

The Redemption of the “Superfluous Man” in Russian Literature

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Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Slavic Studies at Brown University

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

May 2016

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This dissertation by Christopher Henry Carr is accepted in its present form
by the Department of Slavic Studies as satisfying the
dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

If I didn't understand W. H. Auden's statement that "a real book is not one that we read, but one that reads us" before I came to Brown, then I certainly learned this over the seven years of my doctoral studies. Writing this dissertation proved to me beyond any doubt just how personal academic writing is, as the questions that I investigate in this project are the same ones that I have wrestled with for much of my adult life—freedom, conformity, and the search for home and roots. While New York and my family members will always be home to me, there was always something missing that the city and even America could not provide. After working for a year after my undergraduate education, I felt the need to travel in order to seek this missing piece. Although I do have some Russian roots, my foray into Russian language and culture began with a serendipitous Peace Corps assignment to live in Uzbekistan for two years.

It is a powerful thing to realize for the first time that you can choose part of your own identity. Or perhaps sometimes an identity chooses you. Russian always felt natural to me, as I was powerfully aware that I was speaking the language of some of my ancestors. For the conscious individual, Russia—its geographical space, its concept, its culture, and especially its literature—is a sacred space, and I am grateful to all who let me into their homes, for an hour or a year. It was unintentional, yet I cannot deny that I

received more than I gave, and I hope this project can be viewed by all of those people whose paths crossed mine as a sort of compensation (although I could never pay in full for what this journey has given me) for sharing their lives and their homes with me.

I would like to thank my advisor, Professor Vladimir Golstein, for his support of my project and for his advice on how to frame this dissertation, which covers a great deal of ground. It would have been much easier in many ways to have based this work on any one of my individual chapters, so I am grateful for his encouragement. I would like to thank Professor Svetlana Evdokimova for serving as one of my readers and for her suggestions that extended far beyond this project. I would like to thank my third reader, Professor Alexander Levitsky, not only for providing important questions for me to consider on this and other academic work, but also for taking a chance on me seven years ago when I had been teaching English and had been away from my Russian studies for several years. Special thanks also go to: the late Professor Abbott Gleason for working with me independently as I struggled to make sense of the complex nineteenth-century Russian intellectual and philosophical climate that provided the foundation for this project, as well as several other academic pieces that I have written; Lynne deBenedette, for her patience and constant guidance as I learned how to teach the Russian language; Gisela Belton, without whom our department would simply cease to operate; and both Diana Dukhanova and Katie Krafft—the two other members of our 2009 cohort—for their willingness to discuss ideas, but most importantly for their personal support and friendship, which very appropriately was solidified during a summer spent wandering the streets of Petersburg.

Over the past seven years, my life was primarily connected to the Department of Slavic Studies, but certainly not exclusively, and I would like to thank several people that have enriched—and continue to enrich—my life immeasurably. In no particular order, thanks and gratitude go to: Jonathan Readey, for his inspiring teaching and mentorship; James Chansky, for his support and for his willingness to commiserate about the present state of the humanities; John Rubadeau for teaching what is still the most influential class I have ever taken—a writing course that I took at the University of Michigan in my final semester in the spring of 1998—and for his constant reminders over the years about the importance of scratching an itch; Anya Ganzha, for all of our soulful talks that went late into the night in the kitchen at our rodnaya Proletarka; Dexter Jeffries, who taught me how to change sparkplugs and to chop wood, as well as how to teach, how to learn, and how to live in accordance with one’s inner self; Emily Hauer, for her kind words and her tough love; Emily Desrosiers, for being a supportive, generous soul; Jessica Tabak, for always checking in, whether I was writing this dissertation or grading piles of student papers; Carl Findley, for being a gentleman and a scholar; and Joseph Jones, who has been a true brother ever since our first conversation back in August 1999 on a jet-lagged bus ride from the Tashkent airport in the dead of night. And thank you, Russia—the physical place and the spiritual concept—for finding me and for helping me in my own search for identity and home. I love America, but, in the words of Alexander Blok (which was also used as an epigraph in Dvlatov’s *The Suitcase*): Да, и такой, моя Россия, / Ты всех краев дороже мне...

Finally, I cannot express the love and gratitude that I feel for my immediate family members, who have always been supportive even when they didn't understand why I was off on this adventure or that during the last twenty years. I don't mean that disparagingly; most of the time I didn't fully understand it, either. Eternal thanks to my parents for their dedication to their children and for teaching us to do the right thing, which is a lost art in today's world; my sisters, Lesley and Samantha, for their thoughtfulness and their ability to always make me laugh, even when I didn't want to; their husbands, Chris and Tom, in whom I have found two brothers; and my two nieces, Braelyn and Emma, who astonish me every second I am with them with their exuberance, fearlessness, and creativity. I will always, always, always be there for both of you as you seek your own paths toward home.

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INTRODUCTION

Things Fall Apart, the “Superfluous Man” Cannot Hold

In *Oedipus at Colonus*, the exiled former king of Thebes approaches the village of Colonus with Athens in one direction and the grove of the Furies in the background, to the right a heroic statue of a horseman and to the left a rocky ledge overshadowed by the woods. He ponders: “who will receive the wandering Oedipus today?”¹ Antigone, who leads him by the hand and is his only connection to the material world, notices the city in the distance, distinguishing it from the grove of the Furies, which she says is clearly “holy ground.”² Oedipus, blind and nearing the end of his life, wishes only to receive his “promised rest,” his “haven” of the grounds of the Awesome Goddesses that he wishes to make his home.³ Thus begins the final search to unite the stranger with his heritage, which is represented by “the spirit of the place, not much honored in legends, more in the hearts of us who live here, love it well.”⁴

¹ Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 283.

² Ibid, 284.

³ Ibid, 289.

⁴ Ibid, 287.

Like Oedipus, the superfluous man is also an exile who is seeking a place that he can call home. The superfluous man is usually thought of as a misfit or an outcast, a weak-willed individual who cannot find a place in society. He is appropriated by critics on both sides of the nineteenth-century philosophical binary that stemmed from the violent aftermath of the French Revolution and Russia's subsequent victory over Napoleon, which provided the young nation with the sense of its mission to save Europe. Although some view him positively, most see him as someone who fails to achieve any of his goals. Onegin, Pechorin, Rudin, Bazarov, Dostoevsky's underground man, Raskolnikov, Ivan Karamazov, and others are often placed into this category.

If we think of the superfluous man as an outcast, we are right. This is primarily due to the rigid binaries that define most people's lives. The Russian nineteenth century was defined by such binaries, specifically those associated with the East-West question that prompted the country's search for identity on the world stage. Set against this intellectual and historical backdrop, we certainly can see the superfluous man as an individual who has been tossed to the margins of life and who retains no agency in his struggle against historical and temporal forces. This traditional reception of the literary type has long been a valuable contribution to Russian literary criticism and will continue to serve as such.

In recent years, however, the topic of the superfluous man has waned, and nothing new has been said about the type. Perhaps different characters have been added to the list of those considered to be superfluous men, but the type has not been presented from a different perspective. As a result, a handful of twentieth-century characters, such as

Zamyatin's D-503, Bulgakov's Master or Pasternak's Zhivago, are identified as superfluous men but they are merely categorized as such in passing. In essence, the type has lost its vigor and relevance; it has become all too familiar.

This dissertation aims to rectify this slight. To begin, some assumptions must be made. First, the question of whether or not the superfluous man is a winner or a loser will be placed to the side. The characters either do perish in the stories or they inevitably will perish, as the superfluous authors themselves certainly do. This inviolable law of life is, of course, true for conformist and nonconformist alike. Second, if we concede the fact that all characters, if they were alive, would eventually die, then the question shifts away from a value judgment about "winning" and "losing" in life, since that determination involves many external factors that the individual cannot control. Thus, the more appropriate questions are: Given one's lot in life (or a character's in a novel), what does that person do with his time? And mainly, what level of consciousness has that person reached?

For many of the nineteenth-century characters that we know so well, they had no choice but to be superfluous during the stifling reign of Nicholas I. While this is certainly an important factor, it seems comical to think that an individual could literally do nothing. Perhaps an intelligent young man could not rise to become tsar, but it was certainly possible for him to think for himself and govern his immediate surroundings according to his own philosophy. Turgenev's Nikolai Kirsanov, with regards to his estate management, and Tolstoy's Levin, with his farming practices, show that there is some room for individual decision making. And Oblomov's sloth and idleness could be

considered the freest expression of individual will that is humanly possible. Although, there were certainly economic and class-based factors that determined the extent to which one could do so. For the lower classes, this often meant resorting to *nadryv*, to exert power over other individuals. Dostoevsky's anecdote about abuse being passed down the hierarchy at work, only for the man with the lowest status to bring that abuse home to his wife and to animals is an example of this.

The other primary reason for superfluity is simply personality. Given that all people are not the same, it stands to reason that there will be some who do not fit in. This is a certainty inherent in any group, in which the boundaries between being "in" and "out" are ineluctably drawn. So, nonconformists will always exist, and they will often turn into superfluous characters; they and their thoughts are not bound by the rules of a group. (Out of this, of course, arises a paradox in that these nonconformists seek to create a group of nonconformists to counter their isolation.) In fact, it makes sense that this type would appear in literature and in film, since conformist readers and viewers can live vicariously through the reckless rebel from the confines of their safe and predictable environments. Pioneers moving across the American frontier, for example, did not need evening entertainment because their daily lives were themselves an unfolding, unpredictable plot. And a story about a person who lives comfortably and is not conflicted or prohibited in any way would not be worth reading or watching, nor would it be worth writing. Conformist humans and nonconformist fictional characters are linked to form a symbiotic relationship.

But the question that has guided the reception of the superfluous man amongst Slavists—the question of whether or not these characters lose out because they do not succeed in securing a place for themselves in society—is not the only productive question to ask. This is especially true in light of the given society’s posthumous reception of the superfluous man that suggest that the superfluous man is a necessary part of society and is not, in fact, divorced from it. Although he is marginalized and exiled, he builds a monument out of the ruins, both to himself and to his native land. He finds a third node in the binary that is not visible to most who participate along the original spectrum. In doing this, he illustrates the possibility of true being, since his deed shatters the finality of Dostoevsky’s twice two equals four and the Crystal Palace. Usually, this is through the creative act, which helps the superfluous man to reconcile his plight in a more satisfactory way, although the ultimate irony no one can ever achieve this completely. Conformist and nonconformist alike are given one life to lead on this earth. Some people freely choose their paths, while others are restricted and confined to a certain fate. But everyone must spend their allotted time doing something, or even nothing, which can also be considered taking an action. The chapters that follow will expand our understanding of the superfluous man by examining, not his inherent condition of superfluity, but the acts that he performs in response to the natural, absurd state of the human condition.

While the intrusion of a stranger is by no means unique to Russian literary plots, in the nineteenth century there was a prevailing attitude that Russians were all superfluous. Chaadaev famously wrote that Russians were history’s orphans with no heritage: “We are not related to any of the great human families; we belong neither to the

West nor to the East, and we possess the traditions of neither. Placed, as it were, outside of the times, we have not been affected by the universal education of mankind.”⁵ If the superfluous man was originally associated with romantics and dandies such as Onegin and Chatsky, then Chaadaev’s missive worked to apply the concept of superfluity to an entire nation by incorporating the debate over historical philosophy into the type’s significance.

The superfluous man’s immersion into German idealism also did nothing to help his alienation. Schelling became “a way-station where frustrated yet optimistic souls may find temporary sustenance while awaiting something more real and nearer the heart’s liberal desire—either that or giving up in despair.”⁶ He seemed to become even more superfluous when viewed through the prism of a Hegelian-like dialectic in which history was a mythical process that usurped the power and sanctity of the individual, not only for the betterment of society, but for the *future* betterment that the conquered individual would not get to enjoy as a result of his sacrifice. As the Kantian epistemological struggle evolved, first into an ontological struggle and then into a historiosophical one, it certainly did feel like life was nothing more than “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

⁵ Pyotr Chaadaev, *The Major Works of Peter Chaadaev*, trans. Raymond T. McNally (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 27.

⁶ Martin Malia, *Alexander Herzen and the Birth of Russian Socialism: 1812-1855* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), 85.

But while Schelling relegated the individual to the world of ideas and Hegel saw him as an expendable pawn in a future utopia, we can view August Cieszkowski's tripartite conception of the spirit as a counter to the Hegelian dialectic because it culminates in the deed, or the concrete manifestation of the spirit. In this sense, the impotence felt by superfluous men and their literary heroes, most of whom remained either internally or externally in exile, was lifted by the simple fact of their executed deeds. To Cieszkowski, an act is no longer "a result to be received and reflected," but rather an act that is "already reflected, already mediated, already cogitated, intended and then accomplished."⁷ In the case of these men, their deeds were their literary output. Within the works (deeds) themselves, we find an individual approach that, for the author, overcomes the feeling of powerlessness engendered by the professed determinism of history because, "if one looks for the final aim, then the purpose of everything living is—death."⁸

Cieszkowski's system, expressed in his *Prolegomena to Historiosophy* (1838), responds directly to Hegel's dialectic by stating that "*doing* is the true substantial synthesis of being and thinking":

The destiny of mankind is to realize that its concept and history is precisely the execution of this process of realization. The fruit of this development, however, can only be attained at the end, and earlier stages (being and thought) are merely *preparations* and *premises* which in their totality make up the great syllogism of

⁷ August Cieszkowski, *Selected Writings of August Cieszkowski*, ed. and trans. Andre Liebich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 55.

⁸ Alexander Herzen, "*From the Other Shore*" and "*The Russian People and Socialism*" (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1956), 107.

the universal spirit...the process of universal history is not limited to an abstract, formal, and quantitative development; it continuously develops qualitatively substantial rules, and consequently mathematical inductions cannot suffice here even though they must always constitute the base of the process.⁹

The inefficacy of “mathematical inductions” certainly recalls the bristling of Dostoevsky’s underground man at the maxim of twice two is four. If the Crystal Palace is completed, then the individual becomes completely irrelevant and his deed loses all agency. If Hegel leads the spirit only to self-being (in-itself) and self-thinking (for-itself), Cieszkowski advances the paradigm to self-acting (out-of-itself). For Cieszkowski, the spirit’s destiny is to “triple as it must reproduce consciousness and translate thought into being practically and out of itself.”¹⁰ Moreover, “the out-of-itself comprehends bringing forth without self-alienation, thus...man emerges out of this abstraction and becomes the social individual *par excellence*.”¹¹ Thus the superfluous man is not someone who lags behind society or who cannot find a place in society, but someone who emerges out of the abstraction of society into true personhood by virtue of his deed.

Alexander Herzen was perhaps the most talented of Russians, and perhaps therefore the most superfluous, whose fate caused him to be born during the period of growing pains that followed the Napoleonic wars. After having passed through Schelling and Hegel, and after his voluntary exile from Russia, Herzen placed his hopes in the great European revolution that he sensed was unfolding. But 1848 proved to be even more

⁹ Cieszkowski, 55-56.

¹⁰ Ibid, 75.

¹¹ Ibid, 74, 81.

violent than 1793, and, coupled with a series of personal tragedies, Herzen had nothing left to stand on following this defeat. The enlightenment virtues of the eighteenth century had failed. As Yeats would later write in 1919 following World War I:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

While Russian exiles—both internal and external—such as Herzen desperately awaited the revelation that would free them from their superfluity, the Second Coming did not materialize.

Left with no external recourse, Herzen turned inward and devoted himself to his literary works. *From the Other Shore* is his response to 1848, “a frontal attack upon the doctrine at that time preached by almost every left-wing orator in Europe about the sacred human duty of offering up oneself—or others—upon the altar of some great moral or political cause—some absolute principle or ‘collective noun’ capable of stirring strong emotion, like Nationality, or Democracy, or Equality, or Humanity, or Progress.”¹² He rejected the “sadistic mythology”¹³ of German historical romanticism, which possessed no moral justification. Morality was not an “objective, eternal code, a set of immutable commandments which human beings were merely required to obey.”¹⁴ Herzen identified

¹² From Isaiah Berlin’s Introduction to *From the Other Shore* cited above, xv-xvii.

¹³ *Ibid*, xvi.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, xvi.

the adherence to fixed systems as “a constant flight from ourselves, as though we were pursued and frightened by the pangs of conscience.”¹⁵ Yes, man suffered and felt pain. But despondency and detachment—the typically-ascribed characteristics of the superfluous man—were “a challenge to battle.”¹⁶ Reaching full consciousness (another so-called flaw of the superfluous man since it prevents him from assimilating into society):

We realize that nothing fits, neither thought nor ways of life, that what we were taught to lean upon is fragile and rotten, that what we were warned against as poisonous is beneficial; crushed and bewildered, taught to obey authority and rules, finally, with the years, we emerge into freedom, each gropes his way towards the truth, struggling and blundering.¹⁷

The superfluous man, then is not a morbid being who cannot find a place in a stagnant society, but rather an active agent that asserts his freedom from it. Herzen, like Cieszkowski, gives man the freedom to create own morality. If history is a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing, then the individual must not attempt to “fit the work of nature into a straight line,” because “nature hates regimentation, she casts herself in all directions and never marches forward in step.”¹⁸ The center of this world cannot hold because nature is pulling the center apart, leaving us with the only recourse of Blake’s call to see “a world in a grain of sand,” since “we are led to believe a lie / When we see not thro’ the eye.”

¹⁵ Herzen, *From the Other Shore*, 20.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 22.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 24.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 33-34.

The individual act becomes even more significant when we take into account the fact that we know nothing of what will be in the future. The unpredictable deeds of future individuals, along with chance, as we see in Dostoevsky's novels, will preserve the sanctity of the individual act. Hence, Herzen's advice to his son, telling him not to look for answers to his generations' future problems. The Hegelian future is "nothing but a pernicious delusion, perhaps a deliberate deception; for the distant ends may never be realized, while the agonies and sufferings and crimes of the present remain only too real."¹⁹ History naturally turns the individual into a superfluous entity—and the superfluous man in Russia is commonly held to be a peculiarity to a time in which any man of talent could be nothing but superfluous. Herzen connects the burden of the superfluous man to the image of Sisyphus, who rolls his rock in the face of the crumbling edifice of civilization, and cites a statement made decades earlier by Karamzin:

When it falls...when the beneficent sacred flame dies down—what then? I am appalled, my heart trembles. Suppose that a few sparks are preserved beneath the ashes; suppose that there are a few men who find them, and with them light their quiet solitary huts—but what will become of the world?...Sometimes when unbearable sadness grips my heart, I fall on my knees and stretch out my hands to the Invisible... No answer!—my head sinks to my breast. Eternal movement in the self-same circle. Eternal reiteration, eternal alternation of day and night, night and day, one drop of joy and a sea of bitter tears. My friend! What am I to live for? Or you? Or any of us? What did our forefathers live for? What will posterity live for?²⁰

¹⁹ Berlin, "Introduction" to *From the Other Shore*, xvii.

²⁰ Nikolai Karamzin, *Melodore to Philalethe* (1795), quoted in Herzen, *From the Other Shore*, 7-8.

While this existential struggle is great, Herzen is confident that the individual voice can stand up to the challenge: “Where the word has not perished, neither has the deed.”²¹ The individual’s deed, in this case his literary works, cannot save civilization, but it can save the individual, even if only for that moment, before despair sets in once more. In this sense, the deed can also save the literary hero, as well as the reader.

Herzen calls attention to this literary deed of the superfluous man. For Herzen, as well as for Cieszkowski, individual men are not forgone conclusions of their era within a predetermined historical progression. Yes, there is a process of history, but each individual reacts to the circumstances in which he is born and lives, although historical circumstances do sometimes limit the choices that individuals have at their disposal. There is a relationship between past generations and future ones, but the future individuals remain free to act in response to the conditions of their own era. Thus, Russia’s superfluous men write themselves out of their own superfluity, but the next generations are also forewarned that there are no answers within these writings.

They do this by rejecting the ideological binary: “Other than annihilation or self-contempt, there is only one option for the person with a developed consciousness: ‘calmly to turn his back on it all, to say Enough! and, folding his useless arms on his empty breast, to preserve the last and only dignity available to him: the dignity of

²¹ Herzen, *From the Other Shore*, 10.

knowing his own nothingness.”²² This simplest of acts is one that demonstrates the individual’s rejection of the finite world that cannot contain our infinite aspirations. If this alone does not constitute a Cieszkowskian deed—and I believe it does—then we can look to Turgenev’s *Diary of a Superfluous Man* as a more tangible act of a superfluous man faced with his own annihilation at the hands of cruel nature or to any one of the examples where the superfluous man takes up the pen to investigate his innermost thoughts.

It was Turgenev who coined the phrase “superfluous man” in his story about Chulkaturin and who addressed this difference between those who lacked all conviction and those who were full of passionate identity by identifying two categories into which all Russians could be placed—Hamlet or Don Quixote. However, while these two choices exist on opposite ends of the spectrum, they both fall under the category of superfluous man. Although both Hamlet and Don Quixote are superfluous, yet they do have an effect on the world around them. And they do take action. Before examining the nature of these acts, I would like to add one more factor to our definition of the superfluous man. He is still a character who lives on the margins of his community, who does not belong to a group, who cannot fit in with society’s rules. Whether the superfluous character (or author) lives in Russia (or the Soviet Union) or abroad, we can consider him to be an exile. This is a key distinction that will serve as the basis for the current project, as it

²² Ivan Turgenev, “Dovol’no,” *Sobranie sochinenii*, 10:19, 120, 117, quoted in Aileen M. Kelly, *Toward Another Shore: Russian Thinkers between Necessity and Chance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 96.

greatly affects the individual's choice of act. We are all born in a particular place at a particular time, which serves as a starting point, a point of departure, an origin. We are raised according to the rules and customs of that place, making it what we would call our "home" or "homeland."

This search for home is directly connected to the development of the Russian personality, which matured from type to individual as the Russian nineteenth century progressed. If Russian works such as Lermontov's *The Hero of Our Time* and Gogol's *Dead Souls* were mirrors held up to society as whole, then works published after the emancipation of the serfs focused more closely on the inner state of man. The thought of Vladimir Solovyov, for example, allowed man to recognize that "he is not purely idea (*predstavlenie*) or being (*bytie*); he is, indeed, *greater* than these, and he may, consequently, learn something of essential being (*suschee*)."²³ Through his critique of abstract philosophy, Solovyov established his "vital" philosophy:

The authentic truth, complete and vital, itself contains its own reality and its own reason, and it transmits these to all else. In accordance with this, the subject of mystical philosophy is not the world of phenomena, reduced to our sensations, not the world of ideas, reduced to our thoughts, but the vital reality of beings in their internal living relations; this philosophy is concerned not with the external order of phenomena, but with the internal order of beings and their life, which is defined by their relationship with the primordial being.²⁴

²³ Jonathan Sutton, *The Religious Philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 102.

²⁴ Vladimir Solovyov, *Sobranie sochinenii Vladimira Solovyova* (St. Petersburg: Knigoizdatel'skoe tovarishchestvo "Prosveshchenie," 1966) t. 1, 304.

Solovyov's mystical deed parallels the deed of the "superfluous" writer in that the latter's creative act arises out of one's striving for "internal order." This can be seen as a direct response to the Grand Inquisitor's statement that "man has no preoccupation more nagging than to find the person to whom that unhappy creature may surrender the gift of freedom with which he is born."²⁵

The challenge of manifesting Solovyov's vital philosophy, however, lies in the fact that the two poles of any binary will never be fully reconciled. In Dostoevsky, the focus is not on the attainment of perfection—Raskol'nikov never achieves salvation, but only realizes the possibility of it in the future; or Alyosha, who plants the seed of goodness in the hearts of the boys with his speech at Ilyusha's stone, but later is slated to become a radical revolutionary—but rather on the continual planting of seeds so that the future generation will be better connected to their heritage than Chaadaev proclaimed about Russians during the era of Nicholas I, recalling the epigraph to *The Brothers Karamazov* from John 12:24: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."

However, there are no answers, and the individual is free to choose between Dostoevsky's *umileniye* and *nadryv*. What connects Solovyov's vital philosophy to Herzen, Cieszkowski, and our superfluous man is that it cannot be forced upon the individual like political regimes try to do with external ideologies:

²⁵ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1976), 235.

Conscious man cannot be *compelled* to accept an ideal state of harmony, however desirable that state may be and however much man may eventually aspired to attain it when prompted by his own will... Human history must be permitted to run its proper course, and conscious man must be given the opportunity *freely* to take the initiative in affirming the need for harmony in the created order and then in working actively to attain that harmony.²⁶

This philosophy, then, must come from out-of-itself, if we use Cieszkowski's terminology. When this occurs, the superfluous man, as we have seen, is no longer superfluous. Each moment is a chance for him to express his inner self, not for the sake of affecting social change, but simply for the sake of expression. Ironically, it is when the personality is organically evoked that the most lasting and profound change can occur. Sonya's effect on Raskolnikov is a testament to that. Not coincidentally, this was precisely the main reason why the *Vekhi* authors criticized the Russian intelligentsia in their essays of 1909—they were too busy out trying to convert the peasant to their various social ideals when they should have been attending to their inner selves and the deeds that would come out of them.

