertextually to previous works in the same genre: the telling of spooky tales in *Dnevnik* strongly suggests the fragmentary horror stories and folk legends exchanged by the peasant boys in Turgenev's short story "Bezhin Lug" (1852). The story told above is a Soviet version of the trope of the revelatory phantom whose appearance prevents disaster. In Kostia's anecdote, the ghost's timely visit to the doctor saves her mother's life.⁷⁶

The ghost story is framed by the diarist's contempt: 'Когда мне это рассказали, я только плюнул'. This contemptuous framing legitimates the inclusion of a flagrantly non-realistic ghost story in a positivist, didactic text like Ognev's *Dnevnik*. Yet the internal reception of

⁷² Nikolai Ognev, *Dnevnik Kosti Riabtseva* (Paris: Povolotskii, 1927), p. 144.

⁷³ The only Western scholars to (even briefly) mention Ognev are Irene Masing-Delic, who allocates his work a chapter in *Abolishing Death: A Salvation Myth of Russian Twentieth-Century Literature* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 222-242, and Sheila Fitzpatrick, who cites Kostia Riabtsev as an exemplary 'politically conscious Soviet child' in her study of Soviet education, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921-1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 26.

⁷⁴ Jochen Hellbeck, 'Russian Autobiographical Practice', in *Autobiographical Practices in Russia*, ed. by Jochen Hellbeck and Klaus Heller, (Gottingen: V&R Unipress, 2004), 279-298 (p. 294-295).

⁷⁵ Examples range from Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1741) to Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897).

⁷⁶ Kostia's anecdote belongs to a literary tradition including Daniel Defoe's *The Apparition of Mrs Veal* (1706), Pushkin's Countess in "Pikovaia dama" (1833) and Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843).

the ghost story is more ambiguous than this line suggests. The tale quoted above is only one of many macabre stories Kostia transcribes into his diary. Although his scrupulously assumed ‘proletarian toughness’⁷⁷ leads him to despise most forms of aesthetic expression, Kostia remains infinitely susceptible to narrative. When some of his peers (usually those from socially suspect backgrounds, or those guilty of un-Soviet behaviour) start telling spooky tales, Kostia is always in the audience. The more unreal and gruesome the tale, the more likely it is that Kostia will carefully record it in his diary, albeit framed by appropriate criticism. Kostia’s dual reaction reflects the ambiguous position of many Soviet writers, vocally contemptuous of non-realist fiction and yet replicating in their own works the rich vocabulary, evocative themes and macabre tropes of the Gothic-fantastic tradition.

5.1. ‘Покойники могут разгуливать после смерти’

Nikolai Ognev (the pen name of Mikhail Rozanov) was a case in point of this kind of ambiguity. A committed Bolshevik and a pro-Soviet journalist (although he never joined the Party), Ognev was considered an ideologically reliable writer. Reviewing Ognev’s work in 1928, the *Krasnaia nov’* editor and critic Aleksandr Voronskii struggled to reconcile Ognev’s orthodox Communist sympathies with his proclivity for macabre and supernatural fiction. Ognev’s duality recalls the conflict between socialist duty and imaginative indulgence expressed in Kostia Riabtsev’s fictional persona. As Voronskii wrote: ‘У Огнева есть с первого взгляда странное пристрастие к мертвецам, к склепам, к могилам, к кладбищам’. Ognev’s characters are ‘часто похоже на покойников, на лесную нежить’.⁷⁸ Voronskii finds this tendency to the Gothic excusable in Ognev’s pre-revolutionary short stories, which bear an obvious debt to the Symbolists like Leonid Andreev, Fedor Sologub and Andrei Bely. Yet in Ognev’s post-revolutionary work, including *Dnevnik Kosti Riabtseva*, the contradiction resurfaces: ‘И даже в *Дневнике Кости Рябцева*, в вещи наиболее уравновешенной, бодрой и жизнеутверждающей, покойникам, утопленникам, привидениям отведено писателем почетное место...’.⁷⁹ Ognev’s entry in the 1934

⁷⁷ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921-1934*, p. 27.

⁷⁸ Aleksandr Voronskii, ‘Predislovie’, in Nikolai Ognev, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2 vols (Moscow: Federatsiia, 1928), I (1928), pp. 5-19 (pp. 5-6).

⁷⁹ Voronskii, p. 6.

Literaturnaia entsiklopedia: notes that ‘преодолеть дореволюционные настроения и мысли Огневу удастся не сразу’.⁸⁰ In this critic’s opinion, Ognev’s hidden ‘пристрастие к прошлому, к старине’ was betrayed by insidious ‘нотки старого’ repeated in his mature work.⁸¹

Voronskii struggled to reconcile Ognev’s predilection for decay and destruction – which the former termed ‘глупая сила’, or insensate force – with socialist ideology by attributing to Ognev an equal appetite for ‘живая сила’, or revolutionary energy. In Ognev’s early stories, Voronskii notes, ‘глупая сила’ usually defeats ‘живая сила’ – a consequence of Ognev’s infatuation with tragic Romanticism. But Voronskii insists that the later stories, including *Dnevnik*, presage the impending victory of ‘живая сила’ over its antithesis: ‘Огнев, наоборот, молод духом, горяч, подвижен... верит в настоящую умную силу на земле... жадно любит жизнь. Он готов бороться, искать... Освобождение придет, будет!’⁸²

Voronskii is essentially insisting that Ognev’s Gothic tropes of horror and decay are foils for the triumphant insertion of a positivistic, revolutionary theme. However, this neat conclusion ignores the fact that Ognev’s tropes of entropy and corruption implicate Soviet characters, including soldiers and revolutionaries, crushing and traumatizing the new generation even as they continue to infect the lingering ‘Old World’ of pre-Communist Russia. There is no simple solution to Voronskii’s paradox:

О покойниках, о трупах, о могилах и склепах Н. Огнев умеет рассказывать жутко, трепетно и напряженно выразительно. Он, конечно, реалист и атеист. Разумеется, он не верит всей этой смертной, загробной чертовщине, он разоблачает и объясняет ее, он показывает ее с самой омерзительной, отвратительной стороны, но тогда откуда все-таки это страшное пристрастие к кладбищенскому и могильному?⁸³

In this dissertation, I intend to isolate fictions by both orthodox and unorthodox Soviet writers in the period between 1920 and 1940 which display ‘эта смертная, загробная чертовщина’. Voronskii’s paradox can be extended into a larger investigation: how and why this ‘страшное пристрастие’ for Gothic, gruesome, unrealistic, ideologically questionable

⁸⁰ Bochacher, M., ‘N.Ognev’ in *Literaturnaia entsiklopedia*, 11 vols (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo, 1930-9), VIII (1934), pp. 233-236 (p. 233).

⁸¹ Bochacher, p. 233.

⁸² Voronskii, p. 11.

⁸³ Voronskii, p. 7.

fiction survived among writers and readers in the early Soviet era. My thesis can be read as an incomplete answer to Voronskii's question. Any attempt to explain the significance of Gothic-fantastic themes in Soviet literature would be stymied by the inherent ambiguity of the genre, not to mention the complexity of ideological codes in Stalin's Russia. Instead, the following chapters will catalogue and contextualise the re-emergence of Gothic-fantastic tropes in Soviet narrative.

CHAPTER ONE

GOTHIC BODIES

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1. Introduction

This chapter will argue that the transformation of public life and discourse during the early Soviet era was paralleled by a fictional transformation of the body. Many novels from this period experiment with reconfigurations of human form. They posit radical physical alterations intended to enhance innate efficiency or to demonstrate the superiority of scientific enhancement over natural selection. As I will show, however, many of these supposedly progressive traits were in fact regressive, monstrous or grotesque. The futuristic ‘utopian bodies’ of an idealized Soviet regime were frequently admixed with traits from animals or from a superseded stage of human evolution. In many cases, their somatic alterations challenged or precluded their essential humanity. I propose the term ‘Gothic bodies’, borrowed from a critical study of late nineteenth-century British Gothic prose, to describe this new, ill-fated race of fictional hybrids of *Homo sovieticus* and the animal kingdom. The Gothic bodies discussed in this chapter are taken from novels by Marietta Shaginian, Aleksandr Beliaev, Mikhail Bulgakov and Vsevolod Valiusinskii. Despite the ideological disparity between these four writers, their plot structures conform to the conventions of Gothic narrative.

1.i. The New Soviet Body

Over the last four decades, cultural theory has acknowledged the human body as both a cultural artefact (a construction of contemporary society), and a crucial source of metaphor for fictional and ideological discourses. The body has become ‘a familiar context for cultural inquiry, an obvious point of departure for exploration of... political, social and psychic

meaning'.¹ More recently, scholars have recognized the discourse of the body in Soviet culture as foundational to the construction of Soviet ideological and political norms. A recent study of early Soviet social hygiene contends that the clean, healthy body 'размешалось в центре... [процесса] утверждения советской системы'.² However, the body's significance was twofold: besides functioning as a normative metaphor, it possessed a second, darker role as a conduit for disease and deformity: 'Здесь оно [тело] было дано в двойной перспективе: с одной стороны, как мишень для влияний (чаще всего губительных и опасных) среды, с другой – как объект оптимизирующего и корректирующего социального воздействия'.³ In order to secure the health and temperance of the state, the body had to be trained into conformity with a range of discourses on physical hygiene, sexual propriety, and so on. I contend that this projection of the political onto the physical was duplicated in literature.

Keith Livers' study of Soviet utopian fiction, *Constructing the Stalinist Body*, argues that Stalinism projected political ambitions onto an idealization of the human body. The Stalinist era defined itself by a doctrine of 'corporeal utopianism' which attempted to fuse 'private bodies and state ideology'.⁴ Livers analyses examples of this literary fusion from two novels from the 1930s: Platonov's allegory of the female body and the city of Moscow, *Schastlivaia Moskva*, and Zoshchenko's fable of rejuvenation, *Vozvrashchennaia molodost'* (1933). According to Livers, in *Schastlivaia Moskva* Platonov ironically dismantles the perfect, alluring body of his heroine, Moskva, crippled after losing a leg in an accident during the construction of the Moscow Metro. Rolf Hellebust's monograph, *Flesh to Metal*, also examines fictional reconstructions of the human form. Hellebust posits that 'the essential symbol for communist transformation is the metallization of the revolutionary body'.⁵ In Socialist Realist literature, metallization becomes a symbol of physical, and by implication

¹ Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin, 'Introduction', in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. by Kay and Rubin (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 1-9 (p. 5).

² Galina Orlova, 'Organizm pod nadzorom: telo v sovetskom diskurse o sotsial'noi gigiene (1920-e gody)', in *Teoria mody*, 3 (Spring 2007), 251-270 (p. 252).

³ Orlova, 'Organizm', pp. 252-253.

⁴ See Keith A. Livers, *Constructing The Stalinist Body: Fictional Representations of Corporeality in the Stalinist 1930s* (Lanham, MD and Oxford: Lexington Books, 2004), esp. Chapter 1, 'Turning Men into Women: Andrei Platonov in the 1930s', pp. 27-89 (pp. 2-3).

⁵ Rolf Hellebust, *Flesh to Metal: Soviet Literature and the Alchemy of Revolution* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 29.

ideological, perfection. This is a genre where characters frequently aspire to the qualities of machines or metal tools, and where positive heroes are likened to cast iron or molten steel.

As both Livers and Hellebust concede, the apotheosis of the utopian socialist body contains inherent contradictions. Hellebust notes the ‘fundamental ambivalence of metal imagery’ in Soviet fiction, which implies both ‘suffering and dehumanization’ for its heroes.⁶ The moral seems to be that the perfect Soviet body risks discarding its essential humanity *en route* to perfection. The hero of Boris Polevoi’s novel *Povest’ o nastoiashchem cheloveke* (1947) illustrates this. A young would-be fighter pilot loses his legs in a plane crash and trains himself to fly again with the aid of prosthetic limbs. He proves his ability to fly, and, in an heroic sortie that pushes his body to its limits, wins high honours and the respect of his comrades. Clearly, Polevoi’s hero is a ‘real man’ – the novel became one of the most popular classics in the Socialist Realist canon. But in another sense, Polevoi’s hero is not a ‘real man’, and certainly not physically whole. Lacking both legs, he is crippled even more severely than Platonov’s Moskva, whose missing leg can be interpreted as a symbol of the futility of utopian socialism.⁷ Polevoi’s heroic body, the ‘real man’s’ body which future Communists should admire and emulate, is not even entirely human. To function adequately, it depends on metal and leather prostheses. This accommodation with artificiality recalls the heartfelt cry of Volodia, the prototypical New Soviet Man in Iurii Olesha’s satirical novel *Zavist’* (1927):

Я – человек-машина. Не узнаешь ты меня. Я превратился в машину. Если еще не превратился, то хочу превратиться. Машины здесь зверье! Породистые! Замечательно равнодушные, гордые машины.⁸

Olesha’s character aspires to machine status in order to transcend the flaws and weaknesses inherent in a merely human body. In Mikhail Slonimskii’s “Mashina Emery” (1924), the Communist hero dreams of an idealized machine which will take over all human functions, including the emotions, thus liberating the human intellect. Many novels, including those discussed in this chapter by Beliaev and Bulgakov, advocate hormonal or surgical alteration

⁶ Hellebust, p. 106.

⁷ ‘Andrei Platonov’s *Happy Moscow*: Stalinist Kitsch and Ethical Decadence’, *Modern Language Review*, 1: 101 (January 2006), 201-211. Bullock reads the amputation of Moskva’s leg as analogous with the violent reconstruction of both urban Moscow and Communist culture by Stalin.

⁸ Iurii Olesha, *Zavist’*, (London: Pergamon Press, 1966), p. 43.

as a means to physical perfection. Operations and eugenics replace natural selection as arbiters of the physical composition of future generations. This aspect of fiction reflected the overlap between the radical views held by real-life Russian eugenicists and biologists of the early twentieth century and the ‘radically utopian thinking’ of ‘prerevolutionary philosophical proponents of human regeneration and resurrection’.⁹ In Valiusinskii’s *Bol’shaia zemlia* (1931), the scientist-hero regrets that public opinion refuses to ‘примириться с мыслью, что выработка высшей расы, человека, будет производиться таким же путем, как мы создаем голубей или свиней в Йоркшире. Ха! Человек, по их мнению, вовсе не животное’.¹⁰ Here, the public’s irrational refusal to be treated, and bred, like animals is presented as the only obstacle to refining the human species. The route to superior humanity lies through the recognition of the animal in man.

Human or not, the new Soviet body is a trope of a new, harmonious society. Conversely, the fragmented Soviet body signals the threat of social disintegration: disunity, dissatisfaction, external and internal threats to the *status quo*. Eric Naiman flags the media coverage of the discovery of a woman’s dismembered corpse, including a decapitated head, near a Leningrad canal in 1925 as ‘part of a larger, disquieting discourse of social disintegration’ which underlay the ideological ambiguity of NEP’.¹¹ Russian literature is rich in footloose body parts, of which Gogol’s runaway nose is undoubtedly the best-known. One Russian critic interprets “Nos” (1833) as a warning of individual, rather than general, discord: ‘Тело превращается в знак социальных отношений, но отношений неправильных и несправедливых. Его преобразования и деформации олицетворяют нереализованные желания, эротические порывы и мечтания о карьере’.¹² This suggests that the

⁹ Yvonne Howell, ‘Eugenics, Rejuvenation, and Bulgakov’s Journey into the Heart of Dogness’, *Slavic Review*, 3: 65 (2006), 544-562 (pp. 545-546). Both neo-Lamarckianism (which argued that acquired characteristics can be inherited) and mutationism (which considered mutation a more important factor in evolution than natural selection) were widely upheld by Russian biologists in the first three decades of the twentieth century. This made Russian scientists receptive to ontogenic (as opposed to phylogenetic) change as a means for altering the overall genotype of a species. See Alexander Vucinich, *Darwin in Russian Thought* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1988), esp. Chapter 8, “Strategies for Retrenchment”, pp. 272-307.

¹⁰ Vsevolod Valiusinskii, *Bol’shaia zemlia* (Leningrad: Leningradskoe oblastnoe izdatel’stvo, 1931), p. 144.

¹¹ Naiman, *SP*, p. 84.

¹² Aleksandr Stroevev, ‘Telo, raspavsheesia na chasti (Gogol’ i frantsuzskaia proza XVIII veka)’, in *Telo v russkoi kul’ture*, ed. by G.I. Kabakova and F. Kont (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2005), pp. 265-276 (p. 266).

disembodied nose is acting out the inner longings of its owner more effectively than the latter ever could. However, I would argue that the nose's skilful self-insertion into society and its command of the nuances of social convention betray its determination to create havoc on a public scale. Its escapade allegorizes societal chaos rather than personal dysfunction. I contend that most fictional accounts of dismembered or deformed bodies, while they may be read as allegories of individual distress, are in fact indicators of a broader social malaise.

In Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii's fable "Sbezhavshie pal'tsy" (1922), a pianist's fingers run away in search of a new and happier life. Defeated by bad weather, neglect and the dangers of urban life, they eventually scuttle back to their owner, who resumes his career but never again achieves the same sublime heights of expression. As a clear pastiche of "Nos", Krzhizhanovskii's story could also be read as a parable of individual disappointment (in this case, artistic frustration). However, Ol'ga Burenina suggests a different interpretation, placing the story in the context of other early twentieth century allegories of somatic fragmentation, including Daniil Kharm's prose and Pavel Filonov's artworks. She argues that *Sbezhavshie pal'tsy* belongs to a new tropology of the body, an aesthetic which deliberately rejects neoclassical wholeness and perfection. Instead, Burenina argues, some artists and writers turned to deformed or incomplete bodies and detached body parts, as avatars of a new physicality in which the fragment replaces the whole:

Фрагмент человеческого тела как тип изображения, в котором запечатлевается не все тело субъекта, а лишь одна его часть — палец, рука, голова, глаз, и т.д., — выигрывает у целого, обретает власть над целым и тем самым выходит за рамки фрагмента в традиционном смысле, становясь пластическим образом нового, неклассического целого.¹³

Burenina's thesis suggests that a poetics of deformation and fragmentation was emerging in Soviet culture, parallel to but separate from the 'corporeal utopianism' of mainstream realist literature. Vladimir Sorokin's introduction to a selection of twentieth-century Russian short fiction, including the statement: 'В XX веке русская литература воплотилась', references this trend rather than the former. Sorokin's choice of authors ranges from Lev Tolstoi to Ludmila Ulitskaia, including most major Russian twentieth century writers.¹⁴ All the stories

¹³ Olga Burenina, 'Organopoetika: anatomicheskie anomalii v literature i kul'ture 1900-1930-x godov', in *Telo v russkoi kul'ture*, ed. by G.I. Kabakova and F. Kont (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2005), pp. 300-323 (p. 323).

¹⁴ Vladimir Sorokin, 'Vvedenie' in *Russkii rasskaz XX veka*, ed. by Vladimir Sorokin (Moscow: Zakharov, 2005), pp. 5-8 (p. 5).

chosen focus on the body, especially the diseased, destroyed or humiliated body. There are stories of rape, brutality and dismemberment, as well as two stories that describe humans becoming beasts. In Fedor Sologub's account of drunken peasants at a fair, the transformation is metaphorical: 'Люди зверели'.¹⁵ But in Viktor Pelevin's satirical "Problema vervolka v srednei polose" (1993), it has been literalized: ordinary Soviet citizens physically change into wolves and even, potentially, cobras.¹⁶ The collection concludes with homage to Gogol: the tale of an ear separated from its owner.¹⁷

The 1920s witnessed the embodiment of two opposing discourses in Soviet literature: the official discourse of utopian somatic transformation, and an older, countercultural tradition depicting the fallible, diseased and fragmented body. This chapter will discuss fictional bodies which emulate the discourse of perfection, while continually risking degeneration or expulsion into the abject, mortal, flesh-bound world of the second discourse. The fictional Soviet bodies described below are fundamentally unstable. In their struggle to fulfil the aesthetic or other norms of the utopian socialist body, they incorporate non-human features that eventually cause them to be excluded from human society. This chapter presents an alternative analysis of would-be utopian bodies in Soviet fiction which are irredeemably polluted by their admixture of human and animal, or human and sub-human, traits. I propose to call these hybrids 'Gothic bodies'.

1.ii. The Gothic Body

'Gothic bodies' is a term introduced by Kelly Hurley in her monograph, *The Gothic Body*, to categorize new forms deriving from 'the ruination of the human subject'.¹⁸ Specifically, Hurley uses the term to describe atavistic, bestial, or otherwise monstrous bodies in British horror fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by Walter Machen, A. Conan Doyle, Bram Stoker, H.G. Wells and others. The 'Gothic bodies' she identifies in these *fin-de-siècle* fictions subvert species identity, either by mingling human and animal traits or by releasing the body's inner potential to regress. Hurley's subjects range from H.G. Wells' surgically created Beast-People in *The Island of Dr Moreau* to a host of lesser-known

¹⁵ Fedor Sologub, 'V tolpe', in *Russkii rasskaz XX veka*, pp. 59-90 (p. 80).

¹⁶ Viktor Pelevin, 'Problema vervolka v srednei polose', in *Russkii rasskaz XX veka*, pp. 483-519.

¹⁷ Mikhail Elizarov, 'Van-Gog', in *Russkii rasskaz XX veka*, pp. 544-550.

¹⁸ Hurley, p. 3.

monsters from British and American fiction: suppurating fungus-men, sexually predatory beetle-women, cannibalistic slug-people and flesh-eating trees.¹⁹ Hurley interprets these literary grotesques as a reaction to changing scientific discourses – notably, as a response to the impact of evolution theory and its concomitant, degenerationism, on social anthropology, criminology, sexology and other fields of human self-knowledge. Darwin’s revelation that humans and animals derived from the same biological matrix destabilized two standard assumptions: that humans enjoyed innate superiority over animals, and that human form was fixed. It implied that humans, either individually or as a species, could easily regress into an animalistic condition. Religious eschatology was inadequate to refute Darwin. Instead, Hurley argues, writers exploited the imaginative license supplied by evolution theory to rewrite the human template.

Hurley’s definition of Gothic bodies is grounded in Julia Kristeva’s definition of ‘abjection’. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva classifies bodies or things as abject – that is, cast out – when they violate or compromise the boundaries of the symbolic order. To the observer, abject things or individuals are simultaneously repulsive – incurring fear or violent revulsion – and irresistibly fascinating. At a profound, pre-linguistic level, the abjected person or thing beckons the observer with a promise of ultimate, self-immolating *jouissance*. ‘The abject confronts us... with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of the *animal*’.²⁰ In Aleksandr Beliaev’s novella *Khoiti-Toiti* (1930), a man’s brain is transplanted into the skull of an elephant. The resulting man-beast arouses ‘чувство жуткого любопытства и почти суеверного ужаса’ in observers, a combination of horror and compulsive attraction that characterises human response to abject bodies.²¹

Abjection occurs in the liminal territory between man and beast, living and dead, clean and unclean. This is also the space occupied by Hurley’s Gothic, or ‘ab-human’, bodies – the latter expression fortuitously borrowed from W.H. Hodgson, one of Hurley’s authors. Neither fully human nor entirely animal (therefore liminal), uncannily recalling an unwanted past

¹⁹ These feature in the following novels and short stories, respectively: Wells’ *The Island of Dr Moreau*, Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle* (1897), William Hope Hodgson’s “The Voice in the Night” (1912) and “The Crew of the *Lancing*” (1895).

²⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 12.

²¹ Aleksandr Beliaev, *Khoiti-Toiti*, in *Prodavets vozdukh: Romany* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2007), pp. 495-560 (p. 513).

(therefore atavistic), and involuntarily inspiring horror or disgust in all human witnesses, Hurley's 'Gothic bodies' correspond closely to Kristeva's concept of the 'abject'.

To protect ourselves from the uncanny attraction exerted by the abject, Kristeva argues, we have evolved a number of delimiting rituals. These enable the observer to experience *jouissance* vicariously – and safely. In a post-religious age, aesthetic experience is the most important of these rituals, the 'catharsis par excellence'.²² In *The Gothic Body*, Hurley argues that Gothic fiction assumes this ritualized role, containing the abject – the source of horror – within the boundaries of imagination, while exploiting that distance from reality to accomplish ever more grotesque incarnations: 'The *fin-de-siècle* Gothic is positioned within precisely such an ambivalence: convulsed by nostalgia for the "fully human" subject whose undoing it accomplishes so resolutely, and yet aroused by the prospect of a monstrous becoming'.²³ Gothic bodies are typically accompanied by Gothic plot – a plot that reverses the tropes of Darwinian theory to disastrous effect, turning evolution into entropy, utopia into dystopia, and utopian bodies into inhuman monsters. Hurley's category of 'somatic Gothic' fiction not only enacts the familiar trajectory of Gothic plot, but also provides writers with space to protest against, or at least respond to, the ontological trauma of Darwinian theory with their own counter-imaginings:

In place of a body stable and integral, the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic offers the spectacle of a body metamorphic and undifferentiated; in place of the possibility of human transcendence, the prospect of an existence circumscribed within the realities of gross corporeality; in place of a unitary and securely bounded subjectivity, one that is both fragmented and permeable.²⁴

Here I wish to emphasize the distinction between the concept of the 'Gothic body' as formulated by Hurley and Bakhtin's 'grotesque body', delineated in his *Rabelais and His World* (1965). Although Bakhtin's definition of the grotesque body (as found in Rabelais and in medieval pantomime, saints' lives and fantastic narratives) has much in common with Hurley's, his analysis of its implications is predictably ambiguous. The Rabelaisian grotesque, as described by Bakhtin, includes liminal bodies that, through exaggerated 'excrescences' and 'orifices', interpenetrate with their surroundings; bodies sprung from the

²² Kristeva, p. 17.

²³ Hurley, p. 4.

²⁴ Hurley, p. 3.

degeneration and death of their original human form; bodies combining human and animal characteristics; and abject, anatomically repulsive or dismembered bodies. But unlike Hurley or Kristeva, Bakhtin stresses the humanistic, uplifting potential of ‘free play with the human body and with its organs’.²⁵ He acknowledges that degradation and dismemberment of the human form may be interpreted as a satire upon, or a protest against, an oppressive government and society. But Bakhtin considers an exclusively satirical interpretation of the grotesque to be unnecessarily limiting. The grotesque body, in Bakhtin’s view, expresses the joyous transgression of limits, the reassertion of man’s ability to travel along ‘the horizontal line of time and of historic becoming’.²⁶

Bakhtin’s grotesques are imbued above all with the creative and celebratory energy of carnival. What Hurley calls the ‘ruined body’, in which human characteristics have been extinguished, Bakhtin prefers to term a ‘double body... the life of one body is born from the death of the older, preceding one’.²⁷ Platonov’s bodies, which the author readily degrades through filth, suffering or mutilation, have more in common with Bakhtin’s carnival bodies than with Hurley’s Gothic bodies because they remain recognizably human. Livers suggests that Platonov’s characters are ‘optimistically tragic’,²⁸ since they indefatigably seek harmony and even transcendence *through* their physical suffering. Indeed, Livers calls Moskva Chestnova’s body ‘an ideal embodiment of Bakhtinian dialogue’ because she represents ‘both filth *and* cleanliness, high *and* low, self *and* other’.²⁹ By contrast, Hurley’s bodies interrogate not only the limitations of the flesh, but the integrity of species; they are backwards-looking, continually degrading into more primitive forms; and they offer, in place of transcendence, a moral vacuum.

1.iii. Prototypical Gothic Bodies: *The Island of Dr Moreau* and *Animal Farm*

Two novels by British authors can be considered as key contributions to the canon of Gothic bodies: H.G. Wells’ *The Island of Dr Moreau* and George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*. Both are

²⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1984), p. 346.

²⁶ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 364.

²⁷ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 318.

²⁸ Livers, p. 244.

²⁹ Livers, p. 14.

relevant to the current study of Soviet fiction: the first because of its popularity in Soviet Russia, the second because it was written as a satire on Soviet politics. Both books respond to discourses of Social Darwinism and degenerationism that also preoccupied early Soviet authors. Both combine description of 'Gothic bodies' with deeper ideological messages.

The first of these, Wells' *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896) exemplifies both Hurley's definition of 'Gothic bodies' and the tragic inevitability of Gothic plot. Dr Moreau is a surgeon determined to recreate animals in a form as nearly human as possible. To house his community of reconstructed beasts, he has transferred his experiments to a remote island. Moreau's 'Beast-People' have achieved a certain proto-human identity. They speak English, use abstract reasoning, walk upright and wear clothing. But they remain abject by Kristeva's definition: any uninitiated human who encounters one of them instinctively recoils with loathing, even if he or she believes the Beast-People to be deformed humans. Moreau's second failure is his inability to eradicate his creatures' predisposition to revert, physically and mentally, to an animal state. Only constant visits to Moreau's surgery – which the animals superstitiously call 'the House of Pain' – can deter their recidivism. As Moreau bitterly comments, 'the stubborn beast flesh grows, day by day, back again'.³⁰ In the end, the experiment ends in disaster, directly traceable to the actions of the human characters. Moreau is killed in combat with the Puma-Man, whose transformation had involved particularly painful vivisection. Moreau's assistant is torn to pieces after he makes the Beast-People drunk in an unwise attempt to palliate them by descending to their level.

Hurley categorizes the Beast-People as 'Gothic bodies' because they involuntarily provoke fear and revulsion, and because of their morphic instability, their involuntary craving to revert to their former condition. The entire plot proceeds on the Gothic premise of cruel injustice cruelly avenged: Moreau's savage death is inevitable because he must suffer on account of the tortures he inflicted on innocent victims. Moreau's inhuman cruelty (in which his assistant is complicit) has effectively rendered both men abject, unfit for human society. Wells' novel suggests that the distinction between humans and animals has been violated twice. The first violation is physical: Moreau's almost-successful project of raising animals to a human level. The second, perhaps more serious transgression, is moral: the cruelty implicit in Moreau's project reveals the bestial callousness within scientific man. Wells is casting doubt on man's assumed evolutionary superiority and also on the necessary justice of

³⁰ H.G. Wells, *The Island of Dr Moreau* (London: J.M. Dent, 1993), p. 74.

scientific advance. Both these doubts will emerge again in the Soviet fictions discussed later in this chapter.

The plot of Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) is well-known: the novella describes a group of pigs who, after inspiring all the other farm animals to revolution and overthrowing the cruel farmer, eventually become almost indistinguishable from humans, mimicking both human form and human vices. But *Animal Farm* is not just a fable about animals acting humanly, and ultimately becoming human; it is perhaps the twentieth century's most famous indictment of Stalinism. Orwell intends the pigs' hypocritical pretensions to humanity to mock Stalin's bourgeois modification of Marxist-Leninism in the 1930s.³¹ In the novel's final scene, the pigs' dinner party with their human neighbours parodies Stalin's ambiguous wartime partnership with the capitalist nations. This scene owes its importance, therefore, to Orwell's political vision; however, its *horror*, and its impact on the reader, derives from the physical confusion between pigs and humans:

The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again: but already it was impossible to say which was which.³²

Unlike Wells' Beast-People, the pigs are not physically grotesque, nor do they regress into beasthood. They inspire fear and awe only from the other animals, who recognize their transgression of species boundaries. But – and this, is, of course, Orwell's ultimate moral, rebounding on both capitalist and communist societies – the pigs' successful charade of humanity relegates humans to the level of animals. The venal, corrupt and cynical pigs' seamless assimilation into human society glaringly indicts the latter. By becoming indistinguishable from men, the pigs have permanently compromised the integrity of both humans and beasts. Orwell's conclusion is ambiguous: have the pigs truly progressed, or has humanity regressed? Both Orwell's satirical fable and Wells' dystopian tale portray mankind as 'only quantitatively, not qualitatively, different from the animal kingdom' – a warning also given in Mikhail Bulgakov's *Sobach'e serdtse* (1925).³³

³¹ Orwell's clear intention to write *Animal Farm* as an attack on Stalinism is outlined in his essay 'The Freedom of the Press', intended as a preface to the novel's first edition. See Appendix I, 'Orwell's Proposed Preface to *Animal Farm*', in *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story* (London: Penguin, 1989), pp. 97-107.

³² George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 95.

³³ Brian Aldiss, 'Introduction', in Wells, H.G., *The Island of Dr Moreau* (London: J.M. Dent, 1993), pp. xxix-xxxvi (p. xxxi).

This chapter argues that Soviet fiction reproduces the ironic equation posed by both *Animal Farm* and *The Island of Dr Moreau*: the advancement of the beast implies the abasement of the human. When Professor Preobrazhenskii in *Sobach'e serdtse* turns Sharik the street mutt into Sharikov the prodigal orphan, the resulting hybrid expresses the worst of both species. Like Moreau's Beast-People, Sharikov represents 'something more vile' than either original source.³⁴ I contend that early Soviet literature responded to the collapse of previous eschatologies and to new scientific and ideological discourses. I suggest that Soviet fiction between 1920 and 1940 presents a spectacle of the human body in flux, as a direct literary reaction to the new ideals of body and society posed by Communism.

The four novels discussed in the following sections span different genres, from international espionage (Marietta Shaginian's *Mess-Mend*), to Aleksandr Beliaev's science fiction thrillers, Vsevolod Valiusinskii's utopian adventure novel *Bol'shaia zemlia*, and satirical comedy (Mikhail Bulgakov's *Sobach'e serdtse*). With the exception of Bulgakov, none of these writers have received sustained critical attention outside of Russia; Valiusinskii's work, in particular, has never been studied. By analysing both well-known and obscure fiction, I hope to convey the broad extent of the influence exerted by new somatic models on the Soviet literary imagination.

2. Small World, Large Earth: Vsevolod Valiusinskii and the Minima-Man

In March 1929, the author Vsevolod Valiusinskii (1899-1935) was incensed to read an internal review of his yet-to-be-published second novel, *Bol'shaia zemlia*. An extract from the review is given below:

Чередование фантастического элемента с реальным придает роману своеобразную привлекательность. Роман написан литературно, умело, экономно в смысле уплотнения материала...[...] Роман с успехом может быть издан в разряде приключенческой литературы, не ставящей себе широких научных и пропагандистских задач.³⁵

This review was accidentally enclosed with Valiusinskii's manuscript, which had just been rejected for the third time. After its first rejection by the Leningrad publishing firm, Zemlia i

³⁴ Aldiss, p. xxxvi.

³⁵ Moscow, Rossiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva (RGALI), fond 611, opis' 2, delo 21. The review, by the GIZ reviewer A. Starchakov, is cited by Valiusinskii in his letter to GIZ, dated 17 February 1929. The original text of the review has not been preserved.

Fabrika (ZIF), Valiusinskii had sent his manuscript to the state publishing agency, Literaturnoe-khudoshestvennoe Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo (Litkhud GIZ). Despite the favourable opinion of the reviewer cited above, GIZ rejected the manuscript and decided to forward it to ZIF, who published an extensive list of fantastic and adventure fiction. GIZ were unaware that ZIF had already seen and refused the novel. ZIF duly returned the manuscript to Valiusinskii, without further comment, unintentionally enclosing the statement by GIZ's internal reviewer. Valiusinskii was incensed to discover that his book had been rejected despite the reviewer's endorsement. In an annoyed letter to GIZ, Valiusinskii demanded why his novel was refused, when 'в то же время сейчас [1929] спрос на научно-авантюрный роман возрастает'? Why was *Bol'shaia zemlia* deemed unsuitable for propaganda when his first novel, *Piat' bessmertnykh* (1928), 'был рекомендован для рабочих и красноармейских библиотек, а также вызвал весьма положительные и дружные отзывы прессы'?³⁶ *Bol'shaia zemlia* was finally published by a regional Leningrad publishing house, Leningradskoe Oblastnoe Izdatel'stvo, in 1931.

Why, indeed, did Valiusinskii struggle to publish *Bol'shaia zemlia*? The relative success of his first novel had encouraged him to write a series of 'вещей этого жанра', presumably fantastic novels, but his subsequent failures had robbed him of the 'охоты и возможности продолжать намеченный мною труд'.³⁷ (In fact, his last novel, *Zolotoi meteor*, was never published and the manuscript has been lost).³⁸ Valiusinskii was perhaps slow to recognize the increasing resistance to non-realist fiction by censors and the decline of markets for science fiction, a trend leading to the near-total occultation of the genre in the 1930s.³⁹ Praise for Valiusinskii's first novel became irrelevant in the more stringently realist environment of 1930. Another consideration was that *Bol'shaia zemlia*, although pro-Soviet, was not a typical Socialist Realist novel. Its hero was a bourgeois English scientist whose Bolshevik sympathies fail to compensate for his hubris and unreliability. The most telling point against Valiusinskii's plot, I would suggest, was its inauguration of a new model for the utopian

³⁶ RGALI, fond 611, opis' 2, delo 21.

³⁷ RGALI, fond 611, opis' 2, delo 21.

³⁸ For this and other biographical details on Valiusinskii, see the website 'Валюсинский Всеволод Вячеславович', <<http://writers.aonb.ru/map/onega/valus.htm>> [accessed 23 August 2008].

³⁹ Patrick McGuire ascribes this trend to the closure of many private presses after the abrogation of NEP in 1929 and the increasingly hostile stance of censors. See Patrick McGuire, *Red Stars: Political Aspects of Soviet Science Fiction* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985), pp. 13-20.

socialist body. This model contrasted unfavourably with the heroic dimensions of Stalin-era statuary.⁴⁰

Bol'shaia zemlia is the story of Davis, an English scientist who has discovered the 'minima-hormone', a treatment potentially capable of reducing every human being to a height of three centimetres. His star specimen is Daisy, a mouse-sized cat with the physical proportions of an adult feline. Although the scientific community refuse to believe in Davis' achievement, a secret council of aristocrats and leading businessmen are already scheming to exploit his minima-hormone to resolve labour relations. The British economy is crippled by strikes, food shortages and overpopulation; the council hope to solve all three problems at a stroke by shrinking their workers. Smaller workers will need less food and less living space, and can therefore be paid less. The capitalist proprietors scheme to establish a 'Трест рабочий деминимаций' which will reduce all workers to approximately fifty-six centimetres in height. They begin by kidnapping Davis in order to consolidate control over the production of the minima-hormone.

Little do they know that Davis, a firebrand champion of workers' rights, has other plans for his hormone. He is determined to shrink the entire human race equally to a height of under one metre, so that food and other resources will become abundant for all. As humans shrink, the available land will expand proportionately, inaugurating a utopia of material plenty and international fraternity:

Маленький мир! Нет, не маленький, а чудовищно огромный, бесконечно великий... А человек? Он всегда был ничтожен, его величина относительна, он – червь земли. Так пусть же он станет еще меньше [...] завладеет несметным богатством. Ему не нужны семьдесят килограммов...⁴¹

Davis' vision is entirely selfless:

Мы должны жить и умереть за будущее счастливое человечество на Большой Земле, за его грядущее счастливое могущество! [...] Мы больше не принадлежим себе.⁴²

⁴⁰ I have in mind V.I. Mukhina's 25-metre 1937 statue of a male worker and a female collective farm worker, 'Rabochii i kolkhoznitsa', widely considered to be a celebration of Soviet power and dynamism.

⁴¹ Vsevolod Valiusinskii, *Bol'shaia zemlia* (Leningrad: Leningradskoe oblastnoe izdatel'stvo, 1931), pp. 8-9.

⁴² Valiusinskii, *Bol'shaia zemlia*, pp. 184-185.

Impeccably socialist as Davis' views appear, they remain unrealizable because of one stumbling block: the dwarfism essential to Davis' socialist revolution. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, political ideology tends to be predicated on tropes of the body. No nation wishes to liken itself to a dwarf or to a child. Even Davis' own rhetoric foregrounds tropes of size ('the great Earth') in order to justify the downsizing of the human race. Although he argues that the 'minima-man' of the future may possess disproportionate strength (like ants), he is forced to concede that his new race is likely to appear at first glance to be composed of 'беспомощных, слабеньких карликов'.⁴³

Rescued by militant strikers, Davis escapes the capitalists' clutches. Davis and Ellen flee Britain, diverting to the Baltic Sea just as Britain declares war on Soviet Russia (the novel is set in the immediate future, shortly after the completion of the First Five-Year Plan). Along with Daisy the mini-cat and an ampoule of minima-hormone, they take shelter in marshland near Onega. Impounded in a ruined church by a British raiding party, they face starvation – until Davis injects them with minima-hormone. Over several days, they dwindle to 75 centimetres in height. Their hunger disappears and, eventually, they shrink sufficiently to escape through tiny gaps in the walls of the church. Soviet troops are beating back the British advance with heavy casualties on both sides, largely due to the British Navy's use of poisonous gases. Davis is not evacuated in time and dies of gas inhalation, together with Daisy. Ellen gradually recovers her normal size and becomes a stalwart participant in international socialist movements.

The pygmy bodies of *Bol'shaia zemlia* qualify as Gothic for three reasons. Firstly, they are unstable (without regular injections of the hormone, minima-creatures regain normal size within weeks), and they underline the instability of the human body. If tiny bodies really are more compatible with socialist harmony than full-sized humans, the latter's significance is challenged. If size ceases to matter, symbols of triumphant Communism such as Mukhina's monumental workers are reduced to mere 'черви земли', in Davis' dismissive phrase. Secondly, dwarf bodies are atavistic. Minima-men are, despite Davis' rhetoric, impossible to disassociate from stereotypes of infantilism or primitivism (the Soviet troops who meet Davis and Ellen take them for children). Finally, and again in spite of Davis' attempts to argue the contrary, minima-bodies are ultimately uncanny – if not abject. Daisy's unnaturally tiny form provokes suspicion and fear from observers. An elderly Russian woods-dweller dies from

⁴³ Valiusinskii, *Bol'shaia zemlia*, p. 13.

superstitious terror when he sees Ellen and Davis. Crafted by Valiusinskii to fulfil all the criteria of socialist utopia – thirst for justice and equality, selfless commitment to action – the minima-bodies remain fundamentally unacceptable as prototypes of the ideal Socialist Realist figure. The end of the novel is tragicomic: Davis dies murmuring the name of Daisy the mini-cat (rather than Ellen's), and the secret of minima-hormone dies with him.

According to a commentary on the 1990 reprint of Valiusinskii's novel, the idea of miniaturized people had several precursors in early twentieth-century Russian literature. *Bol'shaia zemlia* stands out because its miniaturization theme is not merely a 'сюжетообразующий фактор', but is integrated into the book's socio-economic thesis.⁴⁴ It was perhaps Valiusinskii's boldness in positing a somatic theme with socio-economic implications that made his book initially unacceptable for publication. From 1929, Soviet science fiction was expected to be 'increasingly involved with technological rather than social questions'.⁴⁵ However, Valiusinskii's ideological subtext raises the book, in the eyes of modern critics, above the ranks of similar adventure stories. The minima-man is a dangerously plausible alternative to the accepted physical standard of *Homo sovieticus*; his existence potentially subverts the colossal pretensions of Stalinist aesthetics. It was, I speculate, in recognition of this subtext that both GIZ and ZIF passed on the manuscript of *Bol'shaia zemlia*, and the GIZ internal critic dismissed the book as unsuitable for 'широких научных и пропагандистских задач'.

3. Aleksandr Beliaev: Water-Babies and Flying Men

*If he says that things cannot degrade, that is, change downwards into lower forms, ask him, who told him that water-babies were lower than land-babies?*⁴⁶

My parallel between late nineteenth-century British Gothic fiction and Soviet-era Gothic-fantastic fiction rests on the argument that in both cases, writers were responding to new scientific theories which had revised the ideological basis of human society. One of the first responses to Darwinism in British fiction was Charles Kingsley's children's novel, *The Water*

⁴⁴ E.V. Pavlenko, 'Posleslovie: Chto bylo potom', in *Prekrasnye katastrofy: Zabytye fantasticheskie proizvedeniia sovetskikh avtorov 20-kh godov*, ed. by E.V. Panasko (Stavropol': Stavropol'skoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1990), pp. 485-9 (pp. 490-491).

⁴⁵ McGuire, *Red Stars*, p. 13.

⁴⁶ Charles Kingsley, *The Water Babies* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 43.

Babies (1863). A morally instructive fairy tale, *The Water Babies* tells the story of how Tom, an ignorant young chimney sweep, gets a second chance at life. Beaten and underfed by his master, Tom runs away and falls into a river. Here a benevolent fairy transforms him into a free and happy water-baby, complete with gills. Tom's evolutionary retreat to the underwater world continues:

... until he has reached the point of development where it is possible for him to be reborn and to have a future *quite different from* that permitted to boy-sweeps in Victorian England. And that is both the satirical and the evolutionary point of Kingsley's organisation of his tale.⁴⁷

Gillian Beer reads *The Water Babies* as a deliberate mythologisation of Darwinian theory in sociological terms, a statement that every human being is perfectible, regardless of class origins or status in society.⁴⁸ Kingsley borrows Darwin's tropes of extinction, evolution and degeneration in order to argue that ontogeny overwrites phylogeny: the metamorphosis of one individual can erase the entire biological code of the entire human species. I suggest that Aleksandr Beliaev trials this thesis in his two novels of human somatic transformation, *Chelovek-amfibiia* (1928) and *Ariel'* (1941). Beliaev is not responding solely to Darwin's theoretical revolution but also to the actual transformation of Russian society and culture. The surgically revised forms of his title characters are variants on the Soviet theme of the 'utopian body'. Tom's gills and fins are temporary alterations; he returns to human life as a biologically normal man. But Beliaev's amphibious man and flying boy are permanent incarnations, organically disparate from the human race. If their new bodies prove to be 'Gothic bodies' – liminal, atavistic, and abject – their fates will reflect on the integrity of Soviet utopianism. If Beliaev is mythologizing Darwinism for a socialist audience, what ideological message, if any, is embedded in his novels?

3.i. *Chelovek-amfibiia* and *Ariel'*

Where Kingsley used magic to reverse evolution, Wells' Dr Moreau used surgery to accelerate it, turning live animals into primitive humans. As an admirer of Wells' novels, Aleksandr Beliaev's *Chelovek-amfibiia* must be read as homage to (if not theft from) *The*

⁴⁷ Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 128.

⁴⁸ See Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, pp. 124-129, for analysis of *The Water Babies* in the context of evolutionary theory.

Island of Dr Moreau.⁴⁹ Specifically, Beliaev has borrowed the trope of the ingenious, maverick surgeon in self-appointed exile. Unlike Dr Moreau, Beliaev's Dr Salvator does not train or indoctrinate his creatures: there is no 'House of Pain' where recidivists are tortured. The island of Beast-People becomes a walled garden filled with Dr Salvator's surgical freaks, a 'чудесный сад'⁵⁰ containing six-legged lizards, two-headed snakes, dogs with the upper bodies of cats or monkeys, and so on. Beliaev himself did not acknowledge his debt to Wells, attributing both Dr Salvator and his menagerie to reports in the Brazilian press about a real-life surgeon, also called Salvator.⁵¹

Dr Salvator's secret is the existence of Ikhtiandr, a young Brazilian Indian orphan who has become his surrogate son. Long ago, Salvator saved the weak-lunged child's life by transplanting the gills of a shark onto his body. Renamed Ikhtiandr, the boy grows up completely amphibious, balancing his time between Salvator's home and swimming with dolphins in the Atlantic Ocean. Sadly, this idyll is soon interrupted. Sightings of a mysterious fish-man, the so-called 'морской дьявол',⁵² have terrified local fishermen and pearl-fishers. Pedro Zurita, owner of a pearl-fishing boat and a would-be capitalist kingpin, tracks down Ikhtiandr in order to put him to work as a diver. Ikhtiandr's aquatic compatibility enables him to dive deeper than ordinary humans and thus to gather the most priceless pearls from the seabed. Meanwhile, Ikhtiandr falls in love with a beautiful Brazilian girl, later revealed as Zurita's fiancée. Zurita has both Ikhtiandr and Salvator arrested and tried (for theft and vivisection respectively). Despite a fervent defence of man's right to somatic perfectibility, Salvator realizes their case is doomed. He is able to arrange for Ikhtiandr to escape and take

⁴⁹ Wells did not acknowledge thematic and situational resemblances between his own novel and *Chelovek-amfibiia* when the two authors met. He told Beliaev that the latter's novels 'весьма выгодно отличаются от западных книг. Я даже немного завидую их успеху'. See Grigorii Mishkevich, 'Tri chasa u velikogo fantasta', in *Vtorzhenie v Persoi*, ed. by Evgenii Brandis and Vladimir Dmitrevskii (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1958), pp. 435-442 (p. 440). A.F. Britikov traces another possible source for *Chelovek-amfibiia* to a French novel about an amphibious man serialised in *Le Matin* in 1910 (Britikov, *Russkii sovetskii nauchno-fantasticheskii roman* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1970), p. 114.

⁵⁰ Aleksandr Beliaev, *Chelovek-amfibiia*, in *Izbrannye proizvedeniia* (Moscow: Pravda, 1989), pp. 273-440 (p. 301).

⁵¹ Insisting that Salvator was not a 'вымышленное лицо', Beliaev attributed his inspiration to the 1925 Scopes Trial in the United States (in which a high school teacher was indicted for teaching evolution theory) and to a real-life Dr Salvator who experimented on Brazilian Indian children. 'Большинство описанных в романе операции действительно были произведены Сальватором'. Beliaev, 'Posleslovie k romanu chelovek-amfibiia', *Vokrug sveta*, 13 (1928), 200-202 (p. 200).

⁵² Beliaev, *Chelovek-amfibiia*, p. 273.

refuge with a marine biologist on a remote island in the Indian Ocean. Ikhtiandr's lungs were damaged during his confinement in prison conditions. From a '*chelovek-amfibiia*' he has become a '*chelovek-ryba*', permanently condemned to life in the ocean.

The plot of *Ariel*' is even more exotic but equally tragic. Ariel' is also an orphan, raised in a children's home in Southern India which is run by a mysterious and sadistic cult. One day, Ariel' is selected as the first human test subject for an experiment in human levitation. Unlike in *Chelovek-amfibiia*, Beliaev did not provide a feasible scientific justification for the events of *Ariel*': the hero's mysterious gift of flight is vaguely ascribed to Brownian motion in the molecules of his body.⁵³ When the experiment succeeds, Ariel' uses his new ability to fly at will to escape the school and look for sanctuary in the outside world. However, almost everyone he meets – including psychotic rajahs, Anglican vicars and American circus touts – is exclusively interested in subverting his gift to serve their personal advantage. Even when Ariel' finds his long-lost sister and discovers that he is the heir to an English aristocratic family and a landed estate, she considers his flying ability and Indian connections to be vaguely distasteful. Ariel finds acceptance and content only with the poverty-stricken pariah family who befriend him after his escape. At the end of the novel, Ariel' buys a one-way ticket to India, planning to rejoin them. Like him, they are involuntarily tainted, forced to live apart from society through no fault of their own. Ariel's self-imposed exile is analogous with Ikhtiandr's retreat into the ocean: both men acknowledge their status as outcasts.

3.ii. 'Неуклюжее, безобразное существо'

The bodies of Ariel' and Ikhtiandr qualify as Gothic by all of Hurley's criteria. Firstly, they are abject, as their final exile from humanity makes explicit. Secondly, they are unstable, and by their own instability they threaten the coherency of the human race. And finally, although both their bodies were enhanced in a spirit of scientific progress, they are in fact retrogressive and atavistic. I will treat each of these points in detail below, before showing how the gothicity of Ariel's and Ikhtiandr's bodies negates their utopian aspects.

Both men inspire fear and awe in observers. Ikhtiandr is genuinely part-animal, thanks to his implanted shark gills. He even behaves like an animal, suckling dolphin milk and feeding on freshly caught raw fish. On dry land, Ikhtiandr's appearance is handsome and entirely human

⁵³ As Boris Liapunov notes, *Ariel*', almost uniquely among Beliaev's novels, is 'действительно фантастическая, и Беляев этого не скрывает: роману впервые дан подзаголовок – фантастический'. Liapunov, *Aleksandr Beliaev: Kritiko-biograficheskii ocherk* (Moscow: Sovetskii Pisatel', 1967), p. 117.

(except for his gills); but the goggles, webbed gloves and flippers he dons for swimming make him seem genuinely monstrous. Ariel's ability to fly without wings arouses shock and terror wherever he goes. Both men are prelapsarian socialists: they preserve an edenic naivety with regard to money, property, and human greed. Yet despite this, human society unilaterally rejects them – or seeks to use them unscrupulously. Their interstitial identity is monstrous in and of itself. When Ikhtiandr and Salvator are on trial, the Bishop of Buenos Aires insists:

‘Даже если Ихтиандр сам не виновен, если он является только жертвой, то он все же является богопротивным, кошунственным созданием... Ихтиандр не должен существовать!... Во всяком случае, он должен быть обвинен, изъят, лишен свободы’.⁵⁴

Beliaev's books show that society can only exploit or abject the Gothic bodies of Ariel' and Ikhtiandr: it cannot assimilate them. Even the girl Ikhtiandr loves is revealed to be his sister, turning his innocent romance into a Gothic incest drama. Ariel' rejects his biological relatives, claiming that his real family are his fellow untouchables. Ariel' and Ikhtiandr are both abject.

Not only are their bodies inherently horrifying, they are also unstable. Their mere existence proves the plasticity of human form and its capacity for both degradation and enhancement. Ikhtiandr regresses into a fishlike identity when his lungs fail him; Ariel' may lose his gift of flight at any time, according to the doctor who experimented on him. Yet their ability to thrive – even temporarily – with enhanced bodies challenges received wisdom that the human form is the pinnacle of evolution. As Salvator tells the court at his trial:

‘Я продолжаю утверждать, что организм животных и даже человека не совершенен и требует исправления. [...] Беда не в том, что человек произошел от животного, а в том, что он не перестал быть животным...’⁵⁵

Salvator acknowledges two stages in species advancement: firstly, the admission that humans are unfinished animals, and secondly, submission to surgical correction. This corresponds to the scientist Davis' call for eugenic selection of humans in *Bol'shaia zemlia*. Beliaev's public stance on the issue emphasized the malleability of human form, citing examples of children born with tails or missing major organs. Beliaev argued that physical variability was ‘игра

⁵⁴ Beliaev, *Chelovek-amfibiia*, p. 411.

⁵⁵ Beliaev, *Chelovek-amfibiia*, p. 418.

природы – факт, а не фантастика’.⁵⁶ Surgical alteration was simply a means to rationalize the natural process of mutation: today’s surgical miracles could well be tomorrow’s routine operations. Indeed, the analogy between surgery and progress was so prevalent in Soviet culture that Zamiatin used it to convey the limitations of H.G. Wells’ politics:

Социализм для Уэллса, несомненно, путь к излечению рака, въевшегося в организм старого мира. Но медицина знает два пути для борьбы с этой болезнью: один путь – это нож, хирургия, путь, который, может быть, либо вылечит пациента радикально, либо убьет; другой путь – более медленный – это лечение радиом, рентгеновскими лучами. Уэллс предпочитает этот бескровный путь.⁵⁷

In this allegory, Wells’ moderate, gradualist socialism is compared to slow-acting radiotherapy. Surgery, by contrast, resembles revolution. Just as surgery constitutes a radical but ultimately curative invasion of the body, revolution is the most radical weapon of utopian change. Salvator dreams of converting humanity into a global community of amphibious men, coexisting fraternally on land and under water. His method, surgery, is precisely the same means ironized by Wells in *Dr Moreau* because it relegates both humans and animals to the status of insentient material. Salvator’s intention to revise the human body actually returns it to its bestial origins, erasing the physical differences between beasts and men.

There is a further obstacle to the realization of Salvator’s utopia: are its inhabitants truly men of the future, or revenants from our biological past? Neither Ariel nor Ikhtiandr necessarily constitutes an *advance* on the human prototype: both can be perceived as retrogressive, reversions to a more primitive model of mankind. In *The Water Babies*, Tom’s amphibious body, miniaturised and fish-like, is not an evolutionary advance but an ontogenic retreat – an explicit return to an ‘earlier phase of evolutionary growth’.⁵⁸ Ikhtiandr is also a regression on the evolutionary ladder, to beyond the time when land animals evolved from fish. His name means ‘fish-man’ in Greek: we also note that the title of Beliaev’s novel translates as ‘Man-Amphibian’, underlining the equality of his human and animal components, rather than the ‘Amphibious Man’, which would suggest the dominance of his humanity. Dr Salvator argues

⁵⁶ Beliaev, ‘Posleslovie k romanu *Chelovek-amfibiia*’, *Vokrug sveta*, 13 (1928), 200-202 (p. 201).

⁵⁷ Zamiatin, Evgenii, *Gerbert Uells* (Petersburg: Epoka, 1922), p. 19.

⁵⁸ Beer, p. 124.

that all humans are former monkeys and fish, echoing H.G. Wells' observation that human anatomy is merely 'the anatomy of a fish twisted and patched to fit a life out of water'.⁵⁹

As for *Ariel*, there are many precedents for viewing flight as an ability which humans have renounced or been denied, such as the Icarus legend or the concept of fallen angels. There is an interesting parallel between *Ariel* and the trope of flying Communists in Andrei Platonov's novel *Schastlivaia Moskva*. The heroine is a former parachutist who dramatically crash-lands after lighting a match in mid-air. Another character considers flight, on the evidence of the human skeleton, to be a lapsed human ability:

Человеческое тело летало в каких-то погибших тысячелетиях назад. [...] Грудная клетка человека представляет свернутые крылья. Он попробовал свою нагретую голову – там тоже что-то билось, желая улететь из темной одинокой тесноты.⁶⁰

The gift of flight enjoyed by our ancestors may be enjoyed by denizens of a future communist utopia, a kind of “воздушная страна бессмертия” where “человек будет крылатым, а земля останется в наследство животным и вновь, навсегда зарастет дебрями своей ветхой девственности”.⁶¹ At least symbolically, flight belongs to humanity's past. The quest for flight is therefore a Gothic pursuit of ancestral secrets. If Gothic is defined as the reassertion of a lost heritage, then this resurgence of forgotten ancestral traits is quintessentially Gothic. If flight and amphibious existence are simply lost abilities, evolution may easily be mistaken for degeneration. Interpreted politically, such a conclusion undercuts the freshness and originality of Communism: instead of evoking a spotless future, it risks returning involuntarily to a superseded past.

In conclusion, what can we deduce about Beliaev's ideological message in these two novels? His position is inherently contradictory. Although Beliaev's published comments on *Chelovek-amfibiia* appear to endorse somatic transformation, the plots of both books refute this confidence. Each novel ends with the main character disappointed, condemned, and exiled. If somatic change is metonymous with societal change, Beliaev appears to be warning that the world is not yet ready for either. Beliaev is the most cautious of social critics,

⁵⁹ H.G. Wells, 'Zoological Retrogression', in *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History, c. 1880-1900*, ed. by Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 5-12 (p. 10).

⁶⁰ Platonov, *Schastlivaia Moskva* in *Schastlivaia Moskva: Povesti, rasskazy, lirika* (Moscow: Gud'ial Press, 1999), pp. 5-92 (p. 30).

⁶¹ Platonov, *Schastlivaia Moskva*, p. 36.

inserting a warning as ambiguous as the bodies of his characters. The critic John Griffiths considers Beliaev only ‘superficially orthodox’, arguing that Beliaev’s roller-coaster plot structures betray his ambiguous attitude, frequently using the technique of the ‘twist ending’ to ‘toy with forbidden catastrophes’.⁶² Socialism *almost* collapses or is defeated, until an eleventh-hour miracle turns the tables (and rescues Beliaev’s image as a socialist writer).

With the onset of stricter literary regulation in the 1930s, Beliaev made ‘adaptations to the times’⁶³ by writing what were, in effect, fantastic production novels – socialist realism transferred just outside the realm of the possible. *Podvodnye zemledel'tsy* (1930), on the construction of an underwater *kolkhoz* off the Siberian coast, is one such example. But even in such apparently standardized and orthodox plots, Beliaev tends to inject a destabilizing or subversive subtext. Beliaev’s metaphorical portrayals of his submarine *kolkhozniki* are at least superficially grotesque. Characters in their diving costumes are repeatedly likened to mythological monsters or Martians. A visiting scientist jokes that the *kolkhozniki* must be a lost species of dark-skinned amphibious men. Beliaev’s subtle inference is that the price of underwater utopia is the abrogation of full humanity. As in Ikhtiandr’s case, the consequence of over-ingenuous adaptation is abjection, from dry land to the inhuman ocean.

Soviet critics were divided between praising Beliaev’s futuristic vision and criticizing the physiological feasibility of Ariel’ and Ikhtiandr. Boris Liapunov reads *Ariel*’ literally as a call for wingless flight – using either miniature flying apparatus, or anti-gravity pads.⁶⁴ A Soviet biologist, in an afterword to the 1938 edition of *Chelovek-amfibiia*, observes cautiously that even if surgeons could create an Ikhtiandr, the modifications necessary to make him biologically viable in the ocean, such as insulating blubber, would render him hideous: ‘Ho тогда Ихтиандр превратился бы в неуклюжее, безобразное существо, беспомощное на суще... и утратил бы всякое сходство с человеком’.⁶⁵ Should we read Ikhtiandr and Ariel’ as utopian avatars or as monstrous degenerates? My conclusion is that they embody elements of both. They are failed utopians, as premature as Platonov’s ironical plan to populate the

⁶² John Griffiths, *Three Tomorrows: American, British and Soviet Science Fiction* (London: Macmillan Press, 1980), pp. 45-59.

⁶³ McGuire, p. 5.

⁶⁴ Liapunov, p. 41.

⁶⁵ A. Nemilov, ‘Posleslovie’, in Aleksandr Beliaev, *Chelovek-amfibiia: nauchno-fantasticheskii roman* (Moscow and Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo detskoi literatury, 1938), pp. 177-183 (p. 182).

upper atmosphere with winged Communists. *Ariel*' and *Chelovek-amfibiia* suggest that the time has not yet come for radical surgical metamorphoses of humanity. Whether Beliaev intended to imply that the world revolution planned by the Bolsheviks was also premature remains unknown. Even if this warning did constitute the subtext of Beliaev's novels, the writer characteristically maintained a loophole for salvation. Corporeal utopianism may be incompatible with today's reality, but the future still holds potential for transformation and apotheosis. As Dr Salvator tells his prosecutors, "“То, что сделал я сегодня, завтра будут делать рядовые хирурги”".⁶⁶

4. *Sobach'e serdtse* and *Mess-Mend*

*Наука еще не знает способов обращать зверей в людей.*⁶⁷

In her discussion of late Victorian Gothic, Kelly Hurley introduces the concept of 'palimpsest bodies'.⁶⁸ These are Gothic bodies whose constituent parts reveal the traces of biologically obsolete identities; effectively, their physiologies are narratives of atavism.

Atavism reveals that the human body is too compendious, too full of incompatible histories, too full of strange narrative lines waiting to be developed. The human body, at least potentially, is utterly chaotic, unable to maintain its distinctions from a whole world of animal possibilities.⁶⁹

Degeneration theory, in likening the human body to monkeys, reptiles, and other lower animals, used the idea of atavism to explain individual lapses into crime or insanity.⁷⁰ The palimpsest body reads backwards, revealing multiple overwritten forms from mankind's animal past. It is a negative image of the utopian body, which is homogenous and stable. The following section will locate two palimpsest bodies from early Soviet fiction, Bulgakov's Sharik/Sharikov and Marietta Shaginian's Chiche, in the context of Gothic narrative.

⁶⁶ Beliaev, *Chelovek-amfibiia*, p. 419.

⁶⁷ Mikhail Bulgakov, *Sobach'e serdtse* [hereafter *SS*], in *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. by Ellendea Proffer, 8 vols (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1982-), III (1983), pp. 119-210 (p. 209).

⁶⁸ Hurley, p. 94. See pp. 90-94, for more on palimpsest bodies.

⁶⁹ Hurley, p. 94.

⁷⁰ The criminologist Cesare Lombroso identified 'atavistic anomalies' in criminally inclined individuals, which 'were not in themselves causative, but denoted a savage and animalistic nature that prompted criminal acts' (Hurley, p. 93). Nordau used Lombroso's physiological research in his widely influential *Degeneration* (1892).

4.i. Bulgakov's Dog-Man

The image of a demented surgeon patching dead human flesh into a grotesque, reanimated composite has been part of the cultural sphere since Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (and its many film versions). Beliaev transfers the same image to the Congo jungle in one of his Professor Wagner stories.⁷¹ However, the most famous example of deranged surgical procedure in Soviet literature is Mikhail Bulgakov's novel *Sobach'e serdtse* (1925; unpublished in Russia until 1987). After an operation by the famous endocrinologist and surgeon, Professor Preobrazhenskii, Sharik the dog briefly becomes the man, Sharikov. Sharikov exemplifies the Gothic trope of utopian bodies that degenerate into monsters. Ikhtiandr and Ariel' horrify because they are part animal; Sharikov is horrifying because he is part human. He is a new human prototype who fails – and is dismantled – because he is *too* successful in his assimilation of humanity (from the pituitary gland and testicles of a dead criminal implanted in his body). Yvonne Howell interprets *Sobach'e serdtse* not merely as a political satire but as direct condemnation of the early Soviet biologists and eugenicists who hoped to create a new human type for the age of socialist utopia.⁷² As Professor Preobrazhenskii admits, “‘весь ужас в том, что у него уж не собачье, а именно человеческое сердце’”.⁷³

The transplant that created Sharikov was intended as an experiment in the rejuvenation of organic tissue. To the mingled amazement and chagrin of Preobrazhenskii and his assistant Bormental', the result of the operation is not rejuvenation but ‘полное очеловечение’.⁷⁴ Sharik the dog becomes a man, Sharikov – while retaining disturbingly many canine mental habits and physical proclivities. As such, he demonstrates the characteristics of a ‘Gothic body’. Sharikov is abject: his sneaky behaviour and unclean habits arouse disgust. His liminality between canine and human persists until Preobrazhenskii and Bormental' reverse the operation and turn him back into a dog. Finally, he is atavistic, regressing into the unattractive personality of Klim Chugunkin, the original owner of Sharikov's human glands.

⁷¹ Professor Wagner transplants a human brain into the skull of a dead African elephant in *Khoiti-Toiti* (1930). See Aleksandr Beliaev, *Prodavets vozdukha: Romany* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2007), pp. 495-560.

⁷² See Howell, ‘Eugenics, Rejuvenation, and Bulgakov's Journey into the Heart of Dogness’, and Vucinich, *Darwin in Russian Thought*, pp. 356-359, for discussion of the interaction between eugenics and Marxism in the 1920s in Soviet Russia.

⁷³ Mikhail Bulgakov, *SS*, p. 196.

⁷⁴ Bulgakov, *SS*, p. 162.

Indeed, Preobrazhenskii convinces the police that the entire episode has been a case of natural degeneration: “[Sharikov] поговорил и начал обращаться в первобытное состояние. Атавизм”⁷⁵.

Previous interpretations of *Sobach' e serdtse* tend to relate the novel exclusively to the Frankenstein legend. Certainly, like Frankenstein, Preobrazhenskii is forced to shoulder responsibility for the new being he has created (although he angrily rejects Sharikov's attempt to call him 'папаша').⁷⁶ Moretti has interpreted Frankenstein's monster as a symbol for the working classes created and abandoned by the capitalist system;⁷⁷ similarly, Diana Burgin reads Sharikov as a symbol of the 'Lumpen-Proletariat' whose venality sabotages Preobrazhenskii's transformational project.⁷⁸ However, there is a basic ideological difference between Dr Frankenstein and Preobrazhenskii. While the latter wants to create life from dead matter, Preobrazhenskii is a eugenicist who wants to enhance living humans. Dr Frankenstein abandons his researches after creating his monster; Preobrazhenskii calmly reverses his experiment when Sharikov becomes too obstreperous. At the end of the novel, Preobrazhenskii is examining preserved brains, presumably with a view to future experimentation.⁷⁹ Taking a fresh approach to *Sobach' e serdtse*, one recent critic writes:

The novel's enduring significance lies not in its overworked interpretation as an anti-Soviet satire or as a warning against scientific hubris. Rather, it remains a brilliant exploration of the conundrum of where nature meets nurture in efforts to enhance humankind.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Bulgakov, *SS*, p. 209.

⁷⁶ Bulgakov, *SS*, p. 169.

⁷⁷ See Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders* (London: NLB, 1983), pp. 85-90.

⁷⁸ Diana L. Burgin, 'Bulgakov's Early Tragedy of the Scientist-Creator: An Interpretation of *The Heart of a Dog*', *Slavic and East European Journal* 22 (1978), 494-508 (p. 500).

⁷⁹ I am indebted to Yvonne Howell's article 'Eugenics, Rejuvenation, and Bulgakov's Journey into the Heart of Dogness' for my interpretation of Preobrazhenskii as principally a eugenicist. Howell suggests that Preobrazhenskii's unusual name and patronymic, Filipp Filippovich, may be derived from the well-known Soviet eugenicist Iu. A. Filipchenko (Howell, p. 558). Preobrazhenskii also identifies himself as a eugenicist who has been sidelined into rejuvenation procedures: 'Я хотел проделать маленький опыт, после того, как два года тому назад впервые получил из гипофиза вытяжку полового гормона. И вместо этого, что же получилось?' (Bulgakov, *SS*, p. 195).

⁸⁰ Howell, pp. 545-546.

When Sharik becomes Sharikov, he is immediately and unconditionally accepted as a man by the house committee, his employers, and even his fiancée. In spite of the fact that his job – killing cats for the City Cleansing Department – is as nearly adapted to a dog's requirements as possible, it is a human position, not created specially for Sharikov. Even after Preobrazhenskii disillusions Sharikov's fiancée, she still thinks of him as a man. Her parting insult to Sharikov proves that she still perceives him as human.⁸¹ Like the pigs in *Animal Farm*, Sharikov has become the worst kind of man: a conniving, manipulative, hypocritical criminal. He spies on Preobrazhenskii's female servants and plans to report the entire household to the secret police. In exposing the worst traits of the human race, he threatens the essence of human identity. This makes him truly abject:

It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience... Abjection... is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that dissembles.⁸²

Even the operation that created Sharikov from Sharik debases humanity, by reducing the secret of intelligent life to a series of pathetic, disconnected organs and parts: 'мокрые, обвисшие семенные железы', 'дряблая кожа', 'серо-желтый мозг', 'болтающийся комочек'.⁸³ If the implantation of a dead man's glands in a dog's body can create a new, composite human, then personality – the human soul – is subordinated to physiology. Like Frankenstein's monster, 'he is fabricated as if he were a machine, but out of organic bits and pieces'.⁸⁴ Sharikov is justly described as an 'оборотень', an 'отщепенец':⁸⁵ it is easier to view him as a ghoul or a monster than as a human being who has successfully integrated into Soviet society.

The ultimate horror of Sharikov's uncanny existence is its viability. Society rejects Ikhtiandr and Ariel', but it welcomes Sharikov. As Menshikova argues, the 'кромешный мир' created in Preobrazhenskii's surgery is constantly suborned by the no less fantastic world of NEP

⁸¹ She calls him a 'подлец', rather than the more appropriate insult of 'сукин сын'! See Bulgakov, *SS*, p. 202.

⁸² Kristeva, p. 4.

⁸³ Bulgakov, *SS*, pp. 155-157.

⁸⁴ Beer, p. 103.

⁸⁵ E.R. Menshikova, *Vspolokhi karnavala : grotesknoe soznanie kak fenomen sovetskoi kultury* (St Petersburg: Aleteia, 2006), p. 66.

Moscow. Sharikov ‘оборачивается советским чиновником... внедряется в реальный мир... Шарикова уже можно принять за опричника собачья голова, служба очистки как истребление неверных (котов)’.⁸⁶ Sharikov may be a human prototype, but one designed for dystopia rather than utopia. Sharikov thrives in the world of bribes, purges, and cronyism that is NEP Moscow. Only in the Professor’s citadel of learning and bourgeois refinement is he an abject creature, an ‘отщепенец’.

Ironically, the real proof of humanity in Soviet society is neither birth nor species, but possession of papers (Sharik tells his maker, “‘Сами знаете, человеку без документов строго воспрещается существовать’”!)⁸⁷ Yet, in NEP society, Preobrazhenskii’s origins – he is a clergyman’s son – are at least as vulnerable to accusations of atavism and corruption as Sharikov’s. *Sobach’e serdtse* leaves the ultimate definition of ‘degeneracy’ ambiguous. Are Preobrazhenskii and Bormental’ degenerate, because of the class and cultural differences that segregate them from Soviet society? Or are the Soviet citizens we meet – Preobrazhenskii’s clients, the House Committee, and Sharikov himself – degenerate citizens of dystopia? Preobrazhenskii concludes that evolution is best left to nature. Any woman can randomly give birth to a genius. Yet Preobrazhenskii’s ingenious and intricate surgery created Sharikov – a grotesque and despicable throwback.

4.ii. Marietta Shaginian’s Cat-Men

Marietta Shaginian’s novel *Mess-Mend* (1924) uses the trope of the Gothic body to vindicate, rather than to ironize, Marxist theory. Unlike the writers discussed above, Shaginian’s Gothic bodies are not utopian prototypes for socialist mankind. They are unambiguously degenerate. Darwin’s original theory implied that the body’s protean potential to transform itself includes an equal capacity to degrade.⁸⁸ This idea was easily transferred, on a metaphorical level, to politics and society. Fear ‘that decadence may be an energy as strong as development, and extinction a fate more probable than progress’ was as endemic in Soviet literature as it had been in late nineteenth-century prose, fed by anthropological theories that crime was a result

⁸⁶ Menshikova, p. 65.

⁸⁷ Bulgakov, *SS*, p. 171.

⁸⁸ Charles Darwin’s *The Descent of Man* (1871) states that ‘Man still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin’ (Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 405). Darwin’s theory of natural selection implies that species that cease to compete for environmental dominance begin to degenerate – a scenario potentially applicable to humans.

of localized degeneration.⁸⁹ While social anthropologists like Cesare Lombroso and Max Nordau saw evidence of this degenerative tendency in the physiognomies of criminals and the poor, Marx argued that the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie were inevitably doomed to sociological decline and oblivion. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx states explicitly that ‘other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of modern industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product’.⁹⁰ Marx’s idea of decay was, in this instance, economic rather than biological. Shaginian’s achievement in *Mess-Mend* was to transfer Marx’s concept of economic decadence into Darwinian biological terms, depicting aristocrats, plutocrats and oligarchs in the throes of physical degeneration.

Shaginian was herself a chameleon among Soviet writers, evolving new ideological positions to suit changing times and switching genres several times during her long and active career. In the 1920s she published several experimental works, including *Kik* (1929) (which uses different narrative viewpoints to tell the same story)⁹¹ and the *Mess-Mend* adventure series, published under the pseudonym Jim Dollar. Her production novel *Gidrocentral* (1931) reasserted her commitment as a socialist writer. She finished her career as a laureate of both the Lenin and Stalin prizes and a Hero of Socialist Labour. *Mess-Mend* is a palimpsest text, derived from several incompatible evolutionary lines: the Serapion Brothers’ fantastic stories, Lunts’ and Bukharin’s promotion of the *krasnyi pinkerton* genre in early Soviet fiction, and the influence of Western cinema.⁹²

In *Mess-Mend*, capitalist plutocrats and fugitive aristocrats are falling victim to an unprecedented medical condition, diagnosed by Dr Lepsius, a doctor specialising in diseases of the rich. The chief symptoms are lumbar pain and a limp. Examination of the lumbar region reveals the outward manifestation of this malady: ‘Все как будто в порядке, но предательская лупа в дрожащей руке Лепсиуса указывает на маленькое, с булавочную

⁸⁹ Beer, p. 135.

⁹⁰ Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. by David McLellan (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 13.

⁹¹ See David Shepherd, *Beyond Metafiction: Self-Consciousness in Soviet Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), esp. Chapter 3, ‘Facts versus Figures: Marietta Shaginyan’, pp. 64-89.

⁹² See Samuel D. Cioran, ‘Marietta Shaginian’s *Mess-Mend*: Yankees in Petrograd’, in *Mess-Mend: Yankees in Petrograd*, (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1991), pp. 7-21 (pp. 11-14), for discussion of *Mess-Mend*’s sources.

головку, пятнышко, ощущаемое как небольшая выпуклость’⁹³ on the sufferer’s rear. Lepsius’ aristocratic patients are, in short, acquiring tails. The scientific explanation is that a bone which Lepsius calls the ‘vertebra media sine bestialia’ is spontaneously extruding; however, the subtext of this biological transformation is unambiguously political.

The disease is apparently triggered by what Lepsius diplomatically calls the ‘сильный страх’⁹⁴ provoked by revolution and dispossession; at least one exile of the Russian Revolution is afflicted. The symptoms appear irrespective of nationality, affecting Turkish beys and Rockefellers indiscriminately. According to Lepsius, the disease is occurring ‘все чаще и чаще - и только у определенной категории людей!’⁹⁵ – i.e., the dispossessed upper classes. Ultimately the tail is a consequence of the ‘ужас’ experienced by rich exploiters: ‘ужас перед неизбежностью коммунизма!’⁹⁶ Gregorio Chiche, the arch-villain of *Mess-Mend*, has a protean ability to switch identities, posing as a British psychiatrist (with an asylum in which he manages to imprison several of the novel’s positive characters) and as a red-haired ship’s captain, among other impostures. However, Chiche is also a unique specimen of this degenerative condition. Lepsius is able to identify Chiche despite his disguises by the degenerate traits revealed in the villain’s skull – ‘небольшой и продолговатой’ – and hands – ‘худую, слабую, с припухшими сочленениями’.⁹⁷

The finale of *Mess-Mend* is staged as a scientific exhibition in a St Petersburg lecture theatre. Invited in his capacity as Professor Hiserton (the real-life neurophysiologist Professor Bekhterev is also in the audience), Chiche is unexpectedly exposed by Lepsius as a specimen of “‘такую степень дегенерации, которой мне еще не приходилось наблюдать в натуре!’”⁹⁸ Progressively stripping Chiche of his wig and outer garments, Lepsius reveals the palimpsest layers of Chiche’s personality. Under his clothes, Chiche wears a peculiar

⁹³ Marietta Shaginian, *Mess-Mend, ili Ianki v Petrograde*, in Shaginian, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh*, 6 vols (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1956-8), II (1956), pp. 115-407 (p. 154).

⁹⁴ Shaginian, p. 155.

⁹⁵ Shaginian, p. 205.

⁹⁶ Shaginian, p. 396.

⁹⁷ Shaginian, p. 206.

⁹⁸ Shaginian, p. 397.

supportive corset with iron bars. When Lepsius removes the corset, Chiche's final transformation ensues:

В ту же секунду, потрясающий вопль вырвался из тысячи уст. На стол прыгнул зверь с изогнутым, как у кошки, хребтом. Он соскочил со стола в зал и на четвереньках понесся, едва касаясь пола, к выходу.⁹⁹

Chiche has collapsed into a new, feline form. However, his final descent from humanity is not balanced by a corresponding assimilation into the animal kingdom. Chiche's degeneration places him in the abject state of a creature which is 'полузверь, получеловек' and inferior to both. Both humans and animals in the lecture theatre recoil in horror from the fleeing creature. Only a Red Army soldier who happens to be guarding the exit has the presence of mind to react, coolly felling the thing that was Chiche with a bullet through its skull. *Mess-Mend* concludes with the hero's call to arms against other degenerate capitalists and oligarchs: "Тот, до кого побрезгал дотронуться зверь, перестал существовать, товарищи! Но еще не вымерли те, кто не брезгают пользоваться такими, как он!"¹⁰⁰

Gregorio Chiche's dramatic decline into an atavistic beast-man illustrates the instability and inherent recidivism of palimpsest bodies. As a literary strategy, the palimpsest body has two principal effects. As in *Mess-Mend* and *Sobach'e serdtse*, it serves to identify and 'abject' degenerate elements from normal society. In addition, its chaotic and incompatible form emphasizes the integration and continuity of other bodies (in *Mess-Mend*, the workers who unite against capitalist exploitation).

Shaginian's *Mess-Mend* turns early twentieth-century biological discourse on atavism and degeneration into a parable of working-class triumphalism. Despite its seemingly neat conclusion, with Chiche's exposure and death, some ambiguities remain in Shaginian's narrative. The reader might expect animal species to support their incipient colleagues, the aristocrats and capitalists. On the contrary: a horde of animals, winged, four-footed and fluffy, sustain the narrative by manoeuvring unlikely coincidences (at the risk of collapsing the plot under its own improbability). Moreover, a major character and indispensable aid to the workers is Mike Thingsmaster's dog, Beauty. Possessing at least human intelligence, Beauty is fanatically devoted to her master: her wit and courage repeatedly save major

⁹⁹ Shaginian, p. 399.

¹⁰⁰ Shaginian, p. 400.

characters from death. Cioran considers the relationship between Mike and Beauty to be a ‘parody of deviant sexual psychology’, since Mike prefers the dog ‘to any female companionship’.¹⁰¹ The crucial (and at times inappropriate) role played by animals in the workers’ cause seems to parallel the physiological integration of human and animal traits in the degenerate bodies of wicked capitalists. *Mess-Mend*, therefore, is more complex than the ebullient satire it appears to be. Its ambiguous subtext suggests that even those workers who symbolise masculinity and probity are vulnerable to degenerate traits – albeit psychological rather than physiological.

5. Conclusion

*За левым ухом у мальчика, заняв полголовы, вырос шар, наполненный горячим бурным гноем и кровью, и этот шар походил на вторую дикую голову ребенка, сосущую его изнемогающую жизнь...*¹⁰²

The passage quoted above from Platonov’s *Schastlivaia Moskva* shows the spectacle of the human body in flux at its most terrifying. A child is dying of a grotesquely swollen brain tumour, which Platonov describes as a second head competing for life with the first. This second head is described as both ‘безумная’ and ‘дикая’, ‘безумная’ in the sense that its destructive energy subverts human form, ‘дикая’ in its random manifestation of nature’s energy, eagerly cannibalising its host’s resources. The human body is cannibalized from within by its own out-of-control metamorphic energy:

Это гной в голове ребенка химически размывал и разъедал последнюю костяную пластину, защищавшую его мозг; в уме мальчика сейчас уже стелется туманная смерть...¹⁰³

Platonov’s dying child represents the worst nightmare of Soviet corporeal utopianism: fear that the utopian bodies of future Communists would implode into Gothic bodies, doomed to indifferentiation and extinction. The examples of Gothic bodies analysed in this chapter illustrate the prevalence of this Soviet fear of regression. However, this fear could not be explicitly expressed within the parameters of Gothic-fantastic discourse. Even in the related genre of science fiction ‘all depiction of social retrogression is forbidden... Perhaps the censors fear that showing such a retrogression would imply that it is possible to slip back

¹⁰¹ Cioran, p. 19.

¹⁰² Platonov, *Schastlivaia Moskva*, p. 24

¹⁰³ Platonov, *Schastlivaia Moskva*, p. 24

from socialism into state capitalism even after a revolution is “secure”¹⁰⁴. Degeneration fear had to be allegorized to be expressed – and the ideal ‘ideological envelope’ for such allegory was Gothic plot.¹⁰⁵ Beliaev’s pitifully incompatible freaks of science, Bulgakov’s Sharikov, Platonov’s gradually dismembered heroine Moskva, and Valiusinskii’s doomed minima-men are all allegories of social degeneration. Of these examples, only Shaginian’s atrophied plutocrats can be overtly described as degenerates, since they symbolize the entropy of capitalism. The Gothic obsession with pasts and returns inevitably infects utopian bodies, as well as utopia itself, with the disease of history.¹⁰⁶

Gothic bodies emphasize the spontaneity and mutability of human form. My investigation of Soviet Gothic bodies discloses two archetypal scenarios, already established in the European Gothic-fantastic tradition. The first is the creation (by scientifically induced mutation) of involuntary monsters. This is the most obvious, and tragic, aspect of Gothic plot.

Frankenstein’s monster does not ask to be created; Valiusinskii’s dwarves, Beliaev’s mutants and Bulgakov’s Sharikov are all freaks *malgré soi*. Darwin’s own understanding of his theory placed man randomly among diverse chains of progress and retrogression. ‘Monstrosities which disturb the taxonomies of natural history are, paradoxically, legitimated by the Darwinian version of natural history, and in Gothic natural history, the anomalous is reframed as the normal’.¹⁰⁷ In Gothic plot, monsters become mundane.

The second typical aspect of Gothic plot entails the annihilation of human bodily form. Scientists are usually complicit in this process. Examples in Soviet fiction abound, from Bulgakov’s reduction of Sharik/Sharikov’s identity into a sequence of glands and organs, to the decapitated heads and body parts lurking in the laboratories of Beliaev’s eccentric scientists.¹⁰⁸ The eponymous doctor hero of Mikahil Gireli’s 1926 thriller *Prestuplenie professora Zvezdochetova* has an office full of glass jars ‘наполненных спиртом и формалином, в которых плавают лиловато-серые куски человеческого мяса, миомы,

¹⁰⁴ McGuire, *Red Stars*, p. 58.

¹⁰⁵ Naiman, *SP*, p. 151.

¹⁰⁶ I owe the concept of infected utopia to Naiman, *SP*, pp. 12-16.

¹⁰⁷ Hurley, p. 61.

¹⁰⁸ I have in mind Professors Douell and Kern from *Golova professora Douella* and Professor Wagner from Beliaev’s series of Wagner novellas.

липомы, саркомы'.¹⁰⁹ The final jar contains a preserved foetus. Gireli's Professor inflicts the ultimate humiliation on human identity by calculating that the soul is a collection of electromagnetic impulses – and building a machine capable of replicating them.

Scientific discourse – instead of reversing the processes of mutation and breakdown – ironically emphasizes the human body's continuity with, and therefore subjection to, inanimate matter. Evgenii Zamiatin succumbs to this paradox when arguing for the inevitable triumph of science over natural limitations. In order to contend that biological anomalies from fiction, in this case Wells' Invisible Man, will soon be scientifically realizable, Zamiatin draws on examples from the lower phyla of biology:

В морях живут морские звезды – почти прозрачные, и некоторые морские личинки – совершенно прозрачные. Вы скажете: да, но то – какие-то личинки, а то – человек, это две вещи разные. А знаете ли вы, что теперь в медицине для учебных целей уже пользуются совершенно или частично прозрачными анатомическими препаратами человеческого тела?[...] А раз мы можем сделать прозрачной одну руку – мы можем сделать прозрачными и две руки, а если две руки – то и все тело. И если этой прозрачности удалось добиться на мертвом человеке – может быть удастся добиться и на живом?¹¹⁰

Zamiatin fails to notice that, in defending man's perfectibility, he has dismantled the foundations of humanity's distinction from matter. First, he specifically denies any material distinction between humans and starfish – one of the most primitive life forms – at a cellular level. Next, he equates living flesh with the dead matter of a corpse, arguing that both should be susceptible to identical chemical processes. Yet the corpse is the ultimate Gothic body: 'the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life...'.¹¹¹ Zamiatin's defence of human scientific ingenuity has abjected the human body itself. The body has been reduced to what Mikhail Gireli aptly calls 'человеческое мясо'.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Mikhail Gireli, *Prestuplenie professora Zvezdochetova: Roman* (Leningrad: Puchina, 1926), p. 8.

¹¹⁰ Evgenii Zamiatin, *Gerbert Uells* (Petersburg: Epoka, 1922), p. 10.

¹¹¹ Kristeva, p. 4.

¹¹² Gireli, p. 8.

‘Since medieval times, the body has been a privileged site, vehicle, and metaphor of political struggle’.¹¹³ It is tempting to argue that the texts in this chapter project the fear of degeneration onto a political, as well as an ideological, plane. Just as tropes of evolution and degeneration perturb the unity and fixity of the human body, they challenge the sovereignty and stability of political systems. No creature was too freakish to incarnate: without a creationist hierarchy, there could be no bodily specificity or permanence. Similarly, no régime could claim to embody an ultimate synthesis of opposing hierarchies; individual forces would always shatter the synchronization of powers. I have already cited Zamiatin’s parallel between surgery and revolution in this context. However, of the texts I discuss above, only *Sobach’e serdtse* has received sustained criticism as a political allegory. In later Soviet texts, the political significance of Gothic bodies became more explicit. Sever Gansovskii’s short story “Den’ gneva” (1962) and Anatolii Dnieprov’s “Kraby idut po ostrovu” (1962) both use ‘Gothic bodies’ – respectively, genetically altered bear-men and robotic crabs – to allegorize the Cold War and the international arms race. Both stories exploit Darwinian theory. Both also rework the Gothic trope of the hubristic scientist who, in seeking to alter nature, is destroyed by his creation.

The advantage of Gothic allegory in Soviet fiction for exploring such dangerous territory was clear. The endless formal variations of evolution theory fed the Gothic imagination with potential monsters. In this new conceptual space, writers could ‘expand areas of difficulty while remaining secure within the provisionality of fantasy’. Darwin’s emphasis on the generative abundance of nature ‘reached out toward the grotesque’ and ‘authenticated the fantastic’, allowing real issues of social reform and ideological change to be cloaked in hallucinatory images of dog- and cat-men, flying boys or militant pygmies.¹¹⁴ Allegory should never be confused with escapism in the context of Soviet fiction: as one critic says of *Sobach’e serdtse*, ‘the science fictional layer of the novel is coextensive with the very real world of scientific debates’.¹¹⁵

In addition, Soviet Gothic fantasy was not intended to be merely allegorical; its humanoid hybrids were experimental models for future human beings. As Zamiatin warned his readers,

¹¹³ Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin, ‘Introduction’, in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. by Kay and Rubin (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 1-9 (p. 5).

¹¹⁴ Beer, p. 114.

¹¹⁵ Howell, p. 558.

‘фантастика, может быть, только для сегодня, а завтра она уже станет бытом’.¹¹⁶ This chapter does not attempt to finalize the image of the body in Soviet fiction, nor to list all the variants of non-standard physical forms conceived by Soviet writers. Instead, I contend that Soviet literature used Gothic fantasy to represent multiple reinscriptions of human form and its possibilities. Gothic bodies underline the flexibility and ambiguity of Soviet self-perceptions. The Soviet body was not monolithic; but neither was it entirely human.

¹¹⁶ Evgenii Zamiatin, *Gerbert Uells*, p. 12.

CHAPTER TWO

GOTHIC DEATH

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*Смерти я боюсь, смерти я не хочу, смерти я ужасаюсь.*¹

1. Introduction

Immortality myths – revolutionary visions predicated on the inviolability and imperishability of the Soviet body – played a major role in the construction of early Soviet ideology.² The Soviet immortality myth derived from a range of sources, often blending semi-mystical philosophy with more conventional, if unrealistic, scientific and medical aspirations to reverse or eliminate death and the symptoms of ageing. Although never included in official Communist doctrine, immortality myths were widely disseminated within the Party. They influenced both peripheral socialist movements, such as Biocosmism and ‘Bogostroitel’stvo’, or Godbuilding, and many individuals of high stature, including Lunacharskii, Gorkii and Bogdanov.³ Crucially, immortality myths became embedded in the idealistic framework of Soviet literature, as demonstrated by Irene Masing-Delic’s analysis of prose and poetry by three major Soviet writers.⁴ Although the idea of achieving physical immortality remained ‘too daring a vision for official discourse’, Soviet writers and scientists continued to speculate on the long-term prospect of achieving ‘a deathless world’.⁵ Among other state-led projects

¹ Vasilii Rozanov, *Opavshie listia* (Berlin: Rossica, 1929), p. 8.

² I owe the term ‘immortality myth’ to Irene Masing-Delic’s *Abolishing Death: A Salvation Myth of Russian Twentieth-Century Literature* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1992). For more on the transhumanist and millenarian aims of early twentieth-century Russian thinkers, see Naiman, *SP*, pp. 27-45; Olga Matich, *Erotic Utopia: The Decadent Imagination in Russia’s Fin-de-Siècle* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), pp. 57-89; and Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 168-171.

³ See Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, pp. 102-103; Masing-Delic, p. 18.

⁴ These Soviet writers are Maksim Gorkii, Nikolai Ognev and Nikolai Zabolotskii. Other writers in Masing-Delic’s study are Fedor Sologub, Aleksandr Blok, and the philosophers Nikolai Fedorov and Vladimir Solov’ev.

⁵ Masing-Delic, pp. 8-11.

of the 1920s such as educational reform, the reorganisation of health care and the promotion of sexual hygiene, the achievement of immortality remained a sought-after goal.

This chapter introduces a concept that is directly antithetical to Masing-Delic's immortality myths. It proposes that an important but hitherto unrecognized narratological element in Soviet fiction is the 'mortality myth', as I term plots and subplots which foreground death and physical decay while undermining positivist ideology. The representation of death remained an integral cliché of Socialist Realism, even when it subverted socialist eschatology: 'all Stalinist novels include some kind of "death"'.⁶ However, the narratives that I call 'mortality myths' differ from other death-focused plotlines in that they are predicated on the entropic scenarios of Gothic plot. They represent death not as reward or transcendence (both permissible according to Katarina Clark's analysis of Soviet literature), but as a symptom of breakdown, degeneration and decay, with individual extinction presaging wider, often political, failure.

In such narrative systems, the reward of achievement is invariably death; scientific breakthroughs provoke disasters that lead to the destruction or repression of the original discovery; utopian communities degenerate into dystopian nightmares. While immortality myths link physical integrity to the future victory of Communism, mortality myths embed tropes of death, physical corruption and dismemberment within the framework of present or future Communist society. Some writers, I contend, use mortality myths allegorically as political criticism; some parody Nikolai Fedorov's philosophy by recreating Gothic myths of animated corpses; while still others focus on death (actual or incipient) to frame their undeclared ambivalence about socialist doctrine. Mortality myths are an integral component of canonical Gothic prose, as is the parallel concept of predestination. Works such as Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794) and Wells' *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896) all reinforce the cliché that death, destruction or supernatural vengeance will succeed any discovery that challenges the laws of nature. Although Shelley's Dr Frankenstein is best known for creating the world's first artificial human, he began his career by seeking a scientific means to immortality – just like Professor Kurganov in Valiusinskii's *Piat' bessmertnykh* (1928),⁷ discussed below. Both scientists' hubris, however, incurs their own

⁶ Clark, *Soviet Novel*, p. 178.

⁷ '... what glory would attend the discovery, if I could banish disease from the human frame and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!' Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. by Maurice Hindle (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 39-40.

deaths and the murders of those closest to them. Richard Stites accuses early Soviet scientists of Promethean over-confidence in their ability to change the physical conditions of being; *Frankenstein* was subtitled 'The Modern Prometheus'.

The writers I discuss in this chapter range from politically orthodox authors of popular genres (such as children's literature and science fiction), to fellow travellers like Boris Pil'niak and dissident writers alienated from the mainstream of Soviet literature (such as Daniil Kharmis and Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii). This broad range enables me to demonstrate the essential similarity of mortality myths across genre categories and political bands of Soviet writing. The core argument of this chapter is that mortality myths arise and persist in Soviet fiction both in spite of, and as a result of, the pre-eminence of realism. They are a consequence of the monopoly of optimistic ideology. All too often, Soviet immortality myths implode into their opposite, Gothic plot, *because* of their excessively insistent assertion of rationalist principles. Instead of turning away from death, Soviet fiction frequently foregrounded it. Ironically, the more Soviet authors promoted the transcendence of death by scientific or ideological means, the more they were forced to re-examine the stubborn realities of dying and decomposition. The remainder of this introduction will contextualise the Soviet obsession with death by outlining the ideological and philosophical background to 'immortality myths'. The rest of this chapter will classify those 'mortality myths' which, reacting against Soviet self-aggrandizement, reinstated Gothic plotlines in twentieth-century Russian literature.

1.i. Writing Death in Soviet Literature

Whether in life or literature, death resisted Bolshevik re-organisation. Funerals, in particular, posed an ideological paradox for Russia's Communist government. State ceremonies for fallen Bolshevik heroes had to be public spectacles, even if this meant retaining elements of traditional Orthodox ritual. However, for less distinguished corpses, the ceremonies of death had to be 'democratized': the challenge was to establish a 'Bolshevik way of death: clean, rational and economical'.⁸ In the immediate aftermath of civil war, the hygienic disposal of corpses became both a literal problem and a compelling metaphor – as will be indicated below in my analysis of Vsevolod Ivanov's short story "Kak sozdaiutsia kurgany" (1924). In 1918, Lenin had compared tsarist Russia to a decomposing corpse whose 'труп...

⁸ Stites, pp. 113-4.

разлагается в нашей среде, этот труп гниет и заражает нас самих'.⁹ Ironically, in 1924 the disposal of Lenin's own corpse would divide the Soviet leadership until Stalin decided to have the dictator's body preserved and displayed to the public in a special mausoleum on Red Square.

The Immortalization Commission, the body of scientists responsible for maintaining Lenin's corpse in a condition as close to life as possible, was created partly, but not exclusively, as a political strategy.¹⁰ Its members included some of Russia's leading chemists and biologists:¹¹ several of them genuinely believed that scientific process would make the resurrection of the dead possible within a few years or decades.¹² This belief exemplified the early Soviet tendency to 'millenarianism and a utopianism fed by serious erudition of a special sort and by the unbounded Promethean belief in man's ability to transform nature and reverse its laws'.¹³ Such faith that science would one day actualize miracles was widely reflected (and widely ironized) in Soviet literature of the time. Vladimir Maiakovskii's satirical play *Klop* (1929) speculates that, by 1979, Soviet scientists will be able to thaw out and revivify frozen corpses. Vladimir Zazubrin's novella *Obshchezhitie* (1923) pokes fun at a cuckolded doctor who believes he has discovered a scientific means to stimulate parthenogenesis in humans. Even an apparently absurd plot like that of Aleksandr Beliaev's *Golova professora Douella* (1925, 1937), which describes the resurrection of corpses and the transplantation of heads, was founded on well-documented scientific experiments with dogs and insects.¹⁴ In 1935,

⁹ V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 55 vols (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1967-1970), XXXVI (1969), p. 409. For further analysis of Marx and Lenin's thanatic language, see Naiman, *SP*, pp. 158-160.

¹⁰ It served Stalin's political interest to preserve Lenin's corpse and to represent himself as its chief curator. See Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives: The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 173-182.

¹¹ For more details on Leonid Krasin, V.P. Vorobev, Boris Zbarskii and the other scientists involved in the Immortalization Commission, see Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives*, esp. Chapters 5 and 6 (pp. 134-206); and *Lenin's Embalmers*, by Ilia Zbarskii and Samuel Hutchinson, trans. by Barbara Bray (London: Harvill, 1999).

¹² 'Befittingly, several members of the Commission for the Immortalization of the memory of V.I. Ulyanov believed that resurrecting the dead by reconstructing them was feasible, notably Leonid Krasin, who at the funeral of L.Ya. Karpov in 1921 had stated that he was looking forward to seeing his old friend soon, since science was about to master the art of recreating dead organisms' (Masing-Delic, p. 15).

¹³ Stites, p. 170.

¹⁴ As early as 1843, the French physiologist Brown-Secar proved that organs, if supplied with blood, can remain alive outside the body for up to 48 hours. In a 1938 afterword to Beliaev's novel *Chelovek-amfibiia*, the biologist A. Nemilov refers to previous Soviet experiments in which the heads of beetles are successfully

Professor S.S. Briukhanenko established the Research Institute for Experimental Study (a real-life equivalent of the immortality research centres described by Platonov, Beliaev and Valiusinskii), where experimenters studied the revivification of entire animal bodies (as well as decapitated heads), using artificial life support, blood transfusions and electric shocks. One of Briukhanenko's colleagues commented in *Izvestiia*: 'Усилия наших советских ученых, занимающихся проблемой оживления, и должны быть направлены на преодоление этой основной трудности... Только советская власть обеспечила обстановку этой проблемы по всей широте'.¹⁵

Such Promethean self-belief incited Soviet writers and thinkers to aspire to miracles, including immortality. Yet the scientific quest for immortality inevitably leads to increased focus on the corpse, therefore foregrounding the actuality of death in a culture whose professed intention was to celebrate life. This contradiction is epitomized by the coexistence of the Soviet slogan 'Lenin zhivee vsekh zhivvykh' with the spectacle of Lenin's formaldehyde-soaked corpse in Red Square. Lenin's body became simultaneously a symbol of Communist life and a very public manifestation of death. This paradox is succinctly expressed by Catherine Merridale in her monograph on Soviet attitudes to death: 'Soviet power, which sought in so many ways to deny the power of death, turned the heart of its capital, the ceremonial core of its government, into a grave'.¹⁶ But where did the Soviet obsession with denying death originate? In the next section, I will explore the ideas of one philosopher, Nikolai Fedorov, who arguably exerted the greatest influence of any single individual over the formation of Soviet immortalisation doctrine.

1.ii. Nikolai Fedorov's 'Common Task'

Nikolai Fedorovich Fedorov was a senior librarian in the Rumiantsev Museum, Moscow's chief public library, between 1868 and his death in 1902. This widely and esoterically read genius enjoyed an unofficial following of Muscovite artists, writers and philosophers, including Lev Tolstoi, Fedor Dostoevskii, and Leonid Pasternak.¹⁷ Members of this circle

transplanted onto different bodies. See A. Nemilov, 'Posleslovie', in Aleksandr Beliaev, *Chelovek-amfibiia: nauchno-fantasticheskii roman* (Moscow and Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo detskoi literatury, 1938), pp. 177-183.

¹⁵ E. Petrov, 'Problemy ozhivleniia', *Izvestiia*, 10 May 1937, p. 4.

¹⁶ Catherine Merridale, *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Russia* (London: Granta Books, 2000), p. 195.

¹⁷ George M. Young, Jr., 'Fedorov's Transformations of the Occult', 171-185, in Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, ed., *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 172.

published Fedorov's huge and unpublished archive under the title 'The Common Task' after the philosopher's death in 1903. Fedorov was far from being only thinker of this period to speculate on the possibility of achieving physical immortality; his younger contemporary Vladimir Solov'ev was also a proponent of immortality myths.¹⁸ However, Fedorov's complex and mystical ideas are better suited to Gothic narrative than Solov'ev's, in that they are materialistic, backwards-looking and inherently familial. Fedorov's philosophy lacks space for individual ghosts, but the corpse (reanimated or not) and the graveyard are essential elements of his 'Common Task'.

A crucial Gothic narrative pattern is based on inheritance: the idea that children inherit not only property, but also responsibility for the crimes of their parents. Inheritance is central to Fedorov's philosophy. The Common Task allocates to every human being responsibility for reanimating the corpses of their parents – usually referred to as 'the fathers'. Once restored to life, the formerly dead parent assumes the task of reviving his ancestors – and so on in unbroken line, back to the earliest humans. This was Fedorov's famous programme of 'Universal Resurrection', referred to as *ottsetvoreníe*, or the patrifaction of space. A prerequisite of resurrection was the possession of the tools necessary to collect all the molecules of ancestral corpses, some of which might even have become a part of faraway planets: it was therefore necessary for humankind to spread throughout the universe in its quest for lost predecessors. The actual process of resurrection necessitated both private meditation and yet-to-be-invented devices which would help decomposed particles to recombine.¹⁹ Fedorov advocated the scientific study and preservation of corpses in special museums until it was possible to resurrect them.²⁰ Meditative recollection should take place in close proximity to the corpse; Fedorov recommended that children should meet and conduct business in the cemeteries where their parents were buried.²¹

¹⁸ Vladimir Solov'ev, arguably the ideological father of Symbolism, created an 'immortality myth' that proposed the achievement of eternal life through the rechanneling of erotic energy. Instead of focussing, like Fedorov, on resurrection, Solov'ev envisioned contemporary human beings re-engendering themselves as immortal androgynes. See Masing-Delic (pp. 105-122) and Naiman, *SP* (pp. 29-45) for studies contrasting Solov'ev with Fedorov, Rozanov and Berdiaev.

¹⁹ See Nikolai Fedorov, *Filosofia obshchago dela: Stati, mysli i pis'ma Nikolaia Fedorovicha Fedorova*, ed. by V.A. Kozhevnikov and N.P. Peterson, 2 vols (Farnborough, U.K.: Gregg, 1970), I (1970), pp. 329-332, for more details on the reconstruction of corpses from their constituent molecules.

²⁰ Fedorov, I, p. 288.

²¹ Fedorov, I, p. 49.

For Fedorov, death was no more than a transient limitation, like time or space,²² all of which the developing human race would soon transcend: ‘смерть есть просто результат или выражение несовершенности’.²³ An alternative definition of death compares it to anaesthesia: ‘анестезия, при коей происходит самое полное трупоразъятие, расложение и разсеяние вещества’,²⁴ all processes which could be reversed by the Common Task. This utopian view made personal immortality inevitable, within at most a few generations. However, the lives of individuals remained subordinate to the restoration of the collective. Even sexual desire, perhaps the most individualistic of energies, had to be converted into the force of ‘положительное целомудрие’.²⁵ This would become the energy behind universal resurrection, transforming lust from a brute, destructive appetite to a tool of infinity.

Только святейшее дело, воскрешение, движимое всех объемлющею, родственною любовью, соединяет и объединяет предыдущее с последующим и, даруя тому и другому бессмертие, превращает умирающее Прошлое и рождающееся Будущее в непрерывно живущее, неумирающее Настоящее.²⁶

The future as imagined by Fedorov was not to be defined by individual desires and purposes. Instead it would be a literally timeless realm in which ‘сыны воскрешающие и родители воскрешенные’²⁷ lived in mutually co-operative, intergalactic harmony.

Fedorov’s influence on Russian literature and on the emerging Communist Party was considerable. Fedorovian thought has been shown to play a major role in Dostoevskii’s *Brat’ia Karamazovy* (1881); it also influenced Tolstoi’s *Voskresenie* (1899).²⁸ Modern

²² See Fedorov (II, p. 251) for a statement of how universal resurrection would render the concepts of space and time redundant.

²³ Fedorov, I, p. 91.

²⁴ Fedorov, I, p. 329.

²⁵ Fedorov, I, p. 316.

²⁶ Fedorov, II, p. 57.

²⁷ Fedorov, II, p. 57.

²⁸ Stephen Lukashovich, *N.F. Fedorov (1828-1903): A Study in Russian Eupsychian and Utopian Thought* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1977), p. 23.

Russian writers, notably Vladimir Sharov, have revisited Fedorov's unique mythos.²⁹ Among Soviet writers who borrowed Fedorovian ideas in their lives or works can be ranked dozens of literary and political figures. Although most of the latter had been purged by the late 1920s,³⁰ some rose to high positions in state departments – such as Valerian Murav'ev, a former Constitutional Democrat and Taylorite, who was personally protected by Trotskii.³¹ Gorkii, Maiakovskii, Zabolotskii and Boris Pasternak were a few of the major Soviet writers who incorporated Fedorov's ideas into their work.

However, many other writers, including Andrei Platonov, grew away from or directly challenged Fedorov's ideas.³² Pavel Perov, an émigré writer hostile to the Bolshevik regime, criticized Fedorov's 'абсурдная идея воскресения разложившихся и сгнивших трупов путем химической обработки составляющих их элементов'.³³ Perov argued that universal resurrection was incompatible with material existence and could only be realized in a spiritual dimension. Official Soviet doctrine did not preclude, but officially avoided, the endorsement of Fedorovian resurrectionism.³⁴ Other Soviet topoi of death coexisted with Fedorov's. In her study of the Soviet novel's narrative codes, Katarina Clark interprets death as a positive symbol: a meaningful sacrifice or a rite of passage.³⁵ The hero's death may be symbolic rather than actual (for example, the endurance of extreme physical suffering, mutilation, or any near-death experience during which 'he dies as an individual and is reborn as a function of the collective').³⁶ This idea of guaranteed rebirth as part of the collective heritage is fundamental to Clark's interpretation of heroic death. Even if the hero dies under

²⁹ Sharov's novel *Voskreshenie Lazaria* (2003) depicts the efforts of modern-day Soviet women to resurrect their dead fathers by Fedorovian methods, including communing with their ancestor's remains and intensive meditation on memories of the past.