While we have only scratched the surface of Herzen's works, they assure us that history's unnecessary game is what paints the superfluous man in such a negative light. If we remove the veneer of historical determinism, then we will see how the superfluous man is transformed into a man of action. Many thinkers claimed that Russia was a people of the future. But this does not relegate the man of the present to the ranks of the superfluous. Instead, the individuals who live and die, whose seeds return to the ground, serve to nourish future individuals whose deeds may bring us closer the *sobornost'* of the

²⁶ Sutton, 47.

early Slavophiles. These people do not die in vain on the barricades in the name of an interchangeable, abstract ideal. They act, out-of-themselves, and push humanity forward, toward the organic harmony that transcends ideological binaries. And if it has not arrived yet, the seemingly superfluous man simply has to keep acting, to keep performing his deed, and he will maintain a true place at the table of life and his true status of “executor of history.”²⁷ What gives the superfluous man hope is that true freedom exists outside of the social and political binaries created by the East-West (or Slavophile-Westernizer) debate. Exile is necessary to break out of this binary and to achieve consciousness, followed by writing in an attempt to create unity based on these higher spiritual values, a progression similar to Plato’s cave and philosopher king.

When we are irrevocably cut off from our home, our experience is very similar to that of the superfluous man; we feel alone, inept, incapable of doing the simplest things, we become acutely perceptive and conscious—all of which boils within us until something must come out. This often takes the form of writing. Of course, people create using other art forms, too, but we will focus on writing (and filmmaking in some of our twentieth-century examples), especially given the Russian penchant for graphomania. When we examine our list of superfluous characters, many of them do, in fact, turn to writing as an outlet for their practical ineptitude and for their solitary despair. Of course, not all superfluous characters write. But many do, which is evident even from the titles of the works in which they appear: “Diary of a Madman,” *Notes from Underground*, “Diary

²⁷ Cieszkowski, 54.

of a Superfluous Man,” “*My Past and Thoughts*,” *Notes from the House of the Dead*, and *Diary of a Writer*. Furthermore, the authors themselves often fit into our definition of a superfluous man. This dissertation, then, will examine the superfluous man as exile and his active, creative response to his plight as an exile.

My first chapter serves as the primary conceptual foundation for the entire dissertation. It summarizes the scholarly literature on the superfluous man and reviews the context in which he appears in Russian society, which is connected to Russia’s homelessness in light of its late historical development. The opening chapter also traces the transformation of Russian literary types into individuals, with the types reflecting society more broadly and the individuals exploring their inner beings. Although I do not revisit the standard examples of the superfluous man, I do point out several examples of their literary efforts to illustrate the turn inward and away from the rigid binaries that defined Russian society. These nineteenth-century examples demonstrate my new definition of the superfluous man as mediator between ideological binaries through his writings. I introduce Camus’ existential theory to help illustrate the significance of the superfluous man’s turn inward to develop his own consciousness, which he will later transmit to others through his writing and succeed in creating an organic community that helps Russian individuals satisfy their search for home.

Chapter Two moves into the twentieth century and begins by describing the apocalyptic feeling that pervaded Russian life as it approached the Revolution. Andrey Bely’s *Silver Dove* is analyzed to show just how deeply ideological binaries were entrenched in society. Daryalsky is presented as a potential mediator, but his efforts are

ultimately unsuccessful because they originate from his external movement to the peasants and do not arise out of his inner being. Moving to the Revolution, I discuss the choice between freedom and satiety that the individual faced as the Bolsheviks essentially erased the prerevolutionary culture. Since the nation was literally being reborn, I consider this period as a parallel to that of one hundred years prior when it felt like there was the potential for great reform when those who fought in Europe against Napoleon returned home. After 1917, the Soviet citizen, who now found himself in a developmental state akin to childhood, had to be educated and indoctrinated, and writers primarily either looked back to the golden age of Russian literature or looked ahead to the Soviet utopia that was being promised. In this sense, I call these two choices the “innocences of revolution,” and I explore Evgenii Zamyatin’s *We* and Mikhail Bulgakov’s *The Heart of a Dog* to illustrate these possible choices. Although these two superfluous men are individualist writers who do serve as mediators between the ideological forces, we can consider them also to be anti-Soviet types due to the nature of the historical era.

Chapter 3 moves to the middle of the century and investigates the effects of World War II on the childhoods of Soviet filmmakers Andrey Tarkovsky and Yuri Norstein. Again, historical circumstances help to define the choices that nonconformist artists have. Because the period in which these filmmakers were creating was defined by post-thaw stagnation, artists could only look back to a lost paradise since the future seemed endless and unattainable, and both Tarkovsky (*Mirror*) and Norstein (*Tale of Tales*) use images of the childhood home to present their nostalgic search for meaning and roots. I summarize the history of the Russian pastoral to illustrate some of the typical

images and themes of the genre before investigating the two films mentioned. Just as with our writers in Chapter Two, Tarkovsky and Norstein fit the definition of superfluous man as mediator; however, I do not view their works as the most successful attempt to integrate their internal and external worlds because the pastoral is not rooted in present-day reality.

Chapter 4 presents a superfluous man whom I consider as the most successful of the one's investigated because his works are not grounded in the past or future, but rather in the present. Sergey Dovlatov's use of the anecdote in *Nashi* is presented as an effective way not only to overcome the strict ideological forces in the official sphere of everyday Soviet life, but also to unite an organic community of readers (or listeners) and to build a monument to Russian culture through the lived stories of Soviet and émigré life. I rely on both the theory of the anecdote to show how its internal aesthetic works to nullify ideology through its use of the punchline, which expresses irreconcilable worldviews, and on Alexei Yurchak's concept of living *vnye*, that is, living outside of the official cultural and ideological reality of the Soviet regime. It is this strategy that turns ideological or anti-ideological types into individuals, and this era parallels that of the post-emancipation nineteenth century.

Chapter Five concludes the dissertation by reconnecting the discussions in the preceding chapters to the exile's search for home and for roots, especially given the increasing level of alienation that man reaches in the violent twentieth century and into the technologically dehumanizing twenty first. I use Simone Weil's *The Need for Roots* to illustrate how the search for roots, once determined by family, is now focused on

nation. Additionally, Amy Singelton's work on the concept of home in Russian culture provides an important framework for analyzing the superfluous man's, and especially Dostoevsky's, efforts to solve the crisis of Russian homelessness. His literary works serve to commemorate, not only an individual life, not only a dying Soviet reality, but also Russian culture as a whole. It is through this connection, often achieved by invoking Pushkin, that ideological boundaries are transcended and organic community is created.

Thus, it is through the writings of the superfluous man that we see a path from individual to unity. Like the Masonic temple, which promotes both individual and social development, so does the act of writing. One needs a period of exile through which one investigates the soul in the pages of a journal. But in doing so, one raises one's consciousness. One begins with the intent of exploring individual, egotistical, or ideological concerns. But something unexpected happens—at some point, the writing turns away from the initial intent and organically grows to a higher level of consciousness. In a sense, writing helps us to discover that the ideological binary which initially drove us to a decision to rebel was never a question of either/or, but it was an all-inclusive AND—East and West; Slavophile and Westernizer; war and peace; crime and punishment; fathers and sons. Due to our optical limitations, we may not be able to view both Wittgenstein's rabbit and duck simultaneously, but we can be aware that both views do exist at the same time. It is in this sense that the superfluous man both writes himself in and out of superfluity. He starts deep within himself and ends up—again, unexpectedly, and this point is crucial because it denotes the development of consciousness—achieving in his role as mediator the *sobornost'* that ideology could not

attain. Additionally, in order to write, one must use a common language. So, one begins with individual thoughts, but must express them in a common language, that is, a language that others can understand. This is how the process of writing achieves unity, relieves the superfluous man of his superfluity, and constitutes an act that eradicates the ideological binary that produces no real change. The literary act of the superfluous man is truly a “heroic deed of an honest man.”²⁸

²⁸ This is from Pushkin’s statement on Karamzin in which he calls Karamzin’s *History of the Russian State* “ne tol’ko sozdanie velikogo pisatelya, no i podvig chestnogo cheloveka.”

CHAPTER ONE

Born of the Desert: Superfluous Lenses

In his introductory letter that begins *From the Other Shore*, Alexander Herzen writes to his son: “Do not look for answers in this book—there are none; in general modern man has no solutions.... [The coming revolution] has no paradise to offer, no rewards, except your own awareness, except conscience.”¹ As the nineteenth century unfolded, modern man came to be viewed as a subjective entity with no objective answers. The universal monument to civilization that was built on Enlightenment empiricism was torn down by the tyranny of those same rationalistic forces, epitomized by the figure of Napoleon. With the onset of romanticism, the individual tried to assemble his own monument out of the rubble. In Russia, this was the time when German idealism coincided with the birth and suffering of the so-called superfluous man, whose talents were rendered impotent by the stifling environment of Nicholas I.

Whether it be Onegin, Pechorin, Rudin, Oblomov, Dostoevsky’s underground man, or the authors themselves, the superfluous man has historically been viewed as a weak individual who cannot reconcile himself with the society of his particular time and place. He has been characterized as “a paradigm of a person who has lost a point, a place,

¹ Alexander Herzen, “*From the Other Shore*” and “*The Russian People and Socialism*” (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1956), 4.

a presence in life.”² He has been described as “dreamy and useless,”³ as an “intellectual incapable of action,”⁴ as an “ineffective idealist,”⁵ and as “a hero who is sensitive to social and ethical problems, but who fails to act, partly because of personal weakness, partly because of political and social restraints on his freedom of action.”⁶ The *Literaturnaya entsiklopediya* entry for “lishniye lyudi” cites the type’s most prominent feature as his “alienation from his environment, eventually leading to a complete break from and falling out with it,”⁷ stemming from an unsuitable Western education⁸ and the Russian class struggle.⁹ Similarly, the *Kratkaya literaturnaya entsiklopediya* indicates that the superfluous man is characterized by “an alienation from the official life of Russia,” which leads to “profound skepticism, a breakdown between word and deed, and

² David Patterson, *Exile: The Sense of Alienation in Modern Russian Letters* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 2.

³ Nina A. Toumanova, *Anton Chekhov: The Voice of Twilight Russia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), 195.

⁴ Thomas Winner, *Chekhov and His Prose* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966), 101.

⁵ D. S. Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature*, ed. and abr. Francis J. Whitfield (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 189.

⁶ William Harkins, *Dictionary of Russian Literature* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1957), 373.

⁷ A. Lavretsky, “Lishniye lyudi” in *Literaturnaya entsiklopediya*, ed. V. M. Friche (Moscow, 1932,) Vol. VI, 514.

⁸ *Ibid*, 518.

⁹ *Ibid*, 530.

general passivity.”¹⁰ Some view his inability to function in society as a positive attribute. “If he fails in his goals, if he is miserable, still, the pain is justified because he a noble individual, is better than his fellows.”¹¹ In his discussion of Herzen’s Belto, Richard Freeborn writes that “by implication it [the term “superfluous man”] points to the inadequacy of a society incapable of assimilating such exceptional types.”¹² The focus on the type’s alienation from society is also noted in Rufus Mathewson’s treatment of the character in *The Positive Hero in Russian Literature* (16), while Frank Seeley attributes the social alienation of the individual superfluous man to the social isolation of the Russian intelligentsia as a whole. Seeley writes: “The drama of the intelligentsia lies in its struggle to break out of its isolation, which means to achieve organic reunion with its own people.”¹³

Although the term *lishnii chelovek* was not officially coined until the publication of Turgenev’s *Dnevnik lishnego cheloveka* in 1850, the character appears as early as

¹⁰ Mann, Yu. V., “Lishnii chelovek” in *Kratkaya literaturnaya entsiklopediya*, ed. A. A. Surkov (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo “Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya, 1967), Vol. IV, 401.

¹¹ Ellen B. Chances, *Conformity’s Children: An Approach to the Superfluous Man in Russian Literature* (Columbus, Ohio: Slavica Publishers, Inc., 1978), 18. See also D. N. Ovsyaniko-Kulikovskiy, *Istoriya ruskoi intelligentsii in Sobranie sochinenii* (St. Petersburg, 1914), VII, Part I, p. 90; the “lishnii chelovek” entries in *Slovar’ sovremennogo russkogo literaturnogo yazyka* (Moscow, 1957), VI, p. 302; E. Mikhailova, *Proza Lermontova* (Moscow, 1957), pp. 365-371; P. V. Annenkov, “Literaturnyi tip slabogo cheloveka: Po povodu Turgenevskoi ‘Asi’” in *Vospominaniya i kriticheskie ocherki: Sobranie statey i zametok, 1849-1868* (St. Petersburg, 1879), p. 172.

¹² Richard Freeborn, *The Rise of the Russian Novel: Studies in the Russian Novel From “Eugene Onegin” to “War and Peace”* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 121.

¹³ Frank Friedeberg Seeley, “The Heyday of the ‘Superfluous Man’ in Russia,” *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 31 (1952): 94.

Chatsky in Griboedov's *Gore ot uma* in 1824¹⁴ and is often grouped into categories that are ordered chronologically. In his article, "The Heyday of the Superfluous Man," Frank Seeley attributes the superfluous man's ascendancy to the period between "1815 or 1820 to 1855,"¹⁵ and he distinguishes "three moments or stages or main varieties of the 'superfluous man' as he developed under the pressure of historical circumstances: the sceptics and dandies of the 1820's, the demons of revolt in the 1830's, [and] the preachers of the 1840's. Seeley places Chatsky, Chaadaev, and Onegin in the first category; Pechorin as the primary example of the second group; and Rudin as the representative of "cerebration...and the quietism of the defeated towards historical and moral insignificance."¹⁶ He notes the change in "the psychological center of gravity" of the superfluous man, "which in Onegin was aesthetic and in Pechorin volitional, [but] becomes intellectual or, at least, cerebral [in Rudin]."¹⁷ Beyond Rudin:

on the one hand the road leads out of the domain of the 'superfluous,' upwards to the new experiments, ideological and social, of the Westernizers, the Nihilists, the *mystiques* of the 1870's and beyond... On the other hand the road led downwards past the 'defeated' (Oblomov, the hero of 'The Diary of a Superfluous Man,' perhaps the protagonist of *Notes from Underground*, and others) towards

¹⁴ The entry for "lishnii lyudi" in *Literaturnaya entsiklopediya* notes Dmitri Blagoi's discovery that Pushkin used the word "lishnii" in one of his early drafts of *Evgenii Onegin*. In his article entitled "The Sociology of Pushkin's Art" (1929), Blagoi cites the following lines from Pushkin's early draft: «Кто там меж ними в отдаленьи / Как нечто лишнее стоит».

¹⁵ Seeley, 97.

¹⁶ Ibid, 108.

¹⁷ Ibid, 108.

the stagnation and verbiage of *The Cherry Orchard*—from the heyday of the ‘superfluous man’ through his twilight and evening.¹⁸

For the purposes of this dissertation, one of the more significant features that is common to the superfluous man regardless of chronological stage is some form of isolation or exile, whether it be “the geographical dispersion of these men in the 1820s;¹⁹ Pechorin’s rebellion, desire to “subjugate to his will all around him,”²⁰ and the “striking increase in self-knowledge, in balanced and critical understanding of himself”;²¹ or Rudin’s penchant for “seeking refuge in ideas.”²² The alienation that is often attributed to the superfluous man arises from this state of exile, from which he must extricate himself. The reasons that he must reconcile this condition of exile have both individual and cultural implications and will be discussed throughout this dissertation.

Ellen Chances, in her book *Conformity’s Children: An Approach to the Superfluous Man in Russian Literature*, takes a similar chronological approach. In her discussion of the relationship between these individualists and society, she groups the authors of the Russian superfluous man in the following ways, with each group constituting a chapter of her book: Griboedov, Pushkin, and Lermontov; Herzen, Turgenev, and Goncharov; Dostoevsky and Tolstoy; and twentieth-century developments

¹⁸ Ibid, 110.

¹⁹ Seeley gives the following examples of this geographical exile: “Pushkin in the south, then at Mikhailovskoye, Katenin relegated to his estate, Chaadaev abroad, Griboedov in the Caucasus and Persia, Onegin travelling through Russia, and Chatsky beyond,” (101).

²⁰ Ibid, 105.

²¹ Ibid, 106.

²² Ibid, 109.

(Chekhov, Sologub, Olesha, Gladkov, and Pasternak). Although many studies of the type confine the superfluous man to the nineteenth century, Chances concludes that “the concept of the superfluous man certainly did not die with the wilting of the realistic novel of the nineteenth century.”²³ Related to the general isolation of the superfluous man described above, Chances argues that “what binds Eugene Onegin, Pechorin, Rudin, Bazarov, Dostoevsky’s underground man, Raskolnikov, Ivan Karamazov, Anna Karenina, Andrey Bolkonsky, many Chekhov protagonists, and certain post-Chekhovian figures is their unconventionality when juxtaposed with society or some order.”²⁴ This “unconventionality,” or nonconformity (which can be a form of exile, since exile can be internal or external), will be another key component of this dissertation, as it will lead him to develop his consciousness, which in turn will lead him to seek a community that is created organically.

For this reason, the superfluous man was appropriated by literary and social critics from both sides of the spectrum. Onegin became “the herald of political freedom; Pechorin, the messenger of revolution.”²⁵ Some, such as Bazarov, were labeled “superfluous” because they were too progressive, as “their Western European education detached them from their native roots.”²⁶ The efforts of these superfluous men rarely achieved any lasting change, but they were viewed as sympathetic because they tried to

²³ Chances, 171.

²⁴ Ibid, 19-20

²⁵ Ibid, 22.

²⁶ Ibid, 22.

champion liberal solutions to Russia's problems. Radical critics like Dobrolyubov and Chernyshevsky called these literary heroes "flabby, weak-willed liberals impeding progress."²⁷ Oblomov, for example, was criticized for being a "representative of the slothful, reactionary landed aristocracy"²⁸ when Russia desperately needed men of action. It was in these ways that the type often carried a political message.²⁹

That these superfluous men appear in the most significant literary works of the Russian nineteenth century shows not only the type's importance, but the connection to the progression of the prominent ideas that influenced and defined Russian society during this time. If the superfluous characters are placed on one end of the social binary of conformist and nonconformist (such as in the cases of Onegin and Pechorin) or of the political binary of liberal and conservative (or of romantic and nihilist-positivist, such as Bazarov), it is because nineteenth-century Russia was dominated by intellectual debates that were founded on such binaries. Although the question of whether Russia belonged to the East or to the West was first answered by Peter the Great, this debate permeated every aspect of Russian society following major events such as the French Revolution, the War of 1812, and the failed Decembrist revolt in 1825. Chaadaev's famous statement that

²⁷ Ibid, 23.

²⁸ Ibid, 23.

²⁹ Some examples of how the superfluous man was appropriated by both liberals and radicals can be found in the following: Herzen's "Lishniye lyudi i zhelchviki," *Sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow, 1958), XIV, pp. 317-27; Dobrolyubov's "Shto takoe oblomovshchina?" in *Sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow, 1962), IV, 307-43 and "Kogda zhe pridet nastoyashchii den'?" in *Sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow, 1963), VI, pp. 96-140; Chernyshevsky's "Stikhotvoreniya N. Ogareva" in *Polnoye sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow, 1947), III, 561-68 and "Russkii chelovek na rendez-vous" in *Polnoye sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow, 1950), V, pp. 156-74.

Russians “belong neither to the West nor to the East,”³⁰ that Russians are “placed outside of the times” and “have not been affected by the universal education of mankind” shook a country consisting of “illegitimate children without a heritage, without a link with the men who preceded [them] on earth.”³¹ In *My Past and Thoughts*, Herzen writes that Chaadaev’s letter “was in a sense the last word, a limit. It was a shot that rang out in the dark night... One had to wake up.”³² While Russia’s late arrival on the world stage can be viewed as a tragic disadvantage, it was also perceived as evidence of Russia’s messianic mission to save Europe from the rubble of its failed Enlightenment project. This set the stage for the rise of the Russian intelligentsia, which was still haunted by the “empty place left by the powerful men [the Decembrists] that had been exiled to Siberia”³³ and the heated debate between the Slavophiles and the Westernizers.

The East-West identity crisis brought about the conditions which led to Russia’s first thinkers, whose charge it was to determine whether Russia should continue in its development based on the Western principles adopted by Peter the Great or based on Russia’s inherent communal spirit that prevailed in pre-Petrine times. The ensuing conflict of faith against reason was framed by Russia’s developing social consciousness and the limitations placed on it by state authority. This mission was prescribed to Russian

³⁰ Pyotr Chaadaev, *The Major Works of Peter Chaadaev*, trans. Raymond T. McNally (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 27.

³¹ *Ibid*, 31.

³² Alexander Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts*, trans. Constance Garnett (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 293.

³³ *Ibid*, 293.

thinkers not only in the remnants of eighteenth-century Freemasonry, but more directly following Napoleon's invasion of Russia, which represented the West's "conceit of reason."³⁴

This notion of history became central to the increasingly polarizing intellectual climate. Chaadaev believed in the universal mind, or a collective consciousness that evolved historically. While Chaadaev felt that Peter the Great was correct in making his reforms, the only reason that had been possible was because Russia had not organically developed its own institutions. Individual freedom was not man's natural state, but rather he subordinated himself to his environment, thereby evoking the idea of a society that adheres to communal norms that have been tested and passed down throughout the history of a nation. Because Russia had no society that developed in such a way, "Russians were only a collection of unrelated individuals," with "no sense of permanency and resemble homeless spirits condemned to creative impotence."³⁵ Western ideas such as duty, justice, right, and order are completely unknown to Russians, making them "illegitimate children."³⁶ Russia's mission was not to participate in the development of humanity, but rather to teach the world a lesson.

Chaadaev's statements provide a frame of reference for the burgeoning debate between the Slavophiles and the Westernizers. To the Slavophiles, it was not Russians that were unconnected by traditions, but Europeans, who had distanced themselves from

³⁴ Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought: From the Enlightenment to Marxism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), 72.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 85-86.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 86.

the common people because of their staunch individualism. It was for this reason that they saw the solution to Russia's problem in reintegrating with the common people and reconnecting with Russian cultural traditions that were weakened or eliminated by Western influence. In his Letter to Count E.E. Komarovsky entitled "On the Nature of European Culture and Its Relation to the Culture of Russia," Ivan Kireevsky, one of the members of the Lovers of Wisdom (*Lyubomudriye*) and one of the most prominent of the early Slavophiles, outlined his view of the historical differences between the religious developments of the East and the West in an attempt to arrive at an explanation of Russia's dilemma posed by Chaadaev. In Kireevsky's view, Eastern thinkers were concerned with the inner spirit, while Western thinkers were more interested in external life:

The Eastern thinkers, in their effort to attain the complete truth, sought to achieve an inner wholeness of the intellect—that concentration of intellectual powers which brings all the separate faculties of the mind together in a supreme and living unity. The Western philosophers, on the other hand, assumed that the complete truth could be discerned by separate faculties of the mind, acting independently and in isolation. They used one faculty to understand moral, and another to grasp esthetic, matters; for practical affairs they had yet a third; to ascertain the truth, they employed abstract reasoning; and none of these faculties knew what any of the others was doing until its action was completed... They deemed cold unemotional reasoning and the unrestrained sway of passions to be equally legitimate human attitudes; and when the Western scholars in the fourteenth century learned that the Eastern contemplative thinkers sought to preserve serenity and inner wholeness of spirit, they jeered at the idea.³⁷

While traditional Russian society was perceived as a single living organism, European life was built on the premise that an individual could build a new and rational existence

³⁷ Ivan Kireevsky, "On the Nature of European Culture and Its Relation to the Culture of Russia," trans. Valentine Snow in *Russian Intellectual History: An Anthology*, ed. Marc Raeff (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1978), 193.

for himself by using his own abstract reason. However, “private and social life in the West are based on the concept of an individual and separate independence that presupposes the isolation of the individual.”³⁸ Because Russian life was more integrated, “the laws by which Russia was governed could not have been marked by artificial formality; but, arising out of two sources—popular traditions and inner conviction—they were bound, in spirit, content, and application, to be concerned more with the essential truth than with the appearance of truth,”³⁹ which was the main Slavophile criticism of Western law. Kireevsky emphasizes that a system that is based on logical progress reflects a society based on artificial foundations. Russia, on the other hand, “knew nothing of abstract logic.”⁴⁰

The Slavophiles believed that the “single living organism” of Russia was diverted from its own “innate characteristic—a deep-rooted love of liberty”⁴¹—with the push to adopt Western laws and beliefs. Filling this void and returning the spirit to Russian life was the mission of later writers such as Dostoevsky and Solovyov, and this polemic comprised the great debate between the Slavophiles and Westernizers. Westernizers argued for rule of law, similar to what Kireevsky cites as a negative characteristic of the West and what Chaadaev cites as something that Russians lack, which would teach the

³⁸ Walicki, 94.

³⁹ Kireevsky, 197.

⁴⁰ Kireevsky, 198. Dostoevsky would later reiterate Kireevsky’s musings in his *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*, in which he discusses his observations on the behavior of the bourgeois in Paris and London.