³⁰ Lukashevich, p. 28.

³¹ And also fatally undermined by Trotskii's fall; Muraviev was sent to a prison camp in 1930. For more on this unusual utopianist's career see Lukashevich, p. 28 and Stites, p. 170.

³² Platonov's complex relationship with Fedorovian philosophy is fully discussed in Aileen Teskey's *Platonov and Fyodorov: The Influence of Christian Philosophy on a Soviet Writer* (Amersham, U.K.: Avebury Publishing Company, 1982).

³³ Pavel Perov, *Otvet samomu sebe: opyt postroeniia tsel'nago mirosozertsaniia* (Berlin: Petropolis, [n.d.]), pp. 184-185.

³⁴ Masing-Delic, pp. 11-12.

³⁵ Clark, pp. 178-182.

³⁶ Clark, p. 178.

torture or by White firing-squad, his death remains a worthwhile sacrifice for the future nation. An example of this kind of glorious death is the Chinese Communist who throws himself in front of a White armoured train in Vsevolod Ivanov's novella *Bronepoezd 14-69* (1922). Death of this kind legitimates and vindicates the sufferings of Red heroes because it identifies them with real-life martyrs for Communism (most notably Lenin). Death is simply one stage in the depersonalization of the hero and his absorption into the greater process of historical unity.³⁷

However, in emphasizing the heroic, formulaic function of death, Clark omits mention of death as an apparently meaningless waste, or deaths which deny the possibility of transcendence. There are other functions and interpretations of death in Soviet literature – as a symbolic prelude to Gothic themes of decline and disaster, or as supernatural vengeance, or as meaningless annihilation. It is these negative narrative directions – or mortality myths – that form the focus of this chapter.

1.iii. Medicalizing Death

The French sociologist Philippe Ariès singles out Lev Tolstoi's novella *Smert' Ivan Il'icha* (1886) as a defining moment in a process he calls the 'medicalization of death'. Ivan Il'ich's death is extended, undignified, and unclean. According to Ariès, the repulsion and avoidance displayed by Ivan Il'ich's family typifies the modern attitude to the dying: 'Death no longer inspires fear solely because of its absolute negativity; it also turns the stomach, like any nauseating spectacle... A new image of death is forming: the ugly and hidden death, hidden because it is ugly and dirty'.³⁸ On the heels of this 'new image of death' came increasing public denial of mortality. The act of dying was moved from the family home to the hospital ward; the mourning process was demystified and abbreviated. Death was effectively ghettoised in hospitals and mortuaries. Ariès calls this process 'the complete medicalization of death...',³⁹ that is, the transfer of death from the public domain to the territory of surgeons and pathologists. This is precisely the process we witness in the two novels discussed below, Pil'niak's *Povest' nepogashennyi luny* (1926) and Platonov's unfinished *Schastlivaia*

³⁷ Clark, p. 182.

³⁸ Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. by Helen Weaver (London: Penguin, 1983), p. 569.

³⁹ Ariès, p. 583.

Moskva. In the first of these, a great public figure dies through hospital malpractice; in the second, a surgeon launches himself on a futile quest for the molecular constitution of death.

Platonov's *Schastlivaia Moskva* was written in the mid-1930s. As the writer was not, despite his hopes, invited to participate in a 1933 literary campaign intended to celebrate 'proletarian Moscow', *Schastlivaia Moskva* may have been intended as a satirical denial of the campaign's Promethean aspirations.⁴⁰ Although Platonov signed a contract with a publisher in 1936, the novel did not appear in print until 1991.⁴¹ Pil'niak's novel, which appeared in *Krasnaia nov'* in 1926, was accused of political satire. Pil'niak's novel eerily replicates real-life events, namely the death of the Red hero General Frunze in 1925. Stalin is suspected to have arranged Frunze's death in hospital by chloroform poisoning. In *Povest' nepogashennyi luny*, Gavrillov plays Frunze's role while an unnamed bureaucrat, the 'unbending man', strongly resembles Stalin. Ostensibly an objective account of a failed operation, *Povest'* reads more like horror fiction. The sinister presence of the 'unbending man', Gavrillov's guilty conscience, and the lugubrious, murky atmosphere of Moscow in winter, combine to confer Gothic obscurity on a routine medical procedure. Even the sound of factory horns – a hallmark of technological maturity – performs the gloomy, admonitory function of wolf-howls in a nineteenth-century Gothic tale.

Death dominates the novella: from the killings in Gavrillov's past, his foreboding of his own imminent death, and, not least, Pil'niak's rigidly clinical account of Gavrillov's death on the operating table. This account begins with the doctors' discussion the day before the operation, describes the doctors' sleeping arrangements and breakfasts, and focuses on minutiae such as the choice of instruments, of anaesthetic, and the measurement of the patient's pulse. Under the knife, Gavrillov cedes his human individuality: Pil'niak compares his exposed fatty tissue to 'баранина'. Gavrillov has become a mass of 'человеческое мясо' to be cut open, exposing the scar of the already healed ulcer.⁴² *Povest'* lingers on the

⁴⁰ See Livers, *Constructing the Stalinist Body*, p. 48. For more on the Proletarian Moscow campaign, see Katarina Clark, 'Socialist Realism and the Sacralizing of Space' in *The Landscape of Stalinism*, ed. by Eric Naiman and Evgenii Dobrenko (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), pp. 3-18 (p. 10).

⁴¹ For more on the genesis and political interpretation of *Schastlivaia Moskva*, see Philip Ross Bullock, *The Feminine in the Prose of Andrey Platonov* (London: Legenda, 2005), esp. pp. 134-145, and Philip Ross Bullock, 'Andrei Platonov's *Happy Moscow*: Stalinist Kitsch and Ethical Decadence', *Modern Language Review*, 1: 101 (January 2006), 201-211. See also Livers, *Constructing The Stalinist Body*, esp. Chapter 1, 'Turning Men into Women: Andrei Platonov in the 1930s', pp. 27- 89.

⁴² Boris Pil'niak, *Povest' nepogashennoi luny* (Letchworth, Herts: Prideaux Press, 1971), p. 53.

moments after Gavrilov's heart stops on the operating table, categorising the symptoms of decease. Professor Kokosov, the chief surgeon, continues to order resuscitation long after it is clinically obvious that: 'У больного не было пульса, не было сердце и не было дыхания, и холодали ноги. [...] Это было то, что категорическо указывало [...] что к человеку не придет сознание, – что человек, в сущности, – умер'.⁴³

Gavrilov's death is a steady process of diminution, beginning with his initial surrender to the unbending man's orders. First, by accepting the unbending man's advice over his own better instincts, he cedes freedom of will. Once admitted to hospital, Gavrilov is progressively dehumanised. Nurses remove his epaulettes – symbol of his military glory – his outer clothing, then his slippers. Stripped of all his possessions and outer clothing, Gavrilov is anaesthetized and loses consciousness. This process of submission and diminution parallels the equally formal process of medical ritual. Science – symbolized by the carefully described and highly co-ordinated surgical procedure – and superstition – Gavrilov's secret presentiment of disaster – are woven together. The fact that Gavrilov's ulcer had already healed, rendering the entire operation unnecessary, seems to underline the fallibility of science and the value of superstition.

Platonov's unfinished novel *Schastlivaia Moskva* performs a similar critique of medical infallibility. Platonov's own conception of mortality evolved throughout his career, from a heavily Fedorov-influenced belief in eternal life to an almost pantheistic embrace of mortality.⁴⁴ *Schastlivaia Moskva* was also his last full-length novel. Platonov uses the novel's characters to investigate the meaningfulness of life and to explore the boundaries between existence and extinction. Sambikin, the surgeon-hero, visualizes this boundary as a tangible gap or lacuna in bodily processes. He eviscerates corpses to expose the narrow gap in the gut between undigested food and faecal matter – which he interprets as the boundary between life and extinction. Sambikin also theorizes that an intensification of life force infuses the bloodstream in the moment before death, and conducts endless post-mortems in a doomed effort to identify the secretions produced in this surge.⁴⁵

⁴³ Pil'niak, *Povest'*, p. 54.

⁴⁴ See Ayleen Teskey, *Platonov and Fedorov*, esp. Chapter 5, 'Death and Resurrection', pp. 92-110.

⁴⁵ Interestingly, Sambikin's quest for the ingredients of life parallels Dr Frankenstein's search among corpses for the basic 'principles of life' (pp. 50-51) in Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Philip Bullock considers Sambikin's operation on Moskva's leg 'macabre [and] Frankensteinian... Sambikin goes on literally to rebuild Moskva as

Besides Sambikin's efforts to autopsy the organs of death, a minor character in the novel takes a more practical approach to the same end. Komiagin, one of the heroine's former lovers, has given up waiting passively for death and is now making a determined attempt to preview the experience of dying. Part of his project involves purchasing a coffin before his decease. Komiagin is determined to 'узнать весь маршрут покойника',⁴⁶ trying out his coffin in advance and even tracing the projected route of his funeral. Komiagin's lonely project parodies Sambikin's earlier, scientific efforts to quantify the processes joining existence to extinction. Sambikin cannot isolate particles of death, nor can Komiagin preview the sensations of a corpse. Komiagin's absurd plan, pursued with the single-mindedness of despair, suggests that Sambikin's effort to rationalize and quantify death is equally circular – and equally futile.

I outlined above the ideological basis for Soviet 'immortality myths' and the official model for writing death – that of death as sacrifice and transcendence, identified by Katarina Clark. As I will contend, such a model for death is ultimately self-negating. The so-called medicalization of death eventually enhances the aura of mystery surrounding death, while reinforcing the abject status of the dead body. Both Platonov's and Pil'niak's novels inscribe the ineluctability of death into the epistemology of modern science. Efforts to transcend death, whether in real life or fiction, lead either to forbidden spirituality or to a scientific commitment to resurrection and/or immortalization. The latter course leads logically to renewed focus on the biological phenomenon of death and the materiality of the corpse, and from thence to a pessimistic obsession with the supernatural which is characteristic of all Gothic writing. These are the 'mortality myths' of Soviet literature. The remaining sections of this chapter will discuss two varieties of 'mortality myth' – the uncanny corpse, and the doomed quest for immortality.

2. The Body in the Soviet Library

Agatha Christie's *The Body in the Library* (1942) is a famous English murder mystery, written as a deliberate spoof on the clichés of the detective novel. The book begins with the

he desires her... Sambikin carries her away to the Caucasus where a clumsy romance unfolds. There, he fits his beloved with a prosthetic leg, beginning the literal reconstruction of her body and identity along the lines of medical technology' (Bullock, *The Feminine in the Prose of Andrey Platonov*, p. 144)

⁴⁶ Platonov, *Schastlivaia Moskva*, pp. 5-92 (p. 81).

discovery of a gaudily dressed, asphyxiated corpse in the most respectable room of an English country house – the library.

The library in question must be a highly orthodox and conventional library. The body, on the other hand, must be a wildly improbable and highly sensational body.⁴⁷

I use the image of the body in the library in the context of Soviet fiction because of the similarly disruptive, derisive effect on Socialist Realist narrative produced by an unexpected corpse. A corpse defies assimilation by conventional realist plot. Its irrefutable, repulsive materiality negates Soviet re-envisioning of death as transcendence and as a prelude to rebirth in the Socialist pantheon. In traditional Gothic novels, the corpse is generally associated with supernatural terror, or revelatory of hidden crimes.⁴⁸ In the process of achieving justice, the corpse frequently subverts established ‘positive’ characters. In the following brief example, the Gothic motif of a corpse overturns other characters’ self-confident socialist assumptions.

Nikolai Ognev’s predilection for mixing Gothic vignettes with realist narrative was mentioned in my introduction. Ognev’s short, dark story “Delo o mertrebe”⁴⁹ is a perfect illustration of the disjunctive effect of a dead body – in this case, a baby’s corpse, the ‘мертвый ребенок’ abbreviated in the title – found floating in a drain on the premises of a Soviet school for orphans. The discovery of this concealed, possibly murdered body triggers a witch-hunt among the girl pupils of the school. Former class identities are suddenly recalled, accusations of promiscuity exchanged: suspicion falls on the only girl from a bourgeois background. In the end, the baby is found to be the result of a secret liaison between two manual workers; its death was accidental. Although the pupils are exonerated, their brief flare-up of mutual distrust has permanently damaged the school’s ethos of socialist equality. In addition, the finding of a dead baby is a negative symbol for socialism’s future. Baby Moses, found in the bulrushes, will one day lead his people to the Promised Land; but the *mertreb* of Ognev’s story, discovered in a drain, inspires nothing but divisive suspicion. Here, the infant’s corpse introduces two Gothic tropes into the narrative: the return of the repressed (i.e. the exposure of the secret liaison and of the baby’s death), and the focus on

⁴⁷ Agatha Christie, ‘Author’s Foreword’, in *The Body in the Library* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1983), p. 5.

⁴⁸ One of the earliest examples of this is Clara Reeve’s *The Old English Baron* (1777), in which the unquiet ghost of the eponymous baron reveals the trunk where his murdered body has been concealed.

⁴⁹ Nikolai Ognev, ‘Delo o mertrebe’ in *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2 vols (Moscow: Federatsiia, 1928), I (1928), pp. 315-334.

disintegration (the bad omen, the collapse of social harmony at the school). I argue that the discovery of a corpse in Soviet fiction – the finding of a body in the library – frequently unleashes similar Gothic chains of disorder and breakdown.

The bodies discussed below are taken from a range of texts: a play by Nikolai Erdman, short stories by Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii, Vsevolod Ivanov and Daniil Kharms, and a short novel by Grigorii Grebnev. Of these five, Grebnev and Ivanov are the most ideologically conventional authors. Erdman's play, Krzhizhanovskii's story and Kharms' "Starukha" attack the state of Soviet society in the late 1930s. The chapter is structured to reflect how each author uses the tropes of mortality and decay. For Erdman and Krzhizhanovskii, death is a metaphor for life improperly lived. I therefore contrast their depictions of Soviet Russia as a society where death is privileged. Grebnev and Kharms are discussed in separate sections because, in each case, their ideological message depends on how the physical reality of their corpse is interpreted. Ivanov's "Kak sozdaiutsia kurgany" is examined last because his story can be located in either category: his corpses are real and produce real problems, but they also belong to a complex metaphorical system linking physical corruption with political decay. The previous sections discussed the failure of Soviet efforts to define death conclusively and to ring-fence it within a fixed set of signifiers. As I shall demonstrate in the following short analyses of corpses in Soviet prose, the dead body remains stubbornly unassimilable, a catalyst for Gothic events.

2.i. Finding Amundsen's Corpse

Arktaniia (1938) is a 'fantasticheskii roman' by Grigorii Grebnev (real name Grigorii Nikitich Gribozov), written both to entertain and to inculcate the optimistic message, 'в будущем для человечества не будет ничего невозможного. Человек сможет все' in its teenage audience.⁵⁰ Grebnev himself claimed that the novel was intended to be 'главным образом романтическим, включающим в себя элементы фантастики', and to depict 'борьба прогрессивного человечества с темными силами реакции'.⁵¹ However, the novel's subliminal tensions are considerably more nuanced than this simplistic dichotomy between socialist progress and capitalist reaction might suggest.

⁵⁰ Grigorii Grebnev, *Arktaniia* (Moscow and Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo sovetskoi literatury, 1938), p. 54.

⁵¹ Grigorii Grebnev, 'Krasnyi admiral Erteil', in *Detskaiia literatura*, 5 (May 1939), p. 25.

The novel is set at an unspecified future date when the world is governed by a 'Worldwide Supreme Soviet' (chaired by a charismatic black American) and when, among other technological advances, airborne meteorological stations make it possible to control weather. The plot opens with a problem that combines Gothic and Fedorovian elements: Soviet scientists are hunting for the lost corpse of the long-dead Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen in order to medically 'resurrect' it. The teenage hero, Iura, lives in a floating weather station above the North Pole. After calculating where Amundsen's corpse must lie, Iura sets out alone to the location, a drifting ice floe. The frozen body he excavates is not, however, Amundsen's, but that of a boy his own age. A snowstorm sets in, and Iura is kidnapped by a secret sect of religious conservatives. Grebnev, as discussed later, excels in the use of Gothic tropes to demonize anti-Communist elements, portraying them as monsters with malign powers, while beatifying socialist characters as disinterested Galahads. *Arktaniia* exemplifies this ideological dichotomy. The novel depicts socialist society as technologically adept and ethically humane, whereas the conservative minority are amoral exploiters who have kidnapped an Amazonian tribe to serve as their personal slave race.

Social utopianism in *Arktaniia* includes a reaffirmation of the immortality myth. When rescuers track down Iura's vehicle, they mistake the frozen corpse of the boy Iura found for Iura himself. The corpse is airlifted to hospital where an eminent scientist, Professor Britanov, volunteers to resurrect it. Britanov subscribes to the Fedorovian belief that death and decrepitude are curable and reversible physical symptoms. Like Fedorov, he wants to build hospitals for the revivification of corpses. For this process, Britanov rejects the term 'воскрешать' as excessively metaphysical, preferring the more aseptic 'вылечить от смерти'.⁵²

Yet in spite of Britanov's uncompromising positivism, Gothic plotlines dominate the structure of *Arktaniia*, constantly undermining the book's optimistic tone. The plot's opening gambit is a search for a dead body – Amundsen's missing corpse – in order to recover and resurrect the long-dead explorer. Iura's solitary search for the body conforms to the ideals of romantic heroism. Ironically, the qualities that define a positive hero – technical proficiency, self-reliance, confidence and scientific curiosity – combine to entrap Iura. Once he is actually digging up a corpse, Iura's rationalist convictions crumble into superstitious terror:

⁵² Grebnev, *Arktaniia*, p. 52.

Юра увидел мертвых людей; он не представлял, как можно бояться их. Он сам сейчас искал во льду мертвеца, он только обрадовался бы, если бы вдруг этот мертвец появился бы перед его глазами. Но при виде темной скрюченной руки, вдруг высунувшейся изо льда, мальчику стало страшно...⁵³

This signifier of the corpse's actuality – a disembodied hand poking through the ice – reduces Iura, the enlightened socialist youth, to a child terrified of the supernatural. The body he finds is at once grotesquely abject and grotesquely 'in touch' via its reaching hand. This corpse symbolically dismantles the sustaining preconceptions of socialist society, rupturing its psychological barriers with a primitive message of fear.

Arktaniia replicates this process of deconstruction in the related plot of resurrection, using mistaken identity and ethnic incongruity to provoke iconoclastic humour. The corpse Iura discovers is in fact the body of a young Amazonian Indian who had run away from the capitalist slavers. Professor Britanov, believing the corpse to be Iura's, successfully revives it. Grebnev devotes several dramatic pages to the gradual reestablishment of the corpse's major systems, allowing Britanov to soliloquize on the endless potential of medical science. When Iura's mother is finally allowed to see the fully revived boy, she punctures Britanov's self-adulation by pointing out that this boy could not possibly be Iura – since his skin colour is brown. Britanov's brilliance is undermined by his failure to notice his star patient's ethnicity. *Arktaniia* no sooner demonstrates scientific infallibility than it begins to ridicule its own key assumptions: a pattern already manifest in the iceberg scene, when Iura's would-be heroism degenerates into superstitious dread.

Grebnev never succeeds in restoring the aura of inviolability to his socialist utopia. It is quite clear that while his scientists may have the means to reverse death, they are all too vulnerable to death's comic/grotesque concomitants – superstitious fear and human error.

2.ii. 'Я терпеть не могу покойников': Kharms' "Starukha"

When the narrator of Daniil Kharms' 1939 short story "Starukha" discovers an old woman's corpse in his flat, he becomes ensnared in a web of absurd coincidence linking Russia's literary past to his own Stalinist present. "Starukha"'s plot hinges on two absurdities: the old woman's death in the narrator's flat, and his irrational assumption of responsibility for her body. The ghostly hand of Pushkin's Countess in "Pikovaia dama" can be traced in the old

⁵³ Grebnev, *Arktaniia*, p. 55.

woman's bizarre moral domination of the narrator; many other deliberate intertextual echoes site this story firmly in the Petersburg Gothic tradition of Pushkin, Gogol and Dostoevskii.⁵⁴ The old woman's life-in-death recalls the gleefully uninhibited corpses of Dostoevskii's "Bobok" (1873), or the dancing ghouls of Pushkin's "Grobovshchik" (1831). Even the narrator's obsessive fear that the corpse will bite him owes something to A.A. Pogorel'skii's 1825 "Lafertovskaia makhovnitsa", in which an old woman's corpse tries to bite a mourner's nose.

After much torturous vacillation, the narrator of "Starukha" eventually squashes the body into a suitcase and sets out to dump it in the woods. Unfortunately, someone on the train steals the suitcase containing the body. Uncertain whether this chance theft represents absolution or condemnation for him, the narrator takes spontaneous, childlike refuge in prayer. Critics hotly dispute whether this non-ending constitutes a true, redemptive epiphany, or a typically Kharmasian episode of meaninglessness. One critic argues that "Starukha"'s plot is a tightly controlled network of related events that finally collude in the narrator's enlightenment, and that the old woman is 'not merely the centre of a web of interrelationships, she is the narrator's means to faith; and every character who is connected with her is also in some way related to his search for faith'.⁵⁵ Others suggest that while the narrator of "Starukha" parodically retraces Raskolnikov's path from sin to redemption in Dostoevskii's *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*, the subtraction of any moral context from "Starukha" obviates any hope of future change: 'No murder, no revelation: just guilt and grace'.⁵⁶ "Starukha"'s structural confusion, paranoia and hopelessness have been interpreted as an indictment of Stalin's Russia.⁵⁷ Rosanna Giaquinta, however, contends that Kharms' exaggerated morbidity represents a rejection of the Petersburg tradition of satirical fantasy in favour of sheer

⁵⁴ For more detailed discussion of "Starukha"'s interrelationships with earlier texts, see Ellen B. Chances, 'Daniel Charms' "Old Woman" Climbs Her Family Tree: "Starucha" and the Russian Literary Past', in *Russian Literature*, XVII (1985), 353-366.

⁵⁵ Alice Stone Nakhimovsky, 'The Ordinary, the Sacred and the Grotesque in Daniil Kharms' "The Old Woman"', in *Slavic Review*, 2: 37 (June 1978), 203-216 (p. 208).

⁵⁶ Steven Cassedy, 'Daniil Kharms's Parody of Dostoevskii: Anti-Tragedy as Political Comment', in *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, 1: 19 (Spring 1985), 268-284 (p. 283).

⁵⁷ See Cassedy (p. 278, p. 283), Chances (363), and Robin Aizlewood, 'Introduction', in *Starukha* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1995), pp. ix-xx (pp. xiv-xv) for more on "Starukha"'s polemicism.

negativity: ‘the reality of the miracle is only longed for, not realized... the absurd cannot signify anything but itself’.⁵⁸

I argue that all these critics are, in effect, failing to notice the body in the library: they overlook the very material analysis of the corpse emphasized by Kharms himself. My contention is that “Starukha” is Kharms’ parody of Soviet immortality myths through a pseudo-scientific epistemology of death, in which he proposes the existence of malevolent, animated corpses as a valid alternative to traditional assumptions about the afterlife. The narrator’s assimilation of this epistemology seems intended to imply that Soviet society is designed for the convenience of the dead rather than for the living (Krzhizhanovskii, as I shall show later in this chapter, develops the same metaphor somewhat less grotesquely). In the novels by Platonov and Pil’niak discussed above, characters struggled to define death either by scientific parameters (the doctors struggling to revive Gavrilov’s corpse) or by direct experience (Komiagin’s attempt to visualize the route of his funeral). In “Starukha”, I contend that Kharms ridicules these and similar attempts to analyse or define (and therefore regulate) death, by dramatising the ludicrousness of a super-rational approach to the supernatural. “Starukha”’s narrator proceeds by a sequence of rational stages (observation, citation of evidence, direct contact) before logically concluding that his unexpected visitor is a reanimated corpse. He even has a contemptuous opinion for such corpses, apparently born of weary familiarity: ‘Покойники... народ неважный’.⁵⁹

The narrator’s initial diagnosis of death is based on rational criteria: the corpse’s muscular relaxation and its low temperature:

Рот у нее приоткрыт и изо рта торчит соскочившая вставная челюсть. И вдруг мне делается все ясно: старуха умерла... Я с ненавистью посмотрел на старуху. А может быть, она и не умерла? Я щупаю ее лоб. Лоб холодный. Рука тоже. Ну что мне делать?⁶⁰

However, when the old woman spasmodically shows what a rational observer might interpret as signs of life (crawling, shuddering at sudden noises, bruising), the narrator jumps to a

⁵⁸ Rosanna Giaquinta, ‘Elements of the Fantastic in Daniil Kharms’s *Starukha*’, in *Daniil Kharms and the Poetics of the Absurd: Essays and Materials*, ed. by Neil Cornwell (London: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 132-148 (pp. 142-143).

⁵⁹ Daniil Kharms, “Starukha”, in *Vek Daniila Kharmsa*, ed. by I. Trofimova (Moscow: Zebra E, 2006), pp. 596-625 (p. 615).

⁶⁰ Kharms, “Starukha”, pp. 600-601.

diametrically different conclusion. He immediately assumes that these signs of returning life indicate the old woman's reanimation as a cannibalistic ghoul, and he expounds a kind of urban mythology about corpses: 'Их зря называют покойники, они скорее беспокойники'. In Kharms' narrator's world, corpses delight in acts of Rabelaisian grotesquery, ranging from pranks (the consumption of disinfected laundry, biting midwives in the leg) to Gothic horror (the consumption of an aborted foetus). Even the bitten midwife soon expires 'от заражения трупным ядом' or 'corpse poisoning'. Corpses are an actively malign social group, likely to escape from mortuaries unless closely guarded (note the parody of Fedorov's idea that the living should build houses in cemeteries in order to encourage the buried dead to re-embody themselves; in Kharms' version, mortuary guards are needed to prevent the over-active dead from spontaneously escaping), a group which should be continually watched and treated with caution. The narrator's description of this perfidious corpse army ranges from almost cinematic, grotesque detail ('покойник набросился на выкинутый плод и начал его, чавкая, пожирать') to his rather anticlimactic conclusion: 'с ними надо быть начеку'.⁶¹

However, the narrator's rationalization of such grotesque and ludicrous phenomena as 'corpse poisoning' and walking corpses fails to clarify or resolve his situation. Instead, his conclusions involve him inextricably in a fog of paranoid fear. His attempt to manage the consequences of the old woman's intrusion into his life becomes a classic Gothic plot of suspicion and concealment. The corpse's irregular movements around his flat torture him not simply with primal terror of the resurrected dead, but also with the practical fear that her presence will become known to his neighbours. Additionally, he is endangered by the revelatory function of Gothic: the bruise ripening on the dead woman's chin, which will (in his mind) implicate him in her murder.⁶² Too paranoid to admit the truth to anyone, he decides to conceal all evidence of the corpse's presence in his room. Terrified that a neighbour or visitor will accidentally find the corpse, he furtively sets off to dump the body in the woods, just like a successful murderer. One critic argues that the narrator's paranoia is essential to his final epiphany: 'The narrator's breakthrough is unthinkable without the impetus provided by the sudden intensification of his guilt and paranoia...'⁶³

⁶¹ Kharms, "Starukha", p. 615-616.

⁶² 'Я хотел ударить старуху еще раз, но побоялся, чтобы на теле не остались знаки, а то еще потом решат, что это я убил ее', Kharms, "Starukha", p. 603. This is a clear echo of Raskolnikov's guilt in *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*.

⁶³ Nakhimovsky, p. 213.

I contend that the narrator's feelings are much more confused than this simple opposition of 'guilt and grace' suggests. It is a matter of opinion whether he achieves 'grace' at the conclusion – or rather as I would suggest, a temporary mental vacuum in which the faculty of reasoning is suspended. His initial reaction to the corpse's appearance is fury – 'безумная злость'⁶⁴ – and unwillingness to be associated with it. His paranoia is augmented by fear: terror that the animated corpse will attack him. He admits feeling 'брезгливый страх'⁶⁵ for the body, and prepares to ward off any attack with a croquet mallet. A major aspect of "Starukha"'s irony is that the narrator, by rationalizing every unnatural occurrence in the story, ensnarls himself in increasingly *less* rational situations.

In "Starukha", Kharms has opposed the standard immortality myth – that death is glorious and ultimately reversible – with a bathetic mortality myth in which death is distributed randomly and corpses recover a grotesque semblance of life, while remaining abject – that is, repulsive and frightening. If, as Kristeva says, the dead body is the 'utmost of abjection',⁶⁶ how much more horrifying is a corpse that flouts society's taboos by eating newborn infants? The narrator's pseudo-scientific account of posthumous cannibalism, both 'humorous' and 'horrific',⁶⁷ descends from a ludic tradition that owes more to carnival and folklore than to the civilised prose of either "Pikovaia dama" or *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*, usually considered the chief influences on "Starukha". Why has Kharms' narrator adopted an epistemology in which corpses are as mobile as the living, but lack their moral sense, and 'corpse poisoning' is a medically acknowledged affliction? Soviet aspirations to immortality articulated a self-conscious humanism, but the form of immortality proposed in "Starukha" is profoundly anti-humanist. It not only rejects Soviet culture, but refutes the metaphysical code associated with that culture. What purpose can Kharms' monstrous corpses serve? Viewed in historical context – the background of Stalinist purges, to which Kharms himself would shortly fall victim – the only non-literary purpose of "Starukha" is wholesale condemnation of the social mores of Stalin's Russia.

⁶⁴ Kharms, "Starukha", p. 601.

⁶⁵ Kharms, "Starukha", p. 619.

⁶⁶ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 4.

⁶⁷ Aizlewood, p. xvii.

2.iii. Living Corpses: Erdman and Krzhizhanovskii

Although written fourteen years earlier than “Starukha”, Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii’s unusual short story “Avtobiografiia trupa” uses the same trope of living corpses as Kharms’ story. Krzhizhanovskii’s corpses behave more decorously than Kharms’ malevolent old woman. They play a role in society; indeed, they control society. The Civil War is a smokescreen for the real battle for social domination between the living and the dead:

Да: революция, как я ее мыслю, это не междусобие красных с белыми, зеленых с красными, не поход Востока против Запада, класса против класса, а просто борьба за планету Жизни со Смертью...[...] Понемногу выяснилось, что и вне кладбищ есть достаточно места для трупов. Революция умела ‘использовать’ и их.⁶⁸

It is surprising that this story was even considered for publication in the June 1923 issue of the journal *Rossiia*, edited by Isa Lezhnev.⁶⁹ Lezhnev had already published one story by Krzhizhanovskii and was an admirer of the writer’s unusual style.⁷⁰ However, before “Avtobiografiia trupa” saw print, Lezhnev emigrated. His replacement as editor explained the impracticality of publishing such a story in a manner Krzhizhanovskii would later caricature in “Knizhnaia zakladka” (1927).

The plot of “Avtobiografiia trupa” is simple: Shtamm, an unworldly provincial journalist, travels to Moscow to make his name. Rapidly disillusioned by editors’ lack of interest and by accommodation shortages, Shtamm is about to despair when he is unexpectedly offered a flat. The previous occupant, a suicide, has left a letter addressed to the next tenant describing the circumstances that led to his death. These include myopia, a failed love affair, growing estrangement from reality, the horrors of civil war, and inability to adapt to post-revolutionary conditions. Shtamm reads the letter – and gets on with his life. The implication is that a simpler personality can flourish in circumstances where a fine-tuned individual suffocates.

⁶⁸ Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii, “Avtobiografiia trupa”, in Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, ed. by Vadim Perel’muter, 5 vols (St Petersburg: Symposium, 2001-), II (2001), pp. 508-542 (p. 536).

⁶⁹ For more details on the publication of *Avtobiografiia trupa*, see Vadim Perel’muter, ‘Kommentarii’, in Krzhizhanovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii*, II, pp. 611-700 (pp. 683-685).

⁷⁰ The story was “Moskva-Shtempel” (1925). See Perel’muter, ‘Kommentarii’, p. 684.

Death suffuses this story, from Shtamm's superstitious shudders when he sees the hook in the ceiling from which the suicide hung himself, to the latter's prolonged brooding on extinction. As the suicide confessed,

Я слишком много и часто оперировал с символом 'смерть', слишком систематически включал в свои формулы этот биологический минус, чтобы не чувствовать себя как-то задетым всем тем, что начало происходить вокруг меня.[...] Смерть превращалась в программную правительственно рекомендуемую идею.⁷¹

The suicide differentiates between death as a mass event on battlefields and secondary death, which he presents as a government-sanctioned strategy to capitalise on living energy. Those in the latter category are adapted to survive and prosper in a war-torn nation. Individuals who live their lives in the dative case – who simply receive life's goods without ever participating or believing in any unselfish cause – are effectively living corpses. Everyone who does not accept this passive death-in-life is eliminated in war; logically, the most able and enthusiastic are the first to enlist. Meanwhile, the letter-writer is undergoing a slow and agonizing fragmentation of identity into the status of a living corpse, a 'biological minus'. Family and friends refuse to acknowledge his decease because of the trivial detail of his continuing physical functions:

И родные, и знакомые, и даже друзья чрезвычайно слабо разбираются в неочевидностях: пока им не подадут человека в гробу – в виде такого *cadaver vulgaris* под трехгранью крышки, с двумя пятаками поверх глаз, – они все еще будут с тупым упрямством лезть к нему со своими соболезнованиями, расспросами и традиционными 'как поживаете?'⁷²

Krzhizhanovskii's short story is a clear indictment of Soviet society as a system where only living corpses, the most passive and insincere individuals, survive:

Когда революция начала одолевать, конечно, в нее полезли и трупы: все эти 'и я', 'полу-я', 'еле я', 'чуть-чуть я'. И особенно открытая мною трупная разновидность: 'мне'. Они предлагали опыты, стажы, знания, пассивность, сочувствие и лояльность.⁷³

⁷¹ Krzhizhanovskii, "Avtobiografiia trupa", p. 526.

⁷² Krzhizhanovskii, "Avtobiografiia trupa", p. 520.

⁷³ Krzhizhanovskii, "Avtobiografiia trupa", p. 536.

“Avtobiografiia trupa” suggests that moral death – unambitious, soulless, mercenary existence – has become the Communist way of life.

Nikolai Erdman’s play *Samoubiitsa* (1928) has also been interpreted as a stinging attack on Soviet society,⁷⁴ but in contrast to Krzhizhanovskii’s story, it depicts death as a liberating, iconoclastic statement. Death shatters the mould of silence and conformity imposed on ordinary citizens. Death brings attention, luxury, even notoriety to the deceased. When assured that his funeral cortege will feature a carriage covered in bouquets and drawn by caparisoned horses, one character reacts with delight: “Вот это жизнь!”⁷⁵ Podsekal’nikov, the antihero of *Samoubiitsa*, is an unemployed, unhappily married man who has begun to see death as his only escape from a frustratingly limited existence. It never occurs to him that suicide could be an ideological gesture until a more cynical neighbour introduces him to the idea of death as a politically motivated act. Once word of Podsekal’nikov’s planned suicide gets out, throngs of dissatisfied people offer him gifts and money if he will claim to have died for their cause. Podsekal’nikov rapidly realizes gleefully that he can reap short-term material benefits from his own destruction. But at the end of the play, Podsekal’nikov chooses to live.

The central conceit of *Samoubiitsa* is that death is a form of speech, a voice that cannot be silenced. As Podsekal’nikov’s neighbour Aristarkh Dominikovich says, “А вот мертвого не заставишь молчать, гражданин Подсекальников. Если мертвый заговорит. В настоящее время, гражданин Подсекальников, то, что может подумать живой, может высказать только мертвый”⁷⁶ However, while death cannot be silenced, it can be mistranslated. Aristarkh Dominikovich starts a profitable business selling stakes in Podsekal’nikov’s suicide note to interested bidders. Aristarkh wants him to die for political freedom (“застрелитесь как герой”)⁷⁷, a promiscuous woman begs him to die for love, a butcher wants him to die for the sake of the free market, and so on. As one character shrewdly comments, Podsekal’nikov’s identity is immaterial: what makes his corpse such a valuable commodity is

⁷⁴ Despite praise from Stanislavskii, Gorky and Meierhol’d (the director of Erdman’s previous play *Mandat* (1925)), the play was banned after its first dress rehearsal. See L. Trauberg, ‘Order na samoubiistvo’, in Nikolai Erdman, *Samoubiitsa* (Ekaterinburg: U-Faktoriia, 2000), pp. 5-12.

⁷⁵ Erdman, *Samoubiitsa*, pp. 101-216, II. 3. 139.

⁷⁶ Erdman, *Samoubiitsa*, II. 3. 137.

⁷⁷ Erdman, *Samoubiitsa*, II. 3. 138.

that he has *chosen* to die. ““Заражает не смерть, а причина смерти, а причину мы можем любую выдумать””.⁷⁸

Finding life much more attractive, Podsekal’nikov lies – in the language of death – by faking his suicide. After enjoying a lavish funeral banquet with his guests, Podsekal’nikov pretends to shoot himself and plays dead for three days, rising, like Christ, on the third day.

Podsekal’nikov’s choice of life should be a powerfully humanist, redemptive statement.

Unfortunately, his decision to ‘lie’ has immediate consequences. Another man, believing Podsekal’nikov’s suicide to be real, tragically shoots himself. His suicide note reads:

““Подсекальников прав. Действительно жить не стоит””.⁷⁹ Podsekal’nikov resumes his life burdened by guilt for the suicide he has inadvertently caused. Death in Erdman’s play reverts to a semiotic emptiness, a discontinuity that no language can interpret.

Samoubiitsa is an edgy parody on the limitations of self-expression in Soviet society. Lack of free speech is only part of a deeper problem: Podsekal’nikov is suicidal because he is economically and aesthetically repressed, unable to develop his talents or support his family. This was the position in which Erdman found himself in the latter part of his career – ironically, as a direct result of writing *Samoubiitsa*, which was refused permission for performance just before its Moscow premiere. Despite pleas from Stanislavskii, the play’s director, Stalin personally condemned *Samoubiitsa* as ‘empty and even harmful’.⁸⁰ As a result of Stalin’s personal condemnation, *Samoubiitsa* was not performed until 1969 (and not in Russia until 1982). Both *Samoubiitsa* and Krzhizhanovskii’s “Avtobiografiia trupa” are allegorical autobiographies. Erdman’s play represents death as an escape; in “Avtobiografiia trupa”, death is a strategy for survival. Both works equate Soviet society with living death – a life so constrained it ceases to be worth living.

2.iv. Ivanov’s Tomb

When Marx and Engels imagined that the bourgeoisie produced their own gravediggers,⁸¹ they failed to add a blueprint for circumstances where the bourgeoisie literally dug graves for

⁷⁸ Erdman, *Samoubiitsa*, IV. 16. 197.

⁷⁹ Erdman, *Samoubiitsa*, V. 7. 216.

⁸⁰ Cited by Peter Tegel, ‘Introduction’ in Nikolai Erdman, *The Suicide*, trans. by Peter Tegel (London: Pluto Press, 1979), pp. v-viii (pp. vi-vii).

⁸¹ Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 16.

the proletariat. This is the situation imagined by Vsevolod Ivanov (1895-1963) in “Kak sozdaiutsia kurgany” (1924). Ivanov is perhaps best known for his contribution to Bolshevik mythopoesis, the novella *Bronepoezd 14-69* (1922). Ivanov’s tendency to write philosophico-mystical stories such as the novel *Vozvrashchenie Buddy* (1923) incurred accusations of ‘bourgeois’ style, which did not hinder him from becoming appointed to the Praesidium of the Union of Writers, among other bureaucratic positions. He survived the Stalin-era purges to die in relative literary eminence.⁸² “Kak sozdaiutsia kurgany” stands out as an aberration among Ivanov’s unambiguously pro-Soviet stories. Although superficially a straightforward account of an incident in the Civil War, the story can be read on another level as an indictment of Soviet eschatology – the very world-view Ivanov’s mainstream works represented.

Ivanov’s story recounts the solution of a logistical problem in a remote Siberian town in the winter of 1919. Eighty thousand corpses, left over from a Civil War battle, have been dumped there. Ivanov’s narrator is sent to arrange their burial. The problem is that the ground is frozen solid: it is impossible to dig a grave deep enough for all the bodies. Finally, a local man suggests using a nearby pit. The town’s bourgeoisie, previously imprisoned, are fetched out at rifle-point to fill the pit and erect a mound over it. The job seems to be done, until some weeks later the narrator returns in response to an urgent telegram. He confronts a blackly comical problem:

Засыпали мы тогда могилу – снег с песком. Трупы от весны осели, потом взбухли, земля лопнула – и смрадное гниение облепило город. Сажено за сто нельзя подъехать к могиле. Крест скатился, серая гнойная жижа текла из желто-черной щели.⁸³

The unfortunate bourgeoisie are trotted out again to rebuild the walls of the burial mound with bricks, and the corpses’ effluence is finally contained.

In the spectacle of the leaking corpse-effluence, Lenin’s metaphor ‘мы должны бороться за сохранение и развитие ростков нового в атмосфере, пропитанной миазмами

⁸² For more on Ivanov’s relationship with his critics, and his posthumously published non-realist novels, see Valentina Brougher, ‘Vsevolod Ivanov’s Novel *U* and the Rooster Metaphor’ in *Slavic Review*, 1: 53 (Spring 1994), 159-172 (p. 160); Aleksandr Etkind, ‘Zhit’ u Kremli i pisat’ ne dlia pechat’i: romany Vsevoloda Ivanova 1930-x godov’, *Revue des Études Slaves*, 3: 71 (1999), 633-648; and L.A. Gladkovskaia, *Vsevolod Ivanov: Ocherk zhizni i tvorchestva* (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1972).

⁸³ Vsevolod Ivanov, ‘Kak sozdaiutsia kurgany’, in *Izbrannoe*, 2 vols (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1937), I (1937), pp. 604-12 (p. 611).

разлагающегося трупа ...⁸⁴ is enacted. The irony in Ivanov's story is that the foulness is produced not by the corpses of bourgeois or aristocrats, but by Red soldiers who have died defending Communism. However, Ivanov relativizes the Soviet project to an even more humiliating degree by comparing the ad-hoc interment of the soldiers' bodies with the *kurgany* built by ancient Siberian tribesmen for their dead. In time, Ivanov suggests, the two kinds of monument will be indistinguishable. 'И какой-нибудь молодой археолог и поэт через тысячу лет раскопает курган и – ничего не поймет!'⁸⁵

Ivanov remains ambiguous about *what* the archaeologist of the future will fail to understand. Will he fail to grasp the unique heroism of the Red Army? Or will he admire the burial mound aesthetically without realizing that it exemplifies the banality and repetitiveness of death, and the needless wastage of human life for forgotten causes? Possibly, Ivanov intends the latter meaning, but is unable to be more explicit. As in Vladimir Zazubrin's portrayal of Cheka executions in his novella *Shchepka* (1923), the deliberately unsparing, almost documentary representation of human corpses is sufficiently polemical. An authorial commentary would be superfluous. Ivanov's rotting corpses in their ersatz *kurgany* historicize the Revolution, highlighting its vulnerability and fallibility. The fallen Red soldiers have achieved immortality because future archaeologists will admire their grave. But this immortality is meaningless, because the archaeologist will no more understand the purpose for which they died than we understand the full significance of the ancient *kurgany*.

3. Failed Immortals: Valiusinskii and Beliaev

The next section discusses two immortality myths from the science fiction genre which collapse into mortality myths. Both Vsevolod Valiusinskii's *Piat' bessmertnykh* (1928) and Aleksandr Beliaev's *Golova professor Douella* (1937) describe the attainment of Promethean goals by scientific methods. In *Piat' bessmertnykh*, a neurologically (if spuriously) justified method of immortalization is found. In Beliaev's novel, Professor Dowell and his assistant Professor Kern discover a dramatic means of resurrection. Irene Masing-Delic specifically excludes this genre from her definition of 'immortality myths', arguing that that the immortalization process should be a 'logical, natural and realistic outcome of a "tough war with death" conducted on the battlefields of science, art, collective labour and communal

⁸⁴ Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 55 vols (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1967-1970), XXXVI (1969), p. 409.

⁸⁵ Ivanov, p. 610.

effort'.⁸⁶ Both Beliaev and Valiusinskii fulfil her criteria by writing realistic stories with logical (if not scientifically sustainable) plots. Neither novel depicts 'a utopian construct or a fantastic dream':⁸⁷ *Golova* is set in 1930s France, while Valiusinskii frames the events of his novel in northern Europe in the not-so-distant future.

Both authors prided themselves on the feasibility of the science they describe. A critic singled out *Piat' bessmertnykh* as 'убедительный и плодотворный', because of the immortality plot's foundation on surgery (as opposed to sheer unsupported fantasy). The same article praises Beliaev's work for its scientific consistency: 'В каждом из его произведений поставлена серьезная научная проблема, которая разрешается в полном соответствии с современными научными данными'.⁸⁸ Beliaev rejected critics' suggestions that the reanimation of corpses described in *Golova professora Douella* was unrealistic, protesting that

‘такие воскрешения уже существуют, и их можно наблюдать хотя бы в Московском институте имени Склифасовского... [...] Брюханенко критиковали только за то, что он высказал предложение и даже уверенность в возможности вернуть жизнь спустя долгий период после наступления смерти. [...] В [*Golova professora Douella*] операция сшивания и возвращения к жизни производятся во всяком случае над совершенно свежими трупами’.⁸⁹

I contend, therefore, that these two novels are examples of immortality myths. My interest in both works, however, arises from their insidious re-coding as Gothic mortality myths. The positivistic plot of each novel, which opens with a new and far-reaching scientific discovery, rapidly degenerates into disaster for all the characters. In each case, the discovery is rapidly shrouded by secrecy, betrayals, and murder. *Golova professora Douella* even develops a cast of characters typical of the Gothic novel: incapacitated father figure (Professor Dowell), heroine (Laurent), hero (Dowell's son), and villain (Professor Kern), as well as other characteristically Gothic motifs. Each novel concludes with the irrevocable loss of the

⁸⁶ Masing-Delic, p. 20.

⁸⁷ Masing-Delic, p. 19.

⁸⁸ A. Palei, 'Sovetskaia nauchno-fantasticheskaia literature', in *Revoliutsiia i kul'tura*, 23-4 (December 1929), 63-68.

⁸⁹ A. Beliaev, 'O moikh rabotakh', *Detskaia literatura*, 5 (1939), 23-25 (p. 24). In the same article, Beliaev cites letters from readers to prove that his book has encouraged young people to study medicine.

discovery, the death of the discoverer and the implicit moral that contemporary man is too morally immature to enjoy the benefits of immortality.

3.i. Abolishing Death: Valiusinskii's Immortals

*“Мы создаем жизнь”, сказал Курганов... “но кругом нас пока еще только трупы”.*⁹⁰

Vsevolod Valiusinskii's second novel, *Bol'shaia zemlia*, was previously analysed as a Soviet example of 'Gothic bodies'. In Valiusinskii's first novel, *Piat' bessmertnykh*, the human body exchanges its identity for the ultimate elixir: immortality. The novel opens with an international broadcast announcing the advent of immortal humanity. The story's optimism, and its socialist credentials (the world of the future is imagined as a Eurasian socialist super-state in cold war with still-capitalist America), earned it praise from several critics. One commented that Valiusinskii's book deserved to be 'отнесен к числу полезных книг'.⁹¹ However, the plot rapidly re-orientates itself as a *mortality* myth, internally controlled by Gothic tropes of treachery, guilt and death. Even the initial news broadcast turns out to be fatally premature, leading to political and social chaos and an interplanetary war.

The first indication of the immortality plot's ambiguity is the surname of the Soviet bloc's senior research scientist, Professor Kurganov. His name suggests the prehistoric tombs of Russia's eastern steppes, immediately suggesting death rather than eternal life (recalling the explicit irony of Vsevolod Ivanov's story *Kak sozdaiutsia kurgany*). Kurganov discovers, from initial experiments with animals, that a small segment of the medulla, transplanted from one individual's brain into that of a second, makes the recipient immortal. The donor, unfortunately, dies. Despite this knowledge, Kurganov and his six research assistants decide to continue the experiment on each other. This grim equation of eternal life with premature death is the second hint that Valiusinskii's story will be more concerned with mortality than immortality.

Kurganov's research is conducted in a lonely installation on the coast of the Baltic Sea (evoking the motif of Gothic space). The professor persuades three young female neuroscientists from Berlin to participate in the experiment. When all ten test subjects, including Kurganov, are ready, they form pairs and draw lots to determine who lives and

⁹⁰ Vsevolod Valiusinskii, *Piat' bessmertnykh: roman* [hereafter *PB*] (Kharkov: Proletarii, 1928), p. 243.

⁹¹ A. Tsingovatov, *Kniga i profsoiuzy*, 8 (1928), p. 4.

dies. Here, a Gothic subplot emerges: one of the Berlin neuroscientists, a Japanese girl called Ai, is romantically linked with Kurganov. By coincidence, she and Kurganov are paired. Ai receives the 'lucky' ticket guaranteeing life; Kurganov chivalrously accepts extinction. But by this stage all the surviving assistants have become immortals. As such, they lack emotional empathy. Guided solely by logic, they overrule the ballot without Kurganov's consent and ensure that he becomes immortal at the cost of Ai's life. Although Ai's pathetic death is never discussed, Valiusinskii indicates that Kurganov, at least, suffers guilt over the murder. After Kurganov's operation, there are three immortal men and two immortal women – and five corpses to bury.

The five immortals gradually, but irreversibly, cease to be human. Their bodies become what I have defined in Chapter 1 as 'Gothic bodies'; their minds lose emotional contiguity with the feelings of the human race, whom they increasingly belittle as 'смертные'. The immortality bestowed by Kurganov's transplant procedure does indeed lengthen life – but life of an extremely altered and restricted kind. The five immortals lose all secondary sexual characteristics and all psychological traces of sexuality. Their physical appearance becomes grotesque and, as the years pass, increasingly inhuman: 'безволосые, блестящие головы их покачиваются и шевелятся, как воздушные шары на нитке у торговца. Они походят общим обликом на муравьев-термитов'.⁹² After two hundred years of extended life, 'наружность бессмертных еще сильнее изменилась. Головы стали больше, лица меньше, и они еще менее походили на людей'.⁹³ An attempt to immortalise an Indian servant causes his body to regress rapidly and catastrophically to a simian condition:

Он превратился в скелет, обтянутый кожей... За счет всего организма развился сильный жевательный аппарат и колоссальный живот. Нижняя челюсть выдалась вперед. Подбородок закрутился. Все эти изменения совершились всего в несколько месяцев. Он стал напоминать гориллу. Однажды утром его нашли мертвым. В руках и во рту у него были остатки недоеденного сдобного кекса...⁹⁴

⁹² Valiusinskii, *PB*, p. 282.

⁹³ Valiusinskii, *PB*, p. 240.

⁹⁴ Valiusinskii, *PB*, p. 243.

The five immortals no longer think of themselves as men, women, or even as humans: they are ‘пять существ, которые когда-то были людьми’.⁹⁵

Since beginning their experiments, the five immortals have assumed the same justification for murder as Bolshevik revolutionaries: sacrificing a few for the future good of many.⁹⁶

Throughout their two centuries of extended life, they struggle to find a formula for conferring immortality without sacrifice. Kurganov insists on secrecy: if the principle of immortality is revealed too soon, moral chaos will ensue. Society will institutionalize murder in order to prolong the lives of the rich, especially in still-capitalist America. The immortals’ contempt for human lives is repeated in their arrogant assumption that they can predict human behaviour. Basing their lives on unsentimental logic, they have become entirely estranged from human needs and cares:

Карст попробовал вообразить себя смертным. Каких-нибудь несколько десятков лет, а там – старость и неминуемая смерть... Нет, это слишком ужасно. Как *они* живут и забывают об этом?⁹⁷

When, after two centuries, the immortals finally isolate a serum that makes people immortal without requiring a victim, they go public with their momentous discovery. This disclosure leads to a devastating war and the successive violent deaths of all five immortals, victims of a global tug-of-war between socialists and capitalists. Kurganov, the last of the five, is taken hostage by American forces and commits suicide in order to avoid being used as a human pawn. His last words are suitably inspiring: “Да здравствует Всемирный Союз!”⁹⁸

The moral Valiusinskii evidently intends to express, given in the concluding paragraph of the novel, is an endorsement of the immortality myth and a message of future hope to proletarians:

⁹⁵ Valiusinskii, *PB*, p. 281.

⁹⁶ This is how Valiusinskii expresses the immortals self-justification: ‘Это, конечно, был обман и в некотором роде насилие, но иначе бессмертные боялись поступать. Хотя этот опыт был опасен, они сами себе давали право жертвовать единицами, когда дело касалось миллиардов человеческих жизней’ (*PB*, p. 269).

⁹⁷ Valiusinskii, *PB*, p. 233.

⁹⁸ Valiusinskii, *PB*, p. 395.

И тогда вновь воплощенная сказочная мечта даст человеку не только освобождение и победу над рабством, но подчинит ему и само время, свергнет с черного трона самое страшное господство – власть смерти’.⁹⁹

Despite the utopian promise of these words, their meaning is compromised by the events of *Piat’ bessmertnykh*. Far from being toppled from his black throne (we note that death is portrayed as an autocratic monarch, that arch-enemy of socialist society), death has retained his dominion over the masses and successfully reversed the brief advantage enjoyed by Kurganov’s vanguard. Ironically, the immortals’ long effort to defeat death left them more obsessed than ever with their ineffable adversary: “Потому, вероятно, мы все уцелели за эти полтора столетия, что очень боимся смерти. Мы все время думаем о ней”.¹⁰⁰ The annihilation of the immortals, and of their knowledge, is total. Even the innocent sixth immortal, a second Indian man inoculated with immortality serum (without his knowledge), must be punished. Just after the media discovered his existence – but before he can be reached – he accidentally falls from a height and ‘разбился на смерть’.¹⁰¹

Total destruction, following overweening ambition, is a typical trope of Gothic novels.¹⁰² The immortals’ brave and tragic experiment has supposedly bequeathed their dream of ‘abolishing death,’ to the world proletariat:

Бессмертие опять стало мечтой. Но каждый знал, что оно достижимо, и верил, что рано или поздно опять раздастся радостный, безумный крик: “Нет смерти!”¹⁰³

In fact, it has demonstrated the inevitable subjugation of human life to death’s omnipotence. Moreover, Valiusinskii has failed to prove his case on the evidence provided. Although Kurganov, and through him Valiusinskii, expound the value of immortality, it is not clear why anyone would want to purchase eternal life at the price of love, sympathy, and humanity.

⁹⁹ Valiusinskii, *PB*, p. 398.

¹⁰⁰ Valiusinskii, *PB*, p. 233.

¹⁰¹ Valiusinskii, *PB*, p. 398.

¹⁰² Dr Frankenstein’s case notes are stolen by his creature, and he deliberately leaves no other clues to his discovery. Dr Moreau’s surgical skills die with him; his assistant and most of his Beast-People are killed or degenerate into ordinary animals. Even William Godwin’s Caleb Williams, who has wrongfully gained access to forbidden knowledge, is condemned to a bleak, friendless and rootless life.

¹⁰³ Valiusinskii, *PB*, p. 398.

3.ii. Talking Heads: *Golova professora Douella*

Aleksandr Beliaev's *Golova professora Douella*, a 1925 short story rewritten as a novel in 1937, remains one of Beliaev's most popular works.¹⁰⁴ As noted above, the plot is remarkably faithful to the Gothic formula – as contemporary critics came close to realizing.¹⁰⁵ The novel's first half describes the concealment of a crime from which the villain secretly profits; the second half recounts the exposure and avenging of this crime. Even some of the secondary details – the heroine's imprisonment in a mental asylum by the villain, a fearsome black who acts as the villain's henchman – are authentically Gothic. The book's setting – most of the action takes place either in the morgue or in the professor's surgery, full of partly reanimated body parts – recalls the Gothic obsession with death and post-mortem experience.

Professor Dowell and his assistant Kern are both researching new methods of resurrecting the dead. Dowell discovers a way of reviving disembodied heads. However, Kern kills the older man and uses his head as the first successful test subject for the procedure. Kern reports Dowell's death as natural and keeps their discovery secret, forcing Dowell's head to continue dispensing advice on surgical procedures. Kern soon revives two more heads, which he plans to attach to fresh bodies from the local morgue. Unfortunately for Kern, the new procedure works so well that Kern's patient, Brigitte, escapes. By a supernatural coincidence, she meets Dowell's son and his best friend, Larré. Larré recognizes her body as identical to that of his girlfriend, an opera singer who had recently died in a train accident. Forced by Larré to tell her true story, Brigitte betrays Kern. Meanwhile, Kern's beautiful assistant Laurent has formed an emotional bond with Dowell's head and also plans to expose Kern. Kern is eventually reported to the police; his test subjects die before his achievement can impress the

¹⁰⁴ The film of Beliaev's book has been equally popular in Russia. This is *Zaveshchanie professora Douella*, dir. by Leonid Menaker (Lenfilm, 1984).

¹⁰⁵ Writing in 1939, the critic Ia. Rykachev criticizes the plot's tendency to 'погружаться в чистую беллетристику'. He feels the book uses too many details typical of adventure stories (such as Laurent's confinement in the asylum) to qualify as scientific fantasy. Ia. Rykachev, 'Golova professora Douella', *Detskaia literatura*, 1 (1939), 50-53 (p. 53).

scientific establishment. Kern commits suicide. Laurent and Dowell junior live happily ever after.¹⁰⁶

In my analysis of *Golova professora Douella*, I will focus on one specifically Gothic trope: the idea of return, and retribution, from beyond the grave. As the brief sketch of the plot given above indicates, Professor Dowell is vindicated, and Kern punished, by ordinary human justice. However, the action of supernatural justice in the novel is crystallised in one body. This is the female corpse which Kern resurrects and attaches to Brigitte's head. This body encompasses the ideas of resurrection, return and vengeance, in a manner comparable to Edgar Allan Poe's famous short story, *Ligeia* (1838). The female body in Beliaev's novel is simultaneously 'a figure for unity and timelessness; for the triumph over dismemberment and facticity',¹⁰⁷ and the cause of its own destruction.

Brigitte was a cabaret singer, shot dead during a quarrel. An exceptionally vain and shallow character, she finds life as a disembodied head unbearably tedious. Her only consolation is persuading Laurent to read to her from magazines or put on her make-up. When Kern offers her a new body, she agrees enthusiastically, but is later troubled by both superstitious terror and incipient guilt: "Человек должен умереть, чтобы я получила тело... И, доктор, я боюсь. Ведь это тело мертвеца. А вдруг она придет и потребует отдать ей свое тело?"¹⁰⁸ Kern masks his own fear of the dead in biological jargon: "Главное – как уничтожить в теле трупа продукты начавшегося гниения или места инфекционного заражения, как очистить кровеносные сосуды от свернувшейся крови, наполнить их свежей кровью и заставить заработать "мотор" организма – сердце".¹⁰⁹ However, Kern is more superstitious than he pretends. Unlike the other surgeon-resurrector discussed in this chapter, Professor Britanov, Kern does use quasi-religious terminology about his work, including the phrase 'воскрешения из мертвых'.¹¹⁰ He even compares Brigitte to a Salome

¹⁰⁶ I have modified the transliteration of some of Beliaev's characters' names in accordance with the versions adopted by Antonina Bouis. See *Professor Dowell's Head*, trans. by Antonina W. Bouis (London: Macmillan, 1981). In this system, 'Брике' becomes Brigitte and 'Лопан' becomes Laurent.

¹⁰⁷ Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. xii.

¹⁰⁸ Aleksandr Beliaev, *Golova professora Douella*, in *Izbrannye proizvedeniia* (Moscow: Pravda, 1989), pp. 23-164 (p. 71).

¹⁰⁹ Beliaev, *Golova*, pp. 69-70.

¹¹⁰ Beliaev, *Golova*, p. 70.

who has suffered the same fate as her victim: “На блюдо попала голова не только Иоанна, но и самой Саломеи”¹¹¹ Ironically, Brigitte’s apprehension will prove more justified than Kern’s false self-confidence.

Brigitte is clear about what kind of body she wants: “Я хочу иметь красивое тело... Это так нравится мужчинам”¹¹² Once again, Kern has a secretly similar opinion. When choosing bodies in the morgue, he suppresses his scientific objectivity in favour of a kind of voyeuristic necrophilia. When a headless woman’s body is brought in, Kern’s gaze – and thus the reader’s – ignores the horrific mutilation and focuses on the aesthetic beauty of the body, emphasized by the absence of a head: ‘Навстречу ему служащие несли труп женщины без головы. Обмытое молодое тело блестело, как белый мрамор...’¹¹³ Another corpse causes him to remark: “Какая красота! ... Как по заказу”¹¹⁴ Eventually, he selects two bodies, allowing Brigitte to choose between them. Angelique’s elegant, aristocratic body is contrasted with a sturdy, wide-hipped cadaver which Kern assumes belonged to a servant. Brigitte immediately chooses Angelique’s body, although it has a slight wound on the sole of one foot. Suppressing his professional reservations, Kern attaches Angelique to Brigitte. Kern’s choice – made on the grounds of sexual selection rather than surgical compatibility – proves fateful for his resurrection project. Brigitte’s operation is so successful that she escapes from Kern’s laboratory at the first opportunity.

Not only has Angelica’s younger and more beautiful body renewed Brigitte’s youth and attractiveness, the freshness and sincerity of Angelica’s character infiltrates Brigitte’s personality. The shop-worn cabaret singer reinvents herself as a romantic artiste, until she accidentally meets Angelica’s former lover, Larré, and is forced to reveal the truth. Larré, recognizing Angelica’s body, voice and mannerisms in a stranger, is deeply grieved. But gradually, he and Brigitte fall in love. The fictional precursor for this denouement is Poe’s story *Ligeia*, in which the narrator’s dead wife returns from the grave through sheer force of will. Convinced that ‘Man doth not yield himself... unto death utterly, save only through the

¹¹¹ Beliaev, *Golova*, p. 45.

¹¹² Beliaev, *Golova*, p. 77.

¹¹³ Beliaev, *Golova*, p. 72.

¹¹⁴ Beliaev, *Golova*, p. 76.

weakness of his feeble will’¹¹⁵ (a statement with which Fedorov would have heartily agreed), Ligeia’s spirit returns to earth by forcing its way into the corpse of the narrator’s second wife. To underline the change of ownership, this blond and blue-eyed body rises from its bier with the black hair and dark eyes of the long-dead Ligeia. The question arising from Beliaev’s novel is whether Angelica’s spirit is performing a Ligeia-like eviction of Brigitte, or whether a harmonious compromise has been achieved between Brigitte’s soul and Angelica’s body? Elizabeth Bronfen’s study of female corpses in fiction would suggest that a lasting harmony is impossible, since the ontological chasm of death cannot be so easily ignored or overcome. Commenting on *Ligeia*, she writes:

The ‘re’ of return, repetition or recuperation suggests that the end point is not the same as the point of departure, although it harbours the illusion that something lost has been perfectly regained. Instead, the regained order encompasses a shift; that is to say it is never again/no longer entirely devoid of traces of difference. The recuperation is imperfect, the regained stability not safe, the urge for order inhabited by a fascination with disruption and split.¹¹⁶

As such, Brigitte/Angelica’s temporary accommodation represents a localized triumph over the nefarious Kern. Good has overcome evil; the Gothic villain’s plot has been defeated. But the overall Gothic momentum of the plot demands that Brigitte, who has benefited from Kern’s evil, must also be destroyed. Bronfen’s ‘disruption and split’ is manifested as the seemingly innocuous cut on Angelica’s foot. Like the bruise on the old woman’s chin in Kharm’s “Starukha”, it presages future disaster. When Brigitte celebrates her return to life by dancing all night, the wound re-opens and becomes infected. Blood-poisoning sets in. Brigitte eventually flees back to Kern, who is forced to amputate her entire body to save her life. But life without a body, for Brigitte, is meaningless. She rapidly fades away, shattering Kern’s hopes of exhibiting her to his peers as well as her own modest hopes for a happy life with Larré.

If the real wound on Angelica’s foot destroyed Brigitte, Kern has been undone by the symbolic ‘wound’ of Brigitte’s femininity – the irrepressible sexuality that drove her to escape his clinic and over-exert herself. In *Golova professora Douella*, both ‘femininity and death cause a disorder to stability, mark moments of ambivalence, disruption or duplicity and

¹¹⁵ Joseph Glanville as cited by Poe, no reference given. See Poe, *Selected Tales*, ed. by Julian Symons (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 38-52 (p. 38).

¹¹⁶ Bronfen, p. xii.

their eradication produces a recuperation of order, a return to stability'.¹¹⁷ Therefore, as befits a well-constructed Gothic plot, after the villain's death life returns to normal. There is no indication that Dowell junior will continue his father's work and therefore perpetuate the Gothic cycle. Beliaev suggests that Dowell's and Kern's extraordinary discoveries will be allowed to die with them. This could imply that Beliaev considers their society – and by implication, Soviet society – too immature to cope with artificially extended life. Instead of endorsing Fedorovian resurrectionism, Beliaev's story warns Soviet readers to accept their limitations – moral and physical.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has explored a variety of Soviet Gothic mortality myths: grotesque immortals, graphomaniac and defaulting suicides, malignant corpses and Civil War burials. Perhaps the most notable characteristic of mortality myths is their lack of any ideological harmony. Unlike immortality myths, whose promise of achievable infinity feeds the Soviet post-religious craving for transcendence, mortality myths create an axiological void. They offer the reader a typically Gothic absence of fixed values, an aporetic space open to multiple interpretations. Masing-Delic notes that a universal feature of Soviet immortalization doctrine was 'the notion that man is not trapped by inherited sin. If guilty in any sense at all, it is guilty of various forms of omission, such as the failure to reach illumination'.¹¹⁸ As we have seen, Gothic plot offers a precisely opposed scenario: the inevitable return of inherited guilt. Professor Kern and Brigitte are both destroyed by a tiny wound on the sole of a dead woman's foot. Valiusinskii's five immortals are undone by their renunciation of human values. Podsekal'nikov's bold embrace of life is permanently compromised by the realization that his hypocrisy led an innocent man to embrace death. And so on.

Just as the operation of Gothic justice causes secrets from the past to destroy the present, mortality myths destroy the positivist assumptions of Soviet ideologues. Even 'the positivist impulse so dear to the Marxist tradition can be corrupted by the literature of horror and disgust'.¹¹⁹ Corpses, suicides and grotesque resurrections can be numbered amidst this 'literature of horror and disgust'. In *Schastlivaia Moskva*, Platonov ironically compares the

¹¹⁷ Bronfen, p. xii.

¹¹⁸ Masing-Delic, p. 20.

¹¹⁹ Naiman, *SP*, p. 167.

mortal body of his heroine to the Stalinist metropolis of Moscow. The gradual humiliation and dismemberment of her body prefigures the erosion of the very architecture of Stalinist policy within Russia. Death in Soviet literature thus remains a disruptive force, distorting and subverting the attempts of writers to establish a new and consistent value system. Relatively conformist writers like Beliaev or Ivanov and outright dissidents like Erdman, fall into the same circularity of Gothic recurrence. What I have called 'mortality myths' inevitably overtake and reframe any attempt to inscribe immortality myths – the medical defeat of death, the resurrection of the dead – or new formulations of death – the suicide-protest, the rationalization of mass murder – into the cultural matrix. The more stringently Gothic plots are denied, the more ineluctably they return.

CHAPTER THREE

GOTHIC MONSTERS

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1. Introduction

This chapter categorizes as a unified group the monsters of Gothic literature – those characters which inspire the sensations of terror and dread intimately associated with the genre. Gothic monsters are, most typically, supernatural entities, including ghosts, doubles, vampires and werewolves – collectively referred to as *nechistaia sila* in Russian literature. However, the category also includes human antiheroes, so-called Gothic villains, who may or may not possess supernatural attributes. Gothic villains by Bulgakov, Pil’niak, Vladimir Zazubrin and others all combine, to varying degrees, human and demonic characteristics.

Traditionally, the most sinister or terrifying characters in Gothic literature – such as Bram Stoker’s Dracula, or Frankenstein’s monster – are also those most likely to gain a place in popular culture. Gothic villains and monsters are frequently used to caricature real-life characters, or plundered for political symbolism. The vampire’s malevolent parasitism makes it a particularly apt simile for the latter role. The trope of the ghost is more ambiguous, since its function may be restitutive as well as punitive. Appropriately, since spectres frequently function as a trope of absence or loss, the section on ghosts is based principally upon émigré fiction. The depiction of human Gothic villains varies considerably within the genre. A minority are intrinsically evil; others are flawed heroes whose inner demons compel them to self-destruction.¹ The terrifying figure of the *dvoynik* or double – a figure linked to Russian literature since the beginning of the nineteenth century – combines features of all three preceding categories: ghosts, vampires and villains. It is generally interpreted as a signifier of psychological trauma. This chapter will discuss Gothic monsters in Soviet (or, in the case of

¹ Examples of tragically flawed heroes include Frankenstein’s monster from Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), and Melmoth in Charles Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820).

ghosts, émigré) prose, contextualizing the cultural and political symbolism of each manifestation.

As the most readily identifiable element of Gothic fiction, the Gothic monster is easily suborned for the purposes of parody or polemic. It is also, by virtue of its high profile, relatively easy to censor. Therefore the majority of Gothic monsters discussed in this chapter appeared in unpublished or suppressed fictions by writers who deliberately adopted the Gothic-fantastic style, including Bulgakov, Chaianov and Krzhizhanovskii. Other monstrous characters were used specifically to demonize political enemies (by Grigorii Grebnev to caricature White officers; by the émigré writer Pavel Perov to indict the Bolsheviks) or to convey the more horrific aspects of the Civil War (as in the writing of Vladimir Zazubrin). In conclusion, I argue that the multi-valenced significance of supernatural characters has enabled their literary re-emergence today as markers of Russia's reconciliation with the Soviet past.

2. Gothic villains

While ghosts, vampires and doubles represent supernatural intervention within Gothic narrative, the traditional human Gothic villain usually commits profane offences, such as heir-kidnapping, property theft, murder or treachery. The villain is indispensable to Gothic plot structure: his mistreatment and/or dispossession of the hero or heroine inspire the latter's struggle to re-establish justice. His death, or punishment, signals the restoration of harmony and stability. E.J. Clery recognizes two classes of Gothic villain: 'the anonymous rabble of low-life villains, chiefly interesting for the threat to life they pose' (or to virtue, if the heroine is at their mercy), and the 'fallen prince' – a powerful and distinguished man who 'retains the marks of nobility in his character',² despite his current evil situation. This section will discuss Clery's second category of villain: a flawed, but still glamorous, hero.

² E.J. Clery, *Women's Gothic: From Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley* (Tavistock, Devon: Northcote House, 2000), p. 54.

Power, property and cruelty are the tools in trade of the Gothic villain.³ His narrative function is to acquire more of the first two and to dispense the third, while generating ‘an atmosphere of lurking doom’.⁴ The villain is generally, but not always, foreign. Sometimes the villain may literally be the devil incarnate (like Bulgakov’s Woland, discussed below);⁵ he may be mesmerizingly handsome or repulsively ugly; he may even be female (a Gothic villainess).⁶ Yet another type is the so-called ‘psychic vampire’, who feeds passively off the mental energy of his victims rather than their blood.⁷ Often, the villain’s preternatural charisma, his ‘chiaroscuro shine’, eclipses the hero’s role entirely:

The villains in much of the Gothic create the central development and complexity of the narrative by their inexplicably meaningful actions, their deeply perturbed spirits which precipitously race toward ruin on a grand scale. These villains and their violent machinations against the heroine’s virtue steal the show while the characterless lover is lost in the background with his transparent tenderness and adoration...⁸

Indeed, the Gothic villain is dangerously charismatic. Even Radcliffe’s infamous Count Montoni fails to maintain his veneer of inhuman menace consistently throughout *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Although *Udolpho*’s plot ‘requires that he be depicted, at least potentially, as evil incarnate... he constantly becomes assimilated to a less extreme model of

³ For further discussion of the Gothic villain as a generic character, see E.J. Clery, *Women’s Gothic*, pp. 54-56, and Markman Ellis, *The History of Gothic Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000). Ellis agrees with Clery’s division of villains into two classes, which he calls ‘banditti and tyrants’ (see pp. 56-62). For a treatment of the Gothic villain as Byronic hero or ‘demon lover’, see Toni Reed, *Demon Lovers and Their Victims in British Fiction* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), esp. Chapter 4, ‘The Motif in British Fiction’, pp. 54-92, and Deborah Lutz, *The Dangerous Lover: Gothic Villains, Byronism, and the Nineteenth-Century Seduction Narrative* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), esp. Chapter 2, ‘The Spectral Other and Erotic Melancholy: The Gothic Demon Lover and the Early Seduction Narrative Rake (1532-1822)’, pp. 29-47. Both Reed and Lutz see the Gothic villain as a textual incarnation of dominating (and potentially aberrant) male sexuality. Reed includes Stoker’s Dracula in her survey of demon lovers, arguing that blood-drinking is a metaphor for sexual promiscuity (and perversity).

⁴ Clery, p. 54.

⁵ Zofloya’s evil servant, the Moor, (in Charlotte Dacre’s *Zofloya* (1806)) is revealed at the novel’s end to be the Devil himself.

⁶ Such as the title character of Zofloya in Dacre’s *Zofloya* or the character of Matilda in Lewis’ *The Monk* (1796).

⁷ I owe the concept of the ‘psychic vampire’ to Nina Auerbach’s monograph *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (London and Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), esp. pp. 101-112.

⁸ Deborah Lutz, *The Dangerous Lover*, p. 31.

the adult male, and even his dubious behaviour cannot prevent Radcliffe from showing him as a protective and stable figure'.⁹ Other Gothic novels, such as *Melmoth the Wanderer* or *The Monk*, vividly portray an ordinary character's moral decline into villainy. Frequently, villain and victim become locked into a fictional cycle of cruelty and vulnerability, mimicking the mutually destructive relationship between doubles (which will be discussed in a later section). One critic argues that the villain-victim relationship is essentially uncanny, in Freud's sense of the world, as the victim recognizes in the villain's sexual libertinism and moral autonomy a buried part of his or her self which he or she has hitherto failed to express.¹⁰

Previous chapters have exposed a number of archetypal villains within Soviet Gothic plot: the murderous Professor Kern in Beliaev's *Golova professora Douella*, the shape-changing Chiche in Shaginian's *Mess-Mend*, and the submarine capitalists in Grigorii Grebnev's *Arktaniia*. Grebnev's fiction caricatures political opponents as stereotypical Gothic villains – either psychotically nasty or supernaturally malevolent. In one story, "Rasskaz ob odnom rasstreliannom" (1935), told, like *Arktaniia*, from the perspective of a teenage boy, a White officer is depicted as a psychopath with an uncanny aptitude for survival:

Говорили, что Шок рвет ногти арестованным, во время допроса подвешивает женщин за груди, и сам без всякого суда расстреливает своих подследственных при малейшем подозрении в большевизме. В Шока стреляли в одиночку и залпами, бросали ему под ноги бомбы, отправляли водку, которую он пил, и все это каким-то чудом Шок оставался жив и невредим.¹¹

This formidable bogey-man is finally slain by a 'silver bullet' delivered by the local Red organiser. Shok's fatal wound is graphically described to establish the reality of his death. Like a vampire or werewolf, the White villain must be decapitated in order to be permanently killed: 'Горло у него черными мослаками вывалилось на сторону, и голова казалось отделенной от туловища'.¹² This episode demonstrates Grebnev's facility in manipulating Gothic-fantastic imagery to portray socialist forces as heroic, rational and effective, while their conservative enemies appear as mentally and physically abnormal grotesques. Grebnev

⁹ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, I, pp. 77-8.

¹⁰ Lutz, pp. 34-5.

¹¹ Grigorii Grebnev, 'Rasskaz ob odnom rasstreliannom', in *Poteshnyi vsvod: rasskazy* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1935), pp. 50-59 (p. 53).

¹² Grebnev, 'Rasskaz', p. 59.

argued that fantastic fiction should always represent ‘борьба прогрессивного человечества с темными силами реакции’.¹³

However, not all Soviet portraits of villains are so uncompromisingly one-sided. In some Socialist Realist novels, the villain may reform (like the German engineer in Gladkov’s *Tsement*) or even be revealed as a hero in disguise. In Platonov’s *Kotlovan*, the character of Zhachev – a libidinous, greedy, grotesquely ugly beggar described as an ‘урод империализма’¹⁴ – might be a textbook Gothic villain. Yet this initial presentation is deceptive. Zhachev lost his leg fighting in the First World War; he now intimidates corrupt local Communist officials by reporting them if they fail to bribe him with luxuries. His role is to terrify, and within limits to police, the new government’s functionaries. His honest affection for the novel’s heroine finally proves Zhachev’s credentials as a positive character.

2.i. Devils incarnate

Many Gothic villains are closely linked to the demonic. Both the character known as the ‘unbending man’ (‘негорбящийся человек’) in Boris Pil’niak’s *Povest’ nepogashennoi luny* (1926) and Bulgakov’s Woland in *Master i Margarita* are Gothic villains with demonic attributes. Additionally, both characters have been identified with Stalin – not in itself a surprising association of images. ‘Devilishly attractive, tyrannical rulers, including Stalin, have often held a diabolical fascination for Russian writers’.¹⁵ There is an established precedent in Gothic literature for villains who either possess diabolic powers or incarnate the devil himself. In the concluding scene of Charlotte Dacre’s *Zofloya, or the Moor* (1806), Zofloya’s evil henchman the Moor reveals himself as Satan and kills her, carrying her soul off to hell.¹⁶ Ambrosio in Lewis’ *The Monk* is given temporary supernatural powers by the

¹³ Grebnev, ‘Krasnyi admiral Erteil’’, *Detskaia literatura*, 5 (May 1939), p. 25.

¹⁴ Andrei Platonov, *Kotlovan*, in *Schastlivaia Moskva*, pp. 223-329 (p. 229).

¹⁵ Rosalind Marsh, ‘Literary Representations of Stalin and Stalinism as Demonic,’ in *Russian Literature and Its Demons*, ed. by Pamela Davidson (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2000), pp. 473-513 (p. 479).

¹⁶ Charlotte Dacre, *Zofloya, or the Moor*, ed. by Kim Ian Michisaw (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 266-267.

devil,¹⁷ while Maturin's Melmoth becomes a near-immortal sorcerer in exchange for his soul.¹⁸

As Vatsuro comments, the villain's status as moral outsider encourages his association with Satan: 'Поставленные вне общества, его законов и морали, такие герои легко приобретают черты демонизма'.¹⁹ Representations of the devil in Soviet fiction reflect this Gothic tradition as well as the impact of 'an astonishing surge in artistic depictions of the demonic' in *fin-de-siècle* Russian literature, in particular Symbolism.²⁰ This modern Satan, influenced by Baudelaire's poetics of corruption and ennui, had much in common with the nature and narrative role of the Gothic villain:

For some writers, the devil was viewed in its Romantic aspect – as *a proud rebel, a being who dared to rise above the strictures of conventional morality* [author's italics]. To write about the devil afforded one opportunity to explore zones of human behaviour and motivation that had heretofore been considered taboo or sacrilegious.²¹

Master i Margarita's Woland is easily the most famous devil in twentieth-century Russian literature. He also, arguably, represents the culmination of Symbolist representation of the devil as a glamorous, charismatic, but suffering figure. Woland's identity is never established. Like most Gothic villains, he is foreign. On first meeting him, Berlioz and Bezdomnyi assume he is a foreigner, despite his perfect Russian, and Bulgakov calls Woland the 'иностранец' throughout the book. Azazello describes him to Margarita as an 'очень знатный иностранец'.²² Eighteenth-century Gothic villains have troupes of 'banditti'; Woland has his nefarious retinue, who perform acts of mayhem around Moscow but remain subservient to his commands. Gothic villains traditionally threaten both the heroine's virtue

¹⁷ Ambrosio receives a mirror that shows faraway scenes and an amulet that opens locked doors (*The Monk*, pp. 270-279).

¹⁸ Melmoth the Wanderer, by his own confession, sold his soul to the devil in return for near-immortality and magical powers (Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer*, pp. 600-602).

¹⁹ Vatsuro, p. 93.

²⁰ Julian W. Connolly, *The Intimate Stranger: Meetings with the Devil in Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), p. 277.

²¹ Connolly, p. 277.

²² Mikhail Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, [hereafter *MM*] in *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. by Ellendea Proffer, 8 vols (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1982-), VIII (1988), p. 227.

and her property. Woland's smouldering charisma certainly does displace the Master (the 'characterless lover' in Lutz' interpretation of Gothic plot)²³ into the background. Margarita is even prepared to sleep with him (although Woland does not require this).²⁴ However, Woland needs Margarita as a hostess for the satanic ball just as Montoni in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* forces Emily to act as hostess for criminals and banditti. Margarita has to greet guests in the nude; Montoni forces Emily to wear a deeply décolleté gown that offends her modesty.²⁵ In both cases, the women are hostages to emotional commitments: Margarita will do anything for the Master, while Emily is anxious to persuade Montoni to spare her aunt's life.

Gothic villains are thieves and potential murderers. Montoni tries vainly to force Emily and her aunt to sign over their estates to him. Woland's invitation to the demonic ball causes Margarita to voluntarily abandon her bourgeois home, the 'готический особняк',²⁶ and loving husband. He eventually has both Margarita and the Master killed. In Gothic novels, justice turns *against* the Gothic villain just as he reaches the apex of his success. By the end of Radcliffe's novel, Montoni is a paper tiger, a diminished figure victimized by other robber barons. A similar *dégringolade* awaits Woland. Immediately after his apparent conquest of Moscow, the limits of Woland's power are revealed by Matthew the Levite. Woland cannot pronounce sentence for the Master and Margarita, only enforce others' judgements. He cannot influence their fate: 'light' or merely 'peace'. Bulgakov's conclusion divests Woland of his omnipotence, exposing him as a mere tool of higher authority.

There is interminable critical speculation over Woland's 'real' identity – despite David M. Bethea's caution that there will never be a single answer to any of the interpretative riddles raised by Bulgakov's characters.²⁷ Proposed candidates have ranged from the Soviet aircraft

²³ Lutz, p. 31.

²⁴ Bulgakov, *MM*, p. 229.

²⁵ Radcliffe, *Udolpho*, p. 311.

²⁶ Bulgakov, *MM*, p. 220.

²⁷ 'Let it be said at the outset that there is no single interpretation, no single blade, capable of severing the Gordian knot of *The Master and Margarita*'. David M. Bethea, *The Shape of Apocalypse in Modern Russian Fiction* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 193.

designer and inventor, Roberto Bartini,²⁸ to William Bullitt, the American ambassador in Moscow from 1933 to 1936.²⁹ The Master also has a number of literary prototypes, ranging from Goethe's Mephistopheles in *Faust* to the eponymous character of Venediktov in Chaianov's 1921 story and the title character of Ilia Ehrenburg's 1922 novel *Neobychnyye pokhozhdeniia Khulio Khurenito*,³⁰ a gnostic *agent provocateur* who unexpectedly appears in NEP Moscow. Other critics have suggested that Woland is a portrait of Stalin, whose unconventional relationship with Bulgakov as the writer's mentor and personal censor resembled the torturous fictional relationships between Gothic villains and their victims.³¹

The enigmatic 'негорбящийся человек' at the heart of Boris Pil'niak's novel *Povest' nepogashennoi luny* is generally acknowledged as a thinly disguised portrayal of Stalin. Despite Pil'niak's explicit denial of any connection with real events in his 1926 foreword,³² the novella is clearly based on the suspicious death of the Civil War hero General Frunze. This dangerously topical content may have led directly to Pil'niak's arrest and execution in 1938.³³ Like the famously hard-working dictator of the Soviet Union, the 'unbending man' is a workaholic who sits at his office desk night and day, surrounded by telephones, a radio and an electronic switchboard, the nerve centre of his dominion. His personal life is modest and private. Like Stalin, he can draw on shared revolutionary experience and military comradeship to persuade General Gavrillov, against the latter's will, to submit to the ultimately fatal operation. After Gavrillov's death, the unbending man's visit to the morgue

²⁸ For an expansion of this argument, see Ol'ga Buzinovskaia and Sergei Buzinovskii, *Taina Volanda: Kniga deshifrovki* (St Petersburg: Lev i Sova, 2007)

²⁹ This interpretation is argued by both J.A.E. Curtis in 'Mikhail Bulgakov and the Red Army's Polo Instructor: Political Satire in *The Master and Margarita*', in *The Master and Margarita: A Critical Companion*, ed. by Laura D. Weeks (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1996), pp. 213-226, and Aleksandr Etkind in *Eros of the Impossible: The History of Psychoanalysis in Russia*, trans. by Noah and Maria Rubins (Boulder, Colo. and Oxford: Westview Press, 1997). Etkind suggests that 'Woland is Bullitt, the Master's insane dream is emigration, and the whole novel is a desperate cry for help' (p. 310). See Chapter 9, 'The Ambassador and Satan: William Bullitt in Bulgakov's Moscow', pp. 286-311.

³⁰ See Riitta Pittman, *The Writer's Divided Self in Bulgakov's The Master and Margarita* (London: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 28-30.

³¹ For an evaluation of the similarities between Stalin and Woland, see Donald Piper, 'An Approach to Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*' in *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 7: 2 (1971), 134-157 (pp. 146-147).

³² Pil'niak's foreword appeared in *Novyi mir*, 6 (June 1926). It is reprinted in the Prideaux Press edition of *Povest' nepogashennoi luny* (Letchworth, Herts.: Prideaux Press, 1971), p. 6.

³³ Marsh, p. 481.

suggests grief or even regret. But immediately after bidding farewell to his ‘comrade’ and ‘brother’, he makes a practical complaint about the ventilation.³⁴ His combination of ruthlessness, devotion to bureaucracy and sentimentality echo contemporary clichés about Stalin.

However, as Rosalind Marsh argues, the ‘unbending man’ also has demonic affinities. Marsh emphasizes his affinity with the night-time and particularly with the moon, whose movements he may control.³⁵ He is ‘a master of the universe who can change the direction of the moon, recalling the Devil’.³⁶ He is seen primarily in the morgue and in his darkened, preternaturally silent office. Even the office building seems unnaturally deserted. Like a vampire, the ‘unbending man’ avoids daylight. During his interview with Gavrilov, his face ‘не было видно в тени’.³⁷ His ability to talk Gavrilov into an unnecessary and ultimately fatal medical procedure suggests not only Stalin’s dominance of former Bolshevik comrades but a Woland-like charisma. This combination of charisma and sinister mystery are traditional hallmarks of the Gothic villain. Even his ambiguous reaction to Gavrilov’s death suggests an emotional conflict between ambition and sentiment typical of this generic archetype.

The Gothic villain is often a complex, tormented figure rather than a mere caricature of evil: both Woland and the unbending man combine elements of good and evil. They are anti-heroes with supernatural attributes. Categorizing both these figures as Gothic villains generates new contexts for evaluating their significance. The following section explores Vladimir Zazubrin’s novella about a patriotic but emotionally conflicted Soviet functionary who becomes gradually trapped in the role of a Gothic villain. Ultimately, the unbridgeable ethical gap between theory and practice drives him to suicide.

2.ii. Cheka Gothic: Vladimir Zazubrin’s *Shchepka*

I will frame the following analysis as a contrast between two texts: Vladimir Zazubrin’s posthumously published novella *Shchepka: Povest’ o revoliutsii i o lichnosti* (1923) and M.R.

³⁴ Pil’niak, *Povest’*, p. 59.

³⁵ Pil’niak, *Povest’*, pp. 60-61.

³⁶ Marsh, p. 481.

³⁷ Pil’niak, *Povest’*, p. 22.

Lewis' notorious Gothic bestseller *The Monk* (1796). Neglected in Russia from the late 1930s until the 1990s, Zazubrin has yet to receive critical evaluation in the West.³⁸

Shchepka and *The Monk* share an important narrative strategy: the representation of the Gothic villain as tragic hero. Both stories trace the self-destruction of an essentially noble character. Both stories use hallucinatory images which, read literally, must be ascribed to supernatural agency. The hero of each is a highly principled young man, undermined by a series of moral compromises made with the best of intentions. In each story, the hero is corrupted by a demonic female figure who symbolizes his deepest desires. Ambrosio the monk and Srubov the Cheka officer are simultaneously heroes and villains of plots which transform each man 'from a figure who wields sublime power into one who falls victim to it'.³⁹ In *The Monk*, the Gothic villain is an exceptionally righteous young monk, Ambrosio, lured into perdition by a female demon, Matilda. Matilda initially pretends to be a young seminarian. She secretly reveals herself as a woman to Ambrosio, begs him to keep her secret and eventually seduces him. From this point Ambrosio's descent into a multiple murderer, rapist and apostate is rapid. The girl he rapes, Antonia, turns out to be his sister: to kidnap her, he murdered their mother. The novel ends with Ambrosio's savage killing and dismemberment by Satan.

The Monk was an immediate *succès de scandale* in eighteenth-century Britain; *Shchepka* was not published until 1989 (in *Sibirskie ogni*). Vladimir Zazubrin (1895-1938) was the pen-name of Vladimir Iakovlevich Zubitsov. It is unlikely that Zazubrin, a self-taught writer from peasant stock in Penza, had any knowledge of the novel whose scenes of 'graphic violence' and grotesque sexuality originated the British 'horror Gothic' tradition.⁴⁰ Vladimir Zazubrin, in the words of one critic, 'принадлежал к ряду тех многочисленных писателей, которые своим рождением обязаны Октябрьской революции'.⁴¹ In 1923 Zazubrin was secretary, later editor, of the Irkutsk-based literary journal *Sibirskie ogni*. Because of their strong

³⁸ Works on Zazubrin include N.P. Kozlov, *O romane V. Zazubrina 'Dva mira': Konspekt lektsii iz kursa istorii russkoi sovetskoi literatury* (Uzhgorod: Uzhgorodskoi gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1963), and Veniamin Borovets' 'novelized' biography *Zazubrinskie kostry: Povest'* (Krasnoarsk: Krasnoarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 2001). "Shchepka" has been translated into English by Graham Roberts. See Oleg Chukhontsev, ed., *Dissonant Voices: The New Russian Fiction* (London: Harvill, 1991), pp. 1-70.

³⁹ Donna Heiland, *Gothic and Gender: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 41.

⁴⁰ Heiland, pp. 36-7.

⁴¹ Kozlov, *O romane V. Zazubrina 'Dva mira'*, p. 4.

criticism of the internal workings of the Soviet state, both *Shchepka* and *Blednaia pravda*, a similarly themed novella written in the same year, were rejected for publication by *Sibirskie ogni* and *Krasnaia nov'*, among other journals.

Shchepka opens with its hero in a position of moral responsibility. As a senior Cheka officer, Srubov is responsible for compiling reports on suspects and for supervising the execution of traitors. The first scenes harrowingly portray a Cheka execution squad at work in the cellars under the police building. Afterwards, the Cheka load the still-bleeding corpses of their victims into carts and bury them at a secret location. Srubov controls his emotions during the executions by forcing himself to compare the victims to the pastry figures his mother used to bake: 'человек--тесто, жаворонок из теста'.⁴² However, even atrocities must conform to regulations. He disciplines an officer who attempts to rape a female suspect with the reprimand: "Нет, не все позволено. Позволено то, что позволено".⁴³

Srubov is firmly committed to the Revolution, which he secretly anthropomorphizes as a "баба беременная, русская широкозадая, в рваной, заплатанной, грязной, вшивой холщовой рубашке. И я люблю Ее такую, какая Она есть, подлинную, живую, не выдуманную".⁴⁴ He loves the Revolution with a greater passion than he feels for any human being. So that the Revolution can bear her child – the future socialist utopia – Srubov will order as many murders as necessary. In fact, Srubov visualizes his relationship with 'Her' – as he thinks of the Revolution – in sexual terms. One incident in the Cheka cellars illustrates this. Srubov's men hesitate to shoot a beautiful blonde, blue-eyed woman who begs for her life. Srubov is also tempted to spare her, but, after seeing a second vision of 'Her', shoots the blonde himself:

Но Та, которую любил Срубов, которой сулил, была здесь же. (Хотя, конечно, какое бы то ни было противопоставление, сравнение Ее с синеглазой немыслимо, абсурдно.)⁴⁵

One Russian critic notes the similarity between Srubov's 'She' and the witch/virgin in Gogol's *Vii*: 'ведьма лохматая, полногрудая, широкозадая'.⁴⁶ Both women are

⁴² Vladimir Zazubrin, *Shchepka* (1923), in *Povesti vremennykh let 1917-1940*, ed. by S. Semikhina (Ekaterinburg: U-Faktoriia, 2005), pp. 193-258 (p. 202).

⁴³ Zazubrin, p. 240.

⁴⁴ Zazubrin, p. 214.

⁴⁵ Zazubrin, p. 209.

simultaneously fecund temptresses and supernatural crones. Part *rusalka*, part witch, ‘She’ rejects lovers who are no longer useful:

Перед ним встала Она — любовница великая и жадная. Ей отдал лучшие годы жизни. Больше — жизнь целиком. Все взяла — душу, кровь и силы. И нищего, обобранного отшвырнула. Ей, ненасытной, нравятся только молодые, здоровые, полнокровные. Лимон выжатый не нужен более.⁴⁷

‘She’ increasingly resembles Matilda in *The Monk*. Both women are passionate lovers who insidiously lead their paramours into crimes that estrange them from humanity. Despite Srubov’s love for the Revolution, he increasingly imagines ‘Her’ as a blood-spattered monster. As Pankov observes, ‘Центральный символ повести вдруг обнаруживает черты оборотня’.⁴⁸ Similarly, one critic of *The Monk* comments that ‘Matilda is such a frightening creature that she cannot be female, cannot even be male, but must be relegated to the world of demons’.⁴⁹ As Srubov’s perception of ‘Her’ alters from adoration to horror, his conception of the Revolution obviates individuality or sentimentality.

Srubov’s accommodation with horror necessitates detachment from reality. He experiences visions and nightmares. In his dreams, the Cheka executioners fell trees in a vast forest; he becomes afraid of the dark and of the cellar. Executions no longer make sense to him: the line between what is permitted and what is not has blurred. He is forced to take leave from the Cheka, examined by psychiatrists, and finally arrested. Srubov escapes before his interrogation begins and drowns himself in the river, after a final terrifying, hallucinatory vision in which former victims and mythological beings mingle:

Туман зловонный над рекой. Нависли крутые каменным берега. Русалка с синими глазами, покачиваясь, плывет навстречу. На золотистых волосах у нее красная коралловая диадема. Ведьма лохматая, полногрудая, широкозадая с ней рядом. Леший толстый в черной шерсти по воде, как по земле, идет. Из воды руки, ноги, головы почерневшие, полуразложившиеся, как

⁴⁶ A. Pankov, ‘Anatomiia terrora’, *Novyi mir*, 9 (September 1989), 248-252 (p. 252).

⁴⁷ Zazubrin, p. 254.

⁴⁸ Pankov, p. 252.

⁴⁹ Heiland, p. 39.

коряги, как пни, волосы женщин переплелись, как водоросли. Срубов бледнеет, глаза не закрываются от ужаса.⁵⁰

Yet, ironically, 'She' is independent of Srubov's individual survival. *Shchepka* concludes with Efim Solomin, a former member of Srubov's execution detail, giving a talk at a Party meeting. Solomin has fallen into precisely the same ethical pitfall as Srubov; he believes that there is a moral difference between 'убийство', which is forbidden, and 'казнь', which is the Cheka's business, 'дела мирская'. Meanwhile, the figure of the Revolution watches, 'окровавленная своей и вражьей кровью... оборванная, в серо-красных лохмотьях, вошивой грубой рубаше, крепко стояла Она босыми ногами на великой равнине, смотрела на мир зоркими гневными глазами'.⁵¹ The cycle of bloodshed continues: 'She' awaits a fresh tide of victims.

Many of the scenes in *Shchepka* are overtly Gothic-fantastic, including Srubov's nightmares, the terrifying female figure of the Revolution, the burial scenes, and Srubov's hallucination of a double. Even the structure of the plot has Gothic complexity: for example, Srubov's best friend from university arrested and executed his father for sedition – a crime that Srubov's revolutionary principles prevent him from acknowledging, much less avenging. Ironically for a novella that was banned on account of its realist descriptions of Cheka violence, Felix Dzerzhinskii reportedly dismissed it as the 'green' work of an untrained writer.⁵² The Gothic-fantastic aspects of *Shchepka* are all the more striking in view of Zazubrin's stated opposition to fantastic literature; he dismissed Alexei Tolstoi's allegorical science-fiction novel *Aelita* for example as 'белиберда водянистая'.⁵³

The seeds of *Shchepka*'s Gothic horror lie in an aspect of Zazubrin's writing that is both strength and liability: his commitment to truth-telling. His first novel, *Dva mira* (1921), a barely fictionalized description of White atrocities and Red heroism, met with considerable acclaim from critics and fellow writers alike. Courtesy of Lunacharskii, who called it 'чрезвычайно удавшимся',⁵⁴ it found its way to Lenin's desk. In a foreword to a later

⁵⁰ Zazubrin, p. 257.

⁵¹ Zazubrin, p. 258.

⁵² Borovets, *Zazubrinskie kostry*, p. 17.

⁵³ RGALI, fond 1785, op 1, ed. khr.119, letter from Zazubrin to F.A. Berezovskii, 27 March 1923.

⁵⁴ Letter from Lunacharskii to Zazubrin, cited by Vasilii Prushkin, 'O romane "Dva mira" i ego avtore', in Zazubrin, *Dva mira* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1968), pp. 3-8 (p. 4).

edition of the novel, Gorky quoted Lenin's remark that *Dva mira* was 'очень страшная, жуткая книга... но хорошая, нужная'.⁵⁵ It was widely considered to be Soviet Russia's first ideologically authentic novel.⁵⁶ Lidia Seifullina, Aleksandr Fadeev, Mikhail Sholokhov and other young writers expressed their intention to imitate Zazubrin's primitive but effective style - so-called 'rublenaia proza'.⁵⁷ However, within a decade, Zazubrin had been expelled from the Party and was struggling to find editorial work in Moscow. In April 1928 a critic in *Sovetskaia sibir* dismissed *Dva mira* as 'кровавая колбаса'; subsequent to this Zazubrin had been fired from the editorial board of *Sibirskie ogni* and excluded from the Siberian Union of Writers.⁵⁸ *Dva mira* was not reprinted between 1936 and 1956.⁵⁹ A novel that should have been the first entry in the canon of Soviet literature was systematically excluded from print. Zazubrin was eventually repressed in 1938.

Gothic is, as I have argued, a revelatory mode: truth will always out. Zazubrin made no secret of his own commitment to truth, even quoting Tolstoi's definition of art as truth to a young literary acquaintance.⁶⁰ At the beginning of his career, as the final scenes of *Dva mira* illustrate, Zazubrin genuinely believed that the establishment of socialism necessitated the extirpation of the bourgeois and aristocracy. Later, he evolved a metaphorical image of man as a 'щепка' in the bonfire of the revolution to illustrate his argument that individuals must suffer for universal good. This metaphor appears in *Shchepka* as well as *Blednaia pravda*, the story of a loyal Communist official tried and executed on a false charge of collaboration with corrupt NEP operators. Miscarriages of justice, the sacrifice of individuals, Zazubrin attempted to argue, are an inevitable part of the intoxicating, annihilating blaze of revolutionary transcendence.

The Gothic mode swiftly exposes this argument as fallacy. Zazubrin endlessly rewrote *Shchepka* without succeeding in creating a version that was both ideologically compatible

⁵⁵ Cited by Maksim Gorky, in his 'Predislovie' to the 1928 edition of *Dva mira* (Moscow: [n.pub.], 1928), p. 1.

⁵⁶ See Trushkin, 'O romane "Dva mira" i ego avtore', in Vladimir Zazubrin, *Dva mira* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1968), pp. 3-8 (p. 3), and Kozlov, p. 9.

⁵⁷ See Kozlov, p. 27 and Trushkin, p. 4.

⁵⁸ Borovets, p. 18.

⁵⁹ Kozlov, p. 3. This was in spite of the fact that *Dva mira* went through ten editions between 1921 and 1936.

⁶⁰ Efim Nikolaevich Permitin, "Pervoe знакомstvo s V. Ia. Zazubrinym", RGALI, fond 3140, opis' 1, delo 41, p. 66.

and truthful.⁶¹ “Щепку” свою я безусловно буду расширять, перерабатывать... [...] Надеюсь, вы верите, что я искренно хотел написать вещь революционную, полезную революции. Если не вышло, так не от злого умысла’.⁶² Zazubrin failed to recognize that his determination to write the truth – while refusing to admit it – inevitably involved his novella in the matrix of Gothic plot. Srubov and *The Monk*’s Ambrosio are both well-meaning intellectuals seduced by supernatural forces – for Srubov, the Revolutionary ideal; for Ambrosio, the female demon Matilda. Both commit murder to achieve their ends. Srubov’s motives are self-sacrificing, whereas Ambrosio’s are selfish. However, at the end of each story both men are abandoned by their supernatural protectors, forced to acknowledge the human destruction they have caused, and finally destroyed.

Shchepka ultimately belongs to a category of early Soviet fiction that I am tempted to call ‘Cheka Gothic’, including Ilia Ehrenburg’s *Zhizn’ i smert’ Nikolaia Kurbova* (1923), Mikhail Slonimskii’s “Mashina Emery” (1924), Aleksandr Tarasov-Rodionov’s *Shokolad* (1922) and Zazubrin’s own *Blednaia pravda* (1923), in which so-called heroes of the revolution discover their own inner weaknesses, regrets and compulsions. They are destroyed by their own crimes or – often, ironically – are willingly sacrificed by their peers to hide an overall weakness in the system of Cheka justice. All realize too late that the price of utopia is an ‘отказ от человеческих чувств’.⁶³

3. Blood money: the Soviet vampire

Few supernatural tropes have been as widely appropriated – and misappropriated – as the figure of the vampire. The original of the modern vampire legend, Bram Stoker’s Count Dracula, was a sadistic Transylvanian aristocrat, as avaricious for property as for blood (he hires his first victim, the estate agent Harker, in order to purchase several houses in England). Although Count Dracula became the paradigmatic Western European portrait of her uncanny Eastern Other,⁶⁴ he did not remain an exclusively Western icon. Stoker’s novel, available in

⁶¹ See Kozlov, p. 6 and Borovets, p. 17.

⁶² RGALI, fond 1785, op 1, ed. khr.119, letter from Zazubrin to F.A. Berezovskii, 27 March 1923, pp. 1-2.

⁶³ Leonid Geller, *Vseennaya za predelom dogmy: razmyshleniya o sovetskoi fantastike* (London: Overseas Publications Interchange Ltd, 1985), p. 66.

⁶⁴ In *Bram Stoker and Russophobia: Evidence of the British Fear of Russia in Dracula and The Lady of the Shroud* (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland, 2006), Jimmie E. Cain argues that Stoker’s *Dracula* acknowledged Britain’s anxieties, in the wake of the Crimean War, over Russia’s military threat to her Indian colonies. By personifying Russian might in Count Dracula, the archetypal ‘primitive Eastern invader’, and then

translation from 1902, stimulated a Russian re-discovery and re-appropriation of the trope as both fictional horror and polemical weapon.⁶⁵ The folkloric *upyr* was regenerated into a monster with contemporary relevance for *fin-de-siècle* Russia.⁶⁶ Aleksandr Blok, who was powerfully influenced by the 1902 translation of Stoker's *Dracula* (which he read in 1908),⁶⁷ immediately borrowed the vampire image to attack the tsarist regime (and, in particular, Konstantin Pobedonostsev, the Procurator of the Holy Synod) in his August 1908 essay "Solntse nad Rossiei".⁶⁸ This article portrays Pobedonostsev as a blood-glutted vampire brooding over the nation, an image which was eagerly perpetuated by caricaturists.⁶⁹ In Blok's poems and essays, the vampire is incarnated as 'the embodiment of and moving spirit behind political reaction'.⁷⁰

Both Karl Marx and the twentieth-century literary critic Franco Moretti perpetuated the image of vampire as the ultimate oligarch, an accretive capitalist preying on the lives and possessions of ordinary workers.⁷¹ The vampire's status as a medieval anachronism in the

defeating him, Stoker's novel 'performs the salubrious feat of ameliorating the stain on England's reputation eventuating from her problematic incursion against Russia in the Crimean War' (p. 2). Cain considers *Dracula* to be a successful exercise in what she calls 'Imperial Gothic' fiction (p. 10).

⁶⁵ A measure of the popularity of the vampire legend in fiction was the 1912 appearance of various parodies of *Dracula*, including the novel *Vampyr* issued under the pseudonym Baron Ol'shevri, and a short story *Vampyr* by S. Ia. Stechkin (writing as Sergei Solomin). See M.P. Odesskii, 'Mif o vampire i russkaia sotsial-demokratiia', in *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 3 (1995), 77-91 (p. 84).

⁶⁶ Odesskii goes even further in his estimate of the vampire's symbolic relevance for Russia, stating: 'На исходе XIX столетия самым популярным "эзотерическим героем" стал Дракула, позже превратившийся в своего рода символ XX века, и осмысление его деяний в фольклоре и литературе существенно повлияло на развитие русской социал-демократической доктрины'. See Odesskii, p. 77.

⁶⁷ Henryk Baran, 'Some Reminiscences in Blok: Vampirism and its Antecedents', in *Aleksandr Blok Centennial Conference*, ed. by Walter N. Vickery and Bogdan B. Sagatov (Columbus, OH: Slavica, 1984), pp. 43-61 (p. 46).

⁶⁸ Blok confesses the direct influence of Stoker's novel on his article in a letter written to E.P. Ivanov, cited by Odesskii, p. 84. See also Baran, p. 49.

⁶⁹ 'Solntse nad Rossiei', published to celebrate Lev Tolstoi's eightieth birthday, contrasts Tolstoi's humanitarianism with the inhuman conservatism of the 'старый упырь' Pobedonostsev, under whose 'чудовищная тень' of political reaction Blok claims all Russia has fallen (p. 301). See Aleksandr Blok, 'Solntse nad Rossiei' in *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. by V.N. Orlov and others, 8 vols (Moscow and Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1960-3), V (1962), pp. 301-303.

⁷⁰ Baran, p. 51.

⁷¹ More precisely, Moretti interprets the vampire as a symbol for inanimate capital, rather than for individual capitalists. See Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken For Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms*, trans. by Susan Fischer and others (London: NLB, 1983), esp. pp. 90-98.

modern world appealed to Marx's desire to expose the hypocrisy of capitalism: 'Such ghoulish myths are, again, no mere stylistic flourish but a consistent ironic reversal of the bourgeoisie's own myth'.⁷² Thus, the vampire myth conveniently illustrated Marx's argument that the supposedly modern, transparent economic system concealed a maze of exploitation and maltreatment. Vampires conveniently troped the parasitism of capitalists: blood became a signifier for money.