⁴¹ Walicki, 67.

peasants how to become citizens. In 1864, Alexander II transformed the Russian courts based on Western systems, namely in the change from judge-centered to jury trials and by making court proceedings open to the public. In response to these reforms and to several prominent court cases in the 1870's (which are used as prototypes for Dmitri Karamazov's trial in Book 12: "A Miscarriage of Justice" of *The Brothers Karamazov*), Dostoevsky writes in his article entitled "Environment" that "the English juror understands from the very moment he takes his place in the courtroom that he is not only a sensitive individual with a tender heart but is first of all a citizen and that he is obligated to represent the opinion of his country."⁴² This power did not tumble down from out of the blue, but was affirmed through the centuries, continues Dostoevsky. The notion of being a citizen has become inherent to the English. In contrast, Dostoevsky writes:

But where do you think we'll find such a citizen in Russia? Just consider our situation only a few years ago! Civic rights have tumbled down on our citizen as if from a mountain. They've crushed him, and they're still only a burden to him... We've just heard that the boon of citizenship has tumbled down from the mountain and crushed the People.⁴³

But while the likes of Kireevsky and Dostoevsky would both agree that the Russian citizen does not possess the same view of civic duty as the European individual, this is precisely what gives the Russian the potential of which the Slavophiles spoke in terms of his messianic role. The Russian's expression of compassion for the accused could lead to the latter's acquittal even if the facts show he is guilty, but Dostoevsky states that:

⁴² Fyodor Dostoevsky, "Environment," *A Writer's Diary* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 133.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 134.

in making the individual responsible, Christianity thereby acknowledges his freedom. In making the individual dependent upon every flaw in the social structure, however, the doctrine of the environment reduces him to an absolute nonentity, exempts him totally from every personal moral duty and from all independence, reduces him to the lowest form of slavery imaginable.⁴⁴

Dostoevsky emphasizes a crucial idea of the Slavophiles, namely the distinction between inner and external truth and between individual freedom and subordination to authority. The West requires obedience, not faith, to the external truth of its political and legal institutions, which is precisely what reduces the individual to a nonentity, according to Dostoevsky. Both Kireevsky and Aleksei Khomyakov felt that all institutions and social bonds that had undergone a rationalizing and formalizing process were “conventional, artificial, and external.”⁴⁵ They both criticized the papacy as “exercising ‘external authority’ and Protestantism as individualistic.”⁴⁶ Their analysis of rational authority became crucial to the Slavophile opposition to the West. Kireevsky and Khomyakov felt a mistrust of constitutions and legal codes and believed that the cohesion of a society should be secured by brotherly fellowship in an organic community rather than by external bonds such as penal law and formal contracts.

Konstantin Aksakov went even further in that he saw “all forms of legal and political relations as inherently evil.”⁴⁷ He wrote: “Russians did not want to have anything to do with political power and its exercise, provided that they were left free to

⁴⁴ Ibid, 136.

⁴⁵ Walicki, 96.

⁴⁶ Frederick C. Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia: From Herzen to Lenin and Berdyaev* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 68-69.

⁴⁷ Walicki, 96.

preserve their own traditions, customs, values, religion.”⁴⁸ We can look to novels such as Turgenev’s *Fathers and Children* or Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* to see the disinterest of the peasants, even after Emancipation. It is this inherently Russian characteristic that Dostoevsky describes in “Environment” as the reason why Russians cannot cope with the responsibility of citizenship in the Western sense. Instead, we can apply Dostoevsky’s notion of the perfect society described in his *Dream of a Ridiculous Man* to the potential that exists within the Russian people. In his article “On the Internal State of Russia,” Aksakov reiterates the notion that Russians are not concerned with laws and government:

Without wishing to rule, our people wish to live. Without seeking political freedom, they seek moral freedom, the freedom of the spirit, communal freedom—life in society within the confines of the people... Hence, leaving the kingdom which is of this world to the state, the Russians, being a Christian people, set their feet on another path—the path to inner freedom, to spiritual life, to the kingdom of Christ... That is the reason for their unequalled submission to authority.⁴⁹

Although seemingly counterintuitive, Aksakov maintains that a life of freedom is tied to authority. In other words, Russians submit to the state because they are not interested in its political and social concerns since the spiritual person lives according to a higher code. Aksakov’s statement clarifies Kireevsky’s idea that pure reason only led to the “negative value of man’s spirit.” Kireevsky understandably argued that Russia’s exclusion from the Roman heritage of rationalization and jurisprudence was a blessing, and it was for this reason that Russia was able to stay on this path to inner freedom. It

⁴⁸ Copleston, 71.

⁴⁹ Konstantin Aksakov, “On the Internal State of Russia,” trans. Valentine Snow in *Russian Intellectual History: An Anthology*, ed. Marc Raeff (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1978), 234.

was precisely because of this that Russians were able to preserve their *tsel'naya lichnost'*, or their integral personality:

This “inner focus” helps to harmonize the separate psychic powers and safeguards the inner unity and wholeness, or “integrality” (*tsel'nost'*), of the spirit. The unifying principle is concealed but can be grasped by means of inner concentration; it is only this “vital focus hidden from the ordinary condition of the human soul” but accessible to those who seek it that makes the psyche something more than an aggregate of heterogeneous functions.⁵⁰

Overly relying on reason is what prohibits this *tsel'nost'* in that reason is one-sided and weakens the capacity for intuitive understanding. From this, Kireevsky concludes: “when logical merit is reinforced by aesthetic or moral merit, this very combination (the combination of Roman and Greek essence, or of East and West) of qualities enables the mind itself to recapture some of its primal wholeness and thus brings it closer to the truth.”⁵¹ Khomyakov argued that this *tsel'nost'* was preserved in the Orthodox Church and called it *sobornost'*.⁵² The ideas of both *tsel'nost'* and *sobornost'* are crucial, not only for the development of the Slavophiles, but also for the philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov, as well as for the justification of Father Zosima’s argument regarding his debate with Ivan over the virtues of the ecclesiastical court, to which I will return shortly.

In theory, the Slavophiles thought that Russia belonged to the East (or, to neither the East nor the West) and wanted to remain true to the traditional Russian character,

⁵⁰Walicki, 100.

⁵¹ Kireevsky, 190.

⁵² On the role of *sobornost'* in Orthodox tradition, see: Georgii Florovsky, *Puti russkogo bogoslovia* (Paris, 1937), 227; Sergey Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, trans. Elizabeth S. Cram, ed. Donald Lowrie (1935; reprint, Dobbs Ferry, NY: American Review of Eastern Orthodoxy, 1978), 74-75; Vladimir Solovyov, *Russia and the Universal Church*, trans. Herbert Rees (London: Centenary Press, 1948).

while the Westernizers felt that Russia belonged to the West and should adopt Western democratic institutions. In reality, the two sides do not lend to easy definitions due to the many different factions that existed.⁵³ In fact, at times it was difficult to tell the difference between conservative and liberal Slavophiles or even between Slavophiles and Westernizers. For example, while Slavophiles were generally in favor of an authoritarian regime for Russia, the liberal Slavophiles felt that East and West could influence each other and wanted Russia to absorb the West; the conservative Slavophiles, however, rejected the West and desired its absolute alienation from Russia. Early Slavophiles stressed the importance of the monarchy, but also advocated for reforms that would limit the power of the Russian autocracy. “In praising a strong monarchy as an important prerequisite for Russia’s movement along the road of progress, early Westernizers paradoxically were more ‘Slavophile’ in some respects than the Slavophiles themselves.”⁵⁴ Early in the nineteenth century, both sides “preached a moderate type of

⁵³ For a more comprehensive analysis of the various factions that comprised the Russian intelligentsia, see Andrzej Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought* (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1975); Abbott Gleason, *European and Muscovite: Ivan Kireevsky and the Origins of Slavophilism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972); Martin Malia, *Alexander Herzen and the Birth of Russian Socialism: 1812-1855* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961); and Dmitry Shlapentokh, *The French Revolution in Russian Intellectual Life, 1865-1905* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1996).

⁵⁴ Dmitry Shlapentokh, *The French Revolution in Russian Intellectual Life, 1865-1905* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1996), 32.

liberalism” and saw “a well-organized bureaucratic state as the only guarantee of a citizen’s rights.”⁵⁵

One important commonality was that all sides were heavily influenced by the French Revolution. Interestingly, both Slavophiles and Westernizers “looked on any limitation of the power of the autocracy as something quite dangerous”⁵⁶ and saw the French Revolution as a warning against possible Populist uprisings. The French Revolution “became a symbol of the ill-fated attempt to create Utopia” as well as a “manifestation of humanity’s hubris.”⁵⁷ These feelings stemmed from Karamzin’s reaction to the terror in France, as he wrote: “Century of Enlightenment, I do not recognize you; in blood, in flames, among murders and ruins, I do not recognize you.”⁵⁸ He advocated for a national education (as opposed to studying abroad in Europe)⁵⁹ and cited autocracy as “the Palladium of Russia”⁶⁰ in his *Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia*. While I will not delve deeper here into all of the complexities between the two groups, it is sufficient to note that the issues of authority and individualism were central questions as the nineteenth century unfolded.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 33.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 33.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 35.

⁵⁸ Nikolai Karamzin, *Sochineniya* (St. Petersburg, 1848) III, 439, 441.

⁵⁹ Karamzin, “O novom obrazovanii narodnogo prosveshcheniya v Rossii,” *Sochineniya* , VIII, 221-31.

⁶⁰ Karamzin, *Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia*, trans. Richard Pipes (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 200.

The figure that epitomized this complex view of the French Revolution was, of course, Napoleon, who was appropriated in some way by all sides in Russia's burgeoning political debate. On the one hand, he represented the tyranny of the Enlightenment that threatened both the model of Western political institutions and the inherent communal characteristic of Russia. On the other, he was the embodiment of the universal (super)man, characterized by will and ego, that was valued by Russia's Romantic poets. In the Romantic case, he encapsulated both the ability of the individual to mold boundaries and the yearning and striving of the nation. When Napoleon invaded Russia, Russian poets first denounced Napoleon as "God's enemy, a demonic force, a rapacious eagle, thief and scoundrel."⁶¹ Using apocalyptic imagery, Derzhavin railed against the "serpent-giant, the seeming genius, and evil leader," while a young Pushkin celebrated Russia's victory over the "universal scourge and tyrant."⁶² However, the images of Napoleon in Russian literature change as the bitterness of war faded into the social stagnation of the 1820s and 1830s. The negative image of Napoleon "gave way to that of a lonely and anguished exile, a sinful yet heroic rebel."⁶³ As the century progressed, the image of Napoleon would appear prominently in various literary works, such as Pushkin's "The Queen of Spades," Gogol's *Dead Souls*, Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, and Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. The budding nation's obsession with

⁶¹ Robert Louis Jackson, "Napoleon in Russian Literature," *Yale French Studies* 26 (1960): 107.

⁶² *Ibid*, 107.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 107.

Napoleon reflected the rise of romantic nationalism,⁶⁴ along with the influence of German idealism, which paradoxically celebrated both the individual ego and the equally colossal effort to unite the self with a larger collective.

That Napoleon's image would resound through Russian literature throughout the century reinforced the main question that plagued the ideological debates described above: If everyone is Napoleon, then all is permitted. If Napoleon is the Antichrist, then *sobornost'* is paramount. In terms of our superfluous man, if the former is true, then no one is superfluous (or, perhaps, everyone is, but equally so). In this case, being superfluous would be acceptable and even desired. If the latter is true, then the problem of the superfluous man—the choice between freedom and conformity—is the most profoundly important question that an individual faces. In any case, superfluity is less an objective category than it is determined by the specific lens through which the potentially superfluous object is viewed.

So far, our discussion has been relegated to the confines of philosophy and ideology, a discussion about which has been widely written. But how did people actually live? Or, at the very least, where was the intersection between life and ideology? Whether one was a Liberal Conservative or a Conservative Liberal, the question was the same: how to achieve some sort of balance between individuality and social unity (and the range of answers was admittedly quite wide)? But this very personal question was

⁶⁴ For a concise, yet comprehensive account of the rise of Russian romantic nationalism, see Edward C. Thaden, "The Beginnings of Romantic Nationalism in Russia," *American Slavic and East European Review* Vol. 13, No. 4 (Dec., 1954): 500-521.

difficult to approach given that there was so little mobility in an oppressive society during the reign of Nicholas I.

In the 18th century, the binary was much easier to navigate. Peter III's *ukaz* (1762) gave the gentry plenty of leisure time to explore such philosophical questions. During the freer years of Catherine's rule, life was good for the ancestors of the superfluous man. There was a public sphere⁶⁵ in which one could both develop one's individuality and also foster unity. However, this golden age was short-lived, as Catherine soon saw the Masonic lodge, as well as the printing press, as a threat to her rule. Lodges were closed, and the public sphere was stifled. Coinciding with both the American and French Revolutions, her actions were hardly surprising. The symbols of liberty (again, representing a place where both individual and society could flourish) were shut down, and its figureheads, the likes of Novikov and Radishchev, for example, were imprisoned. This set a precedent—liberty was not to be tolerated, and it was to be cured by exile. This will be an important factor in the development of the superfluous man to which I will return later.

Napoleon, then, became the figurehead of the liberty (read, Enlightenment) that Catherine had extinguished. He was the Antichrist, and his defeat was rightly celebrated. But those who served in the war were exposed to life in the West and were disillusioned when they returned home to Russia and her stifling environment, which eradicated any

⁶⁵ For more on the public space of the eighteenth century in Russia, see Thomas Newlin, *The Voice in the Garden: Andrei Bolotov and the Anxieties of Russian Pastoral, 1738-1833* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001) and Douglas Smith, *Working the Rough Stone: Freemasonry and Society in Eighteenth-century Russia* (Northern Illinois University Press, 1999).

outlet that might allow the individual to express himself. Such outlets as literary circles, Masonic lodges, and university philosophy departments were deemed subversive by the autocratic regime. Left with no recourse but to idle and to think, the gentry used the French Revolution as the fulcrum in its debate over Russia's destiny and turned to German idealism:

Napoleon's defeat was interpreted as proof that Russia had been entrusted with a holy mission, that she had been chosen by Providence to oppose the Antichrist and bring about a rebirth of Christianity. The French emperor's downfall was...seen as an example of the impermanence of temporal glory and the insignificance of human strength compared to the will of God.⁶⁶

Intellectuals such as the members of the *Lyubomudriye* turned to Germany in their search for answers, namely, to Schelling's philosophy of nature and of art, and saw the world as a living work of art. Art was seen as "an organic unity of unconscious and conscious creation," in which "the inspired artist did not imitate reality but created anew according to divine principles of creation (and could be called a divine being)."⁶⁷

The metaphysical world became the center of their thought, as opposed to the rational world of the Enlightenment, framing the intellectual discussion of the nineteenth century as a strict binary. Following Schelling, the Lovers of Wisdom "saw everything in terms of polarity: nature was a living, spiritual whole containing within it the creativity, movement, and struggle of opposites, both attraction and repulsion; at the same time, nature was only the outer garment of the spirit, and all its manifestations therefore had a

⁶⁶ Walicki, 92.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 76.

secret symbolic meaning.”⁶⁸ In the sense of their interpretations of symbols and their belief that true knowledge was attainable only to an elite group of people, the *Lyubomudriye* embodied Russian freemasonry. The main difference between the *Lyubomudriye* and the freemasons was the former’s “apoliticism,” or their “lack of critical and humanitarian spirit”⁶⁹ that the latter possessed. However, the repression of Nicholas I after the Decembrist uprising officially restricted Russia’s development to the world of ideas:

The defeat of the Decembrists in Russia provoked the same muddying of the intellectual waters that the disappointing outcome of the French Revolution had provoked in Europe as a whole. The generation of the aftermath in Russia was driven to seek the explanation of a reality no longer clear and simple in the sinuosities of metaphysics rather than on the straight highway of empiricism. In their search for an explanation of life they turned inevitably to the school of frustration, Germany, just as their predecessors had turned to the school of action, France.⁷⁰

After the failure of the Decembrists, the Lovers of Wisdom officially disbanded, but individual members continued to meet. At this time, their interest shifted away from Schelling’s philosophy of nature to the philosophy of history:

Idealism also saw an organic link between one age and another... Parallel to this organic view of history was a new and more poetic view of nature than that held by the empirical science of the eighteenth century; nature became animate, was endowed with spiritual force, and was looked upon as the prologue to history. At the same time idealism brought back, not exactly the old God of revealed religion but Spirit—*Geist*, or the Absolute—which subsumed all of nature, history, and art in one unified whole.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ibid, 76.

⁶⁹ Gleason, 39.

⁷⁰ Malia, 71.

⁷¹ Ibid, 73.

These two ideas—history and the Absolute—were the key concepts that Russia absorbed from German idealism as the question of Russia’s place in history comes to the forefront of intellectual life. On the one hand, Hegel replaced Schelling and propagated the idea of a linear history in which life was a progression of thesis-antithesis-synthesis, building on Schelling’s idea of the organic development of a nation. On the other hand, thinkers like Vladimir Odoevsky felt that man had once been free but had been dependent on nature since the Fall. “Regeneration was possible, however, through love and art—mankind’s aesthetic evolution had shown that humanity was capable of regaining its lost integrality and spiritual harmony.”⁷² Odoevsky (as well as Ivan Kireevsky) saw history, not as an attempt to move forward to an unknown future state, but as the desire to return mankind to the paradise that it previously attained. In this sense, Odoevsky viewed Russia’s mission as the savior of Europe.⁷³

The other idea taken from German idealism is that of the Absolute, which deals with the way in which man perceives the world. Kant’s theory that man can know only what he experiences directly meant that the mind and the external world were one. “In knowing itself, the mind likewise knew the universe; and in knowing the universe the mind at the same time discovered itself. Thus for the post-Kantians the essence of reality was idea, and all knowledge came to be self-knowledge.”⁷⁴ Furthermore, if all knowledge is self-knowledge, and if the mind is the mirror of the universe, then “whatever the self

⁷² Walicki, 78.

⁷³ This idea provided the basis for Dostoevsky’s *Dream of a Ridiculous Man*.

⁷⁴ Malia, 74.

thinks or feels acquires the validity of absolute truth.”⁷⁵ At the same time, however, mind and the external world must be distinct to some degree, which caused a great tension in the individual’s search for identity in an external world that is both unified with the individual and separated from it. This resulted only in supreme alienation despite the desire to belong. It is no coincidence that the idea of the superfluous man arises in Russian literature at this time.

It is in Hegel that we find the continuation of Schelling’s idealism, but in a form that was more objective and concrete by according equal importance to both the inner and outer worlds, which “offered all the usual satisfactions of idealism and added those of manful realism.”⁷⁶ In doing this, Hegel afforded history a greater role in his Absolute and concluded the following that would be of extreme importance to the next group of thinkers that will be discussed:

Since for idealism a large part of philosophy consists in discovering the laws of mind in the external world of nature or society, history, because it is more human, tells us more about ourselves and consequently about the Absolute than does nature. Nature mirrors only the most abstract forms of man’s reason; history fills these forms with all the riches of the concrete, clothes reality with flesh, and hence lends to philosophy a greater “objectivity.” Thus, by situating the Absolute more firmly in the human context of history, Hegel brought it nearer to earth and thereby gave idealism a new aura of “realism.”⁷⁷

The focus on history, though, raises the notion of perpetual struggle to the highest level of Hegel’s system. Just as in Schelling, the tension of human contact with the external world becomes of supreme importance to Hegel. However, instead of leading to the

⁷⁵ Ibid, 76.

⁷⁶ Malia, 231.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 231.

alienation of the individual, “conflict and negation themselves are the links that bind all things in one whole.”⁷⁸ Therefore, the unity of the world only exists due to the contradictory nature of reality and “the negation of the negation becomes the only path to positive experience.”⁷⁹

As we can see, this conflict between East and West, between Slavophile and Westernizer, was largely played out in the realm of ideas. Given the stifling environment of Nicholas I, there was not much that one could do but to resort to philosophizing, as “the absence of political life as experienced in the West and the existence of the suppressive czarist monarchy created a feeling of deep alienation in many Russian intellectuals.”⁸⁰ This alienation shifted the intellectual development of Russia from the public sphere to pen and paper, as these debates played out in the letters and publications of the nineteenth century. Those who strayed too far were punished (such as Pushkin, Lermontov, Chaadaev, Dostoevsky, as were Novikov, Radishchev and the Decembrists before them), but an astounding volume of philosophical literature was produced during this time. As with Russia’s reception of Napoleon, the question of whether the individual was either useful or superfluous was determined by the lens through which he was being viewed.

The literary texts featuring the superfluous man were appropriated by one side or the other, and for much of the century, the superfluous man was subordinated to a type.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 232.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 233.

⁸⁰ Shlapentokh, 11.

Much of the polemic between the Slavophiles and Westernizers in the middle of the nineteenth century was centered on opposing philosophies of history, namely whether individuals should live for today only or whether they should make themselves useful in service of the betterment of future society. Belinsky valued the individual, but also felt that he had no right to stand over humanity. Chernyshevsky, Dobrolyubov, and other revolutionary democrats held similar utilitarian views that opposed the sanctity of the romantic individual. On the other hand, liberals and individualists like Herzen felt that the Hegelian future is “nothing but a pernicious delusion, perhaps a deliberate deception; for the distant ends may never be realized, while the agonies and sufferings and crimes of the present remain only too real.”⁸¹ History naturally turns the individual into a superfluous entity—and the superfluous man in Russia is commonly held to be a peculiarity to a time of ideological dominance in which any man of talent could be nothing but superfluous.

The literature on the superfluous man cited at the beginning of this chapter shows how the type evolved from the sceptics and dandies of the 1820’s, the demons of revolt in the 1830’s, [and] the preachers of the 1840’s. Dobrolyubov, in his article “What is Oblomovism?,” attempted to demonstrate that we find features almost identical with Oblomov’s in Onegin, Pechorin, Beltov, Rudin, and in Turgenev’s Hamlet from Shchigry County.⁸² As a positivist and as a believer, like Belinsky, that literature should serve

⁸¹ Herzen, *From the Other Shore*, xvii.

⁸² Nikolai Dobrolyubov, “Shto takoe oblomovshchina?” *Sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow, 1962), IV, 315.

society and act as a positive guide, Dobrolyubov condemned the Oblomov type (that Dobrolyubov refers not to an individual but to *oblomovshchina* affirms this relegation of the individual to a type) for “the disgusting habit of getting his wishes satisfied not by his own efforts but by the efforts of others.”⁸³ It was not so much Oblomov himself that was deficient, but the radical lens through which he was viewed that led Dobrolyubov to ask: “Who, then, will in the end shift them from the spot to which they are rooted by the might word ‘forward!’ which Gogol dreamed of, and for which Rus has been longing and waiting for so long?”⁸⁴ The positivist critics of the 1860’s, such as Dobrolyubov, were obsessed with how each person could be socially useful.

Dmitry Pisarev was another such social critic. In his article “Bazarov,” he draws the genealogical tree of Bazarov: the Onegin and Pechorins begot the Rudins and the Beltovs, the Rudins and the Beltovs begot Bazarov.”⁸⁵ It is in a similar context as Dobrolyubov’s criticism of Oblomovism that Pisarev is responding to Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons*, a novel that pits the aging romantic gentry of the 1840s against the positivists and the *raznochintsy* of the 1860s. Just as it is often unclear which characters Turgenev himself favors in his own novels, the there was no clear-cut winner in the ongoing debate in intellectual circles and in literary criticism. Pisarev writes that:

the tired and the bored are succeeded by men who strive to act; life rejects them both as worthless and incomplete. It is sometimes their lot to suffer, but they never succeed in getting anything done. Society is deaf and inexorable to them.

⁸³ Ibid, 310.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 341.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Herzen, “Bazarov Once More,” *My Past and Thoughts*, 631.

They are incapable of adapting themselves to its conditions, not one of them has ever risen so high as head-clerk of a government office.⁸⁶

He concludes by saying that “the Pechorins had will without knowledge, the Rudins knowledge without will, the Bazarovs both knowledge and will. Thought and action are blended in one firm whole.”⁸⁷ Pisarev’s support for Bazarov is curious given the fact that Bazarov, for all of his intellectual and scientific gifts, dies from an infection, while the romantic Kirsanovs, both father and son, live happily at the novel’s end.

Herzen reproaches Pisarev for his subordination of the superfluous man to the process of history and takes great exception to this assertion. In his article, “Bazarov Once More,” published in 1868 in *Polyarnaya zvezda*, he replies by affirming the deed of the individual superfluous man. Herzen argues that, had Turgenev sent Bazarov to London, the nihilist would have seen that:

without rising to the post of head-clerk of an office, one might do quite as much good as any head of a department; that society is not always deaf and inexorable when the protest finds a response; that action does sometimes succeed; that the Rudins and the Beltovs sometimes have will and perseverance; and that, seeing the impossibility of carrying on the activity to which they were urged by their inner impulse, they have abandoned many things, gone abroad, and without “fussing and fretting” have set up a Russian printing press, and are carrying on Russian propaganda... In London Bazarov would have seen that it was only from a distance that we seemed to be merely brandishing our arms, and that in reality we were keeping our hands at work. Perhaps his wrath would have been charged to loving kindness, and he would have given up treating us with “reproach and mockery.”⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Ibid, 631.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 632.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 633-34.

Once again, the object hardly changes, but is defined based on the lens of the observer. Moreover, it is fitting that Herzen calls attention to the deed of the superfluous man, specifically to the literary deed, which will be discussed below.