Subsequent interpretations of the vampire myth have been more varied.⁷³ Psychoanalytic discourse identifies both the vampire and its supernatural cousin, the werewolf, as symbols of aberrant or threatening sexuality. The vampire has exchanged its association with aristocrats and other wealthy elites for the status of a permanent social outsider, even (occasionally) an underdog. Nina Auerbach contends that vampires are symbols of power, whether financial or political, and that they change their cultural affiliations over time.⁷⁴ In essence, they represent forbidden types of power, such as oligarchy in an age of free elections, or mob rule in an era of structured government: 'In both England and America, vampires oscillate between aristocracy and democracy, at times taking command with elitist aplomb, at times embodying the predatory desires of the populace at large'.⁷⁵ Rather than a fixed metaphor, vampires are tropes of political and existential trauma: 'shadows, not symbols, of crises'.⁷⁶

Blok, Gorky, Nikolai Ognev and Aleksandr Bogdanov all used vampire imagery in their early twentieth-century prose. However, the only explicit vampire in Stalinist fiction is *Master i Margarita*'s Gella.

3.i. 'Красавица Гелла'⁷⁷

⁷² Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, p. 125.

⁷³ For more on modern cultural interpretations of vampires, see Andrew Smith, *Gothic Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 115-117, and Frank Grady, 'Vampire Culture', in *Monster Theory*, ed. by J.J. Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 225-241.

⁷⁴ 'Ghosts, werewolves and manufactured monsters are relatively changeless, more aligned with eternity than with time; vampires blend into the changing cultures they inhabit... Vampires go where power is', Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, p. 6. Thus vampires have moved from British to American horror fiction over the last century.

⁷⁵ Auerbach, p. 7.

⁷⁶ Auerbach, p. 117.

⁷⁷ Bulgakov, *MM*, p. 257.

““Миша забыл Геллу!”” was, reportedly, the shocked response of Bulgakov’s widow Elena Sergeevna Bulgakova, when asked why Gella the vampire is missing from Woland’s retinue in the closing scene of *Master i Margarita*.⁷⁸ Strangely enough, Bulgakov never refers to the character of Gella as a vampire within the novel. Instead, she is a ‘нагая ведьма’, the most junior member of the diabolic coterie, a red-haired beauty whose ‘ледяной поцелуй превращает в вампира’⁷⁹ any man who receives her attentions – in this case, the bad-tempered theatre manager Varenuvka. Yet it is Gella’s almost overlooked vampirism, and not her secondary identity as a witch, which determines her role in the novel and her absence from the final scene with Woland.

As with the majority of the characters in *Master i Margarita*, there is debate over whom Gella is intended to represent. Arguing from the premise that Woland is Stalin, Donald Piper calls Gella a ‘fairly recognizable’ portrait of Polina Zhemchuzhina (wife of Viacheslav Molotov), since the latter ran her own perfume and fashion business (corresponding with Gella’s role as a salesgirl in Woland’s Variety Theatre performance) and occasionally acted as hostess for Stalin’s parties.⁸⁰ One critic suggests Olga Sergeevna Bokhsanskaya, Bulgakov’s sister-in-law and the typist of the final version of *Master i Margarita*, a politically conservative woman who frustrated the writer at least as much as she helped him.⁸¹ The same writer proposes V.I. Nemirovich-Danchenko, director of the Moscow Arts Theatre and a long-time enemy of Bulgakov, as the model for Varenuvka.⁸² However, neither interpretation fully explains why Gella remains the ‘единственный персонаж из свиты сатаны, для пощады которого у Булгакова просто не поднялась рука’.⁸³

⁷⁸ Cited by Boris Sokolov in *Mikhail Bulgakov: Zagadki tvorchestva* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2008), p. 440. E.S. Bulgakova was in conversation with the Soviet critic V. Lakshin.

⁷⁹ Irina Belobrovtsseva and Svetlana Kul’ius, *Roman M. Bulgakova Master i Margarita: Kommentarii* (Moscow: Knizhnyi Klub 36.6, 2007), p. 334.

⁸⁰ Piper, p. 144. For a description of Polina Molotova’s friendship with Stalin’s wife Nadezhda Allilueva, her relationship with Stalin and her arrest, exile and eventual pardon, see Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Orion, 2004).

⁸¹ A.N. Barkov, *Roman Mikhaila Bulgakova “Master i Margarita”: al’ternativnoe prochtenie* (Kharkov: Folio, 2006), pp. 227-236.

⁸² Barkov, pp. 221-226.

⁸³ Barkov, p. 229.

Since Gella *does* appear among Woland's retinue in the 1937 manuscript version of *Master i Margarita*, we must conclude that her omission from the final draft a year later was a premeditated decision.⁸⁴ In the penultimate draft, Gella appears last in the description of Woland's suite as they depart:

Геллу ночь закутала в плащ так, что ничего не было видно, кроме белой кисти, державшей повод. Гелла летела, как ночь, улетающая в ночь.⁸⁵

This passage was omitted in the final draft. Nor is this the only point in the novel where Gella's exit is overlooked. In Chapter 12, 'Chernaia magiia i ee razoblacheniiia', Gella acts as hostess for Woland's bazaar of luxury clothing, perfume and accessories in the Variety Theatre:

Черт знает откуда взявшаяся рыжая девица в вечернем черном туалете, всем хорошая девица, кабы не портил ее причудливый шрам на шее, заулыбалась у витрин хозяйской улыбкой.⁸⁶

She enhances the exotic cachet of Woland's goods by speaking French to the audience – and so expressively that everyone understands her, 'даже те из них, что не знали ни одного французского слова'.⁸⁷ Nonetheless, when the show is over, Gella is ignored, although the departures of Woland, Fagot and Begemot are separately described.

Gella is clearly the least important member of Woland's troupe; her role is almost exclusively ancillary. Woland introduces her to Margarita thus: 'служанку мою Геллу рекомендую. Расторопна, понятлива, и нет такой услуги, которую она не сумела бы оказать.'⁸⁸ Gella acts as Woland's maid, as his masseuse, and even types at his dictation (the role that led Barkov to claim Bulgakov's typist Olga Bokshanskaia as the inspiration for Gella). Gella's role as a witch is most clearly illustrated by her preparation of an unguent 'горячая, как

⁸⁴ I am indebted to K. Atarova and G. Lesskis, *Putevoditel' po romanu Mikhaila Bulgakova Master i Margarita* (Moscow: Raduga, 2007) for this opinion. As they note, 'Очевидно, дело было не в забывчивости, а в сознательно принятом решении, придающем большую стройность и значительность финальной сцене' (p. 96).

⁸⁵ Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, 1937 draft, in *Moi bednyi, bednyi Master*, ed. by Viktor Losev (Moscow: Vagrius, 2006), pp. 365-644 (p. 642).

⁸⁶ Bulgakov, *MM*, pp. 131-2.

⁸⁷ Bulgakov, *MM*, p. 133.

⁸⁸ Bulgakov, *MM*, p. 257.

лава' in a cauldron before rubbing it on Woland's injured leg.⁸⁹ Margarita supplants her in this role by volunteering to anoint Woland's leg herself. By the end of the book, Margarita has completely supplanted Gella as a witch and as a member of Woland's suite, riding a broomstick, hostessing at the ball and replacing Gella as 'the only feminine figure in the final configuration of timeless characters'.⁹⁰ The only role in which Margarita does not replace Gella is that of vampire.

We can possibly explain Gella's exclusion by looking at the treatment of her fellow vampire, the theatre manager Varenuška. In a fragmentary passage from an early draft, *Velikii kantsler*, the Varenuška character (then Vnuchata) is the only vampire; there is no Gella. Vnuchata gratefully accepts Woland's offer of the title 'центурион вампиров' as a reward for his 'административный опыт'.⁹¹ He over-enthusiastically fulfils his new role:

‘Да-с, а курьершу все-таки грызть не следовало’, назидательно ответил хозяин [the Woland character]. ‘Виноват’, сказал Внучата’.⁹²

In the final *Master i Margarita*, Gella is the dominant vampire; Varenuška is a humbled and reluctant figure. He begs Woland: ‘Отпустите обратно. Не могу быть вампиром. Ведь я тогда Римского едва насмерть с Геллой не уходил! А я не кровожадный...’⁹³ Varenuška is pardoned on condition that he reforms his telephone etiquette. Later he tries to pass off his entire undead interlude as a drinking spree, but does reform his telephone manner dramatically. In *Velikii kantsler*, vampirism is a promotion (however temporary) into Woland's glamorous retinue; by *Master i Margarita*, it has become a form of punishment.

As stated above, vampirism as a political metaphor is generally negative. Similarly, in fiction, the vampire almost always represents irredeemable evil. The female vampire plays a special role within the iconography of the blood-drinker. She represents uncontrollable female sexuality, whether aberrant (as in the lesbianism of J. Sheridan Le Fanu's eponymous “Carmilla” (1872)) or simply excessive (the lustful vampiresses in Stoker's *Dracula*). The

⁸⁹ Bulgakov, *MM*, p. 259.

⁹⁰ Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour, ‘The Uses of Witches in Fedin and Bulgakov’, in *Slavic Review*, 4: 33 (December 1974), 695-707 (p. 704).

⁹¹ Bulgakov, *Velikii kantsler*, in *Moi bednyi, bednyi Master*, pp. 79-205 (p. 173).

⁹² Bulgakov, *Velikii kantsler*, p. 173.

⁹³ Bulgakov, *MM*, p. 292.

female vampire is ‘erotic primal nature made flesh... the eternal animal in woman’.⁹⁴ Her bloodlust is a thin disguise for promiscuity: the vampire’s kiss is metonymous for sexual aggression. As ‘licensed vehicles of intimacy’, women were the obvious choice to characterize the trope of vampirism as libertinism.⁹⁵ As a result, in *fin-de-siècle* fiction, female vampires were stigmatized as ‘the personification of everything negative that linked sex, ownership and money... the eternal polyandrous prostitute’.⁹⁶ Since the vampire’s indiscriminating lust propagates more corpses, their sexuality is always negative. The only resolution of the vampire’s desire lay in death: if their bodies were ritually killed (with a stake), their souls were released and could ascend to heaven. Bulgakov would have been familiar with this characterization from A.K. Tolstoi’s short story “Sem’ia vurdalaka” (1839) and Stoker’s *Dracula*, both of which feature libidinous and deadly female vampires.⁹⁷

Gella’s appearance and actions demonstrate Bulgakov’s familiarity with vampire symbolism in fiction. He repeatedly mentions the scar (apparently of a noose) on Gella’s neck (in folk legend, suicides return as vampires). Varenuška tries to conceal a similar mark on his neck (presumably a bite-mark) under a scarf and, during his conversation with Rimskii, continually sucks what the reader realizes are his new, elongated vampire fangs.⁹⁸ Gella and Varenuška are able to levitate and to modify their bodies, just as Dracula appears and disappears in different physical shapes. Like him, they are unable to hunt prey by daylight (hence Rimskii’s salvation by cock-crow).

The secret to Gella’s apparent exclusion lies, I contend, in the literary stereotype of the female vampire. To Bulgakov, this figure expressed disruptive, damaging sensuality. Her lust is contagious, infecting others with her unnatural proclivities. Her body, although beautiful, is also a ‘site of abjection and danger’.⁹⁹ However Margarita, as a white witch, incarnates

⁹⁴ Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 341-342.

⁹⁵ Auerbach, p. 60.

⁹⁶ Dijkstra, p. 351.

⁹⁷ Bulgakov’s library included a complete set of A.K. Tolstoi’s works. See A. Konchakovskii, *Biblioteka Mikhaila Bulgakova. Rekonstruktsiia* (Kiev: Muzei istorii goroda Kiev: Literaturno-medmorial’nyi muzei M.A. Bulgakova, 1997), p. 96.

⁹⁸ Bulgakov, *MM*, p. 160.

⁹⁹ Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, p. 118.

healing feminine sexuality.¹⁰⁰ Thus Margarita and Gella the vampire incarnate opposing aspects of female sexuality, one positive, one negative. Margarita *does* replace Gella in her role as a vampire, substituting for nihilistic lust (epitomized by vampirism) unselfish love. Gella's presence in Woland's retinue is henceforth superfluous. She is possibly absent from the final scene because, no longer animated by Woland's spells, her corpse has returned to its grave.¹⁰¹ This is neither forgetful nor callous of Bulgakov: death, by liberating the vampire's soul from its endless thirst for blood, is Gella's own version of the 'peace' received by the Master and Margarita. Her absence from the final scene with Woland's 'свят' is fully justified by this interpretation; she may have already fulfilled her penance and preceded them to paradise.

4. Émigré ghosts

'Spectres arise... on the site of vanished cultural territory'.¹⁰²

The Soviet state violently invented itself on the site of Tsarist Russia, disavowing its own recent history and rejecting previous values. Russia's immediate past thus became a site of 'vanished cultural territory'. This act of cultural self-abnegation might be expected to precipitate many spectres. As Jacques Derrida warned, haunting is an historical process.¹⁰³ However, ghosts in Soviet fiction are extremely rare. Chaianov's short story "Iulia, ili Vstrechi pod Novodevich'im" (1928) is one of only two explicit phantoms in Soviet literature between 1920 and 1940. The second is Krapilin in Bulgakov's play *Beg* (1926-8), discussed below. The majority of literary ghosts engendered by the 1917 Revolution appeared in the prose of émigré writers living outside the boundaries of the Soviet Union, including Georgii

¹⁰⁰ See Beaujour, pp. 695-707, for discussion of Margarita as an archetype of the 'good witch'.

¹⁰¹ Boris Sokolov, *Entsiklopediia Bulgakovskaia* (Moskva: LOKID-MIF, 1996), p. 171.

¹⁰² David Punter, *Gothic Pathologies: The Text, The Body and The Law* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998), p. 1. Punter here draws an analogy between spectrality and fiction, esp. Chapter 1, 'Gothic Origins: The Haunting of The Text', pp. 1-19. This argument is echoed by Peter Buse and Andrew Stott in 'Introduction: A Future for Haunting,' in *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*, ed. by Buse and Stott (London: Macmillan Press, 1999), pp. 1-21.

¹⁰³ See Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), p. 3.

Peskov and Vladimir Nabokov.¹⁰⁴ For such writers, the entirety of continental Russia constituted a lost cultural zone, which they repopulated with phantoms.

The inclusion of émigré texts from the 1920s in this analysis of Soviet literature is not inappropriate. Until the mid-1920s, there was no pronounced cultural divergence between émigré letters and writing produced within continental Russia: only after 1924 did disparate pro- and anti-Soviet cultures emerge among the émigré community.¹⁰⁵ The coherence of Soviet literature as a discrete genre was not recognized until the late 1920s:¹⁰⁶ several major Soviet writers, including Aleksei Tolstoi and Maksim Gorky, remained abroad until relatively late.¹⁰⁷ Chaianov's "Iulia", although set in Moscow, was actually written in Berlin in 1927. Bulgakov's play *Beg*, composed when the writer was still seeking to emigrate, portrays the lives of émigrés in Constantinople in the early 1920s. The two émigré novels discussed in this section, Pavel Perov's *Bratstvo Viia* (1925) and Pavel Nikolaevich Krasnov's *Za chertopolokhom* (1922) are therefore a valid part of the Russian literary response to the Bolshevik takeover. Although they were not composed on Soviet territory (and indeed could not have been published there), they respond to the reality of Soviet Russia. Both novels were published in Berlin, in the mid-1920s the 'столица двух литератур – советской и эмигрантской'.¹⁰⁸

Internationally, ghosts are a quintessential trope of émigré recollections. In the case of Russian émigrés, fictional ghosts tended to be politically animated. Gaito Gazdanov, a Russian-Ossetian émigré living in France, published several novels combining the supernatural with political themes. His *Prizrak Aleksandra Vol'fa* (1947) expresses

¹⁰⁴ Nabokov created many supernatural figures: see W.W. Rowe's *Nabokov's Spectral Imagination* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1981). Georgii Peskov, the pen-name of Elena Deisha, was a less well-known émigré writer who published several ghost story collections between 1930 and 1968, most of which are set in pre-1917 Russia. See Margaret Dalton, 'The Art of Georgij Peskov', in *Mnemozina*, ed. by J.T. Beer and N.W. Ingham (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1974), pp. 78-87, for more on Peskov's work.

¹⁰⁵ Leonid Livak dates the polarization of the émigré community to the 1930s (see Livak, *How It Was Done In Paris: Russian Émigré Literature and French Modernism* (London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), p. 10) while Ol'ga Demidova fixes on 1924, shortly after the publication of Zinaida Gippius' anti-Bolshevik essay 'Polet v Evropu' in the émigré journal *Sovremennye zapiski*. See Ol'ga Demidova, *Metamorfozy v izgnanii: literaturnyi byt russkogo zarubezh'ia* (St Petersburg: Giperion, 2003), pp. 144-161.

¹⁰⁶ Demidova, pp. 144-145.

¹⁰⁷ Tolstoi returned to Russia from France in 1923; Gorky did not finally settle in Moscow until 1932.

¹⁰⁸ Demidova, p. 146.

Gazdanov's Gothic obsession with return. The narrator, a Russian émigré living in Paris, obsessively revisits 'единственное убийство, которое я совершил'¹⁰⁹ – his shooting, in self-defence, of another man during the White Army's retreat from Russia. Twenty years later, the two men meet unexpectedly in Paris and events force the narrator, against his will, to re-enact the murder. The title ghost is in fact a living man, whose death is required not only by Gazdanov's narrative circularity but as a condition of the narrator's exorcism. Involuntary return to one's origins, or compulsory expiation of a past crime, are Gothic topoi that recur in the two novels and one play discussed below. In all three texts (if the earlier Bulgakov's play *Beg* is assumed to be authoritative), the hero or antihero is compelled to return to Russia to exorcise his ghosts. In Pavel Perov's *Bratstvo Viia* (1925), exorcism is literally required: the novel's phantoms must be destroyed before they are used to destroy the human race.

4.i. Pavel Perov: 'Мы возвращаемся непрерывно'

In 1916, the Russian psychiatrist Professor V.M. Bekhterev gave a speech at the Russian Psychoneurological Institute entitled "Bessmertie chelovecheskoi lichnosti kak nauchnaia problema".¹¹⁰ In this speech, Bekhterev claimed that:

все явления мира... могут и должны быть рассматриваемы как производные одной мировой энергии, в которой потенциально должны содержаться как все известные нам физические энергии, так равно и материальные формы их связанного состояния и, наконец, проявления человеческого духа.

Bekhterev proposed that human souls achieved a kind of immortality after death by dissolving into a vast resource of spiritual energy.¹¹¹ However, he expressed doubts that researchers would ever be able to investigate the mechanisms of this process. An unexpected result of Bekhterev's speech was Pavel Perov's adaptation of the idea of 'мировая энергия' for his novel attacking Bolshevik Russia, *Bratstvo Viia*. In this novel, a Communist conspiracy brings the dead back to life as ectoplasmic robots. Perov reinvents Bekhterev as

¹⁰⁹ Gaito Gazdanov, *Prizrak Aleksandra Vol'fa* (St Petersburg: Azbuka-Klassika, 2004), p. 29.

¹¹⁰ For the full text of this speech, see Vladimir Bekhterev, 'Bessmertie chelovecheskoi lichnosti kak nauchnaia problema', in *Biblioteka Maksima Moshkova* < <http://lib.ru/FILOSOF/BEHTEREV/bessmertie.txt> > [accessed September 3 2008].

¹¹¹ For an interpretation of Bekhterev's views, see Mikhail Agursky, 'An Occult Source of Socialist Realism: Gorky and Theories of Thought Transference', in *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, ed. by Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 247-272 (pp. 252-262).

the corrupt scientist Bakterev, ‘a collaborator of the Jewish conspirators who have brought about the Bolshevik Revolution’.¹¹² Perov, who had worked as a journalist in America before the Revolution, paints an unambiguously bleak portrait of Bolshevik Russia.¹¹³ Bolshevism forces living people ‘насильно сделать из людей то, чем они не хотят быть...’¹¹⁴ The Brotherhood similarly compels the dead. Another influence for Perov’s fantasy was the German occultist Baron Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, one of whose books Perov footnotes in the text of *Bratstvo Vii*.¹¹⁵

Not only are Perov’s Bolsheviks evil, atavistic Jews bent on world domination (equipped with portmanteau names like Slonim-Gorbunov), they also dabble in unclean spiritual experiments. Ever since the Civil War, Professor Bakterev has been summoning ‘dead souls’ from the universal reserve of spiritual energy and implanting them into ectoplasm extracted from live human subjects. The resultant creatures are called ‘mortomats’ and controlled by enormous electrical engines operated by the conspirators. The scheme is predicated on vaguely Gothic principles, that is, the return of dead ancestors’ energy from the distant past. As one conspirator explains, ‘Новых энергий нет... [...] Из недр земли мы выкапываем эти останки далекого прошлого... [...] На долю профессора Бактерева выпала честь открытия другой окаменелой формы энергии – энергии человеческих душ, скопившихся в атмосфере кругом нас...’.¹¹⁶

The conspiracy’s title, the Brotherhood of Vii, is an obvious nod to the terrifying folk demon in Gogol’s short story *Vii* (1835). In *Vii*, the superstitious hero is terrorized to death the manifestation of living corpses and numerous folk demons, including the eponymous Vii, in a country church. But in Perov’s novel, the rationalist Brotherhood preserves a casually

¹¹² Agursky, p. 260.

¹¹³ The philosophical grounds for Perov’s rejection of Communism are outlined in his later work. Perov claimed that Communism denied humans the possibility of psychological evolution and therefore stranded them in an ‘идеологический тупик’ (Perov, *Problemy filosofii XX veka* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1970), p. 19).

¹¹⁴ Pavel Perov, *Bratstvo Vii: fantasticheskii roman* (Berlin: Ekho, 1925), p. 69.

¹¹⁵ Perov references Schrenk-Notzing’s *Phenomena of Materialization: A Contribution to the Investigation of Mediumistic Teleplastics*, trans. by E.E. Fournier d’Albe (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1920). This is a record of Schrenk-Notzing’s experiments with two different mediums to investigate ‘teleplastic phenomena’, or ‘the production of forms and materials of organic or even inorganic matter’ (p. 13) (such as ectoplasm). His book was probably a source of the basic details Perov needed to describe ectoplasm-based phantoms.

¹¹⁶ Perov, *Bratstvo Vii*, p. 146-147.

materialistic attitude to the supernatural. When their deceased comrade returns from the dead to deliver a grisly warning, “Мы возвращаемся непрерывно, но не тем путем, которым вы заставляете нас... [...] Прекратить ваши опыты и вернуть смерти все то, что вы от нея отняли”, the message is casually rebutted: “нам нужны мортوماتы, чтобы работать для нас, а не давать нам советы”.¹¹⁷

Any opponent of Bolshevism can potentially become a mindless footsoldier of Soviet power, or ‘mortomat’, his thoughts and actions controlled by the Brotherhood. Their ultimate plan is to establish a global oligarchy, forcing both the dead and the living to become their slaves. Since the scheme is supported by highly placed Communists (Comrade Slonim-Gorbunov is described as ‘[один] из видных вожаков коммунистической партии, чей портрет не раз украшал страницы московских журналов’),¹¹⁸ it seems to have every chance of success. Professor Werner, a breakaway member of the Brotherhood, is already using mortomats to commit murders in New York. Terrifyingly, he converts the bodies of his victims into fresh mortomats. In Gothic narrative, anyone who misuses the supernatural will be punished by means of their original transgression. This Gothic truism is vindicated in *Bratstvo Viia*. The novel’s heroes – an Irish-American journalist, an émigré White officer with his dauntless Cossack orderly – are alerted to Werner’s activities in New York. Determined to trace the conspiracy, the trio travel to the Brotherhood’s hiding place in the Baltic forests. After a pitched battle with a phalanx of reanimated Roman soldiers, they destroy the Brotherhood’s machines. The liberated spirits rebel, precipitating an ectoplasm explosion. Professor Bakterev repents his collaboration with the Brotherhood and commits suicide. The Brotherhood’s secrets are lost, and the spirits animating the mortomats return to the ether from whence they came.

Bratstvo Viia is Pavel Perov’s wish-fulfilment fantasy. The Brotherhood’s ignominious defeat anticipates the defeat Perov longed to see inflicted upon Communist Russia. On a deeper level, Perov’s mortomat is an interesting materialization of Derrida’s concept of the phantom as a thing neither properly alive nor dead: it is a ‘странное существо, фантастическое сочетание живого и мертвого [sic], обладающее сверхъестественною

¹¹⁷ Perov, *Bratstvo Viia*, p. 204.

¹¹⁸ Perov, *Bratstvo Viia*, p. 198.

способностью видеть сразу по обе стороны этой стены'.¹¹⁹ The phantom cannot be defined: it resists classification. Unlike the living, it cannot be suborned – except through brute force. Perov's ultimately rebellious phantoms symbolize the triumph of individual will over collective unanimity. If, as one of the characters in *Bratstvo Viia* claims, 'опаснейший враг коммунистов – личность',¹²⁰ spectres man the final barricade against Communism. The phantom cannot be homogenized within any political system. On an interpretative level of which Perov himself may have been unaware, the book is a trope of the émigré experience. The ghosts of *Bratstvo Viia* claim that they 'возвращаются непрерывно' to the world of the living. Émigrés, like ghosts, return constantly – even if only in spirit – to a homeland they can never re-inhabit.

4.ii. Ataman Krasnov: 'волшебное слово'

Pavel Nikolaevich Krasnov's utopian novel *Za chertopolokhom* (1922) also enacts émigrés' return to an irretrievably altered homeland. Krasnov's twin careers – literary and military – were bound up with returns to Russia, which proved ultimately fatal. A charismatic military commander, Krasnov was named Ataman of the Don Cossacks in 1918. He spent the decades between the wars peregrinating through Europe, making a respectable living from his many novels. Tragically, believing that Hitler's invasion of Russia would finally destroy Communism, Krasnov accepted the position of General of the Cossack division of the Wehrmacht in 1943. He surrendered in 1945 and was eventually hanged as a traitor in Lefortovo prison in 1947.

Krasnov began writing *Za chertopolokhom* at an early stage of the Civil War in parallel to his monumental epic novel *Ot dvuglavogo orla k krasnomu знамени* (1921).¹²¹ In 1946, a captured Krasnov would admit to his interrogators that in the latter novel, "“Я возводил клевету на вождя революция Ленина и советского писателя Горького”".¹²² Krasnov could certainly not have disguised or denied the anti-Bolshevik stance of *Za chertopolokhom*. The book's historical premise is the total failure of the Revolution and the subsequent

¹¹⁹ Perov, *Bratstvo Viia*, p. 52. Derrida calls the ghost or spectre 'the carnal apparition of the spirit, its phenomenal body, its fallen and guilty body' (*Specters of Marx*, p. 170).

¹²⁰ Perov, *Bratstvo Viia*, p. 69.

¹²¹ B. Galenin, 'Zhizn', tvorchestvo, smert' i bessmertie: biographicheskoe predislovie' in P. N. Krasnov, *Za chertopolokhom: roman – fentezi* (Moscow: Fabor-XXI, 2002), pp. 5-57 (p. 52).

¹²² Aleksandr Smirnov, *Ataman Krasnov* (St Petersburg: AST, 2003), p. 198.

devastation of the Russian population by famine, disease and strife. Forty years after 1917, maps of the world show Russia as a black, uninhabited blot. The nation's borders are closed by an impenetrable hedge of tall thistles. Other European nations assume that only desolation lies 'beyond the thistle'.

A young artist called Peter Korenev, born to Russian émigrés in Berlin, sees a strange and wonderful apparition one night in Potsdam. A beautiful dark-haired girl in a white robe floats into view seated on a cloud, then disappears, leaving Korenev in a state of transcendent joy and considerable confusion.

Радость не покидала его. "Почему радость?" подумал Корнев, и сам себе ответил: "Это Россия... Я увидел Россию".¹²³

After a second vision, in which the phantom calls him by the Russian version of his first name, Peter becomes convinced:

О! все равно кто бы ни была она – призрак, греза, хотя сама смерть, он знал, что она России, что она из России. Он спросит ее – как там и что, она скажет ему волшебное слово, скажет ему, что и у него есть Родина...¹²⁴

Finally, a mysterious note appears on the table of his room in feminine handwriting, with the words, "“Я жду”".¹²⁵ Peter hesitates no longer. With the help of a Slavophilic professor, Peter's German girlfriend, Elsa, and several nostalgic second-generation émigrés, he leads an expedition 'beyond the thistle'. Here an enormous surprise awaits them. Like Chaianov's *Puteshestvie moego brata Alekseia v stranu krest'ianskoi utopii*, Russia has become a utopia of a unique kind – a retropia, or return to the past.¹²⁶

During the Bolshevik revolution, the fifteen-year-old Romanov heir took refuge in northern China, where Tibetan mystics taught him supernatural powers. After the revolutionary chaos had subsided, he returned to Russia with loyal regiments and established a benign autocracy, founded on the nineteenth-century authoritarian values of Orthodoxy, state and *narodnost'*.

¹²³ Pavel Nikolaievich Krasnov, *Za chertopolokhom: fantasticheskii roman* (Berlin: O. Diakov, 1922), p. 13.

¹²⁴ Krasnov, p. 16.

¹²⁵ Krasnov, p. 19.

¹²⁶ I owe the concept of 'retropia' to A.N. Shushpanov's article 'A.V. Chaianov i utopia 1920-x godov: problema zhanra' in *Potaennaia literatura: issledovaniia i materialy (Prilozhenie k vypusku 2)*, ed. by V.N. Makogoniuk (Ivanovo: Ivanovskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2000), pp. 74-80 (p. 77).

Russia became a feudal paradise with an agricultural economy. Forgotten by the rest of the world, the nation was free to follow her own path. The only major technical innovations were in broadcasting (used for propaganda), transport (by aeroplane), and thought-reading (used by courts to convict criminals). The arrival of Korenev's group from Western Europe stimulates Russia's re-emergence as a great nation. By resuming contact with the outside world, Russia can once again influence current events and perhaps inspire other nations to become benevolent autocracies. Korenev's beautiful phantom is revealed as a living girl, Crown Princess Radost' Mikhailovna. She used Oriental mystic techniques to project her image into Berlin and lure him to Russia. Although they fall in love, the princess is forced to refuse him. Consecrated to her role as an unchangingly beautiful, virginal symbol of Russia, Radost' can never marry. In this sense, she really is a phantom: an untouchable 'living icon' epitomizing in one body Russia's traditional past and glorious future.¹²⁷

Like *Bratstvo Viia*, Krasnov's novel is 'a dream of the losers',¹²⁸ of those permanently exiled by the Revolution. It blatantly prefers the recreation of past culture to the Soviets' radical utopianism: even Korenev's surname implies the importance of roots. When Korenev and his companions return to their Russian homeland, expecting to find devastation, they discover that Russia as a nation has pre-empted their return. Russia has returned to its own idealized origins – an edenic state unsustainable in modern reality. In fact, as Krasnov's biographer notes, the tsarist retropia is very close to becoming a 'дьявольская пародия' of a dictatorship such as Stalin's Russia.¹²⁹ Krasnov himself certainly identified with the authoritarianism of his invented Russia. His favourite phrase was, reportedly, "Я – царский генерал".¹³⁰ Nor did the historical contradictions of *Za chertopolokhom* deter readers – it was the most popular of all Krasnov's novels.¹³¹ The Tsar-Emperor's strategies for enlightened autocracy – mind-

¹²⁷ Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 187.

¹²⁸ Stites, p. 187.

¹²⁹ Galenin, p. 56.

¹³⁰ Galenin, p. 48.

¹³¹ Galenin, p. 52. For a discussion of *Za chertopolokhom* and its influence on other émigré writers, especially Eduard Limonov, see Andrei Rogachevskii, *A Biographical and Critical Study of Russian Writer Eduard Limonov* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellon Press, 2003), Chapter 2, 'Les Liaisons Dangereuses: Eduard Limonov and Ataman Krasnov', pp. 53-72.

reading, thought projection, the ideological indoctrination of schoolchildren, strict censorship – oddly parallel the policies of totalitarian states.

The role of the phantom in *Za chertopolokhom* defines categorization. She symbolizes the Russian motherland – but of a phantasmatic retropia, rather than a real nation. Her image combines contradictory values: past and future, fertility and sterility, romance and celibacy. Korenev's joyful return to Russia necessitates less joyful returns: the re-emergence from the past of totalitarian oppression and the subordination of individuals. Even the émigrés' return provokes a repetition of the nineteenth-century conflict between tsars and would-be assassins: Korenev narrowly prevents one returned émigré from assassinating the Tsar and Tsarina. Instead of accepting the Radost'-phantom as a symbol of unity, I interpret her appearance as a subliminal signal of conflict in Krasnov's retropia.

4.iii. *Beg*: 'Мой неизменный красноречивый вестовой'

The last of the Soviet ghosts discussed in this section is also, chronologically, the latest. Bulgakov's play *Beg* was first written between 1926 and 1928, reworked many times for the stage and finally performed in Volgograd in 1957.¹³² It is arranged in 'eight dreams' instead of the conventional 'eight acts', a subterfuge which emphasizes the play's oneiric quality. There are two main surviving versions of *Beg*, which are structurally similar but differ radically in the resolution of Khludov's fate and the role of the ghost. It is not clear which version the dying Bulgakov would have staged. As the scripts' textual disparities reflect on the interpretation of *Beg*'s supernatural element, I will contrast both versions below.¹³³

Most of *Beg*'s dreams resemble nightmares, featuring a White general disguised as a pregnant woman, Russian exiles gambling on cockroach races in Constantinople, and the campaign of terror waged by the retreating White army across southern Russia. General Khludov, described as a 'jackal' for his cruelty, leaves every telegraph line behind his army festooned with hanged men. Finally, even a humble orderly, Krapilin, hurls abuse at the general for falsely accusing a female prisoner, Serafima, of spying for the Reds. As soon as Krapilin

¹³² V.V. Gudkova, 'Sud'ba p'esy 'Beg'', in *Problemy teatral'nogo naslediiia M.A. Bulgakova: sbornik nauchnykh trud*, ed. by A.A. Ninov (Leningrad: Leningradskii gosudarstvennyi institute teatra, muzyki i kinematografii, 1987), pp. 39-59 (p. 59).

¹³³ The versions consulted are the Prideaux Press edition (Letchworth, Herts.: 1977), in which Khludov returns to Russia, and the Bristol Classical Press printing, ed. by J.A.E. Curtis (London: 1997), in which Khludov shoots himself.

begins to recant his boldness, Khludov has him hung. But Krapilin's ghost returns, invisible to all except the general. Ironically, since Krapilin is killed for speaking his mind, his ghost haunts Khludov with relentless silence. In Constantinople, Khludov performs a penance of sorts by protecting Serafima until her lover comes to reclaim her. But this penance does not appease the ghost. Khludov is unable to interrogate it or compel its forgiveness:

Если ты стал моим спутником, солдат, то говори со мной. Твое молчание давит меня, хотя и представляется мне, что твой голос должен быть тяжелым и медным. Или оставь меня. Ты знаешь, что я человек большой воли и не поддамся первому видению, от этого выздоравливают. Пойми, что ты просто попал под колесо и оно тебя стерло и кости твои сломало. И бессмысленно таскаться за мной. Ты слышишь, мой неизменный красноречивый вестовой?¹³⁴

Krapilin's ghost refuses to allow Khludov to shelter his actions behind the excuse of historical necessity. By its wordless but persistent presence, it finally forces him to accept personal responsibility for the atrocities he committed during the war. The consequences of this admission vary between different versions of the play. In the version printed by Prideaux Press in 1977, Khludov asks the phantom to endorse his actions with a nod. When it does so, he returns to Russia, despite knowing what his fate will be:

проживешь ты ровно столько, сколько потребуется тебя с парохода снять и довести до ближайшей стенки.¹³⁵

This mirrors the real-life fate of the White commander General Slashchev, on whom Khludov was modelled. Slashchev received a pardon from the Bolsheviks, returned to Russia and taught in a military school until his assassination by the son of one of his victims.¹³⁶

In Bulgakov's final, 1937 redaction of the play (used by Bristol Classical Press), the ending was significantly altered. Khludov takes justice into his own hands by shooting himself – the only act that will free him of the ghost's presence (at least for the instant before he shoots). This denouement was deemed too liberal by the censors – by preventing Khludov from

¹³⁴ Bulgakov, *Beg* (1997), p. 32.

¹³⁵ Bulgakov, *Beg* (1977), p. 94

¹³⁶ J.A.E Curtis, 'Introduction: *Beg* – an imagined journey' in Bulgakov, *Beg*, ed. by J.A.E. Curtis (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1997), pp. v-xxvi (p. xii).

submitting to Soviet justice, it failed to represent the general's ideological self-delusion.¹³⁷ The ghost demanded suicide; the Soviet censor preferred repentance and humiliation. By changing the ghost's verdict from surrender to suicide in the last version of his play, Bulgakov placed spectral authority above the authority of a Bolshevik court. If we are to interpret Krapilin's ghost as a fragment of Khludov's subconscious (an assumption based on the ghost's invisibility to other characters), Bulgakov implicitly places individual conscience above Soviet government. Ironically, this version is much more subversive than the original. While we do not know which version Bulgakov would have staged, the fact that Krapilin commits suicide in three of four variants suggests this was the resolution Bulgakov favoured.¹³⁸

In all versions of the play, the ghost is visible only to Khludov. In the eighth and final act, Serafima overhears Khludov's monologues to Krapilin's ghost. Khludov dismisses these as his 'манера бормотать'.¹³⁹ Bulgakov's 1937 version introduces the motif of the ghost via Khludov's soliloquy as early as the fourth dream, thus emphasizing that Khludov has been under the ghost's influence even before leaving Russia. Krapilin, as man and as ghost, is the ethical pivot of the play and the major obstacle to its production:

Характерно, что первым камнем преткновения на репетициях становится сцена с Крапилиным. [...] "Тибельные выси" Крапилина – это момент этического абсолюта, когда человек думает и поступает так, как он только и должен поступать. Крапилин становится "осевым героем" "Бега", обменивающим жизнь на истину. Крапилин, предельно не объясненный через быт персонаж, о котором ничего неизвестно, кроме фамилии, в "Беге" – один из важнейших героев, незримо присутствующий до самого финала пьесы.¹⁴⁰

Stalin described *Beg* as an "антисоветское явление"¹⁴¹ because it promotes Serafima and her lover as sympathetic figures (implying that the Bolsheviks forced innocent people into exile). Bulgakov's refusal to stereotype the general as a White monster also discredited the play. Khludov's failure, like his penance, is deeply personal. His military tactics are not

¹³⁷ Gudkova, p. 58.

¹³⁸ See B.V. Sokolov, *Entsiklopediia Bulgakovskaia* (Moskva: LOKID-MIF, 1996), p.45; or Gudkova, 'Sud'ba p'sy 'Beg'', p. 58.

¹³⁹ Bulgakov, *Beg* (1977), p. 90.

¹⁴⁰ Gudkova, p. 47.

¹⁴¹ Cited by Sokolov, *Entsiklopediia Bulgakovskaia*, p. 39.

specifically Red or White; they are the slash-and-burn tactics universally adopted by retreating commanders. Through the silent voice of the spectre, *Beg* forces both Khludov and the audience to realize that war crimes can never be generalized; they are committed by individuals and must be avenged upon individuals. Like a mute Hamlet's father's ghost, Krapilin's phantom compels Khludov to search his own conscience. If *Beg* had been rewritten in accordance with the censor's requirements, it would have become a parochially Soviet psychological drama, like Aleksandr Afinogenov's *Strakh* (1932). Krapilin's ghost reaffirms the universality of the human capacity for inflicting and enduring suffering, transforming *Beg* from a minor work to a major statement.

5. Doubles

The double in supernatural fiction has been a subject of special study ever since Sigmund Freud singled it out in his essay 'The Uncanny' (1919) as a 'thing of terror', the self transformed into its own worst rival.¹⁴² Freud characterized the double as a psychological gamekeeper-turned-poacher: a formerly self-regulating conscience which, disassociated from the ego, begins to destructively repress the original self.¹⁴³ Western critics endow the double with primarily negative attributes: it is perceived as 'the uncanny harbinger of death',¹⁴⁴ 'the internalization of 'evil'',¹⁴⁵ an 'internal and irreparable division in the individual psyche'.¹⁴⁶ Few fictional doubles continue to act as consciences or 'better selves':¹⁴⁷ the majority embody the original self's suppressed, transgressive desires, which they turn reflexively against the ego.¹⁴⁸ Goliadkin junior in Dostoievskii's *Dvoynik* (1846) is perhaps the most famous, but not the first, Russian version of the double. The original *dvoynik* in Russian Literature appears in Antonii Pogorel'skii's 1828 story cycle, *Dvoynik, ili moi vechera v*

¹⁴² Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', in *The Penguin Freud Library*, ed. by James Strachey, 15 vols (London: Penguin, 1985-), XIV (1990), pp. 339-376 (p. 358).

¹⁴³ Freud, 'The Uncanny', pp. 356-357.

¹⁴⁴ Freud, 'The Uncanny', p. 357.

¹⁴⁵ Andrew Smith, *Gothic Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 94-95.

¹⁴⁶ Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 93.

¹⁴⁷ One example of the double as the hero's 'better self' is Poe's short story *William Wilson* (1839); however, in this case the virtuous double is murdered by his resentful original, leading to the latter's destruction. See Edgar Allan Poe, *Selected Tales*, ed. by Julian Symons (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 79-96.

¹⁴⁸ Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886).

Malorossii. The narrator initially mistakes him for a Freudian ‘harbinger of death’, but is reassured by the following civil explanation:

Существа моего рода едва ли имеют даже название на русском языке.[...] В Германии, где подобные явления чаще случаются, нашу братию называют Doppelgänger. Можно бы было, конечно, это слово принять в наш язык, и оно не менее других было бы кстати; но так как у нас иностранных слов, говорят, уже слишком много, то я осмелюсь предложить называть меня Двойником.¹⁴⁹

As late as 1922, Viacheslav Ivanov published a Russian translation of Hoffmann’s short story *Die Doppelgänger* (1821).¹⁵⁰ Boris Pil’niak’s *Dvoyniki: Odinnadtsat’ glav klassicheskogo povestvovaniia* (1933) is structurally a ‘роман-двойник’,¹⁵¹ amalgamating two separate, previously published novels. However, the *dvoyniki* in Pil’niak’s novel are genetic twins rather than uncanny doppelgängers.¹⁵²

The *dvoyniki* discussed in the following section are neither benign interlocutors, like Pogorel’skii’s original, nor are they content to disrupt at a distance, like Goliadkin junior. Their intentions are unambiguously to shatter their original’s psychological framework while seizing his life for their own use. Both Bulgakov’s Kolobkov in the short story “D’iavoliada” (1924) and Krzhizhanovskii’s anatomical mannequin in “Fantom” (1926) drive their creators to suicide. Chaianov’s glass man in “Venetsianskoe zerkalo, ili Dikovinnye pokhozhdeniia stekliannogo cheloveka” (1922) is possessed by an insuperable malice against his original which causes him to steal the latter’s body, possessions, and lover. Srubov, the tormented antihero in Zazubrin’s *Shchepka*, sees a grotesque double of himself in mirrors which ‘следит за ним, повторяет все его движения’.¹⁵³ At a metaphoric level, the double remains

¹⁴⁹ Antonii Pogorel’skii (pseudonym of A.A. Perovskii), *Dvoynik, ili moi vechera v Malorossii* (1828), p. 30.

¹⁵⁰ Viacheslav Ivanov, *Dvoyniki* (Berlin: Petropolis, 1922), with illustrations by A. Ia. Golovin.

¹⁵¹ Dagmar Kassek, ‘Dvoyniki B. Pil’niaka – roman-dvoynik’, in Pil’niak, Boris, *Dvoyniki: odinnadtsat’ glav klassicheskogo povestvovaniia* (Moscow: Agraf, 2003), pp. 242-260. *Dvoynik* is a recombination of *Ivan-Moskva* (1927) and *Zavoloche* (1925).

¹⁵² In her afterword to *Dvoyniki*, Dagmar Kassek identifies a Soviet trend to write on ‘тема братьев, оказавшихся после революции по разные стороны фронта, наблюдается у таких разных авторов’ (p. 249), listing examples such as Bulgakov’s *Belaia Gvardiia* (1926), Ehrenburg’s *Rvach* (1924), Leonov’s *Barsuki* (1925), and Fedin’s *Brat’ia* (1928). She considers Pil’niak’s *Dvoyniki* (unpublished during his lifetime) to be a continuation of this trend.

¹⁵³ Zazubrin, p. 231.

a symbol of irreversible psychological rupture: in narrative terms, its role is to ‘subvert the distinction between the real and the phantasmatic – plunging us instantly, and vertiginously, into the hag-ridden realm of the unconscious’.¹⁵⁴

5.i. Doubles in Bulgakov and Chaianov

The doubles of “D’iavoliada” descend directly from the Gogolian and Dostoevskian tradition of *dvoyniki*. The hero is ‘a menial office clerk in a hierarchical system which requires utter servility’; his downfall is triggered by the appearance of a real or imagined double which ‘compromises him by behaving in an outrageous manner’.¹⁵⁵ In “D’iavoliada”, Korotkov’s torment is magnified by two sets of doubles. The first are the bizarre Kal’soner twins, one of whom is his new director. Unable to distinguish between the twins, Korotkov is catapulted into a vortex of random and chaotic incidents. Meanwhile, his own double, whom he never meets, supplants him at work. This unseen alter ego, Kolobkov, represents everything Korotkov fears and despises: Kolobkov is an enterprising thief, a callous womanizer, and a self-confident trickster.

“D’iavoliada” provokes the same question as Dostoevskii’s *Dvoynik*: does the author intend the double to be an objectively real phenomenon, or simply an hallucination of the hero’s troubled brain? One Bulgakov critic assumes the latter, diagnosing Korotkov’s delirious visions as incipient mental illness, ‘clearly of a paranoid schizophrenic nature, where the personality of the protagonist divides into two or more alter egos, and where the motivation seems to derive from some sort of sexual inadequacy’.¹⁵⁶ I suggest the contrary argument: that circumstances provoke Korotkov’s insanity. Bulgakov set *D’iavoliada* at the time of his own arrival in Moscow in September 1921: ‘время, когда все люди скакали с одной службы на другую’.¹⁵⁷ The story’s dizzying list of hirings and firings reflects Bulgakov’s

¹⁵⁴ Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 4-5.

¹⁵⁵ J.A.E. Curtis, ‘Introduction’, in Bulgakov, *Diaboliad*, trans. by Carl Proffer (London: HarperCollins, 1991), pp. vii-xxii (p. xiii).

¹⁵⁶ Curtis, p. xiii.

¹⁵⁷ Bulgakov, “D’iavoliada”, in *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. by Ellendea Proffer, 8 vols (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1982-), III (1983), pp. 3-39 (p. 3).

experience of rattling between six different jobs in as many months.¹⁵⁸ When Bulgakov dismissed the story in a private letter as ‘an idiotic story, not fit for anything’,¹⁵⁹ he was underestimating its function as an apt caricature of post-revolutionary chaos.

The ‘стеклянный человек’ of Chaianov’s story “Venetsianskoe zerkalo” is a variation on a theme introduced in Valerii Briusov’s 1903 “V zerkale”.¹⁶⁰ In Briusov’s story, a respectable if over-imaginative bourgeois housewife finds herself hypnotically controlled by her own reflection in an antique mirror. The reflection compels her to take its place in the mirror while it assumes her life in the outer world. The woman remains a passive prisoner until she in turn succeeds in hypnotising her double. After reversing the exchange, she breaks the mirror.¹⁶¹ In Chaianov’s version, the doubles are male and the setting is early twentieth-century Moscow.

Both stories have an element of sexual voyeurism: Briusov’s double seduces strangers in front of the mirror in the heroine’s bedroom, while Chaianov’s glass man forces the hero’s wife, Kate, to have sadistic sex with him in front of the mirror. The mirror doubles convey both pleasure and terror by acting out the repressed fantasies of their originals. The resolution of Chaianov’s story is more complex than Briusov’s. Although the hero frees himself from the mirror, his double remains free in Moscow. When the double returns and kidnaps Kate, the hero follows them into a bizarre parallel world concealed behind a derelict housefront. There, he symbolically defeats and kills his double. Il’ia Gerasimov suggests that the happy resolution of “Venetsianskoe zerkalo”, with Kate restored to the hero, signals Chaianov’s own continuing confidence in post-Revolutionary Russia. Chaianov remains convinced that ‘в мире вещей все могло быть исправимым’.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Lesley Milne, *Mikhail Bulgakov: A Critical Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 43.

¹⁵⁹ Mikhail Bulgakov, diary entry, from 26 October 1923, in *Manuscripts Don’t Burn: A Life in Letters and Diaries*, ed. and trans. by J.A.E. Curtis (London: Bloomsbury, 1991), p. 53.

¹⁶⁰ Chaianov was a committed admirer of Briusov’s work: in 1912 he sent the latter an inscribed copy of his first poetry collection, *Lenina knizhka*, only to receive a very critical letter in response. See V.B. Murav’ev, ‘Tvorets moskovskoi gofmaniady’, in A.V. Chaianov, *Moskovskaia gofmaniada* (Moscow: Tonchu, 2006), pp. 275-302 (p. 283).

¹⁶¹ See Valerii Briusov, ‘V zerkale’, in *Polnoch’, XIX vek*, ed. by A. S. Gulyi (Moscow: Sombra, 2005), pp. 11-20.

¹⁶² Il’ia Gerasimov, *Dusha cheloveka perekhodnogo vremeni. Sluchai A Chaianova* (Kazan’: Anna, 1997), p. 116.

Both Bulgakov's and Chaianov's *dvoyniki* may be interpreted as explorations of how individuals accommodated the consequences of the 1917 Revolution. While Bulgakov's "D'iavoliada" ends in chaos and suicide, "Venetsianskoe zerkalo" offers a measured optimism that order will be restored. (It was written, however, while Chaianov was posted to London and therefore lacks eyewitness proximity to the early NEP years). In next section, I will argue that Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii's "Fantom" is also a parable of the Revolution's impact on individuals. Written later than the previous two stories, it offers significantly more perspective on the events of the early 1920s.

5.ii. Krzhizhanovskii's doubles

"Fantom" (1926), the second-last tale in Krzhizhanovskii's story cycle *Chem liudi mertvy*, is an unusually fertile adaption of the *dvoynik* theme. The adjective 'fertile' is chosen advisedly, since the 'phantom' of the title is a mannequin used in obstetric demonstrations.¹⁶³ "Fantom" abounds with adventitious doubles. Even the hero's surname, Dvuliud-Sklifskii, is doubly doubled. Not only does the first segment translate literally as 'of two peoples', the second references the famous nineteenth-century Moscow surgeon N.V. Sklifasovskii.¹⁶⁴ This deliberate coincidence in names is perhaps intended to suggest that Dvuliud-Sklifskii, an aspiring doctor, can expect a brilliant career. The eponymous 'phantom' is an artificial foetus, usually made from paper and resin but sometimes, as in this case, a dead infant embalmed in alcohol. The phantom's function is to double an essential human experience: birth.

Dvuliud-Sklifskii, during his final medical exam, induces his phantom with forceps; when he hears a tiny cry at the moment of birth, he disbelieves his senses. However, the phantom successfully imitates growth as well as birth, developing into a fully animate adult. Shortly after its "birth", the creature is adopted and named ('Fifka') by a mortuary assistant, who sees the creature as a double for his own dead son. When the assistant dies in the famine following the revolution, Fifka suffers from neglect and privation. Finally, Fifka finds both security and

¹⁶³ The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word 'phantom' as a 'model of the body or of a body part or organ, *esp.* one used to demonstrate the progression of the fetus through the birth canal'.

¹⁶⁴ See Perel'muter, 'Kommentarii', in Krzhizhanovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii*, II, pp. 611-700 (p. 689, note to p. 543).

romance among the mannequins in a dressmaker's shop. True to the more generally accepted sense of the word 'phantom', the creature returns to haunt Dvuliud-Sklifskii. Like Frankenstein's monster, it makes its creator responsible for its future existence and happiness – at the cost of that creator's life.¹⁶⁵

My reading of "Fantom" suggests that this story is a progression of Krzhizhanovskii's idea that active, intellectual individuals were fatally unfit for post-revolutionary Russian society. "Avtobiografiia trupa" (1925), discussed in a previous chapter (and immediately preceding "Fantom" in the cycle of *Chem liudi mertvy*) proposes the stereotype of the entirely passive individual – the living corpse – as the only human type capable of survival in such an oppressive atmosphere. "Fantom" suggests that only artificial humans, such as wooden mannequins and embalmed corpses, whose only nutritive needs are mercuric chloride and embalming fluid, are compatible with the circumstances and mores of the new age. The contrast with a sensitive intellectual like Dvuliud-Sklifskii, reduced to alcoholism by exposure to Civil War atrocities, is not favourable to humanity. Precisely because they lack idealism and are utterly utilitarian in their actions (the phantom burns his 'mother' – a wooden gynaecological mannequin – to keep warm), these creatures thrive in a culture that rewards the absence of illusions. Fifka calls his determinist philosophy 'phantomism'.¹⁶⁶ He refuses to distinguish between animate humans and artificial models: the former, in his view, delude themselves into a belief in free will, whereas the latter accept the reality that circumstances are thrust upon us just as Fifka himself was thrust into life at the end of Dvuliud-Sklifskii's forceps. Nonetheless, he classes himself as a person, fully entitled to love and to reproduce. He even signs his identity documents Dvuliud-Sklifskii. In an additional fillip of irony, Dvuliud-Sklifskii is directly – if involuntarily – responsible for the creation of his replacement, the parricidal mannequin.

¹⁶⁵ E.J. Clery argues that Frankenstein and his monster are doubles of one another: 'Frankenstein almost always refers to his creation as a 'daemon', rarely as a 'monster', supporting the idea that it is metaphysically 'other', an emanation of the soul – his soul – rather than a living creature in its own right. At the same time its hideous physicality is repeatedly emphasized', in Clery, *Women's Gothic*, p. 128. This seems to replicate the relationship between Dvuliud-Sklifskii and *his* monster (with the exception that the latter was inadvertently and unknowingly created).

¹⁶⁶ Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii, 'Fantom', in *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, ed. by Vadim Perel'muter, 5 vols (St Petersburg: Symposium, 2001-), II (2001), pp. 543-568 (pp. 555-556).

The parallels between Fifka and Frankenstein's monster are not only narrative, but structural.¹⁶⁷ Like Frankenstein's monster, Fifka is an artificially resurrected cadaver (Krzizhanovskii refers to the infant phantom as a 'трупик' or 'little corpse')¹⁶⁸ and physically grotesque. He grows up in the gloomy environment of the hospital mortuary, hiding from human beings and resenting his creator's abandonment of him ('как ты струсил меня').¹⁶⁹ He is unable to fully separate himself from his creator: as an adult, he still carries the mark of Dvuliud-Sklifskii's forceps. Again like Frankenstein's monster, the phantom cannot mate without his creator's involvement. Here, however, the comparison between the monster and the phantom collapses. Fifka has already found his shop mannequin paramour; he does not require Dvuliud-Sklifskii to create one. Instead, he demands his creator's death. As he explains:

'Перед тем, как родиться человеку, нужно, чтобы двое живых любили друг друга,— но перед тем,— слушай же, слушай,— перед тем, как человеку умереть, нужно, чтобы двое фантомов полюбили друг друга. И вот...'¹⁷⁰

Fifka's confrontation with his maker leaves the latter in a state of hysterical paralysis; Dvuliud-Sklifskii dies soon afterwards in hospital, after telling his strange story to a former patient. Krzhizhanovskii suggests that his death may not be entirely natural: a strong whiff of embalming fluid, the phantom's unique odour, taints the death-bed.

Perel'muter's reading of "Fantom" as a reworking of the Oedipus complex¹⁷¹ is convincing, not merely in the obvious sense that Fifka kills his father in order to marry a mannequin (just like his mother). Both the Oedipus legend and "Fantom" subscribe to an antihumanist determinism: in each story, fate decides the characters' destinies in advance, irrespective of intention or merit. Perhaps Fifka's most chilling statement is his equation of his own involuntary return to life ('как мышь в мышеловку')¹⁷² with the impact of the Revolution

¹⁶⁷ The phantom's first-person narrative is embedded within Dvuliud-Sklifskii's own story, as retold by a third party. The narrative of Frankenstein's monster, also told in the first person, is retold by Frankenstein as part of his memoirs, which are in turn framed by the memoirs of a third party.

¹⁶⁸ Krzhizhanovskii, "Fantom", p. 546.

¹⁶⁹ Krzhizhanovskii, "Fantom", p. 558.

¹⁷⁰ Krzhizhanovskii, "Fantom", p. 565.

¹⁷¹ See Perel'muter, 'Kommentarii', p. 690, note to p. 562.

¹⁷² Krzhizhanovskii, "Fantom", p. 556

on individual human lives, which he describes as random and unjustifiable: ““[People]... тщится измышлять философеми и революции, но философии ее – о мертвых несуществующих мирах, а революции все и всегда... срываются с шипцов””.¹⁷³ Freud finds the double uncanny because it reminds us of the self, horribly changed; “Fantom” portrays a world which is recognizably our own, but irreversibly oriented towards darkness and despair.

6. Conclusion

I have analysed Gothic monsters at such length because they constitute the most diverse, as well as one of the most important, subsets of characters in Gothic fiction. They are also the most readily politicized of Gothic archetypes. The politicization of Gothic monsters is evident in all of the texts discussed above. Pil’niak and Bulgakov use the trope of the demonic villain to caricature Iosef Stalin; Pavel Perov uses uncanny occultism to contaminate the Bolshevik cause by association; Krzhizhanovskii, Bulgakov and Chaianov employ the concept of malign, autonomous doubles to condemn the consequences of the 1917 Revolution. In late and post-Soviet Russian fiction, supernatural Gothic villains have continued to parody, or to indict, leaders and ideologues of the Soviet era.

One of the most overtly political uses of a Gothic villain in twentieth-century Russian fiction appears in Andrei Siniavskii’s autobiographical novel *Spokoinoi nochi* (1984). In this passage from the novel, Stalin is envisioned as an archetypal spectre, an ice-cold, transparent phantom:

Ни тени от него не падало, не слышалось дуновения, и само похолодание не бежало по комнате, хотя средоточие холода было рукой подать, притронуся – и отмерзнет... Как будто он замкнулся в замороженном своем одиночестве.¹⁷⁴

Besides plainly implicating Stalin as a political criminal, Siniavskii’s ghost story offers one of Stalin’s victims the chance to exact retributive justice. Stalin’s ghost is burdened with a Gothic quest: to repent his sins by finding and apologizing to every individual he ever injured. The Sisyphean hopelessness of such a task is perhaps fitting as a penance for crimes such as Stalin’s, committed on an almost unimaginable scale:

¹⁷³ Krzhizhanovskii, “Fantom”, p. 555.

¹⁷⁴ Abram Terts (Andrei Siniavskii), *Spokoinoi nochi* (Paris: Syntaxis, 1984), p. 278.

‘А теперь – обойди всех! По одному, по очереди – кому ты должен. Живых и мертвых. И пусть тебя каждый, отдельно, простит. Вымаливай именем Господа ...’,¹⁷⁵

However, more recent Russian fiction has begun the reappropriation of Gothic-fantastic symbolism, paralleling Russia’s increasing reclamation of its Soviet past. Petr Aleshkovskii’s 1997 novel *Vladimir Chigrintsev* sites Gothic tropes of haunting and return on a neglected estate in contemporary Russia. Aleshkovskii uses Gothic villains – *upyr*i and werewolves – in both positive and negative ways. Stalin, for example, is compared to a werewolf and a retired NKVD man to a still-thirsty vampire. But the central trope of Aleshkovskii’s novel is a hereditary curse passed through the generations of the noble Derbetev family. Because of an ancient crime, each Derbetev heir dies at the hands of an *upyr*. The ancestral *upyr* still walks the Derbetev estate. When Vladimir Chigrintsev, a relative of the family and a thoroughly modern Muscovite, visits the estate, he finds surprising insights into his own past and future. The Derbetev *upyr*’ is ultimately a benign figure, symbolizing historical continuity and familial stability. Chigrintsev’s eventual encounter with the *upyr*’ in the forest is a signal of his acceptance as a full member of the family: “‘чужим он не явится’”.¹⁷⁶ *Vladimir Chigrintsev*’s shortlisting for the Russian Booker Prize in 1996¹⁷⁷ demonstrates the enduring cultural relevance of supernatural tropes for Russian writers and audiences.¹⁷⁸ The villain of Gothic-fantastic fiction is not necessarily an embodiment of evil: potentially, he may symbolize reconciliation with the darker side of history, the estranged part of the self.

¹⁷⁵ Terts, p. 285.

¹⁷⁶ Peter Aleshkovskii, *Vladimir Chigrintsev* (Moscow: Vagrius, 1997), p. 294.

¹⁷⁷ The novel was first published in serial form in 1995.

¹⁷⁸ For critical discussion of Aleshkovskii’s novel, see Valentina Brougher, ‘Werewolves and Vampires, Historical Questions and Symbolic Answers in Peter Aleshkovskii’s *Vladimir Chigrintsev*’, in *Slavonic and Eastern European Journal*, 3: 45 (2001), 491-505.

CHAPTER FOUR

GOTHIC GENDER

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1. Introduction

This chapter explores the role of gender in Soviet Gothic narratives, particularly the subgenre termed Female Gothic. Female Gothic fiction relates to female experience and the concept of femininity. It portrays non-conjugal sexual relationships and the consequences of sex – even pregnancy and childbirth – as processes which are both physically dangerous and potentially morally ruinous. Women in Female Gothic plots are cast as either heroines or villainesses of tragedies predicated on female biology. In the early twentieth century, Russian philosophical debates on sexuality had proposed a system of sexual ethics comparable to that practised by the heroines of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic literature. Specifically, both moralities anathematized extramarital or promiscuous sex and depicted sexually aggressive women as amoral monsters. Such views, shared to differing extents by Russian thinkers like Nikolai Fedorov, Nikolai Berdiaev and Vladimir Solov'ev, were fictionalized in Lev Tolstoi's influential (and scandalous) novella, *Kreitserova sonata* (1889).

Eric Naiman is the first scholar to use Female Gothic to interpret the subtexts of Soviet discourse. Aleksandra Kollontai's novella *Vasilisa Malygina* is Naiman's main example of the genre in early Soviet fiction. I propose Female Gothic readings of other texts from the 1920s, including Maks Zhizhmor's play *Grob* (1929), Nikolai Ognev's *Dnevnik Kosti Riabtseva* (1927), and other writings by Iurii Olesha and Fedor Gladkov. However, in addition to conventional Female Gothic in which the heroine is menaced by sexual and/or material dangers, Soviet texts yield a new development of the theme. The tropes and conventions of Female Gothic are absorbed into male narratives in which the hero-narrator assumes the emotional and behavioural attributes of a Gothic heroine. I term this new archetype the 'male heroine'. In the following chapter, I will define and contextualise Female

Gothic narrative in Soviet texts, and discuss the evolution of the male heroine as a phenomenon unique to Soviet Gothic.

1.i. What is Female Gothic?

Ellen Moers, the American critic who coined the term 'Female Gothic', defined the subgenre in the simplest possible terms: as Gothic prose written by women.¹ Female Gothic plot, according to Moers, dramatizes the female body's terrifying physiological possibilities: pregnancy, childbirth, and physical deformity. Gothic plot functioned to give 'visual form to the fear of the self',² converting inner demons into external, visible monsters. Later critics refined Moers' interpretation. Claire Kahane, an important feminist critic, argues that the Female Gothic subgenre fictionalizes daughters' fears of oppressive mothers: the imprisoning Gothic castle, or labyrinth, becomes a trope for the mother's womb.³ Other critics have suggested that the imprisoning structures of Gothic prose represent the effects of restrictive patriarchy on the real lives of women writers in the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries.⁴ A consistent feature of Female Gothic is its 'emphasis on external rather than internal enemies':⁵ the source of terror is always completely externalized as a real and tangible threat to the heroine's mental or physical integrity. (By contrast, so-called Male Gothic favours disembodied, psychological terror). One critical survey of the subgenre concludes that 'dread

¹ See Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (The Women's Press: London, 1978), Chapter 5, 'Female Gothic', pp. 90-110. For an overview of the evolution of Female Gothic criticism since Moers, see Elaine Showalter, *Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), esp. Chapter 7, 'American Female Gothic', pp. 127-145.

² Moers, p. 107.

³ See Claire Kahane, 'The Gothic Mirror', in *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, ed. by Shirley Nelson Garner and others (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 334-352.

⁴ 'In projecting their anger and dis-ease into dreadful figures, creating dark doubles for themselves and their heroines, women writers are both identifying with and revising the self-definitions patriarchal culture has imposed on them'. Susan M. Gilbert and Sandra Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 79. See especially Chapter 2, 'Infection in the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship', pp. 45-93.

⁵ Diane Long Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës* (Liverpool and Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press and Liverpool University Press, 1998), p. xvi.

of female physiology and female sexuality is a constant Gothic theme, and the Gothic as written by both women and men reflects it'.⁶

Sexual violence – real or threatened – is the wellspring of Female Gothic, although in most cases the act remains implicit or takes place outside the span of the narrative. Emily St Aubert spends most of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* menaced by the threat of rape; another female character is imprisoned for life because of an unwise affair.⁷ In Karamzin's "Ostrov Borngol'ma" (1794), the heroine is imprisoned indefinitely because of an unknown sexual offence.⁸ In Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya, or the Moor* (1806), Zofloya's sexual self-indulgence shifts her status from heroine to villainess. Female Gothic narrative typically features sexual triangles consisting of the innocent heroine, her equally chaste fiancé, and the demon lover or villain. The heroine is exposed to the villain's assault by the absence, or death, of her father or protector. After extended melodrama, potentially indicating the heroine's repressed desire for the villain, her fiancé returns and rescues her. In the process, he may suffer a symbolic 'castrating' wound which negates his own sexual potency.⁹ The villain is killed or humiliated and the happy lovers marry. The heroine's task is to contain her own sexuality within the limits imposed by contemporary morality: i.e. to remain chaste until marriage (like Emily in *Udolpho*), or to die pathetically if sexually violated (like Antonia in Lewis' *The Monk*).

In this genre, sexually promiscuous characters of either sex are always either corrupted victims (like Zofloya) or corrupting monsters (*Udolpho*'s Montoni, *The Monk*'s Matilda). By contrast, the virginal heroine is passively vulnerable, dependent on outside intervention to escape the machinations of the villain(ess). Rescue is provided by paternal authority, often wielded vicariously by the heroine's future husband. Although the dynamics of Female Gothic make her appear defenceless, the heroine is not in fact without resources. The critic Diane Hoeveler argues persuasively that the apparent helplessness of Gothic heroines is part of a carefully planned, self-serving strategy to convert moral authority into material success.

⁶ Juliann Fleenor, 'Introduction', in *The Female Gothic*, ed. by Juliann Fleenor (Montreal and London: Eden Press, 1983), pp. 3-28 (p. 14).

⁷ This is Emily's aunt's sister-in-law, the Lady Laurentini, who conspires in a murder and is punished by lifelong confinement. See Radcliffe, *Udolpho*, pp. 654-664.

⁸ Probably incest, as Vatsuro speculates. See Vatsuro, *Goticheskii roman*, pp. 90-93.

⁹ Hoeveler contends that 'the only man who is deserving of such a wife is a man who has been as ritualistically wounded as she has been psychologically wounded' (Hoeveler, p. 54): one example of 'ritual wounding' is Valancourt's prostration after his duel with Montoni.

Carefully exploited, her vulnerability enables her to manipulate more powerful characters. In *Udolpho*, Emily survives persecution and incarceration by ‘learning to treat *herself* as a commodity... [turning] propriety to profit’, while Richardson’s Sentimental heroine Pamela ‘manages her virginity as if it were a business’.¹⁰ Tolstoi expresses this contradiction between vulnerability and control in *Kreitserova sonata*, suggesting that women ‘властвуют’ morally over men at the precise moment when they are ‘доведены до самой низкой степени унижения’.¹¹ Both Tolstoi and Hoeveler suggest that women learn to provoke male desire in order to manipulate men. Hoeveler views the heroine’s role as a tightrope walk between ‘outward complicity with’ and ‘ambivalent rejection of’ male sexual codes:

The female gothic novel represented women who ostensibly appear to be conforming to their accepted roles within the patriarchy but who actually subvert the father’s power at every possible occasion and then retreat to studied postures of conformity whenever they risk exposure to public censure. I have come to recognize and label this ideology as ‘gothic feminism’.¹²

I contend that Soviet versions of Female Gothic also exploit the double standards of ‘gothic feminism’ to influence readers and re-shape behaviour.

Not only does the Gothic heroine’s show of vulnerability conceal her talent for stage-managing other characters, Hoeveler suggests that this strategy was aimed beyond the boundaries of text: she claims that ‘female gothic novels... were thinly disguised efforts at propagandizing a new form of conduct for women’.¹³ This strategy would not lack precedents: many eighteenth-century novelists confessed a Pygmalionesque desire to mould social behaviour. Samuel Richardson intended the eponymous heroine of *Pamela* (1741) as a template for virtuous behaviour. By maintaining her chastity in a Gothic labyrinth of lies, threats and kidnapping, Pamela proves the superior endurance of meekness and frailty over lust.¹⁴

¹⁰ E.J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction 1762-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 122-123.

¹¹ Lev Tolstoi, *Kreitserova sonata*, in *Povesti i rasskazy*, 2 vols (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1960), II (1960), pp. 143-213 (p. 161).

¹² Hoeveler, pp. 5-6.

¹³ Hoeveler, p. xv.

¹⁴ For more on Richardson’s defence of *Pamela* as a novel intended to instruct and cultivate the reader’s mind, see Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 70-75.

Heroines of both Gothic and Sentimental novels suffer from an overdose of ‘sensibility’, a combination of emotional sensitivity and aesthetic refinement. Yet successful heroines eventually convert sensibility into a source of power. Female Gothic narrative is related from the heroine’s viewpoint in terms commensurate with her understanding of events. This is another point of contrast with Male Gothic, which tends to include multiple narrators and, therefore, multiple perspectives.¹⁵ Because of her monopoly on narrative, the Female Gothic heroine can re-shape cultural patterns – even if her pattern appears relentlessly stereotypical.

1.ii. The male heroine

Male and Female Gothic share a tendency to characterize sexually active women as malevolent dominatrices. There is no happy medium between chastity and villainy; a woman excluded from one category must necessarily belong to the other. This stereotyping leads to a certain gender leakage in Gothic plot. If the only acceptable role for a woman is the virtuous submissiveness prescribed for heroines, a sexually liberated woman necessarily shares some of the most aggressive, even diabolic male attributes. The resulting association in popular culture of female promiscuity with unfeminine aggression was eagerly exploited by propagandists in different eras, including, as I shall show, early Soviet Russia. As an additional consequence, the villainess’ sexual confidence tends to feminize the hapless Gothic hero – involuntarily placing him in the passive position of a (true) woman.

This transposition of gender roles is particularly common in *fin-de-siècle* Gothic. Describing late Victorian Gothic novels, Kelly Hurley notes that sexually aggressive women ‘invert traditional sexual roles, [their] inappropriately aggressive femininity requiring as object an effeminized version of masculinity’.¹⁶ In Richard Marsh’s Victorian Gothic novel, *The Beetle* (1897), the hero is seduced against his will by a terrifying Egyptian sorceress. Paradoxically, he is feminized by this experience of coerced arousal: ‘He behaves as a female object – passive, resistless, voiceless, and inert – when under the control of this sexually aggressively, strong-willed, and thus ultra-masculine woman’.¹⁷ This sexually dominating woman threatens both his masculinity and his relationship with his chaste and respectable fiancée.

¹⁵ See Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 102-104, for analysis of the differences between Male and Female Gothic.

¹⁶ Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, p. 143.

¹⁷ Hurley, p. 144.

Bram Stoker's Jonathan Harker suffers a similar process of involuntary feminization when he is sexually assaulted by three lustful female vampires in Dracula's castle.¹⁸ In Female Gothic, a character's sex has less to do with gender than with the sexual role-playing imposed by the plot.¹⁹ Power, and power relations between the sexes, is the ubiquitous subtext of both Male and Female Gothic. The happy resolution of Radcliffe's *Udolpho* is characterized by 'the dispensation of economic power in the relationship' between Emily St Aubert and her husband.²⁰ As in *Kreitserova sonata*, 'not love but power was the issue at stake',²¹ so in Gothic gender, the real issue is not sexual identity but the power inherent in sexual role-playing.

I shall discuss below two examples of conventional Female Gothic narrative in Soviet literature. However, certain Soviet fictions demonstrate an unusual confluence of Male and Female Gothic models. In these texts, both author and narrator are generally male, and the narrator's sexuality is unequivocally masculine. Despite this, the narrator-hero assumes the characteristics of passivity and sensibility traditionally displayed by heroines in the Female Gothic tradition. In this Soviet version of Female Gothic, gender roles are inverted: the sexually avid female is re-figured as the demon lover, an agent of insidious moral corruption, whom the unsophisticated 'male heroine' must ingenuously resist. To gain the promised idyll at the end of the story (bourgeois bliss in the Gothic novel, socialist utopia in the Soviet version), the male heroine must deftly convert his own weaknesses into strengths: sensibility, vulnerability, and even desire can all become tools to resist the villainess.

The anathematization of female sexuality, in conjunction with the glorification of masculinity, was a recognised trend in NEP culture. Eric Naiman argues that Soviet propaganda used Female Gothic tropes, associating women with instinctive sybaritism and ideological laxity, to express fears about cultural recidivism and the return of bourgeois

¹⁸ See Hurley, esp. Chapter 7, 'Abjected masculinities', pp. 142-150, for more on gender inversion in Gothic prose.

¹⁹ In *The Keys To Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), Laura Engelstein notes a similar process of gender inversion in Evdokia Nagrodskaja's serial novel, *The Wrath of Dionysius* (1910-1916). Tania, the heroine, is an ambitious and talented New Woman who 'unmans' her feminine and delicate lover, Stark: 'the male as the object of a woman's regard is unmanned. It is position, not genitalia, that marks gender...' (Engelstein, p. 400).

²⁰ E.J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction 1762-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 123.

²¹ Engelstein, p. 220.

materialism. During NEP, woman became ‘a figure on whom to cathect ideological anxieties’;²² her biological destiny to bear children implicated her in a ‘Gothic discourse binding sex and woman to the past’.²³ The female body was metonymous with the selfish pursuit of individual pleasure (especially erotic pleasure), and ideological heterodoxy. *Pravda*, for instance, often accused party members’ wives of being a conduit for the infiltration of bourgeois affectations: the make-up, gourmet foods and luxury possessions which outrage Kollontai’s heroine in *Vasilisa Malygina*.²⁴ Consequently, Communist women were expected to deny their femininity both physiologically and psychologically – a process of self-abnegation that Naiman terms ‘revolutionary anorexia’. Naiman’s portrait of broadly sustained misogyny in NEP culture is based on a variety of sources, including legal reports, psychologists’ studies, journalism and fiction.

However, Naiman’s analysis ignores the potential of gender fluctuation in Female Gothic: the fact that the gender of the heroine archetype is relative to power, rather than exclusively to sexuality. Naiman’s portrait of NEP femininity presents woman as vilified and diminished, coerced by social pressures into suppressing her own sexuality. But the ideology that created this situation necessarily drew a precisely inverted picture of gender relations: woman figured as an incorrigible, cunningly insinuating enemy, a ‘hostile representative of the not so deeply buried past’.²⁵ Propaganda may have vilified women and female physiology, but it was the inherent power of femininity that attracted this calumny. In NEP Russia, femininity was attacked *because* it was powerful.

In a world where female sexuality is both dangerous and ubiquitous, the passive role of the Gothic heroine – imprisoned and persecuted by ideologically threatening forces – is logically assumed by men. To gain a vital moral advantage over bourgeois femininity, the Communist hero had to assume the Gothic heroine’s prerogative of helplessness, probity, and incorruptibility. This ploy is comparable to the fictional stratagem of ‘gothic feminism’ described by Hoeveler. And if the heroine’s passivity truly can be interpreted as ‘an ideology

²² Naiman, *SP*, p. 203.

²³ Naiman, *SP*, p. 189.

²⁴ Elizabeth Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), pp. 205-206.

²⁵ Naiman, *SP*, p. 236.

of female power through pretended and staged weakness',²⁶ Soviet Female Gothic plot should be read, inversely, as a covert statement of male power.

I will discuss the problematic of Soviet Female Gothic in several stages. As a preface to my close reading of relevant texts, the following section will examine prevailing attitudes to femininity in Russian *fin-de-siècle* philosophy and popular culture. Next, I will analyse examples of Female Gothic narrative in Soviet prose and trace the gradually emerging trend to feminize male personages. In the second half of my interpretation, I compare examples of feminized heroes from early Soviet prose and conduct a close analysis of Ognev's *Dnevnik Kosti Riabtseva* to exemplify the male heroine. I speculate that the trope of the male heroine was a passive-aggressive ideological strategy, analogous to 'gothic feminism', practised by Soviet writers to inculcate twin ideals of sexual continence and ideological orthodoxy in their readers. Both conventional Female Gothic fiction and the 'male heroine' subcategory exploit the genre's traditional linkage between promiscuous sex and mortality. Sex is generally portrayed as a grotesque, even abject experience, an effect often achieved by juxtaposing the locus of sexual activity with the signs or appearances of death.

1.iii. Gothic gender in Russian society

Lev Tolstói's fiction frequently explores the emotional and physical ordeals arising from the contingencies of female physiology. In this sense, Tolstói's prose approaches Ellen Moers' definition of Female Gothic as a literary inscription of the fears inherent in biology. If Tolstói's *Voskresenie* (1899) can be read as an exposure of the unhappiness caused by pregnancy,²⁷ his earlier novella *Kreitserova sonata* denounces the destructive effects of desire:

Я ужасался, я страдал, я молился и падал. Я уже был развращен в воображении и в действительности, но последний шаг еще не был сделан мною. Я погибал один, но еще не налагая руки на другое человеческое существо. Но вот товарищ брата, студент, весельчак, так называемый добрый малый, то есть самый большой негодяй, выучивший нас и пить и в карты играть, уговорил после попойки ехать туда. Мы поехали. Брат тоже еще был невинен и пал в

²⁶ Hoeveler, p. 7.

²⁷ Naiman, *SP*, p. 35.

эту же ночь. И я, пятнадцатилетний мальчишка, осквернил себя самого и содействовал осквернению женщины, вовсе не понимая того, что я делал.²⁸

In this passage, Tolstoi unequivocally associates his hero's awakening sexuality with intense emotions such as fear, horror and disgust – the same emotions exploited by Gothic texts. The passage quoted above contrasts prayer with calumny (осквернение), innocence with corruption (развращение), and ignorance with horror (ужас) and suffering (страдание). Pozdnyshev, the self-flagellating narrator, bitterly repents his youthful 'fall' (падение) into sexual promiscuity. This 'fall' began even before his first sexual knowledge of a woman; in his view, even sexual fantasies and masturbation are sinful. Sexual experience foreshadows spiritual death: Pozdnyshev's use of the verb 'to perish' (погибать) to convey his first experience of desire expresses this association. Despite its extremism, *Kreitserova sonata* made a huge impression on readers within Russia as on the European public. Prurient readers enjoyed its frank treatment of sexual desire; others decried its excoriation of conventional family life.²⁹ In Russia, Tolstoi's novella added fuel to the heated *fin-de-siècle* debate on sexuality led by writers and philosophers.

How is *Kreitserova sonata* Gothic? Like the canonical Female Gothic of Radcliffe and Dacre, it indicts sexuality as physically and morally destructive to both sexes, and especially to women. Pozdnyshev depicts both pregnancy and childbirth as potentially destructive processes, while sex becomes a mutually humiliating, degrading exchange. However, at no point in *Kreitserova sonata* is Pozdnyshev's wife's viewpoint objectively portrayed. Tolstoi's polemic against reproduction is conveyed through the prism of *male* fascination and *male* dread. In fact, women play an aggressive role in the construction of sexual horror, as they lure male partners into wedlock and willingly exchange moral integrity for material guarantees (although Pozdnyshev hastens to add that this hypocrisy and cupidity is a product of limited female education). Pozdnyshev's feminism is apologetic, artificial and post-dated: he never asks his wife about her true feelings while she is alive to express them. Pozdnyshev is a monologic narrator: although he claims that he and his wife were joint sufferers, only Pozdnyshev survives to recount their shared tragedy. Pozdnyshev's assumption of sexual

²⁸ Tolstoi, *Kreitserova sonata*, p. 154.

²⁹ For more on the critical reaction to *Kreitserova sonata*, see Peter Ulf Møller, *Postlude to the Kreutzer Sonata: Tolstoj and the Debate on Sexual Morality in Russian Literature in the 1890s*, trans. by John Kendal (Leiden and New York: E.J. Brill, 1988), for more details on *Kreutzerova sonata*'s contribution to the debate on sexuality in Russian and European society.

victimhood has conveniently justified his actions. He is even acquitted of murder on the grounds of his wife's infidelity – this public acknowledgement of his 'victimhood' saves him from prison. By publicly declaring his weakness, he achieves a position of moral superiority, a stratagem comparable to 'gothic feminism'.

Tolstoi's story shares two common traits with archetypal Female Gothic: it depicts sex as a source of terror and dread, and it portrays sexual aggressors (both male and female) as predatory and venal beings. Moreover, Pozdnyshv's excessive sensibility and emotional vulnerability correspond to the psychological pattern of the Gothic heroine, the protagonist of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Female Gothic plots. The central dilemma of *Kreitserova sonata* is Pozdnyshv's failure to reconcile his ideal of marriage, based on mutual respect, with its reality, based on unrequited lust. Pozdnyshv's fictional ordeal epitomized the moral dilemma preoccupying the so-called 'noumenal revolutionaries',³⁰ the major Russian utopian philosophers, including Nikolai Fedorov and Vladimir Solov'ev. In the mid-1890s, a few years after the novella's publication, Vladimir Solov'ev termed sexual reproduction a 'дурная бесконечность физического размножения организмов', indefinitely perpetuating human misunderstandings and inequalities.³¹

It would be deceptive to argue that either *Kreitserova sonata* or *fin-de-siècle* philosophical doctrine precisely replicated the tenets of Female Gothic prose.³² Simply to name one obvious discrepancy, Pozdnyshv rejects all sexual relationships without exception. This includes marriages based on mutual respect and affection, which he claims are unsustainable. Female Gothic writers glorify this kind of relationship while demonizing loveless marriages or extramarital liaisons. Solov'ev, Fedorov and Nikolai Berdiaev all deplored reproduction as a form of biological slavery antithetical to human spiritual maturation, whereas the ideal resolution of Female Gothic plot is the birth of a legal heir and the continuance of a dynasty.³³ Fedorov viewed sexual reproduction as a haemorrhage of energy which could be

³⁰ Naiman, *SP*, p. 28.

³¹ Vladimir Sergeevich Solov'ev, *Smysl liubvi*, in *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, 2 vols (Moscow: Mysl', 1988), II (1988), pp. 493-547 (p. 547).

³² It would also be unfair to allege that Berdiaev, Fedorov and Solov'ev, all of whom decried the necessity of sexual reproduction, monopolized nineteenth-century debate. On the contrary, Rozanov, in *Opavshie listiia* (1913), celebrates male potency, female fecundity and sexual pleasure within marriage: 'Я постоянно хотел видеть весь мир беременным', Vasilii Rozanov, *Opavshie listiia* (Berlin: Rossica, 1929), p. 288.

³³ According to Eric Naiman, at this period both Berdiaev and Solov'ev viewed sex and parturition as a 'reminder of the change of generations and of the seeming inevitability of human decay' (*SP*, p. 29). In *Smysl*

more usefully directed toward the resurrection of the dead.³⁴ Solov'ev took a more liberal attitude than either Tolstoi or Ann Radcliffe, by celebrating the moral and spiritual value of erotic pleasure (only in the context, however, of gaining eternal spiritual union with the beloved).³⁵

Nonetheless, both the utopian philosophers' views and Tolstoi's propaganda served to pave the way for and to condone a new Soviet morality which, as I will show in the following pages, did coincide substantially with the ethics of traditional Female Gothic. The peculiar forms of celibacy advocated by philosophers like Solov'ev and Fedorov were, to a 'significant and quite paradoxical extent, legitimised by the Revolution' and subsequently practised in reality.³⁶ The 'strong puritanical pressures'³⁷ imposed on Party members during the 1920s required self-discipline as arduous and as frequently tested as the chastity required of Gothic heroines. Female Gothic, redeveloped in the phenomenon of the 'male heroine', proved a convenient template for the construction of a new kind of Soviet manhood.

2. Sex as Horror: Love beyond the Grave

The following sections analyse two Soviet texts which incorporate Female Gothic narrative. Both feature the preservation of a woman's purity as central plot elements. Sexual desire is manifestly associated in both texts with the most grotesque aspects of mortality. In Maks Zhizhnevskii's play *Grob* (1929), a young girl is raped in a coffin-maker's workshop; in the extract from Ognev's *Dnevnik Kostii Riabtseva* (1927), an irreproachably orthodox Bolshevik pilot becomes involved in an assault on an exhumed corpse. Both texts also implicitly

tvorchestva (1916), Berdiaev notes that 'сексуальный акт всегда есть частичная гибель личности... Пол - не только источник жизни, но и источник смерти'. The sexual act is essentially 'призрачный' because it suggests eternal unity without fulfilling this promise. N.A. Berdiaev, 'Smysl tvorchestva', in *Filosofia svobody i Smysl tvorchestva* (Moscow: Pravda, 1989), pp. 251-580 (pp. 409-410), esp. Chapter 8, 'Tvorchestvo i pol', pp. 399-420.

³⁴ 'Для рождающегося [sic]... нет нужды ни в разуме, ни в воле, если последнюю не смешивать с похотью. Воскрешение есть замена похоти рождения сознательным возсозданием'. Nikolai Fedorov, *Filosofia obshchego dela: Stati, mysli i pis'ma Nikolaia Fedorovicha Fedorova*, ed. by V.A. Kozhevnikov and N.P. Peterson, 2 vols (Farnborough, U.K.: Gregg International Publishers, 1970), I (1970), p. 22.

³⁵ For a detailed analysis of the contrast between Solov'ev's and Tolstoi's views on sexual love, see Peter Ulf Møller, *Postlude to the Kreutzer Sonata*, pp. 284-286. Solov'ev's views on erotic communion, 'syzygy', are expressed in his pamphlet *Smysl liubvi* (1892-1894).

³⁶ Naiman, *SP*, p. 28.

³⁷ Naiman, *SP*, p. 131; see pp. 131-138 for more on the puritanical aspects of early Soviet discourse.

feminize the male characters who should function as heroes (but fail to fulfil their roles). It is significant that the incipient feminization of male characters, later to emerge more strongly in Soviet fiction, can be traced in both texts.

2.i. ‘Гробовщика не тронут’: Maks Zhizhмор’s graveyard irony

Relatively little is known about the life or career of Maks Zhizhмор, a Jewish poet-turned-playwright who published several politically inspired plays during the first two decades of Soviet rule. Only two plays were actually performed on stage; one of these was *Grob* or *Posledniaia zhertva*, which was even translated into several languages.³⁸ Described by a contemporary as a ‘типичный пролетарий-интеллигент’,³⁹ Zhizhмор helped to organize the Petrograd Proletkul’t movement. He was deeply concerned with the troubled historical relationship between Russians and the country’s Jewish minority. Interestingly, the 1929 edition of *Grob* is dedicated with the author’s ‘great respect’ to Daniil Gessen. Gessen, the son of a prominent Jewish historian, was a former Cheka commander who had taken part in the Kronstadt massacre. During the 1920s Gessen worked as a journalist for *Krasnaia gazeta*, gaining a reputation for astringent criticism of party leaders’ lifestyles. Sentenced to exile for suspected Trotskyite activity in 1930, Gessen was eventually shot in 1943.⁴⁰ Whether Zhizhмор trod the same ideological path – from radical to internal critic to martyr – as Gessen, or simply remained a concerned fellow traveller, is not known. It is possible to speculate that *Grob* foreshadows Zhizhмор’s personal disappointment in the ideological integrity of the Bolshevik movement.

Grob fulfils most of the narrative prerequisites of Female Gothic: a beautiful heroine betrayed by her family, a lubricious, sadistic villain, and a plot that pivots on an act of sexual sacrifice. Moreover, the play’s action transpires stereotypically Gothic loci: a coffin-maker’s workshop and a (Jewish) cemetery. A metaphor used by one character associates all of Russia with the ultimate Gothic setting, the grave:

³⁸ M. Iankovskii, ‘Khudozhnik odnoi temy: Zametki o tvorchestve Maksa Zhizhmora’, in *P’esy Maksa Zhizhmora* (Leningrad: [n.pub.], [n.d.]), pp. 5-19 (footnote 1, p. 9).

³⁹ M. Iankovskii, ‘Khudozhnik odnoi temy: Zametki o tvorchestve Maksa Zhizhmora’, p. 7.

⁴⁰ See ‘Sudby repressirovannykh Leningradtsev: Daniil Iurevich Gessen’, <<http://www.requiem.spb.ru/list/person.php3?id=284&y=1>> [accessed 10 Sept 2008].

Куда не пойдешь – гроб. Дом твой – гроб. Улица – гроб. Лес, поле – гроб. Живешь в гробу.⁴¹

The action transpires in an unnamed Russian border town during the Civil War, during a White campaign of reprisals against Red sabotage. Colonel Orlov, the commander of the White division stationed in this town, has an appetite for cruelty that exceeds even General Khludov's in Bulgakov's play *Beg*. Orlov beats old men to death, bayonets women and buries victims alive instead of hanging them. Orlov's only weakness is sensuality: he protects the Drashmans, a poor Jewish family, because he has designs on their beautiful daughter, Rachel. Orlov justifies his actions by citing the economy of fear.

Высшая стратегия – эта попытка страхом... [...] Но надо тысячку-другую уничтожить так, чтобы у оставшихся в живых от страха душа в пятки ушла...

Orlov invokes a truism identified with many twentieth-century dictatorships:

Цель оправдывает средства. Она стоит того, чтобы сравнять с землею какой угодно город, вырезать поголовно любую часть населения.⁴²

Colonel Orlov is a classic Gothic villain: he is lustful and sadistic, and powerful enough to indulge both tendencies.

Meanwhile the heroine, Rachel Drashman, is forced in self-defence to rely on the passive-aggressive tactics of 'Gothic feminism'. Her only overt attempt to reject Orlov's advances lacks conviction, because she knows he can order her family killed at any time. The latter fails utterly to understand her moral revulsion for the White colonel. Her brother even reproaches her for rudeness: "‘Язык бы у тебя не отвалился, если бы ты ему сказала ‘да свиданья’ [sic]’".⁴³ As a typical Gothic heroine, Rachel is effectively orphaned: she lacks a male protector and is forced to rely on her own wits to defend herself.

The figure who approximates the role of Rachel's protector is the regimental doctor, a White officer with Bolshevik sympathies. However, his advice precipitates Rachel's destruction. Meanwhile, Orlov forces Rachel's father Aaron to betray the whereabouts of his son, Naiman, a notorious Bolshevik activist. Rachel, the doctor and others manage to save Naiman by concealing him in a coffin at the workshop. Later, they fake a funeral in the Jewish

⁴¹ Zhizhmoor, *Grob*, I. 1. 10.

⁴² Zhizhmoor, *Grob*, II. 1. 28, 33.

⁴³ Zhizhmoor, *Grob*, II. 1. 45.

cemetery, burying the still-living Naiman under several inches of earth. Unfortunately, Naiman's 'resurrection' several hours later is witnessed by two indigents, who report that 'Christ is risen' to Orlov himself. To buy time for Naiman's escape, Orlov must be distracted. Rachel therefore deliberately encourages the colonel's advances in, with grotesque appropriateness, the coffin-maker's workshop.

Grob is a key example of Soviet sexual Gothic because of its unsubtle interplay between sex and death. Throughout the play, tropes of death, burial and resurrection are reprised. Every character in the play is at risk of imminent death at the Colonel's whim. Only the coffin-maker is safe from harm: 'Гробовщика не тронут'.⁴⁴ Rachel's supreme sacrifice of her honour to save her brother's life constitutes a kind of suicide. Her rape in the coffin-maker's workshop recalls one of the most famous scenes in early Gothic prose, the rape of the heroine of M.G. Lewis' *The Monk* in a crypt surrounded by 'putrid half-corrupted Bodies'.⁴⁵ Naiman's eventual escape, which should redeem the play's funereal mood and justify Rachel's sacrifice, somehow fails to do either. Rachel's sexual contamination echoes Naiman's abjection by his temporary experience of death – even a faked death. In Gothic narrative, as I argued in a previous chapter, resurrection never restores the dead individual precisely as he or she was in life. 'Instead, the regained order encompasses a shift; that is to say it is never again/no longer entirely devoid of traces of difference.'⁴⁶ Both Naiman and the Bolshevik movement which he represents survive tainted by their near-death experience.

In fact, the consequence of Naiman's brief interment is the feminization of his character. Although introduced as a strongly masculine figure, aggressively harassing the Whites with guerrilla tactics, Naiman is forced during the action of the play to rely on his sister's sexual manipulation of Orlov. His subsequent strategy of concealment, deceit and flight recalls the survival tactics of the passive-aggressive Gothic heroine. Indeed, these are the only tactics viable for either in a fictional universe where they confront more powerful enemies. And, like a Gothic heroine, Naiman is finally saved by a sexual exchange. In a traditional Gothic novel, this would be marriage to the eligible hero; in *Grob*, it is his sister's violation by the villain. Despite Naiman's survival, this sense of moral violation persists. Like Orlov himself, the

⁴⁴ Zhizhmoor, *Grob*, I. 1. 10.

⁴⁵ Lewis, *The Monk*, p. 379.

⁴⁶ Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, p. xii.

Bolsheviks have accepted success on any terms, adopting the colonel's morally ambiguous principle that 'цель оправдывает средства'.

2.ii. Sex and the Bolshevik Boy

The following tale is one of many vignettes embedded in the journal entries of Kostia Riabtsev's diary. It is told by a fellow pupil of Kostia's, Black Zoia, infamous for telling gruesome stories about walking corpses and wandering ghosts. Zoia's tale is set in an unknown location in the southern Caucasus.⁴⁷ Zoia's brother, a Red fighter pilot, loses his way to base camp on a dark night. Two strangers overpower him and force him at gunpoint to dig up an unmarked grave. In the grave lies a radiantly beautiful woman – a dead Tatar princess, still wrapped in her rich funeral raiment. The two men order Zoia's brother to strip the corpse and pull valuable rings off her fingers. He imagines that she reacts to his assault as a live woman would – by trying to pull her hand away when he grabs the rings.

‘Брат... нагнулся тащить эти кольца, но они не поддавались, и похоже было, что труп тянет руки к себе. “Не могу стащить”, говорит брат. “Тогда руби кинжалом пальцы”. “Не буду”’.⁴⁸

Horried by the command to cut off the woman's finger, Zoia's brother faints. When he recovers consciousness, he is in the cemetery keeper's cottage. A police inspector is waiting to interrogate him – about why he has a dead woman's finger, with the ring still attached, in his pocket.

This deceptively simple fragment is a complex inversion of the values typically associated with a Soviet soldier and a non-Russian female. On the surface, the tale describes how the attempted violation of a woman's grave is frustrated by the incorruptibility (no pun intended) of a Soviet airman. As a Red pilot, and a military hero, Zoia's brother should be automatically above suspicion. Yet the fact that his actions are queried by the police betrays how profoundly the night's events destabilized his reputation. Although feeling like a blameless victim, Zoia's brother finds himself quadruply implicated in un-Soviet behaviour.

Firstly, he was found unconscious in a cemetery, where he had no legitimate business. Secondly, he broke his unofficial Communist bond of chastity and chivalry by stripping and brutalising the dead woman. Thirdly, he involuntarily desired the princess, noticing her

⁴⁷ Ognev, *Dnevnik Kosti Riabtseva*, pp. 146-50.

⁴⁸ Ognev, p. 149.

beauty and deluding himself that she is still alive (he imagined that she tried to resist his theft of the rings, ‘труп тянет руки к себе’). As a foreigner and an aristocrat, the living princess would be sufficiently unsuitable as an object of desire. Zoia’s brother compounded his transgression by desiring her dead body. Horrified by his lack of sexual self-control, he faints. Fourthly, he was literally ‘fingered’ by the grave-robbers, who ridicule Soviet military dignity by their assumption that the planting of a corpse’s finger in his pocket will transfer their guilt. In one night, sexual desire has exerted its power – literally from beyond the grave – over this young paragon of Soviet manhood. Although he is rapidly cleared of all charges, his integrity has been impugned – if not actually violated. Zoia’s tale is harmoniously resolved; the real thieves are captured and confess. But, like the hand of the frozen corpse in Grebnev’s *Arktaniia*, the Tartar woman’s finger continues to accusingly point out the vulnerability of Soviet ideals.

3. NEP Gothic and the male heroine

Eric Naiman interprets Aleksandra Kollontai’s novella *Vasilisa Malygina* (1923) as a literary experiment in the use of Female Gothic stereotypes to convey a Soviet ideological message. The heroine, Vasilisa, is an orthodox Communist whose health and happiness are endangered by her husband’s serial infidelities and involvement in corrupt NEP speculation. On one level, Kollontai’s book is a sentimental history of a Party diehard and a NEP entrepreneur. Read in ideological terms, *Vasilisa Malygina* describes a desperate struggle between opposing economic forces – socialism and capitalism. Vasilisa, the vulnerable Gothic heroine, represents socialism hampered and threatened by the imposition of free-market economics, personified by Vladimir, Vasilisa’s husband. The female body functions in the novel as a dual signifier for good and evil. Kollontai contrasts Vasilisa’s underfed, undeveloped frame with the luscious curves and confident sexuality of her rival, the bourgeois seductress. The seductress – symbol of Old Russia – steals Vasilisa’s husband: but it is Vasilisa who will bear Vladimir’s child, the heir of New Russia.⁴⁹

Naiman compares Vasilisa to Emily St Aubert, the helpless heroine of Ann Radcliffe’s *Mysteries of Udolpho*. He recasts Vasilisa’s errant, NEP-infatuated husband Vladimir as the money-grubbing, power-broking villain, Count Montoni. Vladimir’s lavishly furnished house in the provinces, to which Vasilisa moves from Moscow, ‘reproduces in a Soviet context the

⁴⁹ See Naiman, *SP*, pp. 227-249, for detailed discussion of *Vasilisa Malygina* in a Gothic context.

basic contours of the Gothic chronotope'.⁵⁰ Naiman has in mind the remote castle of Udolpho where Montoni imprisons Emily. Other thematic parallels between the two novels identified by Naiman are the female characters' sensitivity to premonitions and the significance of blood as a symbol of irrational fear.

While many aspects of *Vasilisa Malygina* correlate to the Female Gothic model, others suggest that a more complex typology is required for Kollontai's interpretation of Gothic gender. The first problem is Vasilisa's status as a Gothic heroine. Unlike Emily, Vasilisa does not overcome adversity by exploiting her femininity. In contrast, she ignores her husband's requests for her to display greater femininity in her dress and behaviour. Vasilisa empowers herself by becoming masculinized – in terms of attitude rather than physical gender. She stops competing with the exaggerated sexuality of her bourgeois rival for Vladimir's love, Nina. Instead, with stereotypical masculine practicality, Vasilisa focuses on the task of building socialism. She divorces Vladimir. In a resolution antithetical to traditional Female Gothic, Vasilisa anticipates the imminent birth of a child to whom she will be both mother and father. Can this be the happy ending demanded by Gothic romance? The original happy lovers – Vasilisa and Vladimir – have irrevocably separated and Nina, the Gothic villainess, has apparently won. However, by looking more closely at the shifting gender values of Gothic and by reading Vladimir, rather than Vasilisa, as the novella's 'heroine', we can argue that a happy ending has been achieved after all.

While Naiman's analysis portrays Vasilisa as a Gothic heroine, mine will draw attention to the implied *feminization* of Vladimir. This feminization is balanced by Kollontai's repeated description of Vasilisa as masculine in her appearance and manners. Kollontai notes:

‘Издали похожа на мальчика, плоско-грудая, в косоворотке и потертом кожаном кушачке’.⁵¹ The male diminutive ‘несносный Васюк’⁵² is Vladimir's favourite endearment for her – and later, she is startled to find that a servant boy in Vladimir's house is also called Vasiuk.⁵³ Naiman suggests that Kollontai emphasizes Vasilisa's boyishness in order to reflect a deep-seated fear of and revulsion from the female body, in turn symptomatic of Vasilisa's

⁵⁰ Naiman, *SP*, p. 231.

⁵¹ Aleksandra Kollontai, *Liubov' pchel trudovykh* (Moscow and Petrograd: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1923), pp. 67-304 (p. 67).

⁵² Kollontai, p. 120.

⁵³ Kollontai, pp. 146-147.

obsession with ‘purity, both ideological and sexual’.⁵⁴ Nor is Vasilisa’s masculinity solely physiological: she preserves an unshakeable, stereotypically male logicity in both political and economic affairs. She acts as Vladimir’s political mentor and financial guarantor, supporting him with her own savings and several times saving his career, even preventing his expulsion from the Party.⁵⁵ In fact, her absences on essential business – symbolizing her refusal to subordinate outside responsibilities to marital intimacy – expose Vladimir to the temptations which ultimately wreck their relationship.

In contrast, Vladimir’s behaviour is, in Foucault’s terms, ‘hystericized’.⁵⁶ He has little or no rational control over his emotions or his physical urges. Vladimir’s hysterical behaviour and helplessness are stereotypically feminine (as opposed to Vasilisa’s masculine self-sufficiency). He ascribes his constant infidelity to a physiological inability to resist temptation:

‘Я молод... [...] Месяцами один... [...] Они, подлые, увиваются... Я их ненавижу... [...] Всех, всех! Бабы! Липнут... [...] Вася! Пойми меня, пойми! Иначе и погибну! Пожалей... Жизнь трудная!’⁵⁷

By grounding every misdemeanour in his biology, and by staging hysterical tantrums (exemplified by his suicide attempt after Vasilisa’s first attempt to leave him),⁵⁸ Vladimir acts more feminine than his wife. He is, therefore, the true Gothic heroine of *Vasilisa Malygina*: an Emily St Aubert without the benefit of parental advice, at the mercy of her own over-indulged sensibility. While Naiman emphasizes Vasilisa’s exile in the Udolpho-esque wilds of the provinces, he ignores the fact that Vladimir is the first to go into exile, without the benefit of any chaperonage. Doomed by his feminine weakness of character, Vladimir quickly falls in with a bad crowd of former bourgeois who have reinvented themselves as NEP oligarchs. In *Udolpho*, Emily is exposed to danger by the absence of her beloved fiancé; similarly, Vasilisa’s absence in Moscow leaves Vladimir vulnerable to sexual predation. In

⁵⁴ Naiman, *SP*, pp. 228-229

⁵⁵ Kollontai, pp. 167-193.

⁵⁶ See Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality*, trans. by Robert Hurley, 3 vols (London: Penguin Books, 1990), I (1990), p. 103.

⁵⁷ Kollontai, p. 113.

⁵⁸ Kollontai, p. 222.

Udolpho, Emily feels emotionally betrayed when her fiancé loses money gambling; Vladimir also feels betrayed by Vasilisa's decision to support striking factory workers against his authority.⁵⁹ He views this incident as a revelation of their fundamental incompatibility and ultimately uses it to justify his relationship with Nina. While Emily's fiancé eventually gives up gambling, there is no question that Vasilisa will ever abandon her Party principles.

Nina, the villain of this Gothic piece, is incriminated not only by her sexuality but by her rumoured aristocratic descent. As I showed in the previous chapter, Gothic villains are traditionally, though not always, rogue aristocrats. Nina is Vasilisa's antithesis: voluptuous, reportedly promiscuous, sentimental and unashamedly materialistic. To Vasilisa's Communist perception, Nina is a “барышня”, буржуйка. Чужая... Да еще “без сердца”... [who] Владимира за нос водит’.⁶⁰ In NEP Russia, Nina is undoubtedly a Gothic villain. However, in the interpretative universe of canonical Gothic, Nina is the ideal match: her sentimentality and materialism actually underline her commitment to family values. Whether we ultimately read Nina as a positive or negative character, Vladimir's feminine weakness makes him an unsuitable match for Vasilisa. He is a Gothic heroine, trading on his vulnerability and sexuality to find a protector. These qualities are precisely the ones that Vasilisa renounces in her ambition to create a new, non-sexual way of life. As she tells a friend:

‘Не разлюбила я Владимира...[...] Только любовь-то другая стала. Обиды нет в ней, злоба к нему ушла...[...] А за прошлое спасибо... Будто Владимир братом стал, а Нина – сестрою [...]. Было счастье наше, теперь их черед настал...[...] Каждому свое право. Лишь бы злобы да обмана не было.’⁶¹

Vladimir is a primitive Soviet example of a Gothic heroine: his vulnerabilities prevent him from faithful adherence to the Communist Party and loyal performance of his duties. He is easily suborned by financial or other material considerations. In later examples of the ‘male heroine’ from Soviet texts, we shall see that the feminization of male characters does not preclude ideological orthodoxy and may even strengthen it.

⁵⁹ Kollontai, pp. 198-201.

⁶⁰ Kollontai, p. 247.

⁶¹ Kollontai, pp. 301-302.

3.i. Soviet male heroines

Gothic narrative, as seen in the three previous examples, tends to feminize and weaken male characters. In the irrational atmosphere of Gothic, the hero becomes 'dispossessed of his real or symbolic masculine state within the imaginary, interiorized, or fantastic space of these narratives'.⁶² The Russian intelligentsia were also symbolically feminized, or even castrated, by the powerful phallic energy of the Revolution, a metaphor exploited in sexual imagery by Maiakovskii, Pil'niak, Platonov and other writers of the period.⁶³ The male heroines of Soviet Gothic narrative are not necessarily intellectuals, but anyone who has been dispossessed or displaced or by the 1917 Revolution and its consequences.

In my previous analysis of *Vasilisa Malygina*, I suggested an alternative Female Gothic reading with Vasilisa's husband, rather than Vasilisa herself, viewed as the Gothic heroine. In the final section of this chapter, I will interpret Nikolai Ognev's *Dnevnik Kost'i Riabtseva* as the diary of a Gothic heroine threatened by changing social conditions and by her own excessive sensibility. One obvious difference between Soviet Gothic and traditional female Gothic is the quality of virtue. A traditional Gothic heroine must be a virgin until marriage; Soviet Gothic demands ideological orthodoxy. But even in Soviet fiction ideological orthodoxy and sexual chastity are conflated to a surprisingly large extent. In *Vasilisa Malygina*, Vasilisa's husband is, ultimately, a failed heroine because he abandons the Communist Party and marries a bourgeois woman. In *Dnevnik*, Kostia's unsuitable sexual partners are always also politically suspect (with kulaks or clerical connections). Sex and politics are remarkably germane in Soviet fiction.