Comparing superfluous types to Hamlet was also fairly common in the nineteenth century. In Turgenev's article entitled "Hamlet and Don Quixote," he wrote that these were the two types of intellectual elite in Russia. He attributed this to the fact that, while "all people live based on their own principles, their ideals,...most receive their ideals fully prepared, that is, they don't think them through themselves... "I" is the first priority.⁸⁹ Don Quixote believes in something universal, in a truth outside of his own person, and he is ready to give his life for this ideal. Originating from the fantastic world of chivalry novels, he exhibits no trace of egoism and does not change his beliefs.⁹⁰ Hamlet, on the other hand, is defined purely by egoism and nonbelief. He lives only for himself, but cannot believe in himself. His skeptical mind is too developed to be happy with what is inside of him. He understands his weakness, and out of this self-awareness comes a certain irony about himself. He is acutely aware of his deficiencies, scorns them and himself. He suffers because of this self-loathing. He doesn't know what he wants or what to live for. His suffering is stronger than Don Quixote's. Others beat up Don Quixote, but Hamlet beats himself up with his own sword of hypercritical self-analysis.⁹¹ Irene Masing-Delic writes that the tragedy of Russian Hamlets lies in the fact that they

⁸⁹ Ivan Turgenev, "Hamlet and Don Quixote," *Sobranie sochineniie* (Moscow: Nauka), t. 5, 331.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 332-333.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 333-334.

reject their own culture and do not feel comfortable in any other, either.⁹² Aileen Kelly describes this “tragic polarization between the ironists and enthusiasts” as follows:

the ironists’ search for truth has locked them into an endlessly regressive process of denial, which destroys all meaning with its dissecting doubt. In the opposing type (the dominant one among the new generation of radicals), reflection has been stifled by the need for faith. Their vision is shallow and narrow: but the mad and noble folly with which they pursue shadows without substance has a capacity to inspire others that is denied to the manysided and reflective Hamlets. By infecting others with their passion, the Don Quixotes supply the ferment that leads to change, but they are powerless to determine the results of the upheavals they produce.⁹³

Consistent with the polemic of the times, the Hamlet-Don Quixote binary is based on an individual’s ability to act, which for the Russian nineteenth century meant an ability to affect social or political change. The Hamlets think too much and do not act enough, while the Don Quixotes act passionately, yet their actions are immediately swallowed by and subordinated to the uncontrollable forces of history.

However, while social critics excoriated the Hamlets and other superfluous men for being useless, an individual’s utility is determined by the lens of the observer, not by the inherent nature of each side of the binary. In Robert Louis Jackson’s *Dialogues with Dostoevsky: The Overwhelming Questions*, his chapter entitled “Unbearable Questions: Two Views of Gogol and the Critical Synthesis” further demonstrates the power of the viewer’s lens and also distinguishes between type and individual in literature through a discussion of the divergence in both Belinsky’s and Rozanov’s receptions of Gogol’s

⁹² Irene Masing-Delic, “Philosophy, Myth, and Art in Turgenev’s *Notes of a Hunter*,” *Russian Review*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (Oct., 1991): 440.

⁹³ Aileen M. Kelly, *Toward Another Shore* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 97.

work. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Belinsky saw Gogol as the founder of the natural school, as a realist who grasped the “phenomena of life in all their fullness and reality.”⁹⁴ Rozanov, writing much later in 1894, reacted to the “much abused words *realism* and *reality* in Russian radical criticism”⁹⁵ by writing that “the view that our modern literature stems from Gogol is well known, but it would be more correct to say that it was in its entirety a negation of Gogol, a struggle against him.”⁹⁶ While Rozanov believed that later writers such as Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Ostrovsky, Goncharov, and Leo Tolstoy disclosed the rich inner life of man, Gogol, on the other hand, “looked upon life with a dead glance and saw only dead souls in it. He by no means reflected reality in his works, but only drew a series of caricatures on it with amazing mastery.”⁹⁷

Although the comparison might be unfair given that Rozanov clearly had the benefit of having lived through the second half of the nineteenth century while Belinsky died in 1848, Rozanov’s analysis of Gogol is relevant here for his discussion of literary type. In his criticism of not only Gogol, but also of Russian radical thought as a whole, Rozanov writes: “A type in literature is already a shortcoming; it is a generalization; that

⁹⁴ Vissarion Belinsky, “Otvét ‘Moskvityaninu,’” in *Belinsky o Gogole: Stat’i i retsenzii, pis’ma*, ed. S. Mashinsky (Moscow, 1949), 374. Quoted in Robert Louis Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky: The Overwhelming Questions* (Stanford: Stanford University Press: 1993), 188.

⁹⁵ Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky*, 189.

⁹⁶ Vasily Rozanov, “Pushkin i Gogol,” in appendix to Rozanov, *Legenda o velikom inkvisitore F. M. Dostoevskogo Opyt kriticheskogo kommentariya: S prilozheniem dvukh etyudov o Gogole*, 3rd ed. (Petersburg, 1906), 260. Quoted in Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky*, 188.

⁹⁷ Rozanov, 18. Quoted in Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky*, 188.

is, a certain alteration of reality.”⁹⁸ While Rozanov does not deny Gogol’s genius, he writes that in Gogol’s art there are “absolutely no live people: only tiny wax figures artfully grimacing, seemingly moving but, in fact, motionless,” as well as “an absence of confidence and respect for man.”⁹⁹ Interestingly, while Rozanov’s criticism is not unfounded from his vantage point at the turn of the twentieth century, Gogol’s lifeless types can be considered a “realistic” portrayal of Russian society at the time. In fact, Jackson writes that “the Gogolian type emerges as the tragic truth of Russian life and history, witness to its deepest distress, namely the failure to produce the phenomenon of personality (*lichnost*)...[and] is not a distortion of Russian life.”¹⁰⁰

Despite the fact that Belinsky himself acknowledged that “Gogolian types are *for the time being* [emphasis is Belinsky’s] the most authentic Russian types,”¹⁰¹ and that Herzen wrote that “we encounter [these dead souls] at every step,”¹⁰² it does not temper the lack of individualism in mid-century types at this particular stage of Russia’s historical and social development. In his essay on the ancient Slavs, Konstantin Kavelin argued that the element of personality did not exist in the social organization of the ancient Slavs. “Family life and relationships did not cultivate in the Russian Slav that

⁹⁸ Ibid, 255 [190].

⁹⁹ Ibid, 261, 263 [190, 191].

¹⁰⁰ Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky*, 195.

¹⁰¹ Vissarion Belinsky, “Letter to K. D. Kavelin, Nov. 22, 1847,” *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow, 1956), vol. 12, 433.

¹⁰² Alexander Herzen, *Sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1954), vol. 2, 220.

feeling of separateness, of concentrated oneness that compels a man to draw a sharp line between himself and another, to distinguish himself from others in all respects and at all times.”¹⁰³ Perhaps most germane to the current dissertation is Kavelin’s belief that the development of the Russian people consisted in the gradual development and appearance in them of the “element of personality.”¹⁰⁴ This lack of personality was confirmed by Russian writers themselves. Gogol admitted in letter to Pushkin in 1835 that he wanted “to show all of Russia”¹⁰⁵ in *Dead Souls* (the first volume of which was published in 1842). Similarly, Lermontov criticized the reading public for its naivete and immaturity in the preface to *A Hero of Our Time* (published in 1840), writing that his work was “indeed a portrait, but not of a single person. It is a portrait of the vices of our whole generation in their ultimate development.”¹⁰⁶ Generally speaking, the Russian nineteenth century marked precisely this development from type to individual, from objective landscape painting to impressionistic investigation of the interior life of man.

However, the opposing views of Belinsky and Rozanov are still mired in the throes of ideology. Jackson writes that:

Belinsky...anticipated, and contributed to, a tendency in later radical criticism to divorce social and aesthetic analysis, and more broadly to manipulate artistic truth in the name of an ideological or social cause.... Yet one detects in Rozanov’s

¹⁰³ Konstantin Kavelin, “Vzglyad na yuridicheskii byt drevney Rossii,” in *Sovremennik* (Petersburg, 1847), vol. 1, pt. 11, p. 11.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 12.

¹⁰⁵ Nikolai Gogol, “To A. S. Pushkin. Oct. 7, 1835,” *Letters of Nikolai Gogol*, ed. and trans. Carl Proffer (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1967), 52.

¹⁰⁶ Mikhail Lermontov, *A Hero of Our Time*, trans. Paul Foote (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 3-4.

effort to disconnect Gogol's art from any roots in Russian life a tendentious one-sidedness quite as damaging as Belinsky's troublesome insistence on seeing in Gogol's art a 'full representation of reality.'"¹⁰⁷

Given the different times in which they were writing, it makes sense that Belinsky and Rozanov would interpret Gogol in the ways that they did. But how could Russia move beyond philosophy and ideology, which seemed to prohibit forward progress and lead only to intellectual stagnation?

It was this question that prompted Kavelin's letter to Dostoevsky written in 1880 (but first published in 1889, nearly a decade after Dostoevsky died) in response to the latter's Pushkin speech. Kavelin discusses the state of the Slavophile-Westernizer debate, as well as the state of Russia's own development:

The heated, sometimes bitter polemics that the Slavophiles and Westernizers used to conduct are, it seems to me, already a thing of the past.... Everybody knows by now that the Russian peasantry is far from being the summit of perfection, and that educated people are as devoted to their country as the popular masses.... All men and all nations on earth learn from other men and other nations and always have, not only in childhood and youth, but also in their mature years. The difference is that in childhood and youth...they strive to become exact copies of those who serve them as models; having reached maturity, they already have a sense of individuality and assimilate what they borrow, without trying to become the very image of those whose experience and knowledge they use.... We no longer have pure Slavophiles nor pure Westernizers—both have left the stage. In continuing to contrast their opinions, it seems to me, you are reviving an old quarrel that has already been settled by the development of Russian life and thought. Are you, for instance, an authentic Slavophile? Or those with whom you polemize real Westernizers?... The conciliation of the two trends you are wishing for was tacitly accomplished twenty years ago, when Slavophiles and Westernizers shook hands over the abolition of serfdom.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky*, 204-5.

¹⁰⁸ Konstantin Kavelin, "Pis'mo F. M. Dostoevskomu," *Sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. II (St. Petersburg, 1897-1900), cols. 1021-52. Gertrude Vakar, trans. The letter, written in 1880, was first published in *Vestnik Evropy*, No. 11 (1889).

Kavelin's letter identifies not only Russia's development toward individualism, but also the impotence of pure ideology. As he notes, and as will be discussed throughout this dissertation, it is never one or the other, but rather a combination, some sort of a middle ground that serves as "an existential affirmation of the supremacy of the transcendent human element over inert environment, over the morally and socially frozen landscape of Russian life."¹⁰⁹

What was needed to reconcile the two sides and to subordinate ideology to real life was some kind of mediator, and it is in this way that I propose a new reading of the superfluous man. One of the primary ways that this type developed into an individual is through the characters' literary acts. That Belinsky claimed in 1834 that "we have no literature"¹¹⁰ affirms the importance of writing in the development of individual consciousness manifested in the progression from type to individual, freeing the latter from the clutches of ideology. While the following is by no means an exhaustive analysis of the writings of the superfluous man, I would like to briefly draw on several examples in support of the claim that these confessional writings of an individual can bind people together in order to create a national consciousness that is more cohesive and comprehensive than through ideology alone.

Lermontov's preface to *A Hero of Our Time*, states, as Herzen does in *From the Other Shore*, that there are no solutions, only a portrait, not of one man, but of an entire

¹⁰⁹ Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky*, 207.

¹¹⁰ Belinsky. "Literaturnye mechtaniya." *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*. (Moscow, 1953), 23.

generation's vices. Pechorin generally comes off as an unlikeable character to many. But when Maxim Maximych publishes Pechorin's journal, he "felt convinced of the sincerity of the man who so ruthlessly exposed his own feelings and vices. The story of a man's soul, even the pettiest, can be more interesting and instructive than the story of a whole nation, especially if it is based on the self-observation of a mature mind and is written with no vain desire to arouse sympathy or surprise."¹¹¹ It is through Pechorin's own writings that we see his true self, a self that is more compassionate and sympathetic than we initially thought.

Turgenev's *Diary of a Superfluous Man* begins with this statement:

But isn't it absurd to begin a diary a fortnight, perhaps, before death? What does it matter? And by how much are fourteen days less than fourteen years, fourteen centuries? Beside eternity, they say, all is nothingness—yes, but in that case eternity, too, is nothing. I see I am letting myself drop into metaphysics; that's a bad sign—am I not rather faint-hearted, perchance? I had better begin a description of some sort. It's damp and windy out of doors. I'm forbidden to go out. What can I write about, then? No decent man talks of his maladies; to write a novel is not in my line; reflections on elevated topics are beyond me; descriptions of the life going on around me could not even interest me; while I am weary of doing nothing, and too lazy to read. Ah, I have it, I will write the story of all my life for myself. A first-rate idea! Just before death it is a suitable thing to do, and can be of no harm to any one. I will begin.¹¹²

Turgenev's story is about a self-proclaimed superfluous man, which is a move away from the social and economic impotence of earlier superfluous men and toward the existential crisis of the individual. What plagues Chulkaturin, other than his physical ailments, is a lack of human connection. When he cannot attain this in his real life, he takes up the pen

¹¹¹ Lermontov, 55.

¹¹² Ivan Turgenev, "Dnevnik lishnego cheloveka," *Sochineniya v dvenadtsat' tomakh* (Moscow: Nauka, 1980), t. 4, 166.

and writes the story of his superfluity. Whereas he calls himself superfluous and has a generally bilious attitude toward life, it is through his writing that he realizes, much like Maksim Maksimych comes to understand about Pechorin, that his heart is “capable and ready to love.”¹¹³ It is his writing, then, that sustains him and gives him purpose. Not only does he die only after he stops writing, his last goodbye is to his pen itself after saying goodbye to life, to Liza, and to Terentieva.¹¹⁴ It is because he has left his account of his superfluity that “perishing, I cease to be superfluous.”¹¹⁵

Dostoevsky’s underground man, of course, belongs here. Each of his spiteful acts—for example, bumping into the officer—is performed in order to counter reason and self-interest. But his act of writing is the most crucial since it alone can express the “secret, abnormal, despicable little pleasure”¹¹⁶ the revolting act he had committed that day. Despite the fact that he claims that “it’s better to do nothing” and that “conscious inertia is better,”¹¹⁷ he still undertakes his writing project. At the end of Part I, he declares that, despite the fact that he is aware of the possibility of having readers, he is “writing for [himself] alone.”¹¹⁸ Audience or not, the first step is the confessional act of writing. If the superfluous individual is going to attain a higher consciousness, he must work for it.

¹¹³ Ibid, 214.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 215.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 215.

¹¹⁶ Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, trans. Michael Katz (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 6.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 27.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 28.

And indeed, the underground man performs work that elevates him through his writing: “Somehow it appears more dignified on paper... Perhaps I’ll actually experience some relief from the process of writing it all down... Lastly, I’m bored, and I never do anything. Writing things down actually seems like work. They say that work makes a man become good and honest. Well, at least there’s a chance.”¹¹⁹ Writing alone is what can free him from his hyperconscious state ruled by an ideology that bogs him down.

Even Herzen himself expresses the power of the literary act. In his “Author’s Introduction to the 1855 Edition” of his *Letters from France and Italy*, he writes: “This may not be the right time for me to publish my old letters on Italy and France. I am doing so because I have a great deal of leisure. A Russian can say nothing at this time.”¹²⁰ Therefore, he must write, and Herzen’s letters and memoir, *My Past and Thoughts*, not only constitute some of the finest literary output of the nineteenth century but serve as a chronicle of the Russian sensibility of that age.

Furthermore, in his “Open Letter to Jules Michelet,” Herzen cites Russia’s literature as one reason for the inaccuracy of Michelet’s harsh critique of the Russian people. (Herzen says the critique should have been of the Russian state, not of the people.) He writes: “Why have you been so unwilling to listen to the heart-rending accounts of our sad poetry, of our songs which are merely tears given tongue?... How I wish I could translate for you adequately some of the lyrical poems of Pushkin, or

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 29.

¹²⁰ Herzen, *Letters from France and Italy, 1847-1855*, ed. and trans. Judith E. Zimmerman (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 3.

Lermontov! Then you would welcome us with open arms!”¹²¹ Nothing bodes so well for Russia’s future than her literature. Here we can go further and cite Tolstoy’s well-known statement about the completely original form of the great works of Russian literature. Not coincidentally, many, if not all, of the works that he references deal with and/or were written by one of Russia’s superfluous men.

Interestingly, the second reason that Herzen gives for the promise of Russia’s future is the communal life of the peasant, although he is not interested in the commune for economic reasons, but rather for social ones. Instead, after all of the failed revolutions in Europe, he arrives at his faith in the “spontaneous Russian character uncontaminated by the corroding doubts and moral squalor of the Western world in decline.”¹²² Ironically, Herzen cites the Petrine break into two Russias (political and social) as the reason why the Russian character has remained untarnished. The spontaneity and creativity of the peasant serves as the antidote for the abstract and intentional life of the West. It is crucial, then, that the peasant does not change after emancipation and reform of civil law, as Dostoevsky writes in “Environment.” The mask of citizenship does not fit because he responds only to the higher law of the commune, to the fatherly exhortation of Zosima. However, the process of mediation is still needed in order to raise the Russian character from the realm of ideology to that of real, human life. It is this higher consciousness that is the hallmark of the superfluous man and his literary efforts.

¹²¹ Herzen, *From the Other Shore*, 193.

¹²² From Isaiah Berlin’s Introduction to *From the Other Shore* cited above, xix.

It is in this way that our superfluous men create a sense of community. We can look to the reactions of other characters to the deaths of our superfluous men. The given society's posthumous reception of the superfluous man suggests that the superfluous man is a necessary part of society and is not, in fact, divorced from it. The nineteenth-century superfluous man seems to have two functions—to raise the consciousness of the conformist and to preserve the existence of a culture, group, or individual in his writings. In the first case, a superfluous man imposes himself upon a quiet, static, happy community of conformists; the static community is disrupted; there is conflict; the stranger leaves (usually defeated or dead); and life continues on. But something has certainly changed within some of those conformists. A seed of inner change, however small, has been planted. Whether it eventually bears any fruit is irrelevant.¹²³ What matters is that the possibility of fruit now exists whereas before it did not. In other words, consciousness has been achieved whereas before it was dormant. It is true that individuals do not grow as much as when they face a foil, as opposed to interacting only with like-minded souls. And, even though the superfluous man may be defeated, a sweet sentimentality develops, such as the effect of Pechorin's journal on Maksim Maksimych or the nostalgic effect that Oblomov has upon Stoltz and Olga after his death, or the emotional parting of Goryanchikov and his fellow prisoners, or the poignant scene where Bazarov's parents visit his grave, or the end of *Doktor Zhivago* when Dudorov and Gordon were reading Zhivago's poetry years later:

¹²³ Note the extreme significance of planting a seed in the hearts of others as conveyed by Dostoevsky, especially in *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*.

To the two old friends, as they sat by the window, it seemed that this freedom of the soul was already there, as if that very evening the future had tangibly moved into the streets below them, that they themselves had entered it and were now part of it. Thinking of this holy city and of the entire earth, of the still-living protagonists of this story, and their children, they were filled with tenderness and peace, and they were enveloped by the unheard music of happiness that flowed all about them and into the distance. And the book they held seemed to confirm and encourage their feeling.¹²⁴

It is in this way that the writings of the superfluous man not only represent an account of an individual freed from ideology, but also work to unify readers, especially those who have undergone similar life experiences. In any case, the superfluous man is usually missed by at least one other character, even though life may be more peaceful or more pleasant without him. Although, if we look at stories about conformity such as Tolstoy's "The Death of Ivan Ilych," the word "pleasant" is not always a positive connotation.

It is in these unexpected connections that the superfluous man's writings, which, as we have seen above, reveal his humanity in a much more profound way than his reception by those around him during his life, can elevate the consciousness of a reader. In his essay "Circles," Ralph Waldo Emerson, an American superfluous man, writes: "In my daily work I incline to repeat my old steps, and do not believe in remedial force, in the power of change and reform. But some Petrarch or Ariosto, filled with the new wine of his imagination, writes me an ode or a brisk romance, full of daring thought and action...and I open my eye to my own possibilities."¹²⁵ Not coincidentally, many of Emerson's readers could be described by his words. These superfluous men act as agents

¹²⁴ Boris Pasternak, *Doktor Zhivago* (St. Petersburg: Azbuka-Klassika, 2006), 645.

¹²⁵ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Circles," <http://www.emersoncentral.com/circles.htm>. Accessed February 25, 2011.

that reveal new possibilities to the conformist that lie outside of the latter's repeated "old steps." Emerson continues: "People wish to be settled: only as far as they are unsettled is there any hope for them."¹²⁶ The conformist feels like the superfluous man is an intrusion into his life that is ruled by adherence to one ideology or another, but in reality the latter elevates the consciousness of the former and provides hope of the possibility of elevating one's soul to something greater than can be measured in material terms. In a sense, the superfluous man works to show the static community that twice two can be equal to five, even if only for a moment, even if it is not permanently viable. His rebellion is what keeps us human. This is why the conformist reader or filmgoer often roots for the rebel, even if the former does not discard his static life for the adventure, tumult, and inevitable destruction of the latter.

Admittedly, all of this can seem a bit of a Pollyannaish panacea. As we know, life is not that simple, and a deeper investigation is necessary in order to illustrate the superfluous man's true role. Throughout the nineteenth century, the superfluous man evolves from the Russian Byron to Hamlet to Don Quixote to Dostoevsky's underground man. At each step along the way, the type is defined by the historical, cultural and intellectual forces that were en vogue at the time. Whether one subscribes to the ideology of the Slavophiles or the Westernizers, the superfluous men could be counted amongst both groups. Recalling Chaadaev's letter, the superfluous man can be considered, not a liberal or a conservative type, but a Russian one. In fact, as Dostoevsky writes in his notebooks for *The Adolescent*, the underground man, who is a direct descendent of the

¹²⁶ Ibid.

superfluous man, is more than just a literary character, but a representative of the entire Russian people:

Our talented writers, who have been depicting in highly artistic form the life of the middle-upper circle (familial)—Tolstoy, Goncharov—thought that they were depicting the life of the majority. On the contrary, their life is the life of exceptions, while mine is the life of the general rule... I am proud to have portrayed for the first time the real man of the Russian majority, and for the first time to have exposed his tragic and misshapen side... Underground, underground, poet of the underground, our feuilletonists have been repeating as if this were something derogatory to me. Fools, this is my glory, for that's where the truth lies.¹²⁷

The connections not only to the ongoing intellectual and philosophical debates but also to, as Dostoevsky calls it, “the life of the general rule” is how the plight of the superfluous man takes center stage in the development of national and cultural consciousness. Societal and historical trends have forced the Russian character underground. The men of the 1840s were overtaken by those of the 1860s, and philosophy was shunned in favor of activism. What was the true Russian mission? If we see the superfluous man as a representative of the general rule and not as a point on one end of a philosophical binary, then we can view the question of the superfluous man, not in ideological terms, but in human and existential ones.

The difficulty is that, no matter how logical one end of an ideological spectrum may seem, it can never represent an absolute truth since both sides can be true simultaneously depending on the point of view. By accepting only one side of any ideological binary, we arrive at the Underground Man's statement that “twice two is four

¹²⁷ Dostoevsky. *The Notebooks for 'A Raw Youth,'* trans. Victor Terras (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), 425.

is no longer life, gentlemen, but the beginning of death.”¹²⁸ We can recall the Duck-and-Rabbit drawing made famous by Wittgenstein as a visual example of ideological and perceptual ambiguity. Wittgenstein calls the experience of perceiving the drawing “noticing as aspect.”¹²⁹ The individual has the freedom to see the drawing as he sees fit. While the stakes of choosing “duck” or “rabbit” are not very high, the exercise demonstrates the dangers of taking an overly logical view, e.g. seeing only one picture and not the other. The stakes are raised exponentially when this choice is applied to the social, economic, philosophical—in short, ideological—binaries that defined the Russian nineteenth century.

Perhaps the most profound example of the connection between the superfluous man, ideology, and existentialism is Ivan Karamazov’s poem “The Grand Inquisitor.” Ivan sets out to rationally justify his formula that “all is permitted,” eliciting the choice between freedom and happiness that is presented to all humans. Ivan criticizes Christ’s choice of freedom over earthly bread, arguing that “man is tormented by no greater anxiety than to find someone quickly to whom he can hand over that gift of freedom with which the ill-fated creature is born.”¹³⁰ Man’s desire for earthly bread leads him to the decision to forgo his freedom and align himself with a greater power. Ivan is perturbed by Christ’s rejection of “the one infallible banner which was offered Thee to make all men

¹²⁸ Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, 24.

¹²⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953), 193-99.

¹³⁰ Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1976), 235.

bow down to Thee alone—the banner of earthly bread; and Thou hast rejected it for the sake of freedom and the bread of Heaven.”¹³¹ If this freedom must include the suffering of innocent children, then it is not worth the sacrifice, Ivan says, as Christ-like love is impossible on earth.

But Ivan is still operating on a purely rational level, which involves making the choice between one end of the spectrum and the other—in this case, between freedom and happiness. Seeing this problem as an opposition reflects the blindness that is associated with Western society, a subject that Dostoevsky explores in many works, including his *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*. Geoffrey C. Kabat explains Dostoevsky’s portrayal of the European bourgeois as a split between political and inner states. Although the bourgeois “is supposed to be everything, and indeed has become everything politically, he feels himself to be nothing... In order to maintain his illusion that the rule of the bourgeoisie represents utopia, he must suppress reality” by constructing the Crystal Palace and by ignoring the poor people that he steps over on his way to do so.¹³²

The problem is that this path isolates the overly-rational man and severs his connection to humanity. The essence of the bourgeois, as Dostoevsky observes in *Winter Notes*, or the need to gather and hoard as much material wealth as possible suggests that the notion of brotherhood is not inherent in the Westerner, only self-preservation and

¹³¹ Ibid, 235.