The feminized hero is not an entirely new character in Russian literature. In Dostoevskii's Gothic tale *Khozaika* (1847), the hero plays a passive, feminine counterpart to the masculine

⁶² Ellen Brinks, *Gothic Masculinity: Effeminacy and the Supernatural in English and German Romanticism* (London: Associated University Presses, 2003), p. 11. Brinks has in mind a scene from of Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, in which several young men struggle to carry a massive (and, according to Brinks, phallic) sword flung down by a wrathful ancestral ghost. Their manifest inadequacy allegorizes the dethronement of masculinity by the intervention of the supernatural. The Russian intelligentsia were also symbolically feminized, or even castrated, by the powerful phallic energy of the Revolution, an image exploited in rhetoric by contemporary authors, including Platonov and Maiakovskii. See Naiman, *SP*, pp. 62-63 for development of this theme.

⁶³ See Naiman, *SP*, pp. 62-63, for development of this theme.

role of Katarina, his emotionally aggressive and manipulative landlady.⁶⁴ As we have already seen, the hysterical Pozdnyshev in *Kreitserova sonata* shares many of the manipulative propensities of a Gothic heroine.⁶⁵ Male heroines in early Soviet texts include Andrei Babichev in Iurii Olesha's *Zavist'* (1927). His plump, vaguely hermaphroditic form and preoccupation with feminine concerns – such as cooking and hygiene – represent 'his attempt to draw the feminine into the masculine sphere' as part of 'a new world that is defined almost exclusively in terms of male relationships'.⁶⁶ Gleb Chumalov, the hero of Gladkov's *Tsement* (1925), returns from the front to find himself sexually rejected and humbled by his wife. Although Gladkov portrays Chumalov as powerful, brave and resourceful, and his wife Dasha as an attractive woman, these two positive characters are no longer sexually compatible. Socialism has found new, seemingly contradictory uses for their sexual energies. While Dasha is empowered and masculinized, Gleb is reduced to her enfeebled accessory: 'Даша ли глядит на него злой непобежденной самкой... Смяла она его дерзостью воли, и он, военком, смутился и растерялся'.⁶⁷ Dasha has voluntarily relinquished her femininity. Unlike Kollontai's Vasilisa Malygina, she lacks even the maternal urge: she abandons their child, Nurka, to an orphanage. The masculinization of Dasha became a point of contention among Gladkov's critics. As his biographer Brainina concludes, gender was the one major behavioural issue of Soviet life for which Gladkov's *Tsement* failed to suggest a template.⁶⁸

The inverse of the male heroine is the female hero, a character Eliot Borenstein calls the *bolshevichka*. Androgynous and possibly asexual, the *bolshevichka* equalled and challenged

⁶⁴ See Mark Simpson, *The Russian Gothic Novel and Its British Antecedents* (Columbus, OH: Slavica, 1986), pp. 83-86. Katarina, the landlady, is masculinized by the Gothic narrative: she resembles a 'female Melmoth' (p. 85).

⁶⁵ Laura Engelstein identifies other examples of men feminized by masculine woman (what she calls 'inverted but heterosexual pairs' (p. 400)) in pre-Revolutionary fiction such as Anna Verbitskaia's *The Keys to Happiness* and Evdokiia Nagrodskaiia's *The Wrath of Dionysus* (1910-16). See Engelstein, *Keys to Happiness*, pp. 400-405.

⁶⁶ Eliot Borenstein, *Men Without Women: Masculinity and Revolution in Russian Fiction, 1917-1929* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 167.

⁶⁷ Fedor Gladkov, *Tsement* (Moscow and Leningrad: Zemlia i Fabrika, 1927), p. 35.

⁶⁸ B. Brainina, "Tsement" F. Gladkova (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1965), p. 63. Brainina points out that neither Dasha nor any other female character from *Tsement* should be viewed as templates for Soviet womanhood. Dasha is not ideologically 'finished' and her character will continue to mature in Gladkov's later *Energiia* (1938).

men on their own ground – including on the battlefield.⁶⁹ Bulgakov's *Sobach'e serdtse* (1924) poked fun at androgynous young Soviet women, such as the house committee member whose gender Professor Preobrazhenskii loudly queries.⁷⁰ However, the androgynous heroine failed to gain credence in Soviet literature, and she disappeared during the 1930s when Stalin's restriction of cultural genotypes, the so-called Great Retreat, 're-asserted... the traditional binary of active masculinity and passive femininity'.⁷¹ Thus the *bolshevichka* never succeeded in becoming "“one of the boys”" in the postrevolutionary fraternity. She was undermined by readers' demands for more conventional heroines. Even Gladkov's *Tsement* includes, besides the masculinized Dasha Chumalova, the traditionally feminine Polia. Polia is a stalwart Party member whose rape (by the ambiguous character Badin) is cited by Eric Naiman as another example of Soviet Female Gothic narrative.⁷³ The Soviet Gothic plot does not preclude traditional interpretations of maleness and femaleness: it simply affords space for the virtual enactment of new gender roles. The next section will discuss the new archetype of Soviet Gothic gender, the male heroine.

3.ii. Kostia Riabtsev: Sensibility and Sex

The Gothic novel is better known as a sensationalist text than a blueprint for good behaviour. However, as Hoeveler and others argue, Female Gothic texts can be read as a radical feminist critique of patriarchal society and a manual for subverting male control. They propose new parameters for feminine behaviour. Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is in this sense a Bildungsroman, tracing the emotional maturation of its heroine from the ill-timed journey that makes her a friendless orphan to her final triumphant withdrawal to her family estate with an obedient husband in tow. One critic claims that Radcliffe's major achievement in

⁶⁹ Borenstein lists a number of early Soviet heroines by Gladkov, A.N. Tolstoi, Lavronov, and others, who compete with men on an equal or superior basis. See Borenstein, *Men Without Women*, pp. 43-45.

⁷⁰ Mikhail Bulgakov, *Sobach'e serdtse*, in *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. by Ellendea Proffer, 8 vols (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1982-), III (1983), pp. 119-210 (p. 135).

⁷¹ John Haynes, *Gender and Masculinity in Stalinist Soviet Cinema* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 43.

⁷² Borenstein, p. 44.

⁷³ Naiman, *SP*, pp. 177-179.

Udolpho was to invent ‘a fictional language and a set of conventions within which “respectable” female sexuality might find expression’.⁷⁴

A key aspect in this process of construction of a Gothic heroine’s persona is ‘sensibility’. A literary term associated with Sternean Sentimentalism, and later referring to characters in both the Gothic and Romantic genres, sensibility originally meant physical sensitivity only. During the eighteenth century the term evolved to mean ‘laudable’ emotional delicacy.⁷⁵ Sensibility was, however, a two-edged sword. It is, in many ways, the distinguishing characteristic of both heroes and heroines in Gothic and Sentimental fiction, providing the aesthetic facility needed for the contemplation of nature, the appreciation of art and the enjoyment of each other’s perfections. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily St Aubert treasures her father’s advice to restrain her sensibility in the interests of self-preservation.⁷⁶ Too much sensibility, however, can make the heroine a victim of nervous delusions. In Jane Austen’s spoof Gothic novel, *Northanger Abbey* (1817), the heroine, Catherine Morland, is a victim of runaway sensibility. Catherine is not only addicted to the worst kind of Gothic romances but is determined to cast herself and her friends as characters in the Gothic romance of her own life. Sensibility, therefore, is a source of both vulnerability and empowerment.⁷⁷

Nikolai Ognev’s *Dnevnik Kostî Riabtseva* (1927) and its successor *Iskhod Nikpetozha* (1930) are also Sentimental Gothic Bildungsromans. Not only are they structured in diary form (a preferred mode of self-expression for Gothic heroines),⁷⁸ the diary charts the emotional progress of a young man from his mid-teens to marriageable age. Kostia’s excessive sensibility leads him into unnecessary sexual and emotional entanglements; moral perils such

⁷⁴ See Cynthia Griffin Wolf, ‘The Radcliffean Gothic Model: A Form for Feminine Sexuality’, in *The Female Gothic*, ed. by Juliann Fleenor (Montreal and London: Eden Press, 1983), pp. 207-226 (p. 207).

⁷⁵ John Mullan, ‘Sentimental novels’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. by John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 236-254 (p. 238).

⁷⁶ St Aubert instructs his daughter that sensibility is a ‘dangerous quality, which is continually extracting the excess of misery, or delight, from every surrounding circumstance’ (Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, pp. 79-80).

⁷⁷ For more on the role of sensibility in the eighteenth-century novel, see Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986), and for a specific account of its role in the Gothic novel, see Markman Ellis, *The History of Gothic Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), esp. Chapter 2, ‘Female Gothic and the secret terrors of sensibility’, pp. 48-80.

⁷⁸ For example, Mina Harker in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*; several characters in Eliza Fenwick’s *Secresy* (1795).

as drinking and dancing the fox-trot; and a Catherine Morland-like addiction to unsuitable fiction. He is even orphaned, like Emily St Aubert. Although his biological father is still alive, he plays almost no role in the diary. Instead, Lenin's death in 1924 upsets Kostia so profoundly that he leaves three pages of his diary painted black.⁷⁹ Like a Gothic heroine, Kostia's morality must be preserved sufficiently so that he is 'marriageable' – i.e., ideologically mature – by the conclusion of the diary.

Kostia's ability to control and retell his own narrative coincides with Hoeveler's definition of a Gothic heroine: 'The female gothic heroine is she who learns to tell the tale and thereby seize the more dominant power of narrative and discourse as it circulates freely in a rapidly changing and unstable social system'.⁸⁰ Similarly, Kostia uses his editorial privileges to record significant encounters – and to modify his own reactions and behaviour. He becomes a passive-aggressive figure, at once the puppet of events and the author of his own story.

Dnevnik Kosti Riabtseva is a novel of education on two levels. Overtly, it recounts Kostia's exposure at his local school to the Dalton Plan, one of several radical Western educational programmes trialled in Soviet schools shortly after the Revolution. More subtly, Ognev offers Kostia's trials and temptations as a role model for Soviet youth, just as Emily St Aubert became a role model for the eighteenth-century young lady. The diary describes Kostia's struggle to form a coherently socialist self-identity by overcoming dangerous influences at school and later at university – seductive women, recidivist friends, and a charismatic but intellectually suspect schoolmaster. Finally, like the Gothic heroine who can only marry a sexually unthreatening hero, Kostia can only fall in love with an asexual woman.

Kostia's greatest vulnerability is narrative – preferably Gothic narrative, such as the gruesome and prurient ghost stories related by his classmate Black Zoia or the equally grotesque pamphlets about masturbation and abortion which eventually persuade Kostia to reject promiscuous sex. From the beginning of *Dnevnik*, when Kostia reads erotic passages from Zola, his sexual life is sublimated by print. However, he soon discovers that real-life sexual attraction also has subtexts, when the school Komsomol secretary reprimands Kostia for spending too much time with a classmate:

⁷⁹ Eric Naiman draws a similar parallel in *Sex and Public* suggesting that the character of Polia in Gladkov's *Tsement* is orphaned – and exposed to sexual violation – in the absence of her father figure, Lenin. 'Where a Gothic heroine in a moment of terror sadly recalls a deceased father and protector, Polia remembers Lenin and the age of War Communism' (*SP*, pp. 178-179).

⁸⁰ Hoeveler, p. 101.

Он мне сказал, чтобы я не шился с ней, потому что она дочь служителя культа, и мне, как сыну трудящегося элемента, довольно стыдно обращать на себя всеобщее внимание [...] Что она наместо ученья шатается со мной по улицам и вообще может идеологически прогнать. [...] Что всякое шитие с девушками, как с таковыми, нужно прекратить, ежели желаешь вступить в комсомол.⁸¹

Kostia is thus bluntly reminded that his political future (beginning with Komsomol membership) is directly linked to his sexual behaviour. Ideological heterodoxy, epitomized by the girl, is unsubtly linked to bodily corruption by the use of the verb 'to rot' (прогнать). Later, this girl does effectively 'die' out of the narrative when she becomes the victim of casual sexual experimentation. Embittered by her unrequited crush on Kostia, she sleeps with another boy, gets pregnant, and is sent away. Later she sends a letter of mingled forgiveness and moral exhortation to Kostia, in which she writes that now, purged of sexual jealousy,

‘...мне так легко... [...] Я советую тебе тоже бросить такую жизнь, потому что кроме беспросветного мрака ты ничего не получишь. И только теперь, вырвавшись из мрака на свободу и свет, я поняла, как была глупа’.⁸²

Her apotheosis, which depicts her previous frame of mind as a sort of 'impenetrable darkness', clearly links promiscuity with mortality and chastity with a new life of 'freedom and light'. While Ognev's opinion of Fedorov's philosophy is not known, this passage seems to suggest a Fedorovian link between celibacy and eternal life. Other Fedorovian echoes can be found elsewhere in *Dnevnik*. Kostia's first real sexual experience underlines the sex/death connection even more clearly:

Когда все кончилось, я вдруг почувствовал страшный запах какой-то тухлой козлятины, и меня чуть не стошнило. 'Фу, какая гадость!', говорю я Марии. 'Чем это здесь так воняет?' 'А это здесь отцовские шкурки сложены, ты не обращай внимания...'⁸³

Another classmate of Kostia's, nicknamed Black Zoia, falls in love with him. But she sublimates her desire into an exaggerated 'sensibility' of the most prurient and ghoulish kind. The children call her Black Zoia because she is 'черная, стриженная, в черном платье и вообще вся черная и никогда не смеется... Потом она все горбатится и ходит как

⁸¹ Ognev, *Dnevnik*, p. 6.

⁸² Ognev, *Dnevnik*, p. 93.

⁸³ Ognev, *Dnevnik*, p. 127.

тень',⁸⁴ and because she relishes telling ghost stories and claiming personal contact with the dead. She even fakes a suicide attempt in her efforts to win Kostia's affections. However, when Zoia accepts a role in the school play, she is transformed. Drama gives her fantasies a structured and socially acceptable outlet: her peers suddenly welcome and admire her. Even Kostia admits that she is 'гораздо красивее, чем всегда: вот что значит платье-то меняла'.⁸⁵ She becomes a good socialist girl, although she doesn't stop loving Kostia: 'Свое черное платье она перестала носить, стала веселая... И про мертвецов не хочет разговаривать больше'.⁸⁶

Zoia is emblematic of Ognev's overall purpose in *Dnevnik* because she learns to control her sensibility. Instead of attempting to enact her grotesque dreams and sexual fantasies, she consciously projects them into a fictional space where they can do no harm. The early Soviet years were a transitional period during which sex ceased to be a private matter and became a state-regulated discourse. In Foucauldian terms, Soviet attitudes to sex lacked 'the rigor of a taboo' but nonetheless recognized 'the necessity of regulating sex through useful and public discourses'. Such regulation requires 'a policing of sex'.⁸⁷ Zoia evolves into just such a sexual policewoman, learning to regulate both her own sexuality and others'. She does so either by physically interrupting trysts or by sublimating sexual desire into stories and drama. Kostia also learns to sublimate his desires into text – initially, by copying Zoia's stories. He is on the point of seducing a classmate and model proletarian girl, Silva, when Zoia intervenes with one of her macabre tales. By refocusing his desire on fiction rather than reality, Kostia learns to keep his relationship with Silva platonic – although she will remain a romantic fixation for him throughout the second volume, *Iskhod Nikpetozha*.

In Female Gothic plots, the virtuous heroine is unable to express sexual desire. However, her yearning for an absent lover can be encoded as anxiety and even terror.

Terror becomes a way of coding the sexual feelings of the Radcliffean heroine separated from her lover – as is *Udolpho*'s Emily, Adeline in *The Romance of the Forest*, or Ellena in *The Italian* – by insistently referring to her body; Gothic heroines are always sighing, fainting or shivering. Female

⁸⁴ Ognev, *Dnevnik*, p. 7.

⁸⁵ Ognev, *Dnevnik*, p. 74.

⁸⁶ Ognev, *Dnevnik*, p. 84.

⁸⁷ See Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality*, 3 vols, trans. by Robert Hurley (Penguin: London, 1990), I (1990), pp. 24-25.

Gothic functions like prescriptive, medical and other literary discourses about sexuality that, as Foucault argues, simultaneously express and channel it.⁸⁸

Thus the many Gothic tales embedded in *Dnevnik Kostia Riabtseva* can be read as encodings of Kostia's erotic impulses. They are also cathartic: the acts of writing and re-reading divert these impulses from carnal expression into the realm of sensibility.

Eighteenth-century novelists were divided on the role of sensibility. Some praised the 'enhanced emotional life' it enabled, by creating a psychological arena where 'heightened passions are recognised, rewarded, and explored'.⁸⁹ Others, including Mary Wollstonecraft, claimed that its virtues were misleading, as it encouraged impracticality and irrationality. Even Emily St Aubert's managed sensibility 'restricts her ability to take action in her life, leaves her defenceless against aggressive masculine predators, and renders her listless and enervated'.⁹⁰ Kostia Riabtsev, however, has achieved a successful balance between sensibility and life. By subjugating passions to imagination, he has learned to manage his emotional life and maintain his chastity to an approved Socialist standard.

3.iii. Silva the Vestal Surgeon

At the conclusion of the first volume of *Dnevnik*, Kostia has forged an ideological and romantic partnership with Silva, the irreproachable Komsomolka. But in the sequel which follows Kostia through his first year at university, *Iskhod Nikpetozha*, Kostia dallies with bourgeois temptations such as night clubs and alcohol, while Silva develops into a version of the perfect Communist woman. Apparently untouched by sexual temptation, Silva perceives the body as an anatomical artefact refined by socialist living. This attitude is emphasized by Silva's decision to study medicine at university. Kostia, who studies the more frivolous topic of literature, visits her at her anatomy lab. Their meeting is marked by extensive Fedorovian symbolism.

The gruesome odour of decay from the laboratory initially repels Kostia, while he involuntarily recalls the 'тяжелый и противный запах' of dead animals accompanying his first sexual experience. The sight of a couple kissing on the steps of Silva's Institute

⁸⁸ See Tamar Heller, *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 23.

⁸⁹ Ellis, *History of Gothic Fiction*, pp. 54-55.

⁹⁰ Ellis, *History of Gothic Fiction*, p. 55.

nauseates him. Ognev once again subversively juxtaposes sexual love with death. The lab is filled with corpses, under examination by dozens of mostly female trainee surgeons, all dressed in virginal white gowns. Silva is pleased to see Kostia, but more excited about what she calls a “преlestный труп, легкий и не жирный”,⁹¹ which she invites him to view. She shows him into a room resembling one of Fedorov’s proposed ‘museums of death’.⁹² Here Silva eagerly shows Kostia various human relics preserved for physiological research: wrist bones, segments of skull, pelvic girdles. When Kostia, who is struggling hard with nausea, asks Silva whether she is ever disgusted by her environment, she replies:

‘Бывает, особенно когда нагнешься низко, да ведь это наука, а наука должна все исследовать. Когда профессор в первый раз нас сюда привел, он перед этим нам сказал: “Представьте себе, что вы входите не в комнату, полную трупов, а в цветущий весенний сад, благоухающий розами и магнолиями. Биологически трупы и цветы – одно и то же, частицы единой материи. [...] А если отбросить запах, то здесь становишься на границу познания человеческого тела”’.⁹³

The garden was an important trope of Socialist Realist fiction, symbolizing sustained, harmonious productivity.⁹⁴ Here, Ognev extends the garden metaphor to represent human remains and their potential to generate medical knowledge (possibly including the resurrection of long-dead ancestors). Silva’s socially useful commitment is contrasted with Kostia’s dilettantism and his barely controlled nausea at the sight of death (a failing characteristic of Gothic heroines).⁹⁵ Ognev’s distortion of the garden metaphor in the context of rotting bodies is therefore as deliberately provocative as his earlier image of lovers kissing on the steps of the pathology faculty, or Kostia’s first lovemaking surrounded by decaying animal corpses. Ognev distances Silva’s logical and rational pathological investigations from the immature Zoia’s grotesque stories of walking corpses. For Silva and her fellow vestal

⁹¹ Ognev, *Iskhod Nikpetozha*, pp. 130-131.

⁹² These were intended not only to preserve ‘the relics of the dead as exhibits (mummies), but also... to revive them through scientific research... in workshops for resurrecting’ (see Masing-Delic, pp. 94-95), which seems to be the purpose of Silva’s Institute.

⁹³ Ognev, *Iskhod Nikpetozha*, pp. 131-132.

⁹⁴ Katarina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 3rd edn (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 99.

⁹⁵ Radcliffe generates suspense in *Udolpho* by not revealing until the novel’s conclusion that the terrible sight glimpsed by Emily behind a curtain was not a real corpse but a waxwork likeness.

surgeons, both sex and death are purely functional. Soviet materialism has triumphed over Gothic Romanticism, just as bourgeois comfort triumphs over youthful sensibility in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

When Kostia asks Silva to marry him, her refusal does not surprise the reader. She is fanatically committed to the perfection of socialist society, and cannot entertain a relationship based on erotic love. Silva's attitude was not anomalous. Fedorov's reorientation of sexual energy towards transhumanist goals echoed a trend genuinely felt in Soviet society. As early as 1910, scientists such as Vladimir Bekhterev were calling for the rationalization of sexual selection, so that marriage partners were chosen on biological rather than emotional grounds.⁹⁶ So when Kostia's narrative necessarily concludes without the marriage essential to Gothic endgames, this could be explained by arguing either that Soviet gender revisionism has rejected the need for marriage (as Vasilisa does in *Vasilisa Malygina*) or that the need to conform to Gothic narrative archetypes has expired. Kostia may have lost his physical virginity with someone else, but he never renounces his basic ideological purity – guaranteed by his proletarian background – and there is no need to confirm this with a marriage.

4. Conclusion

The gender fluidity exploited by Female Gothic narrative ceased to be possible in Soviet prose by the 1930s. Stalin's promotion of controlled materialism in Soviet society negated the misogyny of the 1920s: femininity could, once again, be expressed and appreciated without incurring ideological censure. Nonetheless, the male heroine of Soviet Female Gothic made an important contribution to the establishment of socialist values. Emerging during a transitional epoch, before gender roles became fixed in Soviet Russia, he enabled the subliminal absorption of ideology. 'Power... resides ultimately in the ability to tell one's own narrative, and by doing so to shape one's own destiny'.⁹⁷ This is a power that Kostia Riabtsev exerts when he writes his diary: the Kostia that emerges at the end of *Iskhod Nikpetozha* is a close-to-ideal Soviet man, refined and strengthened by the various temptations he has endured. However, Ognev's use of Gothic is self-limiting, fenced by the conventions of a linear plot in which Soviet morality eventually triumphs. Kostia Riabtsev's diary 'ends with

⁹⁶ Engelstein, *The Keys To Happiness*, esp. Chapter 6, 'Eros and Revolution: The Problem of Male Desire', pp. 215-253.

⁹⁷ Hoeveler, p. 101.

the containment of the Gothic as the site of subversion and literary marginality'.⁹⁸ The male heroine of Soviet Female Gothic novel ultimately rewrites history. The message of 'Gothic feminism' is that the heroine of the species is more deadly than the male, except, perhaps, when the male is the heroine.

⁹⁸ Tamar Heller, *Dead Secrets*, p.8.

CHAPTER FIVE

GOTHIC SPACE

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1. Introduction

Gothic fiction is intimately concerned with the definition and transmission of spatial boundaries; questions of property, inheritance, usurpation and reclamation recur repeatedly within the genre. The chronotope of Gothic is the castle, an ancient structure haunted by secrets and ‘saturated through and through with... the time of the historical past’.¹ The Gothic castle can be read in many ways: as a ‘locus of tyranny... eventually abandoned’,² as a ‘site of ultimately restored legitimacy’,³ even as ‘the house of the dead mother’, encapsulating ‘the secrets of feminine existence’.⁴ The locked towers, secret labyrinths and underground vaults of the Gothic castle lure the Gothic hero and heroine into an inevitable confrontation with their past. The Gothic chronotope also includes adjuncts and copies of the castle, such as sinister graveyards, crumbling monasteries, haunted manors, and, in modern times, the haunted house.

¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, ‘Forms of time and of the chronotope in the novel’, in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), pp. 84-258 (pp. 245-246). I use here Bakhtin’s definition of the chronotope as the ‘intrinsic connectedness’ of time and space in certain categories of fiction (p. 84).

² James Watt, *Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre and Cultural Conflict, 1764-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 104. Watt has in mind Radcliffe’s castles and Walpole’s Otranto, which imprison heroines.

³ Watt, p. 104. In some castle tales such as Reeve’s *The Old English Baron*, the monumentality of the castle may symbolize the rightful heir’s endurance until he can reclaim his property. See *Contesting the Gothic*, Chapter 2, ‘The Loyalist Gothic romance’, pp. 42-70.

⁴ Elaine Showalter, *Sister’s Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women’s Writing* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 128.

The Gothic obsession with property and repossession is perhaps uniquely apposite to the early Soviet period, since this epoch was preoccupied, if not defined, by the redistribution of private property (and the abolition of private ownership). The Soviet government stated its intention to restore land to its rightful owners, the people, by the expropriation and collectivisation of private property. In fact, the abrogation of private property in favour of the ‘mass of propertyless workers’ is a basic prerequisite of Communism, as expounded by Marx in *The German Ideology* (1846).⁵ Gothic plot effects a comparable process of expropriation: the restitution of stolen property from its usurpers to its true heirs. In Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, the usurper destroys himself and his family in order to prevent the castle’s legal owner from reclaiming his property. In Clara Reeve’s *The Old English Baron*, a ghost is instrumental in restoring the family estate to the dispossessed heir. In Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the villain pursues Emily St Aubert and her aunt for the sake of their estates; the title of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s Gothic novella *The Entail* speaks for itself.

Since both orthodox Marxism and Gothic plot share an obsession with the reappropriation of space, a number of early Soviet narratives can be considered ‘Gothic’ because they explore precisely this issue. One critic identifies in Isaak Babel’s short story “Berestechko” (part of his 1926 *Konarmia* cycle) the trope of forced transfer from old to new landlords. Babel’s ancient ‘castle on the hill’ symbolizes ‘traditional, vertically structured feudal power, materialized in the castle on the hill’; whereas the Red soldiers who overrun the castle and preach Communist propaganda to the local villagers represent ‘a new horizontal power with different aims... taking its place’.⁶ The politics of Gothic possession, however, are profoundly ambiguous once taken out of the familiar context of feudalism. In Soviet narratives, the identity of the villain and of the rightful heir depends entirely on the reader’s political point of view. A Communist reader of Babel’s story would greet the Reds as liberators; a sympathizer with the old regime would view them as thieving rabble. In every text analysed in this chapter, the reader must finally decide (with or without authorial suggestion) whether the chain of legitimate inheritance has been broken or restored; whether

⁵ Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. by David McLellan, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 175-208 (p. 187).

⁶ J.J. van Baak, *The Place of Space in Narration* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1983), p. 59.

the victorious proletariat are claiming their long-suspended rights, or perpetrating a fresh injustice on the true owners.

This chapter explores the topography of Gothic-fantastic fiction in early Soviet literature. I analyse examples of haunted houses, flats, factories and even foundation pits in texts by a range of writers as creatively and ideologically diverse as Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii and Fedor Gladkov. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first part explores Gothic space which, despite reorganization and redistribution by the Soviet regime, remains haunted by its pre-revolutionary past. The spectres of the past must be confronted and exorcized (as in Gladkov's *Tsement*) before they fatally compromise the new occupants' legitimacy (a disaster literalized in Bulgakov's "No. 13 – Dom El'pit-Rabkommuna"). The second category maps newly created spaces, unique to Soviet culture, which have been subverted, or imploded, by a Gothic subtext. Not all of the buildings discussed in this section were built after 1917, but their new functions (as collective apartments, for instance) pertain exclusively to post-revolutionary culture. Any ghosts in such spaces must relate to flaws within the structures of Soviet space, and by extension, challenge the consistency of Soviet ideology.

Texts from both categories exemplify Gothic narrative themes such as the restitution of property to its rightful owners and the punishment of usurpers. Even the descendants of usurpers, who are innocent of wrongdoing, cannot escape castigation by the mechanics of Gothic justice. The following subsections will site the Gothic chronotope in the Russian literary tradition and attempt to explain its continuing relevance in the twentieth century.

1.i. The Gothic castle chronotope

In his analysis of the European Gothic chronotope and its Russian adaptations, Vadim Vatsuro categorizes the Gothic castle thus:

Он – материализованный символ преступлений и грехов его прежних владельцев, совершавшихся здесь трагедий, 'готических', средневековых суеверий и нравов. Очень важной особенностью этого готического хронотопа является двойная система временных координат: следы и последствия прошедшего ощущаются в настоящем. [...] Отсюда потенциальное, а иногда и реальное присутствие в нем сверхъестественного начала, обычно духа, призрака преступника или жертвы. Поэтому описание замка в готическом романе никогда не бывает нейтральным: он оказывается здесь мощным суггестирующим средством...⁷

⁷ Vatsuro, p. 86.

According to Vatsuro, the Gothic chronotope is characterized by the simultaneity of the present with the spectral past. This remains true whether the chronotope takes the form of a medieval castle, a haunted house or an ill-omened foundation trench. Gothic space compels past and present to cohabit, whether by embodying the past in the form of ghosts, or by inducing recollection and re-enaction, or through a combination of both. Other characteristics of the Gothic chronotope, discussed below, include personification, direction, inheritance and ambiance. By outlining the typical aspects of the chronotope, this section aims to establish criteria for identifying Gothic space in Soviet narratives.

In addition to its ubiquity as the stage for Gothic events, the castle frequently becomes personified within the narrative framework, contributing to the action no less than the human actors. In many Gothic narratives, the castle or haunted house is eponymous. The first Gothic novel in the English language was Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764).

Walpole's castle 'dominates the narrative as both a physical and a psychological presence, and rightly assumes its place in the title. Few critics have failed to make the point that the gothic castle is the main protagonist of *Otranto*'.⁸ In Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), the groaning walls and unstable floors of the Usher mansion, and its final climactic subsidence, not only facilitate but participate in the plot. The American writer Steven King's novel *The Shining* (1977) uses Gothic tropes of desolation, remoteness, haunting and possession to depict a malignantly animate hotel in the Rocky Mountains.

A third essential trope of the chronotope is direction. In Gothic space, there is a dialectical relationship between exteriors and interiors, horizontality and verticality. The visible exterior of the castle, its walls and turrets, are narratologically less important than its interior. Gothic space is concentrated underground – in the tunnel through which Isabella escapes from Manfred (*The Castle of Otranto*), the burial vault where Antonia is raped and killed (*The Monk*), and the vast chasm into which the Giaour disappears (William Beckford's *Vathek*). There is a 'characteristic Gothic movement downwards... emphasised by the vaults and the newly-dug graves',⁹ in a majority of Gothic novels. Typical downwards (vertical) actions are burial, imprisonment, and concealment (underground). The rightful heir often levels these

⁸ E.J. Clery, 'Introduction', in Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. vii-xxxiii (p. xv).

⁹ Cora Ann Howells, *Love, Mystery and Misery: Feeling in Gothic Fiction* (London: Athlone Press, 1978), p. 41.

structures in order to exposes the secrets of his predecessor in the Gothic castle, only to return to the vertical plane by re-building on the same foundations.

A fourth essential aspect of Gothic narratives of space is the importance of inheritance and ownership, as mentioned above. Wills are hidden, witnesses suborned, heirs banished; usurpers may inhabit the Gothic castle for generations before their inevitable expulsion. In many traditional Gothic plots, the virtuous heir is disguised, or unaware of his own identity. This ambiguity is particularly developed in Soviet narratives of Gothic space, since the plot does not necessarily follow the entire trajectory from dispossession to restoration. In Babel's "Berestechko" or Bulgakov's "No. 13", the reader enters the plot at a moment of expropriation. But since every Gothic tale has two moments of expropriation – the banishment of the heir and, later, the eviction of the villain – the reader must guess from the ideological context whether he or she is witnessing a long-delayed restitution or a traumatic dispossession. In some texts, as I shall show, this question is deliberately unresolved.

Finally, Gothic space is characterized by a specific ambiance and a predictable range of contents. Gothic castles radiate an ambiance of gloom, partial ruin and decay. Count Dracula's remote and forbidding castle, surrounded by wolves and sinister gipsies, accessed by a single ominously creaking door, epitomizes such structures. Vatsuro summarizes the sinister atmosphere of Gothic space in novels by Radcliffe, Reeve, Lathom and other eighteenth-century authors:

Готический замок рисуется обычно на фоне мрачного ландшафта, вызывающего дурные предчувствия.[...] Сuggestирующая роль пейзажа усиливается и подчеркивается недобрыми приметами, грозными или загадочными явлениями природы (гроза, буря), сопровождающими путешественника при подходе к замку.¹⁰

In the depths of its cellars or labyrinths, the Gothic castle usually conceals a secret essential to the destruction of the old, unjust hierarchy and the assertion of a new system. This secret may be a manuscript (usually a diary),¹¹ a corpse,¹² or simply a lost will. A resident guardian typically protects both the secret and the property. Once given access by the guardian, the hero or heroine of the Gothic novel become hopelessly trapped within the building. The

¹⁰ Vatsuro, p. 86.

¹¹ In Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), Adeline finds her father's diary in a gloomy cellar.

¹² In Reeve's *The Old English Baron* (1777).

labyrinthine structure and concealed rooms of Gothic space allegorize the Byzantine complexity of subjective memory. Only by penetrating to the centre of the labyrinth, or by finding the hidden room, can the hero or heroine simultaneously resolve their task and redeem the evil acts of the past. Tropes of the guardian and the underground labyrinth appear in a wide range of novels beyond the Gothic genre, including Evgenii Zamiatin's *My*, discussed below. In fact, the near-universal cultural relevance of Gothic structure has led many modern novelists to incorporate the original, medieval Gothic castle into otherwise contemporary narratives.¹³

1.ii. The problem of place

The tropes delineated above are constants of Gothic space, irrespective of the temporal setting of the narrative. Yet how can a chronotope developed in the eighteenth century remain relevant to modern readers? The solution is to modify the structure of the Gothic castle, without altering the concomitants of the chronotope. This was a literary exigency admitted by Bakhtin, who notes the potentially 'antiquated, museum-like character' of the traditional castle setting and praises Walter Scott's historical narratives for reviving this trope.¹⁴ An American critic, Dale Bailey, identifies the 'problem of place'¹⁵ as the writer's task of making Gothic space relevant to modern experience without discarding the rich symbolism of the castle chronotope. Nineteenth-century American Gothic writers, attempting to embed Gothic plots in a culture only a few centuries old, were confronted by this dilemma:

In the absence of any handy ruined castles or monasteries, where were American Gothicists to set their subversive fantasies? And [...] in a culture supposed to be free of oppressive aristocracies, what were they to subvert?¹⁶

Post-revolutionary Soviet writers, inhabiting a culture supposedly cleansed of its aristocratic past, faced the same conundrum. I argue that they found the same solution as, Bailey

¹³ Some modern writers have deliberately chosen to recreate the original Gothic castle chronotope. Examples include the Polish author Witold Gombrowicz' *The Secret of Myslotch* (1939), the Hungarian novelist Antal Szerb's *The Pendragon Legend* (1934), and the American writer Richard Brautigan's *The Hawkline Monster* (1974).

¹⁴ Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel', p. 245.

¹⁵ Dale Bailey, *American Nightmares: The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Fiction* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999), p. 7.

¹⁶ Bailey, p. 7.

suggests, American writers did: modernizing the chronotope. While the original castle, with its outdated associations of nobility and patronage, was indeed displaced, the question of property ownership actually gained cultural significance as property became widely obtainable. Issues of disinheritance and dispossession became relevant to everyone, no longer only to a landowning aristocracy. Thus the concept of Gothic space functioned in American literature ‘not merely as a plot device but as a symbol with profound resonance for American writers’.¹⁷ The haunted castle was re-invented as a haunted house in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s novel *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) and in many of Poe’s short stories (most notably in “The Fall of the House of Usher”). William Faulkner’s Southern Gothic novels and F. Scott Fitzgerald’s tragic *The Great Gatsby* (1925) extended the tradition of ‘symbolically charged houses which bestride a Gothic borderline’¹⁸ into twentieth-century American literature. Such houses were no longer haunted by the injustices of feudalism or the crimes of perverse aristocrats. Their spectres were inspired by timelessly relevant issues: class inequality, social exclusion, financial failure, and psychological breakdown.

A similar modernization of the Gothic chronotope can be traced through Russian literature. A.A. Bestuzhev-Marlinskii’s cycle of Gothic stories, set in medieval Baltic castles, are a Russian response to Scott’s novels.¹⁹ Other nineteenth-century authors updated the haunted castle to the haunted mansion (Odoievskii’s 1838 “Prividenie”), and the ‘anti-dom’, or haunted house, in fiction by Pogorel’skii, Pushkin, and Gogol. Lotman defines the ‘anti-dom’ as the antithesis of the familial or conjugal home: ‘в них не живут - из них исчезают (убегают, улетают, уходят, чтобы пропасть без следа)’.²⁰ Nor is the concept of the ‘anti-dom’ exclusively supernatural: it includes Dostoevskii’s real-life prison camps in *Zapiski iz*

¹⁷ Bailey, p. 23.

¹⁸ Bailey, p. 9.

¹⁹ Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Bestuzhev-Marlinskii (1797-1837) wrote a number of Gothic-fantastic stories, of which the best known is *Strashnoe gadanie*, and including three historical tales set in medieval castles: “Zamok Venden”, “Zamok Neigauzen”, and “Zamok Eizen”. See A.A. Bestuzhev-Marlinskii, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, 2 vols (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1958), I (1958).

²⁰ Iuri Lotman, ‘Zametki o khudozhestvennom prostranstve’, in *Stat’i po semiotike i tipologii kul’tury* (Tallinn: Aleksandra, 1992), pp. 448-463 (p. 459).

mertvogo doma (1862), examples of ‘dead space’ through which the narrator must travel to be resurrected as a functioning citizen.²¹

The early twentieth century saw the refinement of psychological Gothic at the expense of supernatural drama. Bunin’s story “Sukhodol” (1911) is a realist re-imagining of Gothic space in provincial Russia. Sukhodol is the Krushchev family’s gloomy mansion, sited on a neglected estate, guarded by a destitute, half-insane relative. Its history includes destructive secrets of rape and murder which descend as terrifying rumours to subsequent generations. Ancient patterns of revenge are repeated upon innocent descendents. Those most harmed by Sukhodol’s ambience of mental and physical suffering, such as the Krushchevs’ housekeeper, are nonetheless drawn irresistibly back. The Krushchevs and their servants identify themselves with the estate. Classifying Bunin’s story as a late example of Russian Gothic, Dale Peterson concludes:

The author of a Gothic narrative may choose either to exercise or to exorcize those uncanny forces that threaten to make history repeat itself. Still, the reader of Gothic narrative is forced to perceive that an individual’s life story is non-linear, subject to encounters that display genealogical resonances and depths...²²

In “Sukhodol”, Bunin chooses not to exorcize the pervasive sense of doom. Although personally blameless, the modern generation of Krushchevs sense that their family is eternally condemned for an obscure, ancestral abuse of power. The Sukhodol estate is thus ‘a symbolic locus for a deathless rural Russia that repeats ancient premonitions of an exceptional collective destiny’.²³ Preceding the Revolution by almost a decade, “Sukhodol” appears to set the scene for the violent eviction of the landed gentry.

A short story written two decades earlier than “Sukhodol”, Vladimir Korolenko’s “V durnom obshchestve” (1885), seems more conventionally Gothic than Bunin’s novella. Its Gothic loci include a decaying castle in a small provincial town and a graveyard whose tombs are

²¹ In *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1994), Svetlana Boym translates Lotman’s ‘anti-dom’ as the ‘pseudo-house’, and finds numerous examples in *Master i Margarita*: ‘Among such pseudo-homes are the madhouse, the camp, or the hospital, but also the Griboedov House of Writers’ Union, the comfortable apartment of Margarita’s conventional unloving marriage, and the new Soviet communal apartment’ (Boym, p. 136).

²² Dale Peterson, ‘Russian Gothic: The Deathless Paradoxes of Bunin’s Dry Valley’, *Slavic and East European Journal*, 31 (1987), 36-49 (p. 38).

²³ Peterson, p. 47.

inhabited by mysterious indigents. However, “V durnom obshchestve” lacks the tragic historical sweep of “Sukhodol”. Korolenko’s novella has no dark family secret, no subplot of archaic vengeance, and no lost property to regain: the characters’ misfortunes result from human error and accidental misfortune, and the ending is redemptive. “Sukhodol”, with its broader canvas of miscegenation, madness and despair, is the more authentically Gothic work of fiction.

1.iii. Early Soviet Gothic space

There are many variants of the Gothic chronotope in early Soviet fiction. These Gothic spaces are predominantly urban. While the nineteenth century witnessed the creation of a tradition of so-called St Petersburg Gothic,²⁴ the twentieth century inaugurated Moscow as the new locus of haunted space. Bulgakov’s *Master i Margarita* created a topography of haunted squares and landmarks throughout Moscow. In A.V. Chaianov’s words,

Совершенно несомненно, что всякий уважающий себя город должен иметь некоторую украшающую себя Гофманиаду, некоторое количество своих ‘домашних дьяволов’.²⁵

All of Chaianov’s five Gothic-fantastic tales are set at least partially in Moscow, at different stages of the city’s history, from the 1700s to the early 1900s. His utopian novella, *Puteshestvie moego brata Alekseia v stranu krest’ianskoi utopii*, imagines a radically reconfigured, futuristic capital in the year 1984. Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii’s short stories, contemporary with Chaianov’s, present a claustrophobic view of ‘minus-Moscow’, where his characters suffer creative frustration, emotional isolation, poverty and starvation.

Krzhizhanovskii’s concept of literary ‘minus-space’ summarized his personal exigencies in Stalin’s Moscow. More broadly, Krzhizhanovskii’s spatial allegories express how Soviet bureaucracy, by invading personal space, inevitably compromised the quality of individual lives.

Boris Pil’niak’s short story “Ivan Moskva” (1927) transposes the Bronze Horseman motif from Petersburg to Moscow. Like Pushkin’s Evgenii in *Mednyi vsadnik*, the delirious hero

²⁴ Neil Cornwell, ‘Russian Gothic: An Introduction’, in *The Gothic-Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature*, ed. by Neil Cornwell (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1999), pp. 3-22 (p. 19).

²⁵ Cited by Viacheslav Sorbinenko in ‘Slovom, vse bylo po-khoroshemu’, *Novyi mir*, 12 Dec 1989, 254-256 (p. 254).

suffers agonies of ‘леденящий страх’ as he struggles to evade a pursuing statue;²⁶ however, in “Ivan Moskva” the statue is of Pushkin himself rather than Peter I. Pil’niak’s novella *Povest’ nepogashennoi luny* describes Moscow as a gloomy and saturnine Gothic space. Like a living entity, the city is in mourning, its ‘городская душа’ expressed by dismal factory horns.

На рассвете над городом гудели заводские гудки. В переулках тащилась серая муть туманов, ночи, измороси; растворялась в рассвете, — указывала, что рассвет будет невеселый, серый, изморосный. Гудки гудели долго, медленно, — один, два, три, много — сливались в серый над городом вой: это, в этот притихший перед рассветом час, гудели заводы, — но с окраин долетали визгливые, бередящие свисты паровозов, идущих и уходящих поездов, — и было совершенно понятно, что этими гудами воет город, городская душа, залапанная ныне туманной мутью.²⁷

This chapter will discuss primarily urban manifestations of Gothic space in Soviet literary culture, divided into two chronological categories. The first section will examine the conflict between past and present in buildings whose construction predated the Soviet era. Forging an accommodation between old and new systems of property ownership was an uneasy and gradual process, symbolized by a uniquely Soviet living space that first emerged during this period of transition: the communal apartment.

The topography of the communal apartment also often presented a peculiar superimposition of old and new hierarchies... [...] the old structure of the bourgeois household appeared transplanted into the communal apartment [because former owners kept the best bedroom and servants were, occasionally, retained].²⁸

Fictional examples of such awkward power-sharing between old and new regimes include Bulgakov’s *Sobach’e serdtse* (1924), in which Professor Preobrazhenskii exploits the gratitude of his highly-placed patients in order to retain eight rooms and two servants (despite regular complaints from his House Committee). Another example is Zamiatin’s short story “Peshchera” (1921), the story of a bourgeois couple marooned in their unheated apartment during the harsh Petersburg winter. “Peshchera” describes how this naïve, well-intentioned

²⁶ Boris Pil’niak, “Ivan Moskva”, in *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. by K. Andronikashvili-Pil’niak, 6 vols (Moscow: Terra-Knizhnyi klub, 2003-04), IV (2003), pp. 7-60 (p. 49).

²⁷ Boris Pil’niak, *Povest’ nepogashennoi luny* (Letchworth, Herts.: Prideaux Press, 1971), p. 7.

²⁸ Boym, p. 128.

couple are driven to desperation, theft and finally suicide. Their more cynical neighbours, better able to cope with changing times, are compared to half-animal monsters, greedy reptiles and self-seeking mammoths. The only 'true' humans – the bourgeois couple – perish in the new Ice Age of socialist utopia. The story's Gothic quality lies not only in the monstrosity of the neighbours or the atmosphere of near-paranoid suspicion, but in the unsought return of the distant past (in this case, the Ice Age of cavemen and mammoths) upon the present.

The Soviet era inaugurated extensive modification of existing housing: as a result, newly built structures integrated with existing buildings to create unique matrices for haunting. In Marietta Shaginian's novel *Mess-Mend*, the charismatic carpenter Mike Thingsmaster refits a hotel while secretly establishing a 'застенный мир' for his workers' union, a honeycomb of secret corridors linking spyholes and listening spaces behind the partition walls of rooms.²⁹ Unfortunately, Thingsmaster's ingenious conspiracy is trumped by the arch-villain Grigorio Cice, who has already constructed a secret entrance to an inaccessible 'комната без номера'³⁰ within the hotel. Thus even the Gothic labyrinth designed by the workers' collective is pre-empted by the superior cunning of aristocrats.

The proliferation of Gothic space in properties such as those listed above, which combine old and new cultures, may be ascribed to the ideological collision between the superseded bourgeoisie and the triumphant proletariat. Bulgakov's "No. 13" dramatizes this virtually Manichean conflict between outgoing class enemies and *arriviste* workers. The 'древний дом' in Zamiatin's *My* is also a Gothic pocket within a utopian urban conurbation.

However, the next generation of Soviet Gothic space cannot be ascribed to the poisoned heritage of past generations. My second category includes properties that were either built after the Revolution or thoroughly converted to the Soviet mode of living. By the time Bulgakov wrote *Master i Margarita*, the exemplar of my second category of literature, the new Soviet lifestyle – 'a revolutionary experiment in living, an attempt to practice utopian ideologies and to destroy bourgeois banality'³¹ – was culturally embedded. By the 1930s the communal apartment, as a uniquely Soviet institution, had inscribed its own mythological

²⁹ Marietta Shaginian, *Mess-Mend*, II, pp. 115-407 (pp. 156-161).

³⁰ Shaginian, p. 161.

³¹ Бойм, p. 124.

space within Soviet culture. (Ironically, by the late twentieth century the collective apartment had itself become a site of nostalgia and *kitsch*, a symbol of a superseded era.)³² During the Stalin era, new apartment complexes were planned and constructed in pursuit of the dream of utopian collective life. Yet sometimes (as in Platonov's *Kotlovan*) these projects never rose beyond foundations. Hauntings on the site of Soviet cultural space imply that socialist utopia has been fatally corroded by a Gothic subtext of inherent flaws and secret betrayals.

2. Ghosts from the Past

In Andrei Platonov's short story "Takyr" (1934), a young Tadzhik orphan, Jamila, is liberated from her primitive background as a desert nomad by the chance to travel to Russia and receive a Soviet education. Jamila becomes an agronomist. She has apparently assimilated to the modern, mechanized world of Stalinist Russia. But Jamila remains secretly haunted by her past. She cannot forget her first lover, or the ruined tower in the desert, the 'takyr' of the title, where they once lived together. She accompanies a surveying expedition to her homeland of Tadzhikistan in order to revisit the takyr. Inside the building, she finds her lover's skeleton. The crumbling tower in the desert is simultaneously the symbol of Jamila's former love and the grave of her dreams. Jamila decides to remain in the tower instead of returning to her successful life in Soviet Russia. The ruined tower in the Tadzhik desert symbolizes the dominance of past over present; Platonov's story demonstrates the capacity of Gothic space to overturn the lives of the Soviet regime's positive heroes (and heroines).

The following section analyses three Soviet texts which share in the same trope of Gothic space: the past's ability to subvert the present. Like "Takyr", these investigate whether Soviet notions of space successfully replace older concepts, or whether the cost in human suffering fails to justify the exchange. In Bulgakov's short story "No. 13", an attempt to repopulate a luxury apartment block with proletarians ends in flames. This disaster occurs because the new inhabitants renege on their own ideals, failing to practise the socialist virtues of mutual care and obligation. Zamiatin's dystopia *My* describes an intensely collectivised, de-historicized and minutely regulated urban society of the future. Nonetheless, a single old-style house

³² Svetlana Boym cites Bulat Okudzhava's ballads, especially his 'Pesen'ka pro chernogo kota', to argue that aspects of the communal apartment, specifically the 'chernyi khod' or (typically) unlighted entrance, evolved their own supernatural significance: 'The black entrance to the communal apartments leads to a dark corner of the Soviet unconscious... The black staircase is a Soviet public site *par excellence*, a space that is everybody's and therefore nobody's responsibility; it is where the ghosts of collective fear are kept alive much longer than they needed to be' (Boym, p. 141).

preserved from the past suffices to unlock historical secrets and undermine the rigid social order. Gladkov's *Tsement* is a Gothic narrative which underwrites the legitimacy of Soviet Russia; in this novel, Gladkov exploits traditional Gothic tropes and metaphors to describe the re-activation of a derelict cement factory.

2.i. 'Темные люди': Bulgakov's First Property on Ulitsa Sadovaia

"No. 13: Dom El'pit-Rabkommuna", first published in 1922, was reprinted in 1925 as part of the *D'iavoliada* collection, Bulgakov's satirical mythopoeia of NEP Moscow. Dom El'pit was pseudonymous for the real-life Dom Pigita, a luxurious building owned by the tobacco millionaire I. Pigit. It was one of the first private apartment blocks to be collectivised after the Revolution.³³ Between 1921 and 1924 Bulgakov occupied two different flats in this building – No. 50 and No. 34 – with his first wife, Tatiana Lappa. Bulgakov's strong dislike for the incongruities and inconveniences of communal life – his corridor at one time included a motley cast of alcoholics and wife-beaters – influences the bitterly satirical portrait of the inhabitants of Dom El'pit as 'темные люди', unable to appreciate or profit from the property they have appropriated.³⁴

As stated above, a key Gothic trope is the reversion of illegally held property to its rightful owner or that owner's heirs. In Bulgakov's story, both El'pit and his caretaker, the master carpenter Khristi, express overt faith that this Gothic mechanism will work in their favour. Although El'pit was forced to renounce his property and flee to a tiny flat on the far side of Moscow, he remains convinced that collectivisation and Communism will soon fail, and that the pre-revolutionary *status quo* will be restored. With this hope in mind, El'pit pays huge bribes to fuel suppliers in order to keep his house heated over winter. Bulgakov's nameless omniscient narrator evokes romantic memories of the flats' former occupants. These glamorous courtesans, statesmen and generals contrast favourably with the current ignorant, self-interested proletarian tenants. Indeed, the house's occupation by these 'невиданные люди' is figured by Bulgakov in semi-supernatural terms as if it constitutes a haunting:

³³ Edythe C. Haber, *Mikhail Bulgakov: The Early Years* (Harvard and London: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 156.

³⁴ See Lesley Milne, *Mikhail Bulgakov: A Critical Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 52-3.

Примусы шипели по-змеиному, и днем, и ночью плыл по лестница шиплющий чад. Из всех кронштейнов лампы исчезли, и наступал ежевечерне мрак. В нем спотыкались тени с узлом и тоскливо вскрикивали...³⁵

Khristi, a mysterious and powerful individual (part Christ figure, part mage), continues to inhabit the basement of the huge house. His task is to subtly restrain the new Bolshevik house committee from inflicting any permanent structural damage. As El'pit instructs him:

‘Черт с ними, с унитазами, черт с проводами!’ страстно говорил Эльпит, сжимая кулаки. ‘Но лишь бы топить. Сохранить главное. Борис Самойлович, сберегите мне дом, пока все это кончится, и я сумею вас отблагодарить! Что? Верьте мне!’³⁶

However, El'pit's determination to wait out the Bolshevik occupation ‘пока все это кончится’ is frustrated by the new tenants' misguided self-interest. Disobeying strict instructions from both El'pit and the housing committee, a tenant called Annushka Pyliaeva attaches a wood-burning stove to a ventilation pipe in her flat. Some critics interpret Annushka as a Gothic character, ‘in league with the infernal forces’, because of her malign act and witchlike appearance.³⁷ Within hours the entire building has burned to the ground, leaving a vast smoke cloud like a ‘жаркий оранжевый зверь’³⁸ on the Moscow skyline. The Gothic mechanism of retribution has misfired: both the rightful owner and the usurper have lost their homes. Yet the conclusion offers conditional redemption to the egregious Annushka, rather than to the doubly wronged El'pit and Khristi. In the closing lines of Bulgakov's story, Annushka gains the humility to realize her own ignorance (metonymous for the ignorance of her entire class), and to pray for greater wisdom in the future.

The subtlety of Bulgakov's message lies in this ambiguous ending. By depriving both Pyliaeva and El'pit of property, Bulgakov avoids indicating whom he thinks may be the house's rightful owner and whom the usurper, destined by Gothic justice to be dispossessed. He endorses neither El'pit the capitalist nor Annushka the proletarian. Instead, both are shown as victims of self-interest: El'pit cannot appreciate the permanence of the Revolution,

³⁵ Mikhail Bulgakov, “No. 13: Dom El'pit-Rabkommuna”, in *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. by Ellendea Proffer, 8 vols (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1982-), II (1985), pp. 368-376 (pp. 369-370).

³⁶ Bulgakov, “No. 13”, p. 370.

³⁷ Milne, p. 52; Haber, p. 159.

³⁸ Bulgakov, “No. 13”, p. 375.

while Annushka's attempt to enrich her own private sphere leads to catastrophe. While Bulgakov certainly intended the needless combustion of No. 13 as a warning to incompetent Soviet house committees (whom he would again lambaste in *Sobach'e serdtse* three years later), Annushka's epiphany at the conclusion suggests a tentative endorsement of Communism (if not collectivization).

2.ii. Gladkov's cement castle

Fedor Gladkov's first major novel, *Tsement*, appeared in its entirety in the journal *Krasnaia nov'* in 1925. The book won immediate praise from Gorky as the first Soviet work to realize labour as a literary theme and develop it romantically;³⁹ Katarina Clark calls *Tsement* 'the prototypical Soviet novel'.⁴⁰ Despite its immediate success and many imitators (Gladkov's plot set the trend for many dozens of socialist realist production novels),⁴¹ *Tsement* was also heavily criticized for its ambiguous conclusion, spontaneity, individualism and excessively ornamental style. Gladkov admitted stylistic influence from Bely and Remizov.⁴² Clark argues that *Tsement* borrows one of the fundamental Gothic-fantastic characters in Russian literature for the revolutionary tradition: the Bronze Horseman. In Pushkin's original poem, *Mednyi vsadnik* (1833) the metallic body of the horseman, Peter I, allegorizes the oppressive nature of Russian autocracy; the same image was later mediated by Andrei Bely's *Peterburg* (1916). In *Tsement*, Gleb Chumalov, the Red Army soldier and proletarian hero, assumes the metallic qualities of dominance, determination and indestructibility epitomized by the statue. Gladkov uses metallic tropes to describe Gleb's physical solidity. But Gleb oppresses and dominates Engineer Kleist, the factory manager and the only surviving representative of the old political order, instead of the reverse. The supernatural force of the Horseman is embodied, this time, on the side of the Revolution.⁴³

Tsement's principal Gothic aspects derive from the pre-eminence of themes of return and retribution. This Gothic narrative is ultimately defused when Gleb, the hero, chooses

³⁹ Gorky wrote that, in *Tsement*, 'первые за время революции крепко взята и ярко освещена наиболее значительная тема современности – труд'. Cited by M. F. Pakhomova, *Avtobiograficheskie povesti F. V. Gladkova i traditsii M. Gor'kogo* (Moscow and Leningrad: Nauka, 1966), p. 54.

⁴⁰ Clark, p. 69.

⁴¹ See Clark, pp. 69-82, for *Tsement*'s influence on the development of the Socialist Realist production novel.

⁴² B. Brainina, "*Tsement*" F. Gladkova (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1965), pp. 15-16.

⁴³ Clark, pp. 78-79.

restitution and reconciliation over retribution, in an ideologically correct climax, celebrating the unity of collective labour. Other Gothic themes include sexual violence, depicted as a factor in ideological insecurities within the Party.⁴⁴ However, the first part of the novel is concerned with a derelict cement factory which, as I shall show, fulfils most of the defining tropes of Gothic space. Firstly, the opening chapter is entitled ‘Pustynnyi zavod’, signalling the factory’s preeminent narrative role. Several other chapter titles reference space (especially desolate, haunted spaces): ‘Potukhshii ochag’, ‘Spriatannaia komnata’, and so on. Secondly, like a crumbling medieval castle, the factory is now almost ruined; revolution and civil war have banished the owners and foremen, but the proletariat in the factory town have failed to capitalise on their absence. Instead, when Gleb Chumalov returns from the war, he finds his former comrades distracted by private enterprises – such as making cigarette lighters – and the local Party organisation faction-ridden and ineffective. At several stages throughout the novel, the factory is compared to a ‘mogila’, a ‘kladbishche’. This metaphor is historically justified when Gleb discovers that during the Civil War the factory functioned as a White Army barracks and a holding cell for prisoners. Horrified, Gleb contrasts the factory’s glorious past with its ruinous present:

Завод грохотал огненным адом. Дрожала земля от бешенства машин, а воздух горящими стружками брызгал от пламенных окон... [...] Это было в прошлом. А теперь – тишина и великое кладбище. Травой заросли бремсберги, стальные пути и дороги к заводу. Ржа покрыла коростой метал, и упругие железобетонные стены здания изранены проломали и размывами горных потоков.⁴⁵

The factory possesses all the key attributes of a Gothic castle: dereliction, underground tombs (the prisoners’ barracks are described as ‘кошмарные гробы’),⁴⁶ a wicked guardian, and even a collection of captive maidens. The latter are the machines in the main hall, unused but maintained in working order by Brynza the mechanic, who calls them his ‘девчата – чистоплотные’.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ For instance, Naiman calls the rape of Polia by the sinister Party representative Badin a ‘quintessential moment’ in Gothic: ‘nightmarish, frightening and shameful’ (*SP*, p. 178). See *SP*, pp. 173-180, for Gladkov’s use of sexual Gothic to frame an ideological point.

⁴⁵ Fedor Gladkov, *Tsement* (Moscow and Leningrad: Zemlia i Fabrika, 1927), p. 89.

⁴⁶ Gladkov, p. 18.

⁴⁷ Gladkov, p. 20.

The guardian of the Gothic castle is the German chief engineer, German Germanovich Kleist. Like most Gothic villains, Kleist is foreign (and therefore inherently treacherous). Kleist now hides in a ‘спрятанная комната’, a tiny, cobweb-covered office in the administration building.⁴⁸ Kleist built the machines and structures of the factory, and therefore empathizes with these ‘железо-бетонные гиганты’.⁴⁹ But, excluded by the new co-operative economic system, he is now as much prisoner as guardian of the factory: ‘старый специалист инженер Клейст... был пленником своих созданий, оставался в душе собственником’.⁵⁰ Kleist is a recurrent threat to Gleb’s ambitions: ‘То высокий человек с серебряной бородкой... опять стал на пути перед Глебом’.⁵¹ ‘Тогда’ refers to the troubled period before the Civil War, when Kleist turned Gleb and three other striking workers over to a tribunal of White officers for punishment. Both Gleb and Kleist know that this was effectively a death sentence. However, the indestructible Gleb survived and returned to exact vengeance.

Each man returns from the other’s past, determined to avenge previous wrongs. Just as Kleist perpetually blocks Gleb’s path, Kleist recognizes nemesis in his miraculously resurrected former employee: ‘Этого человека я отдал на смерть, но смерть рикошетом отражена в меня’.⁵² In one of *Tsement*’s pivotal chapters, appropriately titled ‘Rasplata’, Gleb, embodying the collective iron will of the proletariat, is empowered to exact penance from Kleist. Their final confrontation takes place, appropriately, at twilight in the deserted factory. For both men, the building symbolizes their personal failure and present ruin. Gleb forces the engineer to join him on a viewing tower overlooking the central shaft. Kleist fully expects his own violent death at Gleb’s hands; he blames the Bolsheviks for the factory’s decline: ‘Мы строили на века - крепко и разумно. А вы превратили все в хаос и развалину’. Gleb inverts this diagnosis, blaming Kleist for the decline. Because the factory was designed as a ‘непобедимая крепость’ to exclude the proletariat, it failed to withstand social change. However, where Kleist sees nothing but destruction – his own and the machines’ – Gleb envisions potential for restoration. He expresses his determination to rebuild the factory in

⁴⁸ In a highly symbolic scene, Gleb invades Kleist’s office and strips the cobwebs from the windows, letting in light (Gladkov, p. 84).

⁴⁹ Gladkov, p. 87.

⁵⁰ Lidiia Nikolaevna Ul’rich, *Gorkii i Gladkov* (Tashkent: Gosizdat UzSSR, 1961), p. 19.

⁵¹ Gladkov, p. 29.

⁵² Gladkov, p. 87.

almost Fedorovian terms: ‘оживить это кладбище... зажечь огнем и заиграть музыкой на всех проводах и канатах’.⁵³

Gleb does not intend to forget the death and suffering endured by former comrades on the site of the factory. He holds Kleist responsible, but will forgive these wrongs for the sake of communal progress. Gleb offers Kleist absolution if he agrees to join the workers’ collective. Kleist realizes that Gleb’s ‘страшные руки, насыщенные смертью, сурово и крепко пригвоздили его [Kleist] к жизни.’⁵⁴ Gleb soon reinvents his old enemy, Engineer Kleist, as ‘товарищ технорук’, the workers’ friend. It is Gleb’s generous offer, with Kleist’s cautious acceptance, that breaks the Gothic cycle of retribution and transforms *Tsement* from a Gothic novel into an optimistic fable of Soviet labour. Gladkov claimed that his plot was inspired by the sight of workers enthusiastically labouring on weekends to restore a cement factory in Novorossisk.⁵⁵ Whatever *Tsement*’s real-life inspiration, Gladkov certainly tapped Gothic metaphor to establish a terrifying *alternative* to the workers’ paradise: Gleb’s vision of the factory as prison and grave. By developing correspondences between the Gothic castle chronotope and the abandoned factory, he emphasizes the villainy of capitalist bosses and sadistic White officers, as well as the probity of men like Brynza and Gleb. However, by introducing the redemptive theme of reconciliation and mutual progress, Gladkov distances the Gothic castle in the past. The factory is reinvented as a symbol of harmony and optimism, forsaking the predestined tragedy of Gothic plot for an incongruously happy ending. Nevertheless, Gladkov’s affinity with Gothic metaphor in an otherwise positivist novel no doubt contributed to the critical sniping which forced Gladkov to rewrite *Tsement* many times between 1925 and 1941.⁵⁶

2.iii. ‘Странное, хрупкое, слепое сооружение’: The Ancient House of *My*

Evgenii Zamiatin’s *My* (1920) contains a Gothic locus analogous to Gladkov’s cement factory. In both novels, a building preserved as a relic from the past becomes a symbol of future hope. In *Tsement*, the reconstructed factory becomes a tool for social synthesis, a

⁵³ Gladkov, p. 92.

⁵⁴ Gladkov, p. 93.

⁵⁵ Ul’rich, p. 7.

⁵⁶ ‘Гладков стилистически правил почти каждую фразу’, Ul’rich, p. 44. The two most heavily Gothic sections, ‘Pustynnyi zavod’ and ‘Bremberg’, were the most intensely revised.

symbol of reconciliation between old and new elements in society (Gladkov exploits the metaphoric value of cement as binding agent as well as building material). The Ancient House of *My* is reoccupied and 'resurrected' by a group of anti-government conspirators, the Mephi. The Ancient House is a wooden mansion, probably dating from the twentieth century. Its anachronistic bourgeois luxuries are maintained as historical curiosities, in order to edify, and arouse contempt in, the enlightened dwellers of the ultra-modern One State. However, unlike *Tsement*, there can be no reconciliation between those determined to restore the values of the past and those complicit in the totalitarian rule of the One State's dictator, the Benefactor. Although the Mephi fail to overthrow the One State, the Ancient House continues to offer future dissidents hope of shelter and renewal.

The Ancient House occupies a liminal site, within the One State yet in close proximity to the glass Green Wall which segregates the One State's inhabitants from the degenerate humans rumoured to live in the wilderness beyond. Ostensibly a museum, the House has become a focus for urban myths expressing the One State's fear of incursions from the outside. One rumour, for example, suggests that someone saw 'около Древнего Дома какого-то человека – голый и весь покрыт шерстью...'.⁵⁷ In fact, the Ancient House's principal function is to challenge the aesthetic and spatial conventions of the One State. Its rooms and furnishings contrast dramatically with the One State's tiny flats and transparent partitions.

The One State's inhabitants, known by numbers instead of names, inhabit these glass-walled apartments. Blinds can only be closed during sexual intimacy (regulated by a strict timetable). They conduct their lives with machinelike regularity, Zamiatin's sideswipe at the Fordist industrial methods tested in Russia during the 1920s. The narrator, an engineer called D-503, is lured into heterodoxy by I-330, an attractive, enigmatic woman who invites him to the Ancient House. The Ancient House offends D-503's sensibilities: he finds its carpets, its piano and bust of Pushkin distasteful. He calls it a 'странное, хрупкое, слепое сооружение', a 'мрачный, беспорядочный помещение',⁵⁸ where he feels outmanoeuvred and imprisoned: 'я определенно почувствовал себя пойманным, посаженным в эту дикую клетку, почувствовал себя захваченным в дикий вихрь древней жизни'.⁵⁹ D-503 mocks his ancestors' 'жалкая клеточная психология', their need to live in private

⁵⁷ Evgenii Zamiatin, *My* (New York: Mezhdunarodnoe literaturnoe sodruzhestvo, 1967), p. 165.

⁵⁸ Zamiatin, *My*, pp. 25-26.

⁵⁹ Zamiatin, *My*, p. 28.

fortresses: “‘Мой дом – моя крепость’ – ведь нужно же было додуматься!’.”⁶⁰ The power of the Ancient House, and its association with the seductive I-330, soon overcomes his reservations. D-503 is seduced and entrapped within the ‘дикая клетка’.

The Ancient House is guarded by a mysterious custodian: а ‘старуха, вся сморщенная и особенно рот: одни складки, сборки, губы уже ушли внутрь, рот как-то зарос – и было совсем невероятно, чтобы она заговорила’.⁶¹ This old woman, guarding the glass door into the Ancient House, embodies the site’s liminality. Her vegetable-like stolidity associates her more closely with ‘the shaggy, untamed forces of nature [rather than]... the smooth citizens of the One State’.⁶² This benign guardian controls admittance to the Ancient House, permitting both I-330’s amorous dalliances and the Mephi’s seditious meetings. As D-503 becomes more involved, sexually and politically, with I-330, he suspects that he too is physiologically compromised, like the guardian and the half-animal savages living beyond the Wall. I-330 speculates that he may be descended from free, forest-living women who intermarried with men of the One State: ‘в тебе, наверное, есть несколько капель солнечной, лесной крови’.⁶³ D-503’s attraction to the past is therefore explained by this inoperable, organic foreignness – a genealogically incurred alienation.

The Ancient House is a place of concealment and secrets. Creaking doors open reluctantly onto cramped, dark rooms: every landing has locked doors that even I-330 cannot open. The bedrooms hoard forbidden treasures from the past: alcohol, tobacco, revealing dresses which emphasize I-330’s exotic sexuality. After D-503 and I-330 consummate their affair, he discovers an additional, labyrinthine level of the Ancient House. Returning unexpectedly to the bedroom, he finds that I-330 has somehow eluded him, even though there is only one exit:

В ту комнату, где она (вероятно) еще застегивала юнифу [the uniform of One State dwellers] перед зеркалом, вбежал – и остановился. Вот – ясно вижу – еще покачивается старинное кольцо на ключе в двери шкафа, а I – нет. Уйти она никуда не могла – выход из комнаты

⁶⁰ Zamiatin, *My*, p. 20.

⁶¹ Zamiatin, *My*, p. 25.

⁶² Robert Russell, *Zamiatin’s “We”* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2007), p. 81.

⁶³ Zamiatin, *My*, p. 72.

только один — и все-таки ее нет. Я обшарил все, я даже открыл шкаф и ощупал там пестрые, древние платья: никого...⁶⁴

D-503's despair at the irrationality of the house's inner geography reflects his growing emotional estrangement. Thanks to I-330, he no longer belongs in the One State. On a later visit to the Ancient House, D-503 finally penetrates the secret. In authentically Gothic tradition, he discovers a lift leading downwards into a subterranean labyrinth used for meetings by the Mephi conspirators. Yet this causes D-503 still greater bewilderment: the underground labyrinth is even more complex than the architecture of the house itself. Unable to rationalize his descent into darkness, D-503 calls it a death: 'в глазах потемнело, я умер'.⁶⁵ Richard Russell interprets D-503's descent as an analogue to the transition from the 'conscious to the subconscious reaches of the mind. The tunnels into which he emerges are those that lie beneath the rational surface of thought. He has now reached the fount of his desires and emotions and it is no coincidence that it is precisely here, in the depths of his subconscious, that he once again encounters I-330'.⁶⁶

The Ancient House, therefore, is a hoard of secrets, but for D-503 the most important secret is the one he and I-330 create within its walls. As Russell notes, 'The journey through the huge, opaque doors of the Ancient House is simultaneously an act of stepping into a dangerous world of sexual passion'.⁶⁷ The passionate relationship which arises between the naïve engineer and his ironical seductress is an emotional throwback, a dangerous remnant of the distant past. Despite his self-abandonment to passion, D-503 evaluates a kiss as an anachronistic action, a 'древний, нелепый, чудесный обряд'.⁶⁸ When he kisses the guardian of the Ancient House on her hirsute lips, he experiences an emotional epiphany: for the first time he recognises the beauty of individuality. This knowledge of individual worth, precariously and ecstatically attained by D-503, is the ultimate mystery of the Ancient House. The house contains 'the secret rebellion that might one day overthrow the Benefactor and

⁶⁴ Zamiatin, *My*, p. 67.

⁶⁵ Zamiatin, *My*, p. 84.

⁶⁶ Russell, p. 82.

⁶⁷ Russell, p. 61.

⁶⁸ Zamiatin, *My*, p. 131.

destroy the Green Wall... the heretical legacy that will ensure that no future Benefactor will ever succeed in destroying people's creativity and individuality'.⁶⁹

Although *My* was banned in Soviet Russia, its significance transcends politics. Its vindication of individuality is more transgressive than any historically relative allegory. The Ancient House is a focus of Gothic mystery, suggesting that the banished past will inevitably return and reassert itself in even the most self-sufficient societies – even those, like the One State, patrolled by thought-police and hermetically sealed behind glass. The book ends with two mutually opposed symbols of continuation. The surgeons of the One State have discovered how to destroy emotional sensitivity in individuals with compulsory lobotomies; meanwhile, D-503's illegally conceived child is to be brought up in the legendary wilderness beyond the Wall. Gothic plot requires that D-503's heir will one day return to reclaim from the One State the universal human legacy of empathy and individuality. Therefore a Gothic interpretation of *My* contains a message of hope that contradicts the novel's terrifying final sentence: 'разум должен победить'.⁷⁰

3. Нехорошие квартиры: Soviet hauntings

In Vladimir Zazubrin's novella *Shchepka* (1923), the regional Cheka building becomes semi-animate in a gruesome Gothic-fantastic transformation:

Ночами белый каменный трехэтажный дом с красивым флагом на крыше, с красной вывеской на стене, с красными звездами на шапках часовых вглядывался в город голодными блестящими четырехугольными глазами окон, щерил зазеденевшие зубы чугунных решетчатых ворот, хватал, жевал охапками арестованных, глотал их каменными глотками подвалов, переваривал в каменном брюхе и мокротой, слюной, потом, экскрементами выплевывал, выхаркивал, выбрасывал на улицу. И к рассвету усталый, позевывая со скрипом чугунных зубов и челюстей, высовывал из подворотни красные языки крови.⁷¹

In this extract, an archetypal Soviet building, the Cheka HQ, is depicted in Gothic imagery. The building is grotesquely personified: its windows are glaring eyes, its gates grind like teeth, and its hungry jaws devour and spit out hapless prisoners during interrogation and

⁶⁹ Russell, p. 80.

⁷⁰ Zamiatin, *My*, p. 200.

⁷¹ Vladimir Zazubrin, 'Shchepka' in *Povesti vremennykh let 1917-1940*, ed. by S. Semikhina (Ekaterinburg: U-Faktoriia, 2005), pp. 193-258 (p. 215).

execution. All this is framed in demonic crimson tongues of fire, and the action takes place at night, the traditional time for supernatural events. Zazubrin's text exemplifies the possession – or gothicization – of Soviet space by supernatural forces created within Soviet society. As the secret police of Communist Russia, the Cheka's crimes – and the subsequent creation of Gothic space – can only be ascribed to Soviet internal politics. No previous government or influence can be blamed. In the 1920s, the Soviet regime was rapidly acquiring its own ghosts: this section will analyse a selection of these uniquely Soviet hauntings.

The most famous Gothic space in Soviet Russia was *Master i Margarita*'s infamous 'нехорошая квартира', located on the same street and inspired by the same building as Bulgakov's earlier story "No. 13": 'большой шестиэтажный дом, покоем расположенном на Садовой улице'.⁷² The demonic Woland may be a 'metamorphosis' of the mysterious figure of Khristi the custodian in "No. 13".⁷³ Sixteen years passed between "No. 13"'s publication and the novel's final draft in 1938; by the end of the thirties, communal apartments were well-established. Flat No. 50 at 302A ulitsa Sadovaia is now the site of a small museum and the destination of thousands of literary pilgrims. No fewer than six chapters of *Master i Margarita*, including the eponymous 'Нехорошая квартира', are set here. Selected by Woland to accommodate his troupe, this flat becomes the stage for outrageous performances which blend the surreal and the all-too-real in Stalinist society: gun battles, telephone denunciations to the secret police, naked servants, and one extraordinary ball. Finally, Begemot sets the flat on fire. The combustion of the entire building echoes the destruction of Dom El'pit, its prototype, in the 1922 short story.

A key thematic difference between "No. 13" and *Master i Margarita* is Bulgakov's treatment of the supernatural. In "No. 13", Gothic-fantastic tropes remain implicit or disguised through suggestion, caricature, and personification. *Master i Margarita*, however, pays homage to the Gothic-fantastic tradition. Echoes from Pushkin, Pogorel'skii, Odoevskii, Chaianov and Hoffmann abound. In the short story, Bulgakov suspends his authorial judgement, refusing to grant possession of Dom El'pit to either the proletarian squatters or the legal landlord. By the time of writing *Master i Margarita*, in the 1930s, Bulgakov has found an heir: the demonic Woland, who dispossesses the Soviet tenants Berlioz and Likhodeev from Flat No. 50. Refusing to endorse either capitalism or communism, Bulgakov releases upon Moscow the

⁷² Bulgakov, *MM*, p. 82.

⁷³ See Boym, *Common Places*, p. 325.

irrational force personified by Woland and his troupe. The collective apartment thus becomes ‘a site of counterrevolutionary orgies and ritual destructions’: its former inhabitants ‘learn to carve imaginary spaces’ in their own homes, admitting grotesque unreality into the regulated world of 1930s Russia.⁷⁴

I read Woland’s occupation of No. 50 as a rejection of two cultures: prerevolutionary and Soviet. Bulgakov demonstrates his contempt for both by ruthlessly rupturing the chain of inheritance: when Woland leaves No. 50, he burns the entire building down. Yet Woland’s flamboyant destructiveness is simply an overt manifestation of the haunting already implicit in the structures of Soviet culture. Flat No. 50 was a Gothic space long before Woland’s arrival. Rumours described it as ‘проклятая’ because of the disappearances of almost all its previous tenants: ‘И вот два года тому назад начались в квартире необъяснимые происшествия: из этой квартиры люди начали бесследно исчезать’.⁷⁵ Not only have former tenants vanished, Berlioz and Likhodeev’s wives have disappeared. Mysterious disappearances are a stock feature of Gothic. In *Master i Margarita*, this Gothic trope refers to an essentially prosaic, but perhaps still more terrifying phenomenon of 1930s Moscow: the arrests and ‘disappearances’ perpetrated by the secret police. Just as Zazubrin’s novella supernaturalized the Cheka, Bulgakov creates a supernatural analogue for the activities of the NKVD. When Likhodeev comes home to find Berlioz’ door sealed, apparently by the police, he immediately suspects that his colleague has been ‘disappeared’ and fears that he might be implicated by association. Thus the Gothic-fantastic exuberance of *Master i Margarita* tropes the pre-existent labyrinth of fear and suspicion in the minds of Soviet bureaucrats and intellectuals.

The hauntings in the following texts are, therefore, phantoms of Stalinism, arising from the internal contradictions within Soviet society. Andrei Platonov’s *Kotlovan* is the story of a *tabula rasa*, a foundation pit for a brand-new housing complex, the All-Proletarian Dom. Its abject failure and symbolic collapse into a grave site indicts Stalinist reality. Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii’s “Kvadraturin” is an emotionally devastating account of one individual’s psychological atomization, framed by the petty events of life in a collective apartment. “Kvadraturin” returns to the ‘little man’ theme of Gogol’s Petersburg tales. Despite the relative modernity of both locations, they are framed by conventional tropes of Gothic space.

⁷⁴ Boym, p. 136.

⁷⁵ Bulgakov, *MM*, p. 82.

3.i. *Kotlovan*: Gothic castles in the air

Andrei Platonov's novel *Kotlovan* was written between December 1929 and April 1930, when the extent of Stalin's restrictive policies was still unclear but writers were already beginning to rally behind a new ethos of political conformism.⁷⁶ The writing was on the wall for fellow travellers like Platonov and Bulgakov who had failed to join the Party; indeed, it was at this time that Bulgakov would apply for permission to leave Russia.⁷⁷ Platonov himself was disillusioned with the direction taken by Communism. Appropriately, *Kotlovan* balances between utopia and dystopia. As the Russian critic A.I. Pavlovskii notes, the story differs from other dystopian novels (like *My*) by its immediacy and relevance to present-day Soviet concerns. Platonov's characters are poor workers, dispossessed kulaks and Party bureaucrats. The narrative focuses initially on a public housing project, the construction of a gargantuan apartment block, and secondly, on the forced collectivisation of a village. *Kotlovan* actually presents its readers with two alternative (and opposed) utopias: the enclosed utopia of the planned apartment building, and the universal 'existential utopia' of the open road which one character follows in his quest for happiness.⁷⁸ *Kotlovan* also manifests, as I will show in the following section, most of the standard tropes associated with Gothic buildings, including personification. The eponymous hero of Samuel Beckett's 1949 play *Waiting for Godot* is a character who never arrives. Similarly, in *Kotlovan* the longed-for house is 'conspicuous by its absence' (by the end of the story the construction work has not even started). Although it is in many ways the central protagonist of *Kotlovan*, 'the house exists only in the conversations, plans and dreams of the other characters, who have, each in their own way, set their hopes and their expectations of a better life on it'.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ From 1927, independent writers' groups were progressively subsumed into RAPP, which was in 1932 replaced by the Union of Writers. The introduction of Socialist realism as official literary doctrine followed in 1934. See Clark, pp. 27-45.

⁷⁷ In a letter to his brother Nikolai dated August 1929, Bulgakov admits that he has applied to leave Russia but has no hope of a favourable outcome. 'If my application is turned down, the game can be considered to be over, the cards can be put away and the candles extinguished' (Cited by Riitta Pittman, *The Writer's Divided Self in Bulgakov's The Master and Margarita* (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 83).

⁷⁸ See Katharina Hansen Löve, 'The structure of space in Platonov's *Kotlovan*', in *The Evolution of Space in Russian Literature: A Spatial Reading of 19th and 20th Century Narrative Literature* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1994), pp. 129-154 (p. 130).

⁷⁹ Löve, p. 138.

One major irony of Platonov's novel is that the utopian plans which obsess the characters are never realised. Instead, the dystopian conditions of their current lives become (literally) more entrenched. The eponymous foundation pit expands beneath ground level, but the planned All-Proletarian House remains a castle in the air. Indeed, the chief architect of the project, Prushevskii, privately considers this utopian structure to be unrealizable in the contemporary world, due to humanity's imperfect condition. His vision of ideal social housing is literally a castle in the air, glimpsed among clouds on a foggy day:

Белые спокойные здания, светящиеся больше, чем было света в воздухе... те дальние здания устроены не только для пользы, но и для радости. Прушевский... наблюдал точную нежность и охлажденную, сомкнутую силу отдаленных монументов... Как остров, стоял среди остального новостроящегося мира этот белый сюжет сооружений и успокоенно светился.⁸⁰

Prushevskii secretly prefers for the All-Proletarian House to remain unfinished, since in its 'вечно стоящийся и недостроенный' state, it harmonizes with 'его разрушенная жизнь'.⁸¹ Meanwhile, Pashkin, the Party official overseeing the project, arbitrarily decides that the foundation pit should be expanded sixfold in order to build an even bigger house, thus 'дабы угодить наверняка и забежать наперед главной линии'.⁸² This plan is implemented, but building work never begins.

Like characters in a Gothic novel, lured to a forbidding manor or castle by the promise of shelter, the construction workers in *Kotlovan* idealize the future All-Proletarian House as a sanctuary. Even in its unfinished condition, the pit becomes a source of shelter – a 'теплая яма для ночлега'.⁸³ In his analysis of *Kotlovan*, Thomas Seifrid expands on this idea of shelter as a central preoccupation of Platonov's ontology. If realized, the house would constitute a shelter for the souls as well as the bodies of suffering workers, a retreat from the trials and vicissitudes of the physical world. Platonov seems to hint – through Prushevskii's soliloquies as well as the phraseology used to describe the House – that such a sanctuary would be incompatible with living as we know it. Löve notes that the House is imagined by the workers as a place offering 'pokoi', a place where workers' bodies will 'khranaiutsia'.

⁸⁰ Andrei Platonov, *Kotlovan*, in *Schastlivaia Moskva, povesti, rasskazy, lirika* (Moscow: Gud'ial Press, 1999), pp. 223-329 (p. 266).

⁸¹ Platonov, *Kotlovan*, p. 266.

⁸² Platonov, *Kotlovan*, p. 273.

⁸³ Platonov, *Kotlovan*, p. 230.

These terms suggest both the religious metaphor of ‘vechnoi pokoi’ for death and the mortician’s task of preserving corpses. Viewed from this perspective, the All-Proletarian House recalls a Fedorovian necrological museum rather than a workers’ paradise. The workers’ ambition to escape the difficulties and vicissitudes of life threatens to engage them prematurely with death – in a Gothic bargain resembling the ‘mortality myths’ discussed in Chapter Two.

Löve concludes that the idealized structure ‘no longer resembles a house, but is specified as a tower’, thus identifying itself with the Tower of Babel: ‘another, well-known megalomaniac building project in human history... The building of the all-proletarian house in Kotlovan can be interpreted in a way similar to the Babylonian building of a tower as a deed of pride, and a “rebellion against God”’.⁸⁴ If the *Kotlovan* building project is indeed a ‘deed of pride’ or rebellion, it invites divine retribution. The mechanism of this supernatural retribution is the eponymous foundation pit. Both the phantom House and the real foundation pit drain human resources. Whereas the utopian vision of the completed House haunts the workers’ imaginations, the constant labour to deepen and widen the pit feeds with vampiric rapacity on their mental and spiritual energy. Eric Naiman notes that empty space is one of Platonov’s most persistently used metaphors. The foundation pit, like the desert to which Jamila returns in “Takyr”, is a symbol of emptiness – ‘a void with a dual potential’, which can be either positive or negative. If the empty space is left unfilled, Naiman warns, ‘it may become a grave and the pit of Hell. Filled, it becomes a womb symbolizing future paradise and transforms an image of death into one of life’.⁸⁵ The tragedy of *Kotlovan* is that the pit is abandoned and remains unfilled – thus coming to ‘symbolize the emptiness of the characters’ lives’.⁸⁶

No critic has overlooked the correspondences between the foundation pit and the grave – which Platonov highlights by using the pit as a burial site at the end of the book. Nastia, the orphan girl who has become the builders’ unofficial mascot, succumbs to a cold aggravated by exposure. Nastia’s death functions as a symbolic indictment and revocation of the entire

⁸⁴ Löve, p. 141.

⁸⁵ Eric Naiman, ‘The Thematic Mythology of Andrei Platonov’ in *Russian Literature*, XXI (1987), 189-216 (p. 191).

⁸⁶ Naiman, ‘Thematic Mythology’, p. 196.

utopian project; her burial is also ‘похорон Великой Мечты’.⁸⁷ She had symbolised the future, happy generations who would inhabit the House. Instead, vengeance for their sins is visited upon this figure of innocence and hope. Yet not even Nastia is completely innocent. She disowned the memory of her mother, who was a kulak. In her final delirium, she recants and begs for her mother’s bones to be brought to her. By the terms of Gothic justice, Nastia’s apostasy has excluded her from utopia. In the Gothic tradition, children cannot renounce responsibility for their ancestor’s crimes. As a descendant of kulaks, she must suffer from their sins.

Platonov describes the excavation of Nastia’s grave by Chiklin, one of the workers, in detail:

В полдень Чиклин начал копать для Насти специальную могилу. Он рыл ее пятнадцать часов подряд, чтоб она была глубока и в нее не сумел бы проникнуть ни червь, ни корень растения, ни тепло, ни холод и чтоб ребенка никогда не побеспокоил шум жизни с поверхности земли.⁸⁸

This passage emphasizes how the original utopian plan – which was a plan for ascension *upward* into tall towers – has become inverted into a typically Gothic *downward* movement. Chiklin is one of the most committed and most idealistic builders involved in the project. He is the strongest digger – yet at no point in the book does he *build* anything. He descends into the bottom of the foundation pit with Nastia’s corpse, and then digs further down for fifteen hours until he is satisfied with the depth of her grave. As noted earlier, another fictional aspirant to utopia, D-503 in *My*, finds himself trapped in an underground labyrinth when he tries to find a rational explanation for his lover’s disappearance. Similarly, Chiklin’s quest for equality and shared happiness leads him deeper and deeper underground, culminating in Nastia’s interment.

Earlier in this chapter, I drew a parallel between the Gothic buildings Dale Bailey identifies in American literature and those depicted in Soviet fiction. In 1925, F Scott Fitzgerald published *The Great Gatsby*, the story of a successful entrepreneur who bought the biggest house on East Egg – but could not buy love. Bailey numbers ‘Gatsby’s sprawling mansion’ among his catalogue of modern-day Gothic castles, noting that it ‘is haunted by nothing less

⁸⁷ A.I. Pavlovskii, ‘Iama (o khudozhestvenno-filosofskoi konseptsii povesti Andeia Platonova “Kotlovan”)', in *Russkaia literatura*, 1 (1991), 21-41 (p. 32).

⁸⁸ Platonov, *Kotlovan*, p. 238.

than the American dream'.⁸⁹ *Kotlovan*, written five years later, is haunted by the Soviet dream. The characters' hopes for idyllic communal life are not only thwarted by Gothic plot, but actually inverted into the reality of a nightmarish pit, steadily growing downwards into the depths of the earth... If officials like Pashkin continue to order its expansion, the pit will spread infinitely, scarifying the landscape 'до дурной и катастрофической бесконечности'.⁹⁰

3.ii. Kvadraturin: The haunted room

Kotlovan describes a space that remains unreal because it is unachievable. The following text, Krzhizhanovskii's 1926 short story "Kvadraturin", is set in a space that is all too real: a tiny (86 sq. feet) boxroom in a collective apartment in Moscow.⁹¹ A partially redemptive feature of Platonov's novel is the fact that Chiklin, Nastia and others have at least dared to dream. In "Kvadraturin", the hero, Sutulin, lacks even this elemental courage. Even his name suggests the pathetic, crouched position from which he metaphorically conducts his life. Sutulin inhabits; he has an uninteresting job as an office clerk (note his similarity to the downtrodden Gogol's Akakii Akakievich in "Shinel'" (1842)). However, the tiny box Sutulin calls home soon manifests all the attributes of Gothic space – once the mysterious 'Kvadraturin' element enters the story.

'Kvadraturin' is a paste with the miraculous property of expanding living space when applied to the walls or ceiling of an apartment.⁹² When an anonymous vendor calls to his door and offers him a free tube as a trade sample, Sutulin agrees to test the paste on his own flat. He fails to realize that the vendor's refusal of payment, insistence on a signature and injunction to secrecy are all hallmarks of gifts from the Devil – the ultimate Gothic villain.

⁸⁹ Bailey, p. 14.

⁹⁰ Pavlovskii, p. 23.

⁹¹ Krzhizhanovskii's own room in a collective apartment on the Arbat was considerably smaller – only 64 sq. feet. Especially in his later years, Krzhizhanovskii was increasingly reluctant to leave this tiny space – possibly because of his own agoraphobia, caricatured in "Kvadraturin". For more on the autobiographical elements of Krzhizhanovskii's portrayal of space, see V.N. Toporov, "'Minus"-prostranstvo Sigizmunda Krzhizhanovskogo', in *Mif, ritual, simbol, obraz: issledovaniia v oblasti mifopoeticheskogo* (Moscow: Kul'tura, 1995), pp. 476-574 (p. 548), and Vadim Perel'muter, 'Posle katastrofy' in Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, 5 vols (St Petersburg: Symposium, 2001), I (2001), pp. 5-70 (pp. 10-11).

⁹² Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskii, "Kvadraturin", in *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, ed. by Vadim Perel'muter, 5 vols (St Petersburg: Symposium, 2001-), II (2001), pp. 449-460 (p. 450).

Traditionally, the recipients of such gifts pay for their supernatural privileges with their lives. Sutulin guilelessly follows the directions on the tube and paints Kvadraturin on the four walls of his flat (unfortunately, forgetting the ceiling). Next morning, the effects are dramatic. Sutulin's room has expanded substantially. The walls are farther apart, the furniture has moved, there is even extra space between his coat-hooks. Yet none of this expansion is perceptible to the other tenants surrounding Sutulin's room: somehow, he has gained access to an extra dimension. Satisfied, Sutulin leaves for work.

When he returns, the Kvadraturin is still acting. The walls are now grotesquely extended, so that the ceiling now seems disproportionately low. Before the treatment, Sutulin's room had been a 'спичечная коробка',⁹³ but it was also 'такой тесной, но такой своей, обжитой и теплой крохо-тушей'. Now the room has unambiguously assumed the appearance of a coffin: 'Вся комната, растянутая и уродливо развороченная, начинала пугать и мучить'. In the traditional progression of Gothic spaces, the room has changed from a place of shelter to a place of terror and/or captivity. In this story, the typical downwards momentum of Gothic fear has been replaced by the horizontal orientation of agoraphobic dread. Sutulin realizes that the room will continue to expand indefinitely: "Вот – вытеснится этакое из тюбика, расквдратится: квадрат в квадрат, квадрат квадратов в квадрат. Надо думать в обгон: если его не передумаешь, перерастет оно и..."⁹⁴

Like the narrator in Kharms' "Starukha", Sutulin is terrified that his landlady or a neighbour will enter his room and discover his secret. Thanks to a broken bulb, which plunges his coffin-room into darkness, he narrowly avoids an inopportune visit from the Room Re-measuring Committee – raising echoes with the House Committee seeking to reduce the size of Preobrazhenskii's apartment in *Sobach'e serdtse*.⁹⁵ To hide the secret expansion of his room, Sutulin voluntarily becomes its prisoner, deciding to stay inside constantly. Like other 'little men' of Russian literature, Sutulin submits to the inevitability of his fate: he cannot

⁹³ Krzhizhanovskii, "Kvadraturin", p. 449.

⁹⁴ Krzhizhanovskii, "Kvadraturin", pp. 455-457.

⁹⁵ Vadim Perel'muter states that it is no coincidence that both this story and Bulgakov's *Sobach'e serdtse* contain references to Soviet room allocation committees which redistribute the size of rooms. Bulgakov visited Krzhizhanovskii (while working on this novel), shortly after the latter's partner, the actress Anna Bovshek, had been resettled by one such committee. The previous occupant of Bovshek's new flat was a famous Moscow doctor – Sergei Ivanovich Preobrazhenskii, a likely source for the hero's name in *Sobach'e serdtse*. See Perel'muter, 'Kommentarii', in Krzhizhanovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii*, II, pp. 611-700 (pp. 677-678, note to p. 457).

stop the Kvadraturin's endless expansion, nor can he prevent the eventual exposure of his secret. In a brief moment of rebellion (“Бежать. Дверь настезь, пусть и они. Почему одному мне? Пусть и они”),⁹⁶ he decides to run away. But, lacking matches to light the way to the door, Sutulin loses himself in the unlit immensity of his room. Krzhizhanovskii ends the story on one of the most despairing notes in Soviet literature:

Жильцы квадратур, прилегавших к восьми квадратным гражданина Сутулина, со сна и со страху не разбирались в тембре и интонации крика, разбудившего их среди ночи и заставившего сбежаться к порогу сутулинской клетки: кричать в пустыне заблудившемуся и погибающему и бесполезно и поздно: но если все же – вопреки смыслам – он кричит, то, наверное, так.⁹⁷

In this story as in many others, Krzhizhanovskii establishes his status as a poet of the minus-space of loneliness, fear and emotional deprivation of Stalin's Moscow. Krzhizhanovskii considered himself to be an inhabitant of 'minus-Moscow', a place both Gothic and fantastic in the extremity of its absurdities and its estrangement from normal human conditions. The false socialization of communal apartments offered no compensation for the physical isolation sensitive individuals suffered. Although an early work, “Kvadraturin” anticipates Krzhizhanovskii's own detachment from his generation and from Soviet literature.⁹⁸ Additionally, like Flat No. 50 in *Master i Margarita*, Sutulin's flat is Gothic even *before* the incursion of the supernatural. It is a space characterized by confinement, privation and paranoia. Krzhizhanovskii's fable warns how, in Soviet culture, ‘омертвляется пространство жизни, и о том, как сама жизнь связана с пространством и зависит от него’.⁹⁹

4. Conclusion

I hope to have demonstrated in this chapter that the Gothic chronotope of ‘пугающие лабиринты, потайные двери, непроходимые чащи леса [which] таят в себе опасность преследования, смерти, насилия’,¹⁰⁰ is sustained and even developed in early Soviet

⁹⁶ Krzhizhanovskii, “Kvadraturin”, p. 459.

⁹⁷ Krzhizhanovskii, “Kvadraturin”, p. 460.

⁹⁸ For more on Krzhizhanovskii's treatment of 'minus-space', see Toporov, pp. 476-574.

⁹⁹ Toporov, p. 543.

¹⁰⁰ Vatsuro, p. 134.

fiction. The standard locus of the Gothic castle is redeveloped in a range of variants, including the haunted collective apartment, the Cheka prison cellars, and even the factories of heavy industry. Fictions by both dissident and conformist Soviet writers appropriate the Gothic trope of dispossession and repossession, often with a polemical edge that destabilizes the foundations of the Soviet dream.

The stories examined above convey a progressive dislocation of the individual from society. In the early NEP accounts of Gothic space, a continuum of property transfer exists between owners and heirs. While this continuum may be disrupted by external forces (such as the Revolution), its prior legitimacy is still recognized. The first group of stories recounts hauntings that are at least partially incurred by their victims: the capitalist landlord El'pit, for example, or Engineer Kleist with his history of abusing workers' rights. However, a decade later, the legal structures of Gothic narrative have been dismantled. Haunting is now visited on victims by *the society they inhabit*. The trajectory of retribution becomes arbitrary. Contrast the tentative note of reconciliation Bulgakov strikes at the end of "No. 13", (Annushka's epiphany as she watches Dom El'pit smoulder), with the uncompromising firestorm Begemot and Korov'ev ignite in Moscow at the end of *Master i Margarita*. Bulgakov's later novel no longer offers hope of a *rapprochement* between the proletariat and the educated classes through communal enlightenment.

In *Master i Margarita*, the fire that destroys 320A ulitsa Sadovaia breaks out hours later in Dom Griboedova, the writers' club, and a sanctum of Soviet intellectuality. This destruction of the temple of Soviet literary culture is a deeply meaningful act, expressing the extent of Bulgakov's disillusionment. Not only was the writer revenging the frustration of his own prospects, he negated the prospects of Soviet culture as a whole. Krzhizhanovskii's hero Sutulin, condemned to a tiny and oppressive apartment by the unfeeling society he inhabits, also inhabits Soviet Gothic space. His fate 'с беспощадностью точностью свидетельствует о том, как это пространство пожирает своих детей'.¹⁰¹ Soviet society has become a Gothic space which atomizes individuals and exposes them to terror. The individual is trapped in the labyrinth under the castle: and, 'in Gothic fiction, the castle is always haunted'.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Toporov, p. 543.

¹⁰² Peterson, p. 38.

CONCLUSION

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‘Готический роман – целостная и хорошо структурированная система’.¹ Gothic has always been noteworthy for its ‘remarkable institutional stability... its long history of repeating and reworking a limited set of devices to reproduce similar effects’.² In the context of this generic stability and coherence, it would be surprising if Gothic-fantastic tropes had *not* emerged in Soviet literature. In the preceding chapters, I have attempted to demonstrate the dissemination of characteristically Gothic tropes and topoi throughout Soviet fiction, and to argue for the enduring relevance of this ‘хорошо структурированная система’ to twentieth-century Russian culture. My introduction contextualised Gothic narrative within the framework of Russian and European Gothic fiction and identified three major narrative strategies characteristic of all Gothic-fantastic plots: liminality, regression, and revelation. I also outlined five tropes associated with Gothic narrative, derived from my survey of canonical Gothic novels.

Gothic bodies – degenerate or distorted bodies – are a trope of Gothic fiction which challenge the integrity of physical form. The deformed or hybrid versions of humanity imagined by Bulgakov, Platonov, Beliaev and others, contrast with the avatar of Soviet humanity, the utopian body. The latter was a hygienic and physiological ideal of Stalinist culture, engendered by a combination of social engineering, genetic selection and even surgical intervention. Both utopian and Gothic bodies are premised on the malleability and permeability of human form, evidencing the relativity of each type: one culture’s Adonis is another’s Caliban. Gothic narrative demonstrates that monsters are inherent in utopian thought, implying deadly consequences for excessively rapid social or scientific change. Similarly, the Gothic obsession with death and decay interrogates the Soviet cultural fixation on immortality and the scientific resurrection of the dead. Ironic or grotesque narratives by Beliaev, Ivanov and Kharmis oppose standard Socialist Realist archetypes of the hero-martyr or Nikolai Fedorov’s influential theory of universal resurrection.

¹ Vatsuro, p. iii.

² Peter K. Garrett, *Gothic Reflections: Narrative Force in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 2.

Gothic monsters and Gothic villains defy socialist ‘positive heroes’, while Gothic heroines take advantage of the flexible gender typing in early Soviet fiction to appropriate the work’s ideological message. Heroes in Soviet fiction may assume the traits of the traditional Gothic heroine – sensibility, vulnerability, and innocence – while female characters are branded with the worst traits of either sex. Such gender inversion exemplifies the radical conceptual experimentation common in Gothic, which found a niche in the experimentalism of early Soviet prose. The rupture of property regulations and the creation of new types of public housing by the Soviet regime permitted the incursion of Gothic spatial tropes of haunting, inheritance, and isolation. The idea of Soviet Russia as territory haunted by internal ghosts seems to contradict the foundational idea of the USSR as a progressive, rational workers’ utopia. However, the ghosts emergent in early Stalinist culture foreshadow the historical revelation of Soviet Russia’s ultimately fatal inner contradictions, six decades later.

Gothic narrative, in short, challenges, interrogates and subverts cultural and literary conventions. Yet Gothic is neither exclusively nor nihilistically transgressive; instead, the genre functions to identify forbidden topics and assimilate them within mainstream literature. Gothic archetypes allow writers and readers to explore, and defuse, contentious issues. Gothic villains, for example, often embody negative political stereotypes. But, like Bulgakov’s Woland, their apparent malevolence is often opposed by a latent commitment to the general ‘good’. It is dangerously reductive to read Gothic-fantastic tropes as political statements. They resist conclusive interpretation, conveying different meanings to every new reader and to every new generation: the tropes of Gothic fiction are timelessly relevant.

If Gothic narrative does have a unitary characteristic, this may be its mutually destabilising relationship to realist prose. David Punter suggests that the Gothic’s ‘general opposition to realist aesthetics’ is the criterion which ‘could apparently most simply define a unitary “Gothic tradition”... against the immediate immersion in a naturalised world which characterises the “realists”, Gothic writers have placed an enduring set of symbols, articulations of the imaginary...’³ I contend that Gothic maintains a dialogical, rather than an oppositional, interaction with the aesthetics of realist fiction. If, as one critic argues, the novel itself was originally a transgressive form, which ‘represented or incarnated a potentially disruptive or socially unstabilized energy that may threaten, directly or implicitly, the organization of society’, Gothic-fantastic tropes refresh and perpetuate this aspect of the

³ Punter, II, pp. 182-3.

genre.⁴ By incarnating and stabilizing potentially dangerous discourses, Gothic prevents the novel from reifying and losing its relevance to contemporary culture. To borrow Formalist terminology, Gothic tropes are an effective device for renewing our perception of literature, ‘to make a stone feel stony’.⁵ Or in another critic’s words, ‘The Gothic works not so much to break entirely with realism but slowly to contaminate it by introducing an unassimilable force’.⁶ The relationship between Gothic-fantastic tropes and motifs and Socialist Realism is characterized by this regenerative, mutually enriching exchange.

The earliest practitioners of Gothic prose engaged in metaliterary dialogue with realist rivals, insisting that the fantastic topoi of Gothic plots offered superior insight into human psychology. Horace Walpole used his famous second preface to *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) to protest against the hegemony of Voltairean realism, claiming that ‘the great resources of fancy have been dammed up, by a strict adherence to common life’. Walpole’s remarks were levelled at his own contemporaries, realist novelists such as Samuel Richardson, who ignored the revelatory potential of the supernatural in their works. Walpole insisted that fantastic fiction gave writers ‘the liberty to expatiate through the boundless realms of invention’.⁷ Nathaniel Hawthorne, a major American Gothic writer, preferred the form of the (fantastic) Romance over the (realist) Novel because the former mode eschewed ‘a very minute fidelity... to the probable and ordinary course of man’s existence’. In contrast, realism tended ‘relentlessly to impale the story with its moral, as with an iron rod’.⁸

Walpole’s evaluation of Gothic-fantastic fiction as the surest way to express emotional truth was echoed by later Russian writers and critics. Pushkin, who was acquainted with the polemic between Walpole and Voltaire, constructed his play *Kamennyi gost* (1830)

⁴ Tony Tanner, *Adultery in the Novel: Contract and Transgression* (Baltimore, MD and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), pp. 3-4.

⁵ Viktor Shklovsky, ‘Art as Device’, in *Theory of Prose* (1925), trans. by Benjamin Sher (Elmwood Park, Ill.: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), pp. 1-14 (p. 6).

⁶ Cindy Hendershot, *The Animal Within: Masculinity and the Gothic* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), p. 2.

⁷ Horace Walpole, ‘Preface to the Second Edition’, in *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (1764), ed. by W.S. Lewis (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 9-14 (p. 9).

⁸ Nathaniel Hawthorne, ‘Preface’, in *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 1-3 (p. 2).

on the principle that a plot hinged on the supernatural amplifies emotional intensity.⁹ The same polemic would be repeated between Belinskii and Dostoevskii, when the former, criticising Dostoevskii's Gothic-fantastic novella *Dvoïnik*, wrote: 'Фантастическое в наше время может иметь место только в домах умалишенных, а не в литературе, и находится в заведывании врачей, а не поэтов'. Interestingly, Belinskii discounts fantasy not because it is frivolous or intellectually corrupting, but because it is too cerebral, and therefore irrelevant to most readers, except 'дилетанты искусства, для которых литературных произведения составляют предмет не одного наслаждения, но и изучения'.¹⁰ Later, Andrei Siniavskii would renew this debate in the context of Socialist Realism, arguing in *Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realism* (1958): 'пусть утрированные образы Гофмана... научат нас, как быть правдыми с помощью нелепой фантазии'.¹¹

The ideological chasm between the Gothic-fantastic aesthetic and the conventions of Soviet realist prose is not as wide as critics like Konstantin Fedin or Siniavskii imagined; in fact, it is criss-crossed with rope bridges. In modern European literature, the interconnections between Gothic-fantastic and realist prose are complex and multilayered. Gothic fiction emerged as a darker incarnation of Romanticism; and *soi-disant* Socialist 'Realism' can be more accurately characterized as 'revolutionary romanticism'. Gothic is therefore a predictable subtext of post-Revolutionary self-exploration. The Soviet Writers' Union envisioned realist literature as the fulfilment of 'the task of ideological change and the education of workers in the spirit of socialism': as such, rather than being a monolithic discourse, Socialist Realism 'guaranteed to creative art an extraordinary opportunity to manifest any artistic initiative and a choice of various forms, styles, and genres', potentially including the Gothic-fantastic.¹² The prevalence of the Gothic genre within Soviet Socialist Realist fiction proves that the latter is a richer, more dialogical corpus of work than commonly assumed. As shown in previous chapters, the ideals of Soviet romanticism are continuous with the monstrosities of Gothic nightmare. I suggest that Gothic tropes provided

⁹ Vatsuro, p. 43.

¹⁰ Vissarion Belinskii, 'Vzgliad na russkuiu literaturu 1846 goda', in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 13 vols (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo akademii nauk SSSR, 1953-59), X (1956), pp. 7-50 (p. 41).

¹¹ Abram Terts (Andrei Siniavskii), *Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realism*, in *Fantasticheskii mir Abrama Terts* (New York: Mezhdunarodnoe literaturnoe sodruzhestvo, 1967), pp. 399-446 (p. 446).

¹² Régine Robin, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 11.

realist authors with a controlled system to interrogate and explore the problematics of a self-invented culture. At a metafictional level, the same Gothic tropes ultimately exposed the inconsistencies and contradictions of Socialist Realist aesthetics, as they do for any self-contained aesthetic system.

The resurgence of supernatural and occult fiction in Russia since 1989 proves that a new generation of authors has adopted Gothic-fantastic tropes. The Gothic legacy of contamination, subversion and disruption continues to this day to engage writers and to enrich our pleasure, as readers, in the Soviet text.

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***Note:** where the author of a selected text is also the author of the collection from which it is taken, the author's name will not be repeated.

Example: Beliaev, Aleksandr, *Ariel'*, in *Prodavets vozdukha: romany* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2007), pp. 135-322

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