¹³² Geoffrey C. Kabat, *Ideology and Imagination: The Image of Society in Dostoevsky* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 84.

self-promotion. Dostoevsky writes that brotherhood cannot be created out of this self-centered society because “in true brotherhood, there is no ‘I.’”¹³³

But this “I” is one of the nodes on our ideological spectrum. Choosing freedom seems to involve following one’s own path. What stumps Ivan, however, is that Christ’s reason for rejecting the miracles and choosing freedom is precisely the opposite of what Ivan feels is an acceptance of the statement that “all is permitted.” Christ must reject the miracles for people to retain freedom. If Napoleon is called the Antichrist, then here Christ can be called the anti-Napoleon if we recall the ways and the reasons why the latter was appropriated by Russian artists and intellectuals. Christ must appear as an inadequate god, because his task is to show people the connection between freedom, suffering, good, and evil. It is a constant struggle, not a one-time choice like accepting miracles and handing freedom to some ideological authority. Interestingly, perhaps to plant the seed of faith in Ivan, Christ does not reject the miracle when a child’s life is at stake; he brings the girl back to life! Thus, freedom must be retained at all costs, even at the expense of suffering children. The most significant defect of the Grand Inquisitor’s utopia is that its goal is happiness, or attainment of earthly bread, and not goodness through suffering, or heavenly bread. If Ivan had succeeded in intellectually removing suffering from the equation of life, then he would have succeeded only in affirming the Underground Man’s twice two is four, or death. The greatest irony is that Ivan writes his poem in order to logically justify his own rejection of life. In fact, as Alyosha rightly

¹³³ Dostoevsky, “Zimniye zametki o letnikh vpechatleniyakh,” *Sobraniye sochinenii v desyati tomakh* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye izdatel’stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1956), t. 4, 106.

points out, his poem is in praise of Christ. He intends, with his Euclidean mind, to construct a story that aligns with his ideological worldview. The fact that he ends up doing the opposite points to the power of writing as a process that unconsciously moves beyond binaries. In this sense, Ivan writes himself out of superfluity (even though his individual story does not exactly end happily; although, everyone's story ultimately ends the same way eventually.)

What is interesting is the connection between Ivan's developing consciousness and his article on the ecclesiastical courts, which is presented in Book 2, Chapter 5 ("So be it, So be it!"). There, he argues for the excommunication of a person that commits a crime, saying that his punishment should be separation from his fellow man. Zosima, of course, counters with his idea of fatherly exhortation that rehabilitates the criminal and reintegrates him into society rather than excommunicates him. Ivan's article symbolizes his own separation from society, an isolation which leads him to overly logical explanations that remove any possibility of freedom. His formula that "all is permitted" seems like the utmost expression of freedom, perhaps indicating to him a transcendence toward twice two is five. However, instead of liberation, he becomes spiritually excommunicated.

This type of writing, one that is dedicated to an idea, represents the tyranny of reason that Dostoevsky, as well as the Slavophiles, despised. Michael Holquist explores this concept of using language to isolate rather than to unite:

Since the bourgeois defines his individuality as a radical uniqueness, he is alone: he cannot share language with others, and so language loses its ground of meaning. The only thing one bourgeois shares with another is the concern to

cover up the void at the center of their existence; thus the dominant mode of their discourse is eloquence, hyperbole.”¹³⁴

Ivan indulges in this same eloquence in his article and subsequent discussion on the ecclesiastical courts. What will save him, though, is not a move to the opposite end of the ideological spectrum. If Ivan had, for example, left society and gone to Zosima’s monastery, he would not have arrived at a better solution to the crisis of the freedom-happiness binary. He does need to see this other side, which is represented by his “getting acquainted” with his brother in the chapter preceding “Rebellion” and “The Grand Inquisitor.” The fact that his poem is actually an affirmation of Christ destroys Ivan’s own argument. Choosing one side of binary is not the goal, but rather to mediate between both, thereby retaining the possibility of individuality and at the same time creating brotherhood. Unbeknownst to Ivan, he has demonstrated that life is not a choice between antinomies, but rather a confrontation of opposing aspects with no concrete resolution. The resolution, or a definitive answer, is the underground man’s twice two is four. Ivan’s claim that he is not his brother’s keeper isolates himself even further, cementing his eventual fate through his rejection of heavenly bread. In reality, he is his brother’s keeper. In this case, individual choices take brotherhood into account and connect personal goals to communal ones. This is how earthly and heavenly bread are attained, and this is why Christ refused performing the miracles. Christ must be inadequate (read, human) so that we can maintain our freedom of choice and so that we can err our way into suffering and, hopefully, out of it through self-awareness. Similarly, this is why

¹³⁴ Michael Holquist, *Dostoevsky and the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 47.

Zosima himself “refuses” the miracle through his stinking corpse. His followers should not be disappointed that his body started to stink. Instead, they should look at him as their own potential to choose good over evil in this life, while they are here on this earth. This refusal is Dostoevsky’s attempt to break the illusion of perfectibility that he feels plagues European society and excommunicates itself from the greater whole.

The more productive kind of writing, the one that our superfluous men are drawn to, is seemingly about an idea, but really displays an exploration of consciousness. Ivan sets out on this same path of eloquence, but unconsciously betrays himself, as noted by Alyosha. In this sense, writing solely for an idea (something that Raskolnikov also does in his article “Concerning Crime”) represents earthly bread, while writing for a more existential purpose is the heavenly bread because it is not bound by ideology. In order to pass from the earthly to the heavenly realm, however, one must pass through ideology and transcend it. Ivan does not do this by himself, but he does with the help of his brother Alyosha, just as Alyosha does so through the guidance of Zosima. Ivan’s attempts at writing symbolize what Holquist calls a “search for a story that will endow [one’s] life with validity.”¹³⁵ Holquist’s discussion revolves around Raskolnikov’s efforts to find an “authentic self,”¹³⁶ unsuccessfully through a detective story and then successfully through a wisdom tale. Ivan embarks on a similar search. But despite Alyosha’s statement that Ivan’s poem praises Christ, Ivan cannot free himself from his overly-rational mind, which he ends up losing before the trial scene. Ivan cannot comprehend that “the mystery of

¹³⁵ Ibid, 98.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 99.

good and evil in human life and in the world cannot be completely comprehended as stated in perfectly logical terms.”¹³⁷

Although this process does not articulate a definite solution—Ivan loses his mind at the end of *The Brothers Karamazov*, and Raskolnikov still needs “another tale” to finish his redemption as *Crime and Punishment* reaches its final page—it demonstrates the necessity of rising above ideological binaries to see that the answer lies not with one side or the other. It is not Ivan or Zosima, but rather both. This undoubtedly makes life more challenging, but it enables the individual to retain one’s freedom to make daily choices of good or evil. All we can do is to use the positive memories to help us to choose the former. Many of Dostoevsky’s characters retain such memories: Alyosha remembers his mother holding him up to the icon; Dmitri remembers the bag of nuts that Dr. Herzenstube gives to him; Grushenka has her onion; and the boys have Aloysha’s speech at Ilyusha’s stone. Even the Grand Inquisitor has Christ’s kiss, and Ivan has his sticky green leaves.

The paradox is that both attaining the consciousness of this choice and creating community involve a period of exile. If we frame the problem as such, then Ivan’s situation begins to sound like an existential crisis, and rightly so. In his essay “An Absurd Reasoning,” Albert Camus discusses precisely the type of journey upon which Ivan embarks. After first noting the absurd beginning of all great deeds and thoughts, he identifies the problem of the modern world. Man’s daily schedule involves: “rising,

¹³⁷ H. R. Niebuhr, “The Truth in Myths.” *The Nature of Religious Experience*, eds. Bewkes et al. (New York: Harper and Bros., 1937), 124-25.

streetcar, four hours of work in the office or the factory, meal, streetcar, four hours of work, meal, sleep,¹³⁸ a pattern which repeats from Monday through Friday. Camus notes that this pattern is easily followed much of the time, “but one day the ‘why’ arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement.”¹³⁹ And although the search to answer this “why” may bring Ivan (or our superfluous men, in general) a great deal of uncertainty and discomfort, it is the first step on the path to the self, as Camus writes that “everything begins with consciousness and nothing is worth anything except through it.”¹⁴⁰

Camus then undertakes the task of explaining how the process of attaining consciousness unfolds, and we immediately see that this is the path that Ivan—and our superfluous man, in general—follows. First, “the mind must determine what is true from what is false,”¹⁴¹ and this must be done through one’s own observations, not by following a prescribed Table. Camus cites Aristotle on the challenges associated with this first step, as there are “an infinite number of true or false judgments,”¹⁴² or possible ideologies. Camus warns that the mind can get caught in a vicious cycle of affirming and negating various opinions since “the very simplicity of these paradoxes makes them irreducible” and since “the mind’s deepest desire is an insistence upon familiarity, an appetite for

¹³⁸ Albert Camus, “An Absurd Reasoning,” *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O’Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 10.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 13.

clarity.”¹⁴³ This “vicious cycle” is what plagues not only our superfluous men, but anyone who participated in the ideological debates that marked Russia’s historical and social development in the nineteenth century.

But the mind’s “nostalgia for unity, that appetite for the absolute illustrates the essential impulse of the human drama,”¹⁴⁴ although Camus also notes that this nostalgia is rarely immediately satisfied. The journey to consciousness is difficult, as it is hard to arrive at a true definition of the self. Once we finish describing what we can see and touch, “there ends all knowledge, and the rest is construction”:

For if I try to seize this self of which I feel sure, if I try to define and to summarize it, it is nothing but water slipping through my fingers. I can sketch one by one all the aspects it is able to assume...but aspects cannot be added up.¹⁴⁵ This very heart which is mine will forever remain indefinable to me. Between the certainty I have of my existence and the content I try to give that assurance, the gap will never be filled. Forever I shall be a stranger to myself. In psychology as in logic, there are truths but no truth. Socrates’ “Know thyself” has as much value as the “Be virtuous” of our confessionals. They reveal a nostalgia at the same time as an ignorance. They are sterile exercises on great subjects. They are legitimate only in precisely so far as they are approximate.

And here are trees and I know their gnarled surface, water and I feel its taste. These scents of grass and stars at night, certain evenings when the heart relaxes—how shall I negate this world whose power and strength I feel? Yet all the knowledge on earth will give me nothing to assure me that this world is mine. You describe it to me and you teach me to classify it. You enumerate its laws and in my thirst for knowledge I admit that they are true. You take apart its

¹⁴³ Ibid, 13.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 13.

¹⁴⁵ A similar idea is expressed in Vladimir Odoevsky’s *Russian Nights* (1848), when the interlocutors discuss the atomization of Western society. They are frustrated with various disciplines that theorize but cannot teach us anything about their essences. For example, the field of medicine is denigrated because we can figure out why a person died by examining a corpse, but we cannot explain why we live, why bodies are animated in the first place.

mechanism and my hope increases. At the final stage you teach me that this wondrous and multicolored universe can be reduced to the atom and that the atom itself can be reduced to the electron. All this is good and I wait for you to continue. But you tell me of an invisible planetary system in which electrons gravitate around a nucleus. You explain this world to me with an image. I realize then that you have been reduced to poetry: I shall never know. Have I the time to become indignant? You have already changed theories. So that science that was to teach me everything ends up in hypothesis, that lucidity founders in metaphor, that uncertainty is resolved in a work of art. What need had I of so many efforts? The soft lines of these hills and the hand of evening on this troubled heart teach me much more. I have returned to my beginning... I cannot, for all that, apprehend the world... And you give me the choice between a description that is sure but that teaches me nothing and hypotheses that claim to teach me but that are not sure. A stranger to myself and to the world, armed solely with a thought that negates itself as soon as it asserts... To will is to stir up paradoxes. Everything is ordered in such a way as to bring into being that poisoned peace produced by thoughtlessness, lack of heart, or fatal renunciations... That universal reason is enough to make a decent man laugh... This world in itself is not reasonable, that is all that can be said. But what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as on the world. For the moment it is all that links them together.”¹⁴⁶

The epistemological challenges of the above passage are, of course, not new, although perhaps they do take on new meaning with the technological advancements of the twentieth century. But I offer such a long quote here because it epitomizes the both the struggle and the crucial role played by the figure of the exile, by literary characters such as Ivan and other superfluous men. For Camus, this struggle “implies a total absence of hope, a continual rejection, and a conscious dissatisfaction.”¹⁴⁷ The easier route would seem to be to adhere to an ideology and to never face this problem. For Ivan, it would be easier to accept Christ’s miracles and never take on the responsibility of enduring Dostoevsky’s furnace of doubt. If we consider the ends of many of our superfluous men,

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 14-16.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 23.

then it is clear that the path to consciousness does not appear to be the most desirable, at least not from a materialist perspective.

As we have noted, this is a human question as opposed to an ideological one. Camus writes: “It is always easy to be logical. It is almost impossible to be logical to the bitter end.”¹⁴⁸ Ivan tries to remain logical, but he cannot, thereby demonstrating the mystery that is inherent within us. The most interesting part of this is not that we all have the innate capacity for higher consciousness, but rather that this faculty is developed through the writing process, even when the individual does not intend to develop it. Ivan’s literary activities are responsible for the development of his consciousness that is, according to Camus, “born of the desert,”¹⁴⁹ and for his turn away from conformity, even though his original goal was to write in order to prove the absolute perfection of the logical, rational mind. In this sense, the value of the superfluous man is in his enactment of Camus’ process of attaining consciousness through the experience of exile. Once this consciousness is achieved, then the superfluous man must work toward *sobornost*. It is no coincidence, then, that many of the usual superfluous suspects take up writing, even if it is only in diary form.¹⁵⁰ By virtue of his literary act, the superfluous man is not just the result of social and historical forces; he is an active agent who responds to his social

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 7.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 17.

¹⁵⁰ Although the lack of a traditional form supports Tolstoy’s statement about the uniqueness of Russian literature precisely because it does not conform to European standards of the novel.

dissatisfaction through written examination of the existential forces that lie beneath the surface of his and others' social status.

Once again, the aim of this dissertation is not to rehash the usual superfluous suspects in detail as many have already done. These studies are referenced above in order to get a general sense of the type, to understand the type's historical and social context, and to provide a point of departure from which I will examine the concept of the superfluous man from a different angle. By viewing the superfluous man as an exile, we will come to see him not simply as a type situated on one extreme end of the conformist-nonconformist (or Slavophile-Westernizer, or happiness-freedom) spectrum. Instead, this dissertation aims to portray the superfluous man as mediator that transcends philosophical binaries and creates a cultural community, or *sobornost'*, that is truer than those held together by the geographical, political, familial, in short, ideological binaries of the official sphere of Russian (and human) life. In this way, the superfluous man not only breaks free from societal chains, but also unifies that society and creates its cultural identity, a task that becomes increasingly vital in the violent, technologically-obsessed, and ideologically-dominated twentieth century.

CHAPTER TWO

The “Innocences of Revolution”: Failed Utopias, Nostalgic Longings, and the Battle for Time

So, how does the experience of the superfluous man’s exile and his subsequent attainment of consciousness unfold as we enter the twentieth century? How does his development change or deepen compared to the nineteenth? As was discussed in the last chapter, the story of the superfluous man is not contained solely in his defeat at the hand of the social forces accompanied by Russia’s arrival on the historical scene. It is certainly valid that he can be and has been portrayed as either a weak figure who cannot assert himself in society or as a superior individual who is ahead of his time. But if we look at his response to his social and political impotence, namely his writing, we see that he takes on new significance as a mediator and as a precursor to the existential philosophy that helped to free the individual from the physical and ideological violence of the twentieth century.

As the origins of the superfluous man are inseparable from Russia’s historical progress, it seems appropriate to look at the continued development of his narrative at certain historical points in the twentieth century. To this end, I will look at the superfluous man at three points of particular social and political upheaval: the Russian Revolution, World War II, and the deterioration of the Soviet Union. Clearly, not every

single artist who could be deemed “superfluous” will be portrayed. But those that are covered will show the various ways that the type can write itself out of superfluity. Interestingly, the three periods that will be investigated can be seen as the different steps in the process by which the exile attains consciousness—the initial split with society, the experience of solitude, and the creation of meaning through transcendence of his isolation and his ability to attain some level of *sobornost*’. What is more interesting, perhaps, is that the same progression from type to individual that we observed in the nineteenth century repeats itself in the twentieth, beginning with the Bolsheviks’ rise to power and their need to indoctrinate a largely illiterate population into the new ruling ideology.

As we have seen, the nineteenth century was defined by the philosophical and historical binaries—for example, Slavophile-Westernizer, Hamlet-Don Quixote, even fathers-sons, crime-punishment, and war-peace—related to the East-West question. But while Hegel and his adherents, such as Belinsky, Dobrolyubov, and Chernyshevsky, wanted to subordinate man and sacrifice his individuality for the sake of future progress, some individualists refused to be led to the abattoir. This refusal to participate in the social issues of the time led to the appearance of the superfluous man in literature. This superfluity only intensified with the rise to power of the Soviet regime, and one could do very little to retain one’s freedom, especially, say, with a brutal Civil War engulfing and razing the entire nation. People took sides, betrayed one another, and betrayed a rich culture—all in the name of the future. While the Soviet utopian experiment forged ahead toward the goals professed by its ideology, the individualists of the old century had few

options, not only to survive, but to stay true to themselves and to the essence of Russian culture that was being rewritten daily by the Bolsheviks.

Embedded within the search for both individual and cultural identity was the ongoing condition of Russian homelessness, Chaadaev's articulation of which sparked much of the philosophical debates discussed in the preceding chapter. Peter the Great's western reforms "split Russian society and its cultural consciousness,"¹ as the gentry adopted a western system of education and dress and the peasantry continued its traditional way of life. "The comparatively eastern ways of Russia's past and the new western ways constituted two conflicting perspectives on the Russian 'home' and self."² But while Russia's symbolic homelessness of the nineteenth century remained into the twentieth, it was accompanied by a literal homelessness that arose out of the brutality of revolution and the subsequent communal housing policies of the Soviets. If "the fictional characters of Russia's literary tradition look to the home of the past, mourn the present state of domesticity (or lack thereof), and anticipate an idealized home life in the future,"³ then Soviet citizens were faced with the added challenge of finding a literal home in which to live as the country modernized and restructured following the Revolution.

¹ Marc Raeff, "Russia's Perception of Her Relationship with the West," in *The Structure of Russian History: Interpretive Essays*, ed. Michael Chernyavsky (New York: Random House, 1970), 262.

² Amy C. Singleton, *Noplace Like Home: The Literary Artist and Russia's Search for Cultural Identity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 26.

³ *Ibid*, 20.

Central to these new housing policies was the communal apartment (*kommunalka*), which not only served as a practical solution to the housing shortage, but also “served the ideological goal of fostering a collective social consciousness.”⁴ Those who still subscribed to the old values of prerevolutionary Russia were “suddenly cut off from their traditions” and “looked for ways to span the cultural divide that separated pre- and post-revolutionary Russian and Soviet society.”⁵ These members of the old cultural elite, many of them writers, found themselves as exiled emigres, both inside and outside of their homeland. Internal emigres, such as Zoshchenko and Bulgakov, “decried Soviet cultural values—rationalism, materialism, collectivism—with scathing satire of the absurd official housing practices and policy,” while those exiled abroad organized Russian journals and literary groups, whose names emphasized the theme of home or homelessness—The New House (*Novyi dom*), The Circle (*Krug*), The Russian Hearth (*Russkii ochag*), The Camp of Nomads (*Kochevye*), and The Wanderer (*Strannik*).⁶ But while the new housing policies sought to promote unity, the reality of living in such close quarters failed to achieve the regime’s ideological goals. “Communality, in the Russian sense of *sobornost’*, suggests a spiritual unity from common identity and combined efforts. But the conditions of the communal apartment undermine the notion of cultural unity; instead of battling the natural elements or the influences of westernization, the

⁴ Ibid, 35.

⁵ Ibid, 34.

⁶ Ibid, 34. The concept of the Russian émigré will be discussed further in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

residents battled each other.”⁷ The idea that human forces trump ideological ones will be continually discussed throughout this dissertation.

Before turning to 1917 and its aftermath, it is important to consider the beginning of the revolutionary era, when the feeling of apocalypse was overwhelming Russian society. The East-West question remained unanswered as the twentieth century opened, but it was still the most significant question, due to Russia’s geographical location, to her late arrival on the world (read: European) stage, to her penchant for adopting Western ideas, and to her great pride in her so-called messianic calling. Beginning in the 1820s, literature became the battlefield for the ideas that could not be enacted during the oppressive reign of Nicholas I. Russia’s literary and cultural leaders took sides as Slavophiles and Westernizers, as both claimed to possess the correct way for the country to progress. But even the great thinkers of the nineteenth century had not been able to provide any solutions, and by the turn of the twentieth century it appeared that all hope was lost.

Whether one identified with the Slavophiles or to the Westernizers, the peasantry was central to both philosophies. The problem, however, was that those who were doing the philosophizing and the moralizing had never truly understood those for whom they intellectualized. Each tried either to claim that the peasant possessed qualities that were, in actuality, absent, or to make the peasant conform to Western social and legal institutions. Ironically, however, Russia’s quest for unity produced nothing but

⁷ Ibid, 36.

dichotomies that took her farther and farther away from the realization of her messianic destiny purported by some, as the conflict for control of Gogol's galloping troika waged on through the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. In his *Vospominaniya ob Aleksandre Bloke*, Andrey Bely recounts that Alexander Blok, after finishing his poem, "Dvenadtsat'," "often physically felt a loud noise surrounding him, the noise of the destruction of the old world."⁸ Bely discusses how he and his contemporaries heard this same noise, especially in 1900-1901, writing that he "lived the feeling of the End, as well as the sensation of the blessing of a new and final epoch of the ringing bells of Christianity."⁹ The aura of the turn of the century was decisively apocalyptic.

Bely captures this feeling of the old world's imminent demise in his novel, *The Silver Dove*, which can be read as a literary manifestation of the crisis of the intelligentsia. This crisis, coupled with Russia's defeat at the hands of the Japanese and Russia's failed revolution of 1905, brought about an effort to reflect back upon the disappointments of the nineteenth century. The most widely discussed analysis of the intelligentsia is the *Vekhi* collection of essays, published in 1909. Echoing Chaadaev's statement that "there is absolutely nothing general in our heads,"¹⁰ the contributors to *Vekhi* argued that the intelligentsia chose egotism over the creation of absolute, national

⁸ Andrey Bely, *Vospominaniya ob Aleksandre Bloke* (Letchworth, England: Bradda Books, Ltd., 1964), 16.

⁹ *Ibid*, 17.

¹⁰ Pyotr Chaadaev, *The Major Works of Peter Chaadaev*, trans. Raymond T. McNally (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 37.

values. Just as Chaadaev wrote that “ideals have always been the cause of interests, never have interests provoked ideals,”¹¹ the *Vekhi* authors felt that the intelligentsia’s “interest in philosophy was limited to their need for philosophical sanction, of their social sentiments and their aspirations”¹² and that their only concern was that they could shape an idea into dogma that favored their own conception of the welfare of the masses.

Nikolai Berdyaev articulates the essence of the crisis in the following way:

We see symptoms of intellectual, moral, and cultural decadence in the division of philosophy into “proletarian” and “bourgeois,” “left” and “right,” in the assertion of two truths, one useful and the other harmful. This road leads to the disintegration of the universal consciousness, binding on all, with which the dignity of man and the growth of his culture are necessarily associated.¹³

This is certainly not a new observation in Russian thought. Prince Vladimir Odoevsky wrote the following in his *Russian Nights* (written throughout the 1830s, but not published until 1844) on the futility of rational philosophy: “There is no opinion, the contrary of which could not be affirmed with all the proof possible to man.”¹⁴ Furthermore, this statement can be found in the German idealist philosophy upon which Odoevsky’s thought was founded. But the fact that Berdyaev is identifying the same frustration over the separation of thought and truth into strict ideological binaries without any unification of them demonstrates the failure of the nineteenth century actors to

¹¹ Ibid, 44.

¹² Boris Shragin and Albert Todd, eds, *Landmarks*, trans. by Marian Schwartz (New York: Karz Howard, 1909), 4.

¹³ Ibid, 7.

¹⁴ Vladimir Odoevsky, *Russian Nights*, trans. Olga Koshansky-Olyenikov and Ralph E. Matlaw (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1965), 208.

resolve the Russian crisis. The *Vekhi* authors contend that the intelligentsia ignored the Russian thinkers, such as Chaadaev, Solovyov, and Dostoevsky, whose worldviews had the potential to offer the universal consciousness that the intelligentsia lacked. Bely uses several pairs of divisions in order to construct *The Silver Dove*: setting (East-West); character (masculine power of Kudeyarov-feminine power of Daryalsky and Katya-Matryona); political parties (mud party-dust party); and creative forces (Apolline-Dionysian). After dividing these parts into two opposing sides, Bely attempts to answer the question of “East or West?” through Daryalsky’s own fate.

That Bely even sought to write his trilogy *East or West* indicates a finality of the era, represented by the intersection of the two dichotomous paths. (In his novel *Petersburg*, or the second part of his unfinished trilogy, Bely describes the city as a black dot, or the point at which two perpendicular lines intersect.) The question had become so painful that an answer was needed, regardless of what it might be. There could be no more hesitation. It had been over half a century since Gogol had asked at the end of his *Dead Souls*: “Russia, where are you flying? Answer me! There is no answer. The bells are tinkling and filling the air with their wonderful pealing.”¹⁵ Bely opens his novel with this same bell, this time the Tselebeyevo bell tower, which calls Daryalsky to travel eastward down the road from which “there’s no returning.”¹⁶ Thus, Bely sends his hero,

¹⁵ Nikolai Gogol, *Dead Souls*, trans. George Reavey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985), 270.

¹⁶ Andrey Bely, *The Silver Dove*, trans. John Elsworth (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 36.

Daryalsky, to meet his (read, Russia's) fate, "at a loss to understand where the sorrow in his soul had come from."¹⁷ Daryalsky himself does not know why he sets out for Tselebeyevo. Katya, who he had spent two years trying to attain, has agreed to marry him, yet "the smell of the fresh birch branches, of a crowd of perspiring peasants, of their blacked boots, of candle-wax and ubiquitous red calico"¹⁸ proves to be too tempting for him. Thus Daryalsky is immediately portrayed as the crippled Russian intelligent with the split personality who "lives outside of himself,"¹⁹ illustrating the main problem of the Russian intelligentsia throughout the nineteenth century. The main critique of the *Vekhi* authors that "the activity of the consciousness must be directed inward" can be applied to Daryalsky from the very beginning of the novel: "For half a century they have been milling about, wailing and quarreling. At home there is dirt, destitution, disorder, but the master doesn't care. He is out in public, saving the people—and that is easier and more entertaining than drudgery at home."²⁰ Daryalsky, like the intelligentsia as a whole, is not content at home. Instead, he leaves because "he needed to get to know the ordinary people better."²¹ It is this inability to look inward that leads both to Daryalsky's end and to the intelligentsia's failure.

¹⁷ Ibid, 39.

¹⁸ Ibid, 40.

¹⁹ Shragin and Todd, eds., *Landmarks*, 51.

²⁰ Ibid, 58.

²¹ Bely, *Silver Dove*, 287.

That Daryalsky does not himself understand why he goes to Tselebeyevo places him in the role of the misguided *intelligent* of the Russian nineteenth century, and therefore he cannot be the free artist who can conceive of unity by looking inward. The *Vekhi* contributors fault the intelligentsia for ignoring Russia's greatest thinkers in favor of their derivative methods of adhering to foreign philosophies that they could use to meet their social goals. "One might think that our great literature could have cured us, for it was not bound by spiritual fetters. Inner autonomy is the primary characteristic of the true artist."²² But the freer the artist (Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Tyutchev, Fet, and Solovyov are mentioned), the more hateful was the reaction of the intelligentsia toward them. Instead, writes Gershenzon: "There were no individuals, only a homogenous mass... Most of the intelligentsia was impersonal, and its stupidly inert radicalism and fanatical intolerance gave it all the characteristics of a herd."²³ Daryalsky, too, exhibits this herd mentality and is not an example of a free artist who possesses inner autonomy. "Such were Daryalsky's thoughts—but it was not he who thought them, for the thoughts occurred in his soul without his volition."²⁴ Daryalsky only acts outside of himself, without really understanding what is necessary for him. Like a good *intelligent*, Daryalsky tries to worship the people, yet this goal is clearly does not arise from within his own soul, virtually sealing his fate before he even begins his quest.

²² Shragin and Todd, eds., *Landmarks* 60.

²³ *Ibid*, 61.

²⁴ Bely, *Silver Dove*, 41.

Furthermore, the receptive peasant who is eager to be saved is not who Daryalsky meets during his time in Tselebeyevo. Rather, the villagers are suspicious of Daryalsky's intentions and decide that "he must have a purpose and that purpose was seditious."²⁵ The mistrust of the gentry by the peasantry is one of the major ways in which the former misread the latter. Bely writes that the villagers "aren't impressed by anything. If you come, you'll be made welcome and treated to all manner of pies—they won't let you go hungry...if you don't want to, God's your judge: the people of Tselebeyevo will manage to live out their days without you."²⁶ But, as was proven in 1918 when the Bolsheviks gave land to the peasants (albeit briefly), the villagers of Tselebeyevo do not have any political agenda. "Just use yer gumption, you blockhead—use yer gumption: who is it that works the land? The peasant—me, right? So it's the peasant what should have the land, full freehold possession. Other than land we don't want no freedom; it's just a bind, freedom is. What d'we want freedom for."²⁷ Unbeknownst to the majority of the intelligentsia, the peasantry was not politically motivated and had no inherent sense of civic duty or of individual rights.²⁸ Not only did the intelligentsia misjudge the peasantry by thinking that the masses wanted to be saved, but they also did not understand the peasant's faith in God, making Belinsky's axiom that the peasants are deeply atheistic

²⁵ Ibid, 44.

²⁶ Ibid, 45.

²⁷ Ibid, 63-64.

²⁸ Recall Dostoevsky's article "Environment" in *Diary of a Writer*.

one of the primary causes of this fundamental error. The intelligentsia failed to see that the people did “not regard [the intelligentsia] as human beings; that to the [peasants they] are man-like monsters, people without God in [their] souls.”²⁹ Bely plainly establishes these two irreconcilable poles, yet Daryalsky cannot see this. Instead, he naively hypothesizes: “if they had read what was concealed beneath the fig-leaf drawn on the cover of Daryalsky’s book—oh yes, they would have smiled, and what a smile! They would have said: ‘He’s one of us.’”³⁰ Daryalsky is enacting the dream of many a member of the intelligentsia—to be accepted by the masses and to be seen as their liberator. Furthermore, the fact that he is a writer places him in the category of superfluous men, as defined in the previous chapter. In other words, his literary activities give him the potential to serve in the mediator role between individual and society.

It is no coincidence, however, that, at this moment in the text, as Bely invokes the last line of Blok’s cycle “Na Pole Kulikovom” cycle as he prepares to introduce his reader to the villagers of Tselebeyevo. Just as Daryalsky states his above desire, Bely writes: “Well, anyway, it isn’t at all the right time for that now; it’s just the time to introduce the illustrious inhabitants of Tselebeyevo themselves. So here goes.”³¹ The last line of this section, “So here goes,” is purposely written as its own paragraph. It carries the same abrupt finality of Blok’s final line of his cycle: “And now your time has

²⁹ Shragin and Todd, eds., *Landmarks*, 61.

³⁰ Bely, *Silver Dove*, 45.

³¹ *Ibid*, 45.

come.—Pray!”³² Additionally, Father Vukol Golokrestovsky, the priest of the village, “is enacting the storming of the fortress of Kars by a valiant warrior and the utter rout of the Turks.” He says: “Listen—the drum is beating: the enemy forces are crossing the bridge: the machine-guns are rattling.”³³ That Bely conveys these sounds of battle to the reader just as we meet the villagers of Tselebeyevo shows Bely's own sense of the impending End. This apocalyptic energy was the essence of Blok's cycle, which influenced Bely greatly; in *The Silver Dove* it serves as the force which will prevent Daryalsky from completing his mission.

A short digression is necessary here, as Blok's influence goes beyond his “Na Pole Kulikovom” cycle. In his essay, “Narod i intelligentsia” (1908), Blok arrived at a similar conclusion as the *Vekhi* authors did. He writes that a certain love for the people arose within the intelligentsia during the time of Catherine the Great. The Russian *intelligent*:

is saddened about the masses; he goes to them, filled with hope and despair; finally, he dies, going off toward execution and naked death in the name of the people's cause. Perhaps, he has finally even *understood the soul of the masses*; but how can he understand? Doesn't understanding *everything*—even that which is hostile, even that which requires renunciation of what is most important to oneself—mean that he understands *nothing* and loves *nothing*? (Emphasis is Blok's)³⁴

³² «Теперь твой час настал.—Молись»!

³³ Ibid, 47.

³⁴ Aleksandr Blok, “Narod i intelligentsia,” *Aleksandr Blok: Sobraniye sochinenii—Proza, 1903-1917* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoye literatury, 1962), t. 5, 322.

Blok affirms the *Vekhi* authors' expression of detriment caused by the intelligentsia's refusal to look inward. One cannot truly understand and love others if one does not provide first for one's own inner requirements.

It was Blok's need to discuss Russia's long-standing suffering in this manner that led him to write on the theme of the looming battle between the Russians and the Mongols toward the end of the fourteenth century. The poems in his "Na Pole Kulikovom" cycle capture the tension experienced by Russia just prior to the final battle, which is precisely the noise that Blok hears in his own time at the turn of the twentieth century. "Our path is the steppe, our path is in our boundless melancholy"³⁵ fits both historical periods, just as does the symbol of the "eternal battle"³⁶ and the idea that "peace only comes to us in dreams."³⁷ And the final stanza of the cycle is infused with the same apocalyptic feeling that Bely, Blok, and their contemporaries experienced so intensely. Blok describes the impossibility of peace in one's heart, the storm clouds gathering, and the heavy feeling of armor before the battle with the Tatars, yet he is also connecting the crisis of his present day with these images. In a sense, Dmitri Donskoy's victory over the Tatars began the era of Russia's potential that is now ending during Blok and Bely's time. Although Daryalsky does not, the reader can feel quite clearly and

³⁵ «Наш путь—степной, наш путь—в тоске безбрежной»

³⁶ «вечный бой»

³⁷ «ПОКОЙ НАМ ТОЛЬКО СНИТСЯ»

realistically Blok's expression of the End in the last line of the cycle: «Теперь твой час настал.—Молись»!

The discussion of Blok here is necessary due to the well-documented personal ties between himself and Bely. And while they had stopped talking for a period of two years around the time of *The Silver Dove's* publication, it was, in fact, Blok's "Na Pole Kulikovom" cycle that proved to Bely that there was a divine connection between the two:

Just as his reading of *Balaganchik* in February of 1906 had opened for me the second difficult phase of our relationship, so was 'Kulikovoe Pole' for me the leitmotif of the final 'yes' between us. 'Kulikovoe Pole,' once and for all, showed me that the crossing of our paths was not coincidental, that it was fatal and independent of us.³⁸

Bely admits that it was Blok's cycle that proved to Bely that Blok understood the point to which Russia had come. He goes on to write: "Death is lurking...for Russians because everyone amongst the intelligentsia knows that Kulikovoe Pole means certain death."³⁹ This image of two intersecting paths, the fatal point at which two distinct entities meet, whether it be Bely and Blok or East and West, is crucial to our understanding, not only of the entire era of the Russian intelligentsia, but also of Bely's literary manifestation of this era in *The Silver Dove*. The End that Blok and Bely anticipate occurs symbolically when Daryalsky is killed by the Doves at the end of the novel.

³⁸ Bely, *Vospominaniya ob Aleksandre Bloke*, 191.

³⁹ Vladimir Bonchbruyevich, ed., *Aleksandr Blok i Andrey Bely: Perepiska* (Moscow: Izdaniye gosudarstvennogo literaturnogo muzeya, 1940), 251.

But this apocalyptic juxtaposition of irreconcilable poles does not stop simply with East and West (Tselebeyevo and Gugolevo) or with *narod* and *intelligentsia* (the villagers and Daryalsky). The theme of two opposing entities saturates the entire novel to the point where virtually everything is presented in relation to its fatal opposite. Bely presents the world as being fundamentally split on any level, whether it be geographical, ideological, interpersonal, or even individual. Tselebeyevo and Gugolevo are clearly opposing entities. So are Daryalsky's women. His fiancée, Katya, who awaits him back in Gugolevo, is akin to a dying Europe and to the materialism of the intelligentsia. As he leaves Gugolevo, Daryalsky thinks of how he “smiled a cutting witticism at the lovely young lady,” and “how he had then paid her court”:⁴⁰

In vain he tried to summon in his soul the image of Katya, and kept repeating to himself, ‘My lovely bride, my gentle bride!’—the beloved image was as though drawn in chalk on a blackboard; the cruel teacher had wiped it off with his sponge and not a trace of it was left.⁴¹

Like the *intelligent* whose love for the people is intellectual and not spiritual, Daryalsky tries to convince himself of his love for his fiancée by repeating the words that would represent these genuine feelings. But Katya is described only in physical terms as if she possesses no spirit. In Daryalsky's mind, Katya is merely a chalk outline of a person, while Matryona, who “looks at everything with the spirit” and has “a very spiritual body,”⁴² represents the dormant potential of the East and of the peasant.

⁴⁰ Bely, *Silver Dove*, 39.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 41.

⁴² *Ibid*, 74.

Even within the village, there are diametrically opposed pairs. The mud party and the dust party of Likhov reflect the uselessness of politics in the villages. “There is no need to add that the mud party was most content with its situation and looked forward to the future with hope, while the latter [dust] party regarded itself as belonging to the disconnected, to the innocently suffering.”⁴³ The only difference between the two is that the “courageous” mud party wrote denunciations of the dust party, and the dust party wrote no denunciations. Like the intelligentsia of the nineteenth century, those who played the game of politics abandoned the spiritual battlefield in favor of the civic one.

But Bely is not content with simply portraying this dichotomy on the societal level. In order to truly convey the sense of apocalypse and hopelessness, Bely’s divisions continually seep down into smaller and smaller parts of society. The schism even infects individual households. Luka Silych Yeropegin, the miller of Likhov, and his wife, Fyokla Matveyevna are described as follows:

In short, you could turn the master inside out (with his soul outside)—he would become Fyokla Matveyevna; and if it were the other way around then Fyokla Matveyevna would indubitably turn into Luka Silych; the two of them were split halves of a single countenance, but the fact that this countenance was of two heads and four legs, and that each half led, so to speak, an independent life... The two halves had long since split off from one another, and now they looked in completely different directions: one half kept a sharp eye on the work of more than ten mills, scattered around the district, bred horses, and didn’t miss a single halfway beguiling skirt; the other was completely enclosed in herself: strangely so, with anxiety, fear, and bitterness.⁴⁴

⁴³ Ibid, 81.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 77.

Once again, Bely gives us an exact representation of the cultural schism analyzed in the *Vekhi* essays. In the Introduction to the collection, R. Khazarnufsky describes how this “self-negating dualism”⁴⁵ is generated:

When the integrating thread of society is broken, the thread between the individual and society, between spirit (content) and body (form—the state), the individual loses touch with himself, and the society is polarized into intransigent or dogmatic extremes: those who are exclusively for the state and those sectarians who are exclusively for the liberated individual. Where there once was social integration, there is now a self-negating dualism.⁴⁶

As we have seen, it is this self-negating dualism that pervades the entire novel, as well as Bely’s generation, to the point of infiltrating individual households, as shown here. The issue becomes ever larger than simply East versus West or the masses versus the intelligentsia. The division plagues each entity, as well as defines the antithetical relationship between the entity and its opposite.

Then there is Daryalsky’s own converse entity. While Daryalsky is clearly presented as an opposing force to the villagers, he has an opposite in Kudeyarov, the carpenter. If Daryalsky lives completely outside of himself, then Kudeyarov lives completely within his spirit. Kudeyarov “seems to know what mysteries are needed to transform the brethren: a feat of the spirit is needed, a great act of daring.”⁴⁷ In his role as carpenter and as spiritual leader, Kudeyarov speaks as if he is leading a Masonic quest, talking of mysteries and of improving the self. “The brotherhood had set their hopes on

⁴⁵ Shragin and Todd, eds., *Landmarks*, vii.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, vii.

⁴⁷ Bely, *Silver Dove*, 70.

certain mysteries.”⁴⁸ Additionally, these mysteries were only known to Kudeyarov and to Matryona, resembling the hierarchy within a Masonic lodge, where certain secrets and wisdom were only attainable to members that had passed to the higher stages. Kudeyarov appears to view the Doves sect as one that purifies the individual as he passes farther and farther along. “Our substance is the spirit; and our property is from no one but the Holy Ghost... Substance is like rough timber: you shape the timber, saw it here, plane it there, and, hey presto, you’ve made a chapel.”⁴⁹ This is precisely what Douglas Smith calls “working the rough stone” in his book of the same title about the rise of Freemasonry in eighteenth-century Russia. The connection between the Doves sect and the Freemasons allows us to view Kudeyarov as an individual who is consumed by the development of the spirit, saying “there’s no such thing as property.”⁵⁰ He is also extremely concerned with ritual, for example, when he becomes upset that Daryalsky and Matryona are making love without the proper ceremony. It is this intense focus on the inner spirit that makes Kudeyarov Daryalsky’s opposite.

This difference is what Berdyaev, in his article entitled “Ruskii soblazn,” calls “the chronic Russian disease” of the love of the masses. Berdyaev uses yet another dichotomy to explain Daryalsky’s failure and his eventual death. “The Russian intelligentsia in essence has always been feminine: it is capable of heroic deeds, of

⁴⁸ Ibid, 57.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 72.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 71.

sacrifice, of giving its own life, but it has never been capable of masculine action, it was never capable of inner support; it gave in to the elements and was never a transmitter of Logos.”⁵¹ Berdyaev attributes this to the fact that Russia never had chivalry. But the explanation is not as important as the fact that Daryalsky embodies this feminine energy, while Kudeyarov exemplifies the masculine, creative, active energy. Berdyaev emphasizes that it is precisely this lack of masculine energy that leads to Russian intelligentsia to its doom. Kudeyarov uses this active, masculine power to tempt Daryalsky into feeling that he belongs and that unity is possible. At the end of Chapter One, the following conversation occurs:

- Well, then have they found the man?
- They’ve got their eye on one...
- Who is it, tell me...”
- Just a layabout from the gentry, only he’s one of us, all the same...
- Is he taking the bait?
- He will...⁵²

From the beginning, the villagers think Daryalsky’s motives are seditious, and Kudeyarov continually treats Daryalsky like an honored guest while he secretly plots to kill him.

It is with regards to this distinction that we can apply yet another related dichotomy—the Apolline and the Dionysian. Like many of his contemporaries, Bely had become a follower of Nietzsche and his book, *The Birth of Tragedy*. The contrast

⁵¹ Nikolai Berdyaev, “Ruskii soblazn,” in *Andrey Bely: Pro et contra—Lichnost’ I tvorchestvo Andreyana Belogo v otsenkakh i tolkovaniyakh sovremennikov* (St. Petersburg: Russkiy Khristianskii Gumanitarnyi Institut, 2004), 269-70.

⁵² Bely, *Silver Dove*, 66.

between the Apolline world of plastic forces and of the forms found in dreams and the Dionysian realm of ecstasy, intoxication, ritual, and chanting is ascribed to the corresponding figures of Daryalsky and Kudeyarov. Like Apollo, Daryalsky “holds sway over the beautiful illusion of the inner fantasy world.”⁵³ He holds to the form of the peasantry and of his love for it, although it only exists in his own delusion. Kudeyarov, on the other hand, “expresses himself as a member of a higher community,...gives voice to supernatural sounds”⁵⁴ like Dionysus. Kudeyarov “is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art.”⁵⁵ He is constantly being described in different ways, especially his face. His Dionysian attributes parallel his resemblance of a Masonic leader:

“The artistic power of the whole of nature reveals itself to the supreme gratification of the primal Oneness amidst the paroxysms of intoxication. The noblest clay, the most precious marble, man, is kneaded and hewn here, and to the chisel-blows of the Dionysiac world-artist there echoes the cry of the Eleusinian mysteries.”⁵⁶

It is clear that Bely’s novel is constructed based on the dichotomous pairs discussed in this paper that represent the schism in Russian culture between the Slavophiles and the Westernizers and between the *narod* and the *intelligentsia*. But what of Russia’s destiny? To answer the long-standing question of “East or West?” we can examine the fate of Daryalsky in *The Silver Dove*. As previously discussed, Daryalsky goes to live with the peasants as part of his loyalty to the intelligentsia, although he seems

⁵³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 16.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 18.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 18.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 18.

to be driven by an outside force. As the novel progresses, Daryalsky begins to sense that unity between the intelligentsia and the masses is not possible. “Stop! I’ve lost my way!”⁵⁷ Recalling a childhood memory, he thinks of how “he had read everything, but nothing had taken shape yet in his mind.”⁵⁸ Doubts seem to begin creeping into his head. But despite the fact that he does not truly believe in the force that drives him, he continues on. And even in Chapter Three his thoughts seem to carry the same tone as the expression of facing fate in Blok’s “Na Pole Kulikovom” cycle. “He knew that once he stepped upon the path of this battle, there was no going back.”⁵⁹ And he chose to follow that path.

But the longer he lives amongst the peasantry, the more he sees that they are nothing like what the intelligentsia assume them to be. At first he feels that he is assimilating. After a long day of work, “Daryalsky’s feet were hurting, his back was aching, his hands were throbbing from the work, but in his soul was joy and sweetness, bliss beyond words.”⁶⁰ He even appears to be transforming into the free artist about which the *Vekhi* authors wrote. “Rhymes were forming in his head, the words were taking shape harmoniously.”⁶¹ Rather than learning from books, which Aleksandr Nikolaevich,

⁵⁷ Bely, *Silver Dove*, 96.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 97.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 118.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 222.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 222.

the village sexton, says are “full of garbage and gobbledegook,”⁶² Daryalsky is creating from within. Confused about what is happening to him, Daryalsky admits that there is much more to peasant life than the usual stereotype of the dirty and dark village, piles of straw, and grubby faces. He speaks poetically about the beautiful silence of the Russian peasants and of the majestic sunsets that stir the soul. Daryalsky admits that “those who live in cities...when they come to the villages, can never know or understand that it is not a peasant, but Kudeyarov the carpenter, the secret bearer of good tidings.”⁶³ He begins to critique the West for its reliance on “effable words”⁶⁴ that are not compatible with the soul: “The soul is not a word: it grieves for the ineffable, it yearns for the unspoken.”⁶⁵ Daryalsky longs to live in the fields and rejoice in his newfound inner freedom:

The sunset here cannot be compressed into a book: and here the sunset is a mystery; in the West there are many books; in Russia there are many unspoken words. Russia is that on which the book is smashed, knowledge dissipated, and life itself burns up; on the day when the West is grafted onto Russia, a world-wide conflagration will engulf it.⁶⁶

This is Tyutchev’s «Умом Россию не понять» that Daryalsky experiences. Blok, too, in his “*Narod i intelligentsia*,” articulates Daryalsky’s problem in his statement: “I am a member of the intelligentsia, a man of letters, and my weapon is the word.”⁶⁷ He is

⁶² Ibid, 222.

⁶³ Ibid, 223.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 224.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 224.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 224.

⁶⁷ Blok, “*Narod i intelligentsia*,” *Sobraniye sochineniy*, t. 5, 319.

finally starting to see that he had misjudged the peasantry and what is soulful and transcendent cannot lie in the word.⁶⁸ At this point, he retains some hope that he can attain his goal of becoming one with the *narod*. He even utters the following in an attempt to convince himself of his transfiguration: “I’m not a philologist any more now, not a member of the gentry, not a poet: I’m a Dove; I’m not Katya's fiance, I’m Matryona's lover.”⁶⁹ But even this optimism is extremely naïve. Despite the Dionysian expressions of the soul, the reader can feel the same tragic aura that is evoked in Blok’s “Na Pole Kulikovom.” Although Daryalsky is praising the life of the peasants and desperately wants to identify with it, his thoughts inherently express the apocalyptic feeling that plagues Russia, describing the fire that will consume the world when East and West collide. «Теперь твой час настал.—Молись!»

But as he is participating in the Doves’ rituals, Daryalsky eventually sees that the two poles, *narod* and *intelligentsia*, are irreconcilable. However, by that time it is too late to turn back. “He was already beginning to realize that this was terror, the snare, and the pit: this was not Russia, but some dark abyss of the East assailing Russia from these bodies, emaciated by their rites.”⁷⁰ He hears the warning, “Turn back,” but “it occurred to

⁶⁸ This recalls Michael Holquist’s idea of the use of language to isolate rather than unite (see page 44-45 of Chapter 1 of this dissertation) along with Dostoevsky’s pitting of the “word” (i.e. human words) against the “Word” (i.e. the Bible) in *Crime and Punishment* and in his polemical account of Russian lawyers and the court system expressed in his rendering of Dmitry Karamazov’s trial in Book 12 of *The Brothers Karamazov*.

⁶⁹ Bely, *Silver Dove*, 226.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 252.

him that he was already in the abyss; and these four walls were the hell in which he was to be tortured.”⁷¹ He longs once again for the predictability of Gugolevo. “Everything is pure and unsullied there; there at least there is no secret summons, which seems sweet at a distance, but close to is dirty.”⁷² This seems to echo Ivan Karamazov’s statement that one can only love people from afar. In it Daryalsky both realizes his mistake and knows that he will not be able to correct it.

At this point, Daryalsky knows he is in fate’s clutches. He appeals to the sunset, which only accentuates the emptiness within him. It is no coincidence that it is an autumn evening, autumn being the preferred time for elegiac poetry. “Pyotr’s soul was bathed in tears,”⁷³ and he submits to “the one, same voice—familiar immemorially, but long forgotten, that now rang out again: Come to me—come, come.”⁷⁴ He knows that his death is imminent. Once again, we can recall Bely’s words: “Death is lurking...for Russians because everyone amongst the intelligentsia knows that Kulikovoe Pole means certain death.”⁷⁵ Daryalsky knows that his time has arrived. Not coincidentally, at this moment, Daryalsky, on his way to Likhov, notices something:

All the way from Tselebeyevo, at quite a substantial distance in front of them, someone was driving a little dark-bay horse at full-tilt; it was a light racing trap, and perched upon it sideways was a little dark figure; it kept whipping the horse

⁷¹ Ibid, 253.

⁷² Ibid, 252.

⁷³ Ibid, 284.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 284.

⁷⁵ Vladimir Bonchbruyevich, ed., *Aleksandr Blok i Andrey Bely: Perepiska*, 251.

on, and seemed to be silently luring them after it, as though it was talking to them without words.⁷⁶

Daryalsky notices nothing other than Gogol's troika coming to decide his fate. Furthermore, the "trap seemed to be deliberately keeping at the same distance from them,"⁷⁷ showing that the troika containing Russia's painful identity question is always following behind. Daryalsky is offered one last chance to escape via train, but he decides to stay. Again, Bely uses a one-sentence paragraph that contains the finality of Blok's «Теперь твой час настал.—Молись!» Bely writes: "And he stayed."⁷⁸ The troika appears, and Daryalsky is led to his death.

Bely presents this diametrically opposed world as two entities that are unable to unify. The two sides—East and West, Tselebeyevo and Gugolevo, Kudeyarov and Daryalsky, Slavophile and Westernizer, *narod* and *intelligentsia*—are both missing something. The intelligentsia, as the *Vekhi* contributors argued, had lost their faith and their ability to see any absolute truth, while the peasantry had no civic sense. Like the intelligentsia itself, Daryalsky thinks he is untouchable because he is a writer. As he nears his death, Daryalsky says: "This is my work; I'm a writer; everybody knows me; if anyone touches me it'll be all over the papers."⁷⁹ But, as did the Russian *intelligent*, Daryalsky misunderstood the peasantry. "Seized by a fit of trembling and grasping from

⁷⁶ Bely, *Silver Dove*, 288.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 288.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 292.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 287.

the side pocket of his coat a little book with a fig-leaf on the cover.”⁸⁰ Daryalsky enacts the first step of our new definition of the superfluous man as mediator: he writes, and his writing seems to indicate an elevated consciousness in his discovery about the true nature of the peasantry. But his writing is never read or shared, and he never truly suppresses the external ideological binaries that motivated his pilgrimage to live with the peasants; thus his writing does not succeed in creating *sobornost*. Daryalsky therefore enters the final stanza of Blok’s “Na Pole Kulikovom.” His time had arrived, and so had the time of the Russian intelligentsia. Gogol’s troika had returned, this time with an answer: The Russian path leads to death.

But just because the Doves “win” and kill Daryalsky, does not mean that their Dionysian culture is the correct answer to Russia’s question, either. The sect, with its own rules and rituals, lives outside of society, just as the intelligentsia lived outside of themselves. Thus, the answer is not either East or West, but the combination of East and West. Like the *Vekhi* authors argue, unity is needed. But as Berdyaev writes in his contribution to *Vekhi*:

Russian mysticism, which is essentially very valuable, needs philosophical objectivization and norms if it is to serve the interests of Russian culture. I would put it this way: the Dionysian principle of mysticism must be combined with the Apollonian principle of philosophy. Love for the philosophical investigation of truth must be imparted both to the Russian mystics and to the atheist *intelligenty*.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Ibid, 287.

⁸¹ Shragin and Todd, eds., *Landmarks*, 15.

But this successful combination of East and West, of Apolline and Dionysian, of individual and society, of *narod* and *intelligentsia*, never materialized as the twentieth century began. The reality of the Russian nineteenth century, as argued by the *Vekhi* authors and as exemplified in Bely's *The Silver Dove*, was self-negating dualism. Rather than the unity of these two opposing poles, what occurred was a cancellation of both entities, resulting in an apocalyptic era and in the death of the old world.

Unfortunately, the new world did not deliver Russia from its identity crisis, either, despite its ideological promises. From the perspective of the development of the individual, the Bolshevik revolution marked a regression to the place it had found itself a century earlier. The annihilation of the gentry and of the tsarist regime made Russians once again, to recall Chaadaev's words, "illegitimate children without a heritage, without a link with the men who preceded [them] on earth."⁸² In a much swifter manner than the rise of the *raznochintsy* in the 1800s, the gentry was leveled and found itself with as much power as the classes that had once been lower than theirs. Blok's poem "Retribution" had come to fruition—"And in the path to crush/The guilty, as well as the innocent/Those without rank, as well as those with rank"—, and to the leaders of the new regime, all were new Soviet children who needed to be educated, that is to be led out of innocence and into adulthood.

The literal innocence that we typically ascribe to childhood, though it is relevant and will be discussed, was accompanied by ideological innocence. During such periods

⁸² Chaadaev, 31.

of revolution, there are inevitably ideological winners and losers. Interestingly, there are opposing types of innocence associated with both sides: a revolutionary innocence that is reflected in the utopian promises of a better society to be delivered by the new regime and a reactionary innocence associated with a nostalgic longing by some for a culture that has now perished. The early Soviet period was in many ways one of great hope and can be viewed as the childhood of the new Soviet citizen, one depicted in socialist realist literature and film as untainted by past cultural influences and motorized and electrified by twentieth-century technology. But these years also witnessed an innocence associated with a longing for the golden age of Russian literature that arose out of the desperation felt by artists who would not obey the new Soviet marching orders. To investigate both of these “innocences of revolution”—the inadequacy of the utopian promises of the twentieth century and the unattainability of the lost paradise of the nineteenth—I will focus primarily on Evgenii Zamyatin’s *We* and Mikhail Bulgakov’s *The Heart of a Dog*.⁸³ These two works represent a contrast to Alexander Blok and other naïve, self-deceiving poets who were all too eager to welcome a revolution that pushed the old world

⁸³ There are certainly other writers that can and have been considered in this role, such as Il’f and Petrov for their character Vasilialiy Lokhankin (*The Golden Fleece*) who might serve effectively as comic relief to the themes of this dissertation. Or Yuri Olesha, whose Nikolai Kavalerov (*Envy*) would serve as an example of the *intelligent*’s fate during the early Soviet period. For more on Olesha, see Arkady Belinkov, “The Soviet Intelligentsia and the Socialist Revolution: On Yuri Olesha’s *Envy*,” *Russian Review*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Oct., 1971): 356-368 and “The Soviet Intelligentsia and the Socialist Revolution: On Yuri Olesha’s *Envy*: Part II,” *Russian Review*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Jan., 1972): 25-37. These articles were later turned into a book: *Sdacha i gibel sovetskogo intelligenta: Yuri Olesha* (Madrid: Ediciones Castilla, 1976). See also Robert Louis Jackson’s chapter on Olesha’s *Envy* in his book *Dostoevsky’s Underground Man in Russian Literature* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1958).

out of the official sphere of public life. I use the term “innocences” in the sense that they are ideals that cannot be manifested in reality, which is exactly why we yearn for utopia or paradise. If prelapsarian innocence is characterized by a lack of knowledge, then after the fall, we have traded paradise for knowledge. Only the scant memory of paradise remains, and we attempt to recreate it either in the past or in the future. Thus, individuals on both sides of the ideological spectrum are subordinated to their causes. It is in this way that anyone living in this era was relegated to a type—either pro- or anti-Soviet, as it was virtually impossible to be neutral.⁸⁴ As the Soviet regime solidified its hold on the new nation, the patterns associated with type and with ideology that we observed in the first half of the nineteenth century accompanied the tumultuous political and social change that took place. Driving much of this change was that Russians, again to recall Chaadaev’s words, felt “no sense of permanency” and “[resembled] homeless spirits condemned to creative impotence.”⁸⁵ These two themes—homelessness (or, in other words, a search for roots) and creative output—are crucial to our investigation of the superfluous man’s role as mediator as Russia was pushed to the brink of destruction by a series of historical events: the Russo-Japanese War, the 1905 Russian Revolution, World War I, the 1917 Russian Revolutions, and a long Civil War.

⁸⁴ Perhaps Boris Pasternak and his hero Yuri Zhivago come closest to this ideological neutrality.

⁸⁵ Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought: From the Enlightenment to Marxism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), 85-86.

As the old world was literally being leveled, both by the above events and by the Soviet regime's focus on urbanization and industrialization, Russia's writers—both pro- and anti-Soviet—searched for the country's true roots either in arcadia or in utopia. The Russian Futurists penned their manifesto entitled “A Slap in the Face of Public Taste” in 1912, proclaiming that “the past is too tight” and that “the Academy and Pushkin are less intelligible than hieroglyphics.” They urged citizens to “throw Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, etc., etc. overboard from the Ship of Modernity” and screamed: “from the heights of skyscrapers we gaze at their insignificance!”⁸⁶ On the other hand, the individualists of the old century did what they could, not only to survive, but to stay true to themselves and to the essence of Russian culture that was being rewritten daily by the Bolsheviks. Two examples of such individualists were Evgenii Zamyatin and Mikhail Bulgakov, who both produced works that investigated the choice between freedom and satiety, between aligning oneself with the Golden Age of the past or with the Great Soviet Future.

In Zamyatin's utopian novel *We*, an internal battle develops within the pages of his protagonist's journalistic record of the crystalline life engineered by the Well-Doer of the United State. D-503's initial intention, as per his charge, is to glorify the *Integral*, the United State's manmade solution to the “indefinite equation of the Cosmos.”⁸⁷ The mission of the government is advertised in Record One of the novel, framing the struggle

⁸⁶ Michael Almercyda, ed., *Night Wraps the Sky: Writings by and about Mayakovsky* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 57-58.

⁸⁷ Evgenii Zamyatin, *We*, trans. Gregory Zilboord (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1952), 3.

of man versus nature and anticipating the victory of “the grateful yoke of reason” over the “primitive state of freedom,”⁸⁸ echoing eighteenth-century Enlightenment claims. The government invites the willing and capable to “consider it his duty to write treatises, poems, manifestoes, odes, and other compositions on the greatness and the beauty of the United State.”⁸⁹ These literary works are intended to serve as the “first cargo which the *Integral* will carry” to the “unknown beings”⁹⁰ who will read these works in the future.

Although D-503 intends to document his logical self that is governed by reason and thereby represents the proclaimed flawlessness of the United State, his journal transforms into his search for consciousness and freedom, the metaphor for which becomes the square root of minus one, which indicates an irrational number and an unsolvable equation. As he records more and more of this thoughts, he begins to perceive this irrational root within him, writing that “perhaps it is my hairy paws and I feel like that only because they are always before my eyes,”⁹¹ suggesting that the senses might be more powerful than reasoning ability. At first, D-503 is scared of this new and powerful part of his internal being, announcing that he dislikes his hairy paws and noting disdainfully that “they are a trace of a primitive epoch.”⁹² Thus begins D-503’s internal battle for the self, even though his rational mind tells him that there cannot possibly be an

⁸⁸ Ibid, 3.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 3.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 4.

⁹¹ Ibid, 23.

⁹² Ibid, 23.

unknown quantity “X” within him. This is the purported Truth of the United State, the essence of its ideology that it uses to keep all of the Numbers following the Tables. But D-503 continues to write in order to prove that there is no unknown entity within him.

His rational mind forges ahead despite the signs of his primitive origins that he observes, but in Record Seven, he dreams a rather puzzling dream:

Green, orange, blue. The red royal instrument. The yellow dress. Then a brass Buddha. Suddenly it lifted the brass eyelids and sap began to flow from it, from Buddha. Sap also from the yellow dress. Even in the mirror, drops of sap, and from the large bed and from the children’s bed and soon from myself... It is horror, mortally sweet horror!⁹³

The dream, which naturally occurs at night, the time of poets and Romantics, is much more indicative of an impressionist painting than a mathematical table, and D-503 has to calm himself with the “soft blue light, the glass of the walls, of the chairs,”⁹⁴ in other words, with the uniformity and clarity of the present utopian world in which he lives. He calls his dreaming a “serious mental disease”⁹⁵ and determines that he is sick since he had never seen dreams before. He had previously likened his brain to a “precise, clean, glittering mechanism, like a chronometer without a speck of dust on it,” but now he feels that there is “some foreign body” in his brain, “like an eyelash in the eye.”⁹⁶ Although the “cheerful, crystalline sound of the [morning] bell” returns his attention to the mathematical routine of his daily life, he is now aware of the foreign body, an unknown

⁹³ Ibid, 31.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 31.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 31.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 31.

entity, within him that “one cannot forget for a second.”⁹⁷ This is exactly the point at which Camus’ “why” arises in D-503 against the mechanical rhythm of life under the United State, marking the beginning of the “impulse of consciousness.”⁹⁸

The remainder of the novel shows D-503’s doubt evolve into acceptance and then celebration of this foreign body and his rejection of the “precise beauty” and uniformity of the society of the United State which has “not a single superfluous gesture.”⁹⁹ He mentions the exact point in his childhood when he was introduced to the concept of irrational numbers. As a child, D-503 responded to this new knowledge by weeping, banging the table with his fist, and crying: “I do not want that square root of minus one; take that square root of minus one away!”¹⁰⁰ He then admits that “the irrational root grew into me as something strange, foreign, terrible; it tortured me; it could not be thought out.”¹⁰¹ He uses his assigned sexual partner, O-90, as a point of comparison, writing that “there is nothing in [her eyes], nothing foreign, nothing superfluous.”¹⁰² D-503 tries to maintain his belief in the rational mind, but eventually submits to this overwhelming

⁹⁷ Ibid, 31.

⁹⁸ Albert Camus, “An Absurd Reasoning,” *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O’Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 10.

⁹⁹ Zamyatin, *We*, 32.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 37.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 37.

¹⁰² Ibid, 34.

power that “could not be defeated because it was beyond reason.”¹⁰³ Later, in Record Twenty-Two, D-503 is much more comfortable with the “desperately joyful power [of] that wild being with hairy paws which arose in [him].”¹⁰⁴

Not coincidentally, D-503’s childhood is referenced, as well as his hairy paws, which serve as a metonym for the foreignness and superfluity that develops within him over the course of his journal. These come to symbolize the search for innocence that is portrayed in the conflict between the pristine United State and crude nature, with both sides advocating for a similar return to innocence either in the past or in the future. Zamyatin goes as far as presenting these two groups as different species. In an unpublished preface,¹⁰⁵ Zamyatin writes: “Man ceased to be an ape and overcame the ape the day the first book was published.”¹⁰⁶ Additionally, in Record Seventeen, D-503 comments on the “wisdom of walls and bars,” writing that:

man ceased to be an animal the day he built the first wall; man ceased to be a wild man only on the day when the Green Wall was completed, when by this wall we isolated our machine-like, perfect world from the irrational, ugly world of trees, birds, and beasts...¹⁰⁷

While the implications of this passage reach far beyond biological categorization, the division between rational man and irrational beast permeates the pages of D-503’s journal

¹⁰³ Ibid, 37.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 120.

¹⁰⁵ As indicated by Marc Slonim in his 1959 preface to the English translation of *We*.

¹⁰⁶ Slonim, 1959 Preface to *We*, xxi.

¹⁰⁷ Zamyatin, *We*, 89.

in terms of his constant references to his hairy paws; his trips to the Ancient House, the only opaque building in the United State, with the exception of its windows that afford a glimpse into its depths as do human eyes; and his sensory accounts of the natural world beyond the Green Wall, such as the wind from “unknown plains [that brings] to us the yellow honeyed pollen of flowers”¹⁰⁸ or the “chattering of birds.”¹⁰⁹ That the Ancient House is opaque reiterates the fact that nature’s purity is intentionally obscured from plain view, reserved only for those who consciously seek it, while manmade purity is seemingly too clear, again emphasizing the shortcomings of Enlightenment rationalism.

This discussion recalls Zamyatin’s essay “The Tame and the Wild” that was published in May 1918 under the pseudonym Mikhail Platonov in the Left Socialist Revolutionaries’ newspaper *Delo naroda* (*The People’s Cause*). In her essay entitled “Zamyatin’s ‘Tame Dreamer’ and the Conception of D-503,” Dianne Sattinger Goldstaub argues that Zamyatin, the wild individualist, satirizes the tame, self-deceiving poet in his characterization of D-503 in his novel *We*. Zamyatin defines these contrasting types as such:

There are two types of dreamers: tame and wild. The tame ones are useful...; the wild ones are harmful. Tame ones are convenient; wild ones are inconvenient. And while it is most useful to isolate the wild ones in special reserves, the tame ones should simply be multiplied artificially. We should set up nurseries and breeding points for them. We should establish academies of tame dreamers.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 5.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 164.

¹¹⁰ Zamyatin, “Domashnie i dikie,” *Sochineniya* (Munich: A. Neimanis Buchvertrieb und Verlag, 1988), t. 4, 341.

The distinction between the two types of dreamers is manifested quite obviously in *We*, with the tame, useful ones representing the faceless Numbers, or citizens, of the United State and the wild ones representing individuals such as D-503 and I-330, who believe more in the reality of their imaginations than in the cold logic of the Tables and the entropy of settled domesticity. It was along these lines that Zamyatin accused the literary group Scythians (led by writers such as Blok, Bely, Solovyov, and Ivanov) of “settling down”¹¹¹ in his 1918 essay “Scythians?,” connecting his work to the ongoing challenge of Russian homelessness. Moreover, the wild elements in *We* are, in fact, isolated in special reserves, either kept as artifacts of the “ancients” or hidden from society’s view behind the Green Wall. That both sides are referred to as “dreamers” points to the two “innocences” that are being discussed here.

In pursuit of these innocences, the themes of artificial societies and convenient citizens were common, in both literature and in life, for the revolutionary period in Russia. And while the connection between the Soviet Union and Zamyatin’s United State is clear, it is interesting that “The Tame and the Wild” targets not only the Bolsheviks, but specifically Alexander Blok as the supreme example of the self-deceiving poet. Of course, this does not provide us with a complete view of Blok. In fact, Zamyatin wrote several positive pieces on Blok after they met and worked together shortly before Blok’s death. But “The Tame and the Wild” does allow us to understand that this negative perception toward conformists did exist.

¹¹¹ Zamyatin, “Scythians?” *Sochineniya*, t. 4, 503.

While I do not intend to use Blok as an entirely polar opposite to Zamyatin's quest for individual freedom, Blok does serve as a sensible reference point for a discussion of some of the authors of the revolutionary era, such as Zamyatin and Bulgakov. For example, Blok begins his essay "Intelligentsia and Revolution" with the following:

All around me I hear statements like "Russia is dying," "Russia is no longer," "Eternal remembrance to Russia." But before my very eyes is Russia: the Russia that our great writers saw in their awesome and prophetic dreams; that same Petersburg which Dostoevsky saw; that Russia which Gogol called a galloping troika. Russia is a tempest. Russia is destined to survive suffering, humiliation, divisions; but she will emerge from these humiliations like new and, in a new way, great.¹¹²

Although Blok was responding to the death knell that resonated throughout his contemporary society by advocating for the continuation of Russian roots, especially those of the golden age of Russian literature, he also implores his readers to "Listen to the Revolution, with all your body, with all your heart, with all your consciousness."¹¹³ These statements encompass both of our innocences—one of the golden past and one of the "new, great" future looming on the horizon.

Blok was not the only writer to advocate for such change, as many were captivated by the new regime's drive toward modernization, represented by the Five-Year Plans that focused on industrialization and on providing electricity and infrastructure to rural areas as well as cities. Vladimir Mayakovsky, who became the most Soviet of poets

¹¹² Blok, "Intelligentsia i revolyutsia," *Sobraniye sochinenii* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoye literatury, 1962) t. 6, 1.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 15.

for much of the 1920s before his eventual suicide in 1930, wrote: “Fa-a-a-ster.../ FasterFaster/ Hey provinces/ Raise your anchors!/ Astrakhan, follow Tula/ one *makhina* (large, bulky thing) after another/ Standing immobile/ Even in Adam’s day/ have now moved/ and are shoving/ others, rattling/ their cities.” These modern themes were seen in the development of Soviet cinema, which Lenin felt he could use to educate a largely illiterate population as to how the New Soviet Man should look and act.¹¹⁴ Indeed, the Bolsheviks looked upon the citizenry as children who needed to be educated according to the new political and social ideas. In a sense, the goal was to lead Soviet citizens out of a childlike innocence toward adulthood and knowledge shaped by the communist ideology (one of our ideological innocences). This newness and freshness was exemplified by filmmakers such as Dziga Vertov, Lev Kuleshov, Sergey Eisenstein, and Vsevolod Pudovkin, who created the art of montage to serve as a new language for a new world.¹¹⁵ The idea of mastery over nature drove these artistic discoveries, as Eisenstein “called for film that ‘recarves reality and real phenomena,’ that would ‘interrupt’ and ‘overcome’ reality *as it was* and, implicitly, recast it *as it should be*.”¹¹⁶ Interestingly, this sentiment drove both sides of our innocence spectrum as each fought for its own ideological vision. Of course, the reality of the new Soviet era was far different from its frequent depiction in film. But in 1918, when “Intelligentsia and Revolution” was published, it is difficult to

¹¹⁴ Emma Widdis, *Visions of a New Land: Soviet Film from the Revolution to the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 13.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 63.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, 67.

fault Blok for attempting to remain optimistic in the face of an uncertain future, or even present, as various political parties were still jockeying for power in the aftermath of 1917.

However, innocent dreams and harsh reality differed sharply. While Blok hoped for a positive outcome to the Revolution, he died in 1921 and was not forced to live in its aftermath as were individualist writers such as Zamyatin and Bulgakov. Some of them seemed to respond not only to the changing times, but also to Blok's exhortation to follow the music of the Revolution. Bulgakov's *The Heart of a Dog*, for example, is one such literary work that contains a satirical answer to Blok's welcoming of the Revolution, with Sharik's existence deriving from a re-interpretation of recurring images in several of Blok's poems. Additionally, Sharik represents the fate of the individual, talented writer, an elegist of the old world that has vanished and left him homeless and struggling for survival. This reading of Bulgakov's novella—focusing on Sharik before his operation and contrasting it with Blok's poetic imagery—will illustrate: (1) the illusory and tyrannical nature of revolutionary promises (these promises, in theory, seem ideologically innocent yet are corrupted when put into practice); (2) that reality for the individual with integrity is higher than the revolutionary ideal and (3) the importance of elegizing the lost paradise of the past once the individual succumbs to revolutionary forces.

The Heart of a Dog opens with two elements that recur frequently in Blok's poetry—a snowstorm (*v'yuga*) and a dog (*pyos*)—making these images a logical genesis

for Sharik. In several of his poems,¹¹⁷ Blok voluntarily seeks the snowstorm by leaving his house, or the old world. He writes: “Dear friend, even in this quiet house/ I am shaken by a fever./ I cannot find my place in a quiet house/ Beside a peaceful fire!/ Voices sing, the blizzard howls/ I am appalled by comforts.”¹¹⁸ Naturally, it is easy to condemn material comforts if one has them. A starving, freezing creature that lives on the streets would find it difficult to scorn a peaceful fire in the confines of a quiet house while the blizzard howls outside. Blok’s blizzard and howling wind become the setting for Sharik’s first-person narration at the beginning of *The Heart of a Dog* and set up the main contrast between satiety and freedom, the primary question that faced all Soviet citizens throughout the twentieth century.

In this sense, perhaps the most notable connection between Blok’s poetry and *The Heart of a Dog* occurs in the poems “Poety” and “Dvenadtsat’,” in which appear the image of the stray dog. The last stanza of “Poety” reads:

Let me die under a fence like a dog,
Let life trample me into the earth,
I believe: that God will cover me in snow,
And that the blizzard will give me a kiss!¹¹⁹

The dog in Blok's poem is bombarded by the same blizzard as is Sharik at the beginning of Bulgakov's novella. Yet Blok's narrator is simply imagining what it would be like to die under a fence *like* a dog. He feels that God will cover him with a blanket of snow and

¹¹⁷ Poems such as “Dikii veter,” “To ne eli, ne tonkie eli,” “Milyi drug, i v etom tikhom dome,” and “Pust’ ya i zhil, ne lyubya.”

¹¹⁸ Blok, *Sobraniye sochineniy*, t.3, 286.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, t. 3, 128.

that the blizzard will kiss him. Unlike Blok, who is dreaming of the snowstorm as he is shielded from it by the comforts described above, Sharik is actually living in it. He is bombarded by “a snowstorm moaning a requiem for [him] in this doorway.”¹²⁰ God is not tucking him in with a blanket of snow but rather a cook is scalding him with boiling water, leaving him no option but to die under someone’s doorstep. There will be no kisses from the blizzard, only one last poke from someone’s stick to finish him off before the garbage men come along to remove his carcass from the Moscow streets. Bulgakov’s reality diverges sharply from Blok’s innocent ideal.

Before continuing with the connection to Blok’s poetry, it is important to note that in the first sentences of the novella we see an artist’s soul that is suffering over its own existence and survival. An artist is much more sensitive in feeling his own blood coursing through his veins, just as Sharik senses his pain so acutely that he says he is dying. The following sentence expands upon this initial observation. Sharik’s impression that “there’s a snowstorm moaning a requiem for me” shows not only a considerable degree of linguistic sophistication, but it introduces two of the most poignant themes on which a poet can write—nature and remembrance. In his book *On Romanticism in Slavic Literature*, Dmitri Chizhevsky writes:

Nature is contiguous with the profundities of the human being. This contiguity gives man the possibility of conscious, semi-conscious, and subconscious spiritual intercourse with nature. This finds expression in the motif, constantly recurring in romantic poetry, of “conversation” with nature. Nature, however, is either mute, or speaks an “incomprehensible,” “secret,” or “silent” tongue. The sounds, the

¹²⁰ Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Heart of a Dog*, trans. Michael Glenny (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1968), 3.

“voice,” the “speech” of nature are incomprehensible directly to the poet; at least, they are incomprehensible to his intelligence. Therefore the poet’s “conversation” with nature is in romantic poetry a monologue of the poet, directed to nature. Nature’s “answer” is given by the poet himself, by means of a symbolic interpretation of nature’s sounds, voices, or of some trait of phenomenon of hers.¹²¹

This symbolic interpretation of nature’s sounds is no less than what Sharik experiences when he hears nature’s requiem in her snowstorm. The fact that Sharik has the capacity to perceive nature’s elegiac musings implies that he is a creative artist, a poet in the truest sense of the word, and it is in this sense that I include him as a superfluous man that takes up writing in order to transcend the pain of existence through consciousness. Nature has long been an interlocutor for the artist, representing either a lost period in one’s life or an idealized version of the ephemeral, banal life that the artist now lives (or once lived). Whether it be Ivan Karamazov’s “sticky little leaves,” which he remembers from his childhood, or Pushkin’s “The Snowstorm,” which is the force that saves two seemingly doomed souls from loneliness by reversing Romantic expectations, or even Gogol’s parody of nature, the streetlamps of “Nevsky Prospekt,” which distort reality rather than reveal it, nature has always been one of the perennial symbols of Romantic literature.

Furthermore, it is often through the portrayal of nature that the concept of requiem is addressed. One of the best examples of this device is Thomas Gray’s eighteenth-

¹²¹ Dmitri Chizhevsky, *On Romanticism in Slavic Literature* (Heidelberg: Mouton and Co., 1957), 11.

century poem “Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard,” when, after describing the faithful toiling of a rural farmer, he writes:

On some fond breast the parting soul relies,
Some pious drops the closing eye requires;
E’en from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,
E’en in our ashes live their wonted fires.

For thee, who, mindful of th’ unhonour’d dead,
Dost in these lines their artless tale relate;
In chance, by lonely contemplation led,
Some kindred spirit shall inquire their fate,...

While nature, such as the ebb and flow of a body of water or the unpredictability and the violence of a storm, is a reflection of the human experience, there arises the concomitant need to memorialize and to remember the people alongside whom we have lived. The poet hears this calling and devotes his life to this service. And when it is his own time to perish, it is another poet’s task to inscribe new words on the recently deceased poet’s life. Sharik, in hearing the snowstorm’s requiem, is responding to this same calling that has been reflected in poems such as Derzhavin’s “*Evgeniyu. Zhizn’ zvenskaya*” and “*Pamyatnik*,” Pushkin’s “*Osen*” and “*Exegi monumentum*,” Lermontov’s “*Son*” and Baratynsky’s “*Osen*” and “*Smert’*.” Sharik is continuing this tradition as he laments his current condition.

The use of the word “requiem” by Sharik should not be taken lightly, and, if we look back at the tradition of elegy, we immediately notice that this honor is reserved almost exclusively for poets. By “honor” I refer not only the right to compose an elegy, but also the right to have an elegy written in one’s name. Elegiac verse, such as Mandelstam’s “*Pamyat’ Andreya Belogo*,” Baratynsky’s “*Na smert’ Gyote*,” Derzhavin’s

“*Na smert’ Knyazya Mesherskogo*,” Del’vig’s “*Na smert’ Derzhavina*,” Kuchelbecker’s “*Smert’ Bairona*,” pauses to reflect, not only upon the poet’s existence, but also upon the gifts the deceased poet has left to the world. Sometimes, as in the case of Del’vig on Derzhavin’s death, poets will coronate another poet (here, Pushkin) and charge him with the duty to carry the artistic torch of the deceased from one generation to the next. If Sharik hears nature’s requiem, then we can consider Sharik as a descendant from the line of great artists listed above.

The final sentence of the novel’s first paragraph—“I can howl and howl, but what good does it do?”¹²²—addresses another significant need of the artist, which is an audience. A true creative artist will accept suffering as a natural byproduct of life as long as he is free to uncover his own truth and is not forced to conform to the standardized lifestyle of the masses. Upon arriving at this truth, he needs someone to receive it. Joseph Brodsky identified this same need in his writings on Marina Tsvetaeva. Included in his musings on her poem entitled “*Novogodnee*,” Brodsky writes: “In the deceased Rilke, Tsvetaeva discovers that for which every poet strives—an absolute listener.”¹²³ While Rilke was alive, it was conceivable that he, as a fallible human being, for one reason or another would not be able to return her correspondences to him. After his death, it is her right as a living poet to communicate freely with the souls of poets that have passed away. Her anxiety regarding the unpredictability of the human being Rilke’s willingness

¹²² Bulgakov, *The Heart of a Dog*, 3.

¹²³ Joseph Brodsky, “Footnote to a Poem,” in *Less Than One: Selected Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1986), 211.

to answer her is replaced by absolute confidence that the immortal Rilke will receive and respond to her missives. Sharik longs for the same type of listener. His exhortations of pain are intended to be heard by someone, not to be uttered for their own sake. His howling is not an expression of decadence, not art for art's sake, but a manifestation of the suffering that pervades his existence. Being seemingly accustomed to the life of a stray dog (which we will learn as he continues his monologue), he probably does not expect to be saved and to be brought home by an altruistic passerby. More than anything, Sharik wants his suffering to be acknowledged and his existence to be validated. In Sharik's existence before his operation, we observe the two components of the superfluous man's role as mediator that we identified in the previous chapter: (1) a developed consciousness through writing and (2) the desire for *sobornost'* once that consciousness has been attained.

Returning to Blok, his *pyos* returns in the final section of "Dvenadtsat'" when the "old world" is likened to a "mangy mutt." The adjectives "mangy," "kinless," "cold," and "hungry"¹²⁴ are used to describe the dog that lags behind the revolutionaries who are following the red flag. They are blinded by the snowstorm and are unaffected by bullets. Bulgakov's novella can thus be considered as a continuation of Blok's "Dvenadtsat'." The revolutionaries have been swept away by the violence of their voluntary transformation. Only the dog remains, and Sharik's pitiful existence is described in order to show what has replaced the old world that has been destroyed. While no direct

¹²⁴ Blok, *Sobraniye sochineniy*, t. 3, 358-59.

statements on Blok can be found in Bulgakov's notes, letters, or journals, Bulgakov, a writer of a younger generation, could have perceived Blok as a naïve advocate of the Revolution and as one who did not have to live in the aftermath of his powerful blizzard that leveled the old world. However, the lack of documentary evidence that Bulgakov was, in fact, responding to Blok does not undermine the fact that certain figures and images from Blok's poetry—namely the stray dog and the snowstorm—take on new meaning as revolutionary promises eroded in the early 1920s.

Perhaps Bulgakov knew of the pre-revolutionary meetings at the aptly-named “Stray Dog” on Mikhailovskaya Square, where Blok and his elitist contemporaries discussed literature and the music of the Revolution in an indulgent revelry of endlessly flowing wine. Akhmatova remembered these meetings fondly:

Yes, I loved them, those nocturnal meetings,
On a little table, the icy glasses,
Over the black coffee, a fine odorous steam,
The heavy winter heat of the red fire place,
The caustic gaiety of a literary joke...¹²⁵

In his reminiscences of that era, Yuri Annenkov wrote that there are two types of poets—“those who do their best to join the ranks of any kind of ‘ism’ and the rare individuals striving to disengage themselves from any ‘ism’ whatsoever, to remain themselves.”¹²⁶ Annenkov places Blok in the second group of heroic individuals, but Bulgakov would likely have placed him in the first. Blok may very well have followed his own path,

¹²⁵ Yuri Annenkov and William Todd, “The Poets and the Revolution—Blok, Mayakovsky, Esenin,” *The Russian Review*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Apr. 1967): 129.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 130.

writing in 1913: “No more symbolisms. I alone answer for myself.”¹²⁷ But Blok could easily have been thought to have followed an “ism,” and in doing so he falls in line, following the red flag of his “Dvenadtsat” and placing the stray dog at the heels of those followers of the music of the Revolution.

If Blok innocently anticipated the music of the Revolution, then Bulgakov was forced to live in the eye of its storm. Bulgakov arrived in Moscow in the same year that Blok died—1921—and found a city that was being reconceived after having been annihilated by revolution and civil war. In a sense, Bulgakov’s life answers the question posed by Arthur Lourier in his article on Blok’s musical theme: “If music abandons us, what will become of our world?”¹²⁸ This is the world that Blok did not have to live in and the one in which Bulgakov played the role of the stray dog by attempting to preserve his individuality by not following the red flag. If Blok was disgusted by the comforts and the peaceful fire of the old house, Bulgakov’s main concern was finding shelter in Moscow’s “transition to a new form of life, such as it hasn’t had for a very long time, a life of fierce competition, feverish activity and initiative.”¹²⁹ This was during a time when the Soviet regime’s goal became clear: to dominate nature. Cities were growing, causing major housing shortages, and the reality of this new life fell far from the utopian innocence promised by the proletarian government. Not only was housing an issue because it was

¹²⁷ Ibid, 130.

¹²⁸ Quoted in Annenkov and Todd, 132.

¹²⁹ Andrzej Drawicz, *The Master and the Devil—A Study of Mikhail Bulgakov*, trans. Kevin Windle (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), 33.

scarce, “State policy dictated that housing be used as one of the most important of a variety of rewards to be granted to the loyal, or withheld from the disloyal,”¹³⁰ a theme that both Zamyatin and Bulgakov exploit in their works. Soviet housing policy simultaneously destroyed the old culture so centered on the ideal of home (i.e. the gentry estate) and “turned living space into an ideological and material commodity.”¹³¹ Using the promise of housing to “mold revolutionary consciousness and behavior,”¹³² the Soviet regime created a family of hack, conformist writers who worked further to push the Soviet future away from the golden age of the past. Bulgakov had no choice but to face such raw conditions upon moving to Moscow, and he certainly did not have the luxury of dreaming about the music of the revolution from the confines of a literary salon.

Blok and his contemporaries such as Bely had felt this apocalyptic murmuring since the turn of the century. But Blok died before he could experience the type of “rejuvenation”—Preobrazhensky’s experiment—that the Soviets were offering. Bulgakov’s portrayal of Sharik represents this conflict between our two innocences—the dilemma of satiety versus freedom that the artist faces. While *The Master and Margarita* satirizes Soviet hacks who conformed in order to eat well at Dom Griboedova, *The Heart*

¹³⁰ Stephen Kotkin, “Shelter and Subjectivity in the Stalin Period: A Case Study of Magnitogorsk,” in *Russian Housing in the Modern Age: Design and Social History*, ed. William Craft Brumfield and Blair A. Ruble (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and the Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1993), 176.

¹³¹ Singleton, 38.

¹³² William Craft Brumfield, introduction to Brumfield and Ruble, *Russian Housing in the Modern Age*, 3.

of a Dog is Bulgakov's satire of artists such as Blok who wished for a revolution that ultimately destroyed those who wanted nothing but freedom, something that Blok himself proclaimed that a poet needed. Sharik's existence is what Blok's fate would have been had he lived and it is what Bulgakov's life was actually like—a writer in the 1920s could either maintain his individuality and essentially live on the streets, or could become a Soviet hack and enjoy the satiety and facelessness of conformity. To Bulgakov:

Independence was a serious matter. In Bulgakov's milieu the art of compromise was being widely practiced. From the beginning he had evidently marked out its boundaries for himself, and left himself a narrow margin. He had great ambitions and attributed the greatest importance to his art. But he did not wish to make it publishable whatever the price. In *Notes on Shirt Cuffs* he wrote in desperation, "Needing money for food I took my top hat to the market. Some kind people bought it to use as a chamber pot. But I won't take my heart or mind to sell in the market. I'd sooner die."¹³³

Bulgakov responds to Blok by showing what life was like for him as a new arrival to Moscow, a life in which he managed to preserve his freedom and individuality, albeit at great cost. Blok chooses the Katkas and the Petkas¹³⁴ as the ones who require the "freedom" provided by the red flag behind which the soldiers march, while ascribing the mangy mutt as the derogatory symbol of the crumbling old world. Through Sharik, Bulgakov reminds Blok that any writer with integrity is, in fact, that "mangy, kinless dog" in Blok's poem.

It was this childlike dog without roots that the Soviets wanted to mold into the ideologically pure and innocent New Soviet Man. However, Sharik mocks this idea of

¹³³ Drawicz, 75.

¹³⁴ Characters in Blok's poem "Dvenadtsat'."

revolutionary transfiguration in his rejection of the need to change people. Bulgakov's suggestion is that playing the role of the lowly, individual, stray dog is enough and that one does not need the blizzard of a revolution to be transformed into a higher being. In fact, one does not need anything except for one's own instincts and talents. To this end, Bulgakov gives Sharik linguistic skills that are considerably more sophisticated than the vulgar utterances of Sharikov after the operation. Bulgakov was especially proud of his endless efforts to develop contacts and to stabilize his life in Moscow so that he could turn his attention to his writing. He gives this industriousness to Sharik, who shows the reader that transfiguration is not necessary and that one's education through experience is enough to live on. "Why bother to learn to read when you can smell meat a mile away?"¹³⁵ Sharik's lessons range from learning colors to letters to the sharpness of insulated cable, a mistake that is regarded as "the beginning of Sharik's education."¹³⁶ Having been whipped by the cable, Sharik learns that "blue" doesn't always mean "butcher."¹³⁷ Sharik's natural "education" is similar to that of D-503's as he begins to rely more on his senses and less on reason as his journal progresses. Thus, our pursuit of innocence is connected with education, grounded either in nature and instinct or in Enlightenment logic and learned ideology.

¹³⁵ Bulgakov, *The Heart of a Dog*, 14.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, 15.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 15.

Furthermore, Sharik learns to distinguish between people of different classes. He is well aware of the differences between garbage men, cooks (as well as the difference between nasty cooks and kind ones, the kind ones being associated with the old world of Tolstoy's estate), typists, and gentlemen such as Preobrazhensky. He even learns that class cannot be determined by clothing, since "even lots of proletarians wear overcoats nowadays,"¹³⁸ but rather by the person's eyes. Interestingly, Zamyatin also uses the image of eyes throughout *We* as a portal into the being's soul. As mentioned above, D-503 recounts that "there is nothing in [O-90's eyes], nothing foreign, nothing superfluous."¹³⁹ Later, when D-503 laments the fact that "new unknowns appeared in my equation" just at the point when he thought he had untangled all of the X's, he walks along the Green Wall and comes face-to-face with "some unknown beast" through the glass:

Its yellow eyes kept repeating the same thought which remained incomprehensible to me. We looked into each other's eyes for a long while. Eyes are shafts which lead from the superficial world into a world which is beneath the surface. A thought awoke in me: "What if that yellow-eyed one, sitting there on that absurd dirty heap of leaves, is happier than I, in his life which cannot be calculated in figures!" I waved my hand. The yellow eyes twinkled, moved back, and disappeared in the foliage.¹⁴⁰

Similar to D-503's realization, Sharik, and by extension, Bulgakov, understand that adhering to an "ism" is not necessary for personal betterment and for happiness and that the soul, which can be reached through the eyes, is paramount. Sharik's spiritual

¹³⁸ Ibid, 8. A clear reference to Nikolai Gogol's "The Overcoat" (1842).

¹³⁹ Zamyatin, *We*, 34.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 88-89.

intelligence is evidence that artificial transfiguration is pointless, a lesson that Preobrazhensky only learns after the experiment turns disastrous. Later in the novella, he and Bormenthal discuss transplanting Spinoza's pituitary into a dog and turning it into a highly intelligent human being:

But what in heaven's name for? That's the point. Will you kindly tell me why one has to manufacture artificial Spinozas when some peasant woman may produce a real one any day of the week? After all, the great Lomonosov was the son of a peasant woman from Kholmogory. Mankind, Doctor, takes care of that. Every year evolution ruthlessly casts aside the mass of dross and creates a few dozen men of genius who become an ornament to the world.¹⁴¹

Preobrazhensky's experiment thus reverses the nature of mankind. If evolution ruthlessly casts aside the masses in favor of a few dozen men of genius, then Blok's Revolution has done the opposite and has forced those men of genius either to be transfigured into inferior Sharikovs or, in the case of such men as Bulgakov and Zamyatin, to suffer the fate of a homeless and beaten-down Sharik.

For Sharik, ideological lobotomies do not rejuvenate, just as artificial Spinozas and Lomonosovs do not need to be produced because they occur in nature. Nature rejuvenates and instructs; dogs do not need to learn how to read because they can smell the meat from the butcher shops. Sharik has learned to fend for himself thanks to his natural skills and talents that are infinitely stronger than learned, forced, or artificial ones. In contrast, when Preobrazhensky threatens to stop feeding Sharikov, he says, "I can't do without food. Where would I eat?"¹⁴² The operation has taken Sharikov's instincts from

¹⁴¹ Bulgakov, *The Heart of a Dog*, 122-23.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, 115.

him and has turned him into a being that, out of fear, looks to give up his freedom in return for sustenance and comfort; in choosing revolutionary innocence, one exchanges self for satiety. Bulgakov, however, reiterates that education and self-betterment are individual processes, not mass, ideological ones. The individual dog has to learn for himself how to smell, to read, and to survive. That the smell from a butcher shop could be drowned out by car exhaust fumes shows industry's (i.e. the logical, material world's) ability to dull and to deceive the natural senses.¹⁴³

Additionally, Sharik mocks those who marched after the red flag through the blinding snowstorm in Blok's "Dvenadtsat'." When Sharik sees the billboard asking "Is Rejuvenation Possible?," Blok's blizzard "boomed like gunfire over his head."¹⁴⁴ In "Dvenadtsat'," the mangy mutt follows behind the revolutionaries carrying the red flag. Sharik mimics this act by following Preobrazhensky to his home and to his unwilling transfiguration. Sharik's transformation begins here, and he shows what abandoning one's individuality and blindly following at the heels of another will do:

His flank hurt unbearably, but for the moment Sharik forgot about it, absorbed by a single thought: How to avoid losing sight of this miraculous fur-coated vision in the hurly-burly of the storm and how to show him his love and devotion? Seven times along the whole length of Prechistenka as far as the intersection at Obukhov he showed it... "Don't worry, I'm not going to run away. I'll follow you wherever you like."¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Ibid, 14.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 9.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 10-11.

Not coincidentally, as soon as Sharik arrives at the Professor's home, the story changes from Sharik's point-of-view to that of a third-person narrator. By following at the heels of a greater power,—here, our revolutionary innocence—one renounces one's individuality and loses one's voice. Even Sharikov later proclaims the following when asked if he preferred life as a dog to life as a human: "So what if I had to eat out of garbage cans? At least it was an honest living."¹⁴⁶ Although we cannot be certain that Bulgakov was, in fact, responding specifically to Blok, we do know that Bulgakov was good friends with Zamyatin, whose aforementioned article "The Tame and the Wild" can aid us in our discussion of *The Heart of a Dog*, as it contains a similar assessment of those who are too eager to embrace the Bolshevik transformation. If Sharik is the wild dreamer, then Blok's tame, self-deceiving poet is the "gentleman's dog" that has been domesticated. He has lost his voice and given up his freedom in succumbing to the temptations of material comfort offered by the Professor.

Moreover, Blok can be seen as Preobrazhensky (or Zamyatin's Well-Doer) himself, as a naïve figure that is all too eager to consent to conducting the Bolshevik experiment. Artificially multiplying tame dreamers is what Preobrazhensky sets out to do without thinking of the possible consequences, which both recalls the Don Quixote type discussed in the previous chapter and echoes Blok's statement in his essay, "The Intelligentsia and the Revolution" that "it is not the artist's concern to look after how the

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 84.

concept is carried out.”¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, in his diary entry for June 11, 1919, Blok even admired the Bolsheviks’ “exceptional ability to exterminate both the personal domestic environment and individual people.”¹⁴⁸ Yet he cannot bring himself to condemn this ability, when he writes: “I don’t know whether that is bad, or not particularly so. But it is a fact.”¹⁴⁹ By the time Blok realizes the severity of the experiment, it was irreversible.

If Blok was not able to reconcile his own thoughts about the Bolshevik transformation, then we can view *The Heart of a Dog* as Bulgakov’s attempt to do so in his absence. As the “corrective” operation is about to be performed on Sharik:

Suddenly a violent thought crossed his mind. Instantly and clearly he remembered a scene from his earliest youth—a huge sunny courtyard near the Preobrazhensky Gate, slivers of sunlight reflected in broken bottles, brick rubble, and a free world of stray dogs.

No, it’s no use, I could never leave this place now. Why pretend? mused the dog, with a sniff. I’ve gotten used to this life. I’m a gentleman’s dog now, an intelligent being. I’ve tasted better things. Anyhow, what is freedom? Vapor, mirage, fiction...democratic rubbish.¹⁵⁰

One could imagine this justification coming from a self-deceiving poet, a conformist resigning himself to the fact that he has relinquished his freedom in exchange for the utopian promises of the new regime. Only one last elegiac musing about the carefree days of youth lingers in his mind as he moves forward toward transfiguration. Sharik’s

¹⁴⁷ Blok, *Sobraniye sochineniy*, t. 6, 12.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, t. 7, 365.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, t. 7, 365.

¹⁵⁰ Bulgakov, *The Heart of a Dog*, 56.

resignation exemplifies what Goldstaub calls “the credo of the self-deceiver”.¹⁵¹ “To hold your nose, close your eyes, shut your ears—and believe: this is a great talent, it makes life comfortable.”¹⁵² In becoming “a gentleman’s dog,” Sharik, like Blok, ignores his senses—the very instincts which enabled him to survive on the streets as a wild dreamer. By forfeiting his own voice, he allows himself to grow accustomed to better things that are provided to him by a higher power. Sharik acquiesces to these comforts, which are the same that Blok claims to appall him in his poetry. Yet Blok does nothing to renounce them for the perpetual struggle of the streets, tacitly agreeing to suppress his individuality as he chases the revolutionary innocence that is offered.

Zamyatin’s hatred for the self-deceiving poet resonates in Bulgakov’s portrayal of Sharik. Although Sharik resolutely claims freedom to be “vapor, mirage, fiction...democratic rubbish,” his last free thoughts are consumed by a pastoral elegy for a former, ideal life represented by the “sunny courtyard” and the “free world of stray dogs.” This is not a dream of satiety. It is not a dream of sitting by the crackling fire underneath the roof of a quiet house. No—it is a dream of being free on the streets and in communion with kindred souls who value freedom above all, a dream of childhood, free play, innocence, and Slavophile *sobornost’*. In real life, these “stray dogs” were

¹⁵¹ Dianne Sattinger-Goldstaub, “Zamyatin’s ‘Tame Dreamer’ and the Conception of D-503,” *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (1994): 343.

¹⁵² Zamyatin, “Domashnie i dikie,” *Sochineniya*, t. 4, 341-42.

individualists such as Bulgakov, Zamyatin, and Olesha, among others.¹⁵³ *The Heart of a Dog* represents this opposition between the individualists of the old world and the naïve dreamers who are all too willing to consent to the snowstorm of the Revolution.

In his last conscious moments, Sharik questions his decision to sacrifice the one thing he valued most. It is too late to return, either to his youth or to the streets of Moscow where he had to fend for himself in the brutal snowstorm. As he is anesthetized and he loses consciousness, his last thought is “What’s it all for?”¹⁵⁴ Not only does Sharik appear to be recanting his current decision to choose satiety over freedom, but he utters a thought that is most characteristic of a writer who is struggling to make sense of the world by attempting to answer life’s unanswerable questions and to come to terms with the square root of minus one, as does D-503. In her article entitled, “Failures of Transformation in *Sobac’ e serdce*,” Susanne Fusso writes: “Survival is won by refusing to capitulate to either camp, by persistence and courage in holding onto freedom—freedom from labels.”¹⁵⁵ If we were to write a credo of the wild dreamer, this may very

¹⁵³ Sergey Esenin was another such individualist poet who turned to the pastoral in order to express his dislike of the new world destroying the old. His narrator in his poems essentially wants to merge with nature to avoid the Soviet obsession with technology and machines. He wants to stand still like a tree and to stop time. However, the shepherd attains innocence and happiness through a retreat, which is also motion—a motion against the grain. Socrates states in *Phaedrus* that he is looking for knowledge “not in the woods and among trees, but within the city walls and among his fellow men.” Esenin also doesn’t *seek* knowledge in the woods; the woods are knowledge itself.

¹⁵⁴ Bulgakov, *The Heart of a Dog*, 58.

¹⁵⁵ Susanne Fusso, “Failures of Transformation in *Sobac’ e serdce*,” *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (1989): 397.

well be it. The wild dreamer wishes to seek innocence in his nature and not in any manmade ideological constructs that promise innocence but fail to deliver it, such as Preobrazhensky's experiment or the Tables of the United State.

In Zamyatin's *We*, D-503's journal similarly depicts the individual's struggle between freedom and happiness. Just as in Bulgakov's novella where the primary conflict exists between Sharik and a second possible version of himself, Sharikov, D-503's journey to the self also takes place internally. In Record Eleven, D-503 writes about the role of knowledge as the solid, ineluctable foundation for the faith that he has always had in his rational self. But now that he is aware of the square root of minus one that is within him, he writes: "But then...I look in the mirror. And for the first time in my life, yes, *for the first time in my life* [emphasis is Zamyatin's] I see clearly, precisely, consciously and with surprise, I see myself as some 'him!'¹⁵⁶ At this point, D-503 still believes that "the real I is *not* he,"¹⁵⁷ but by the end of the novel he understands that the opposite is true. His untrammled faith in knowledge and reason will be reduced to Socrates' assertion that "to know, is to know that you know nothing—that is the meaning of true knowledge" by the end of Record Seventeen. The search for innocence, then, is ultimately a conscious search for identity. Wild or tame? Citizen or shepherd? Those choosing the comforts provided by the winning side are not necessarily wrong, but they are not respected by the remaining individualists. Thus, for Zamyatin, the wild dreamer becomes the essential

¹⁵⁶ Zamyatin, *We*, 57.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 57.

image of the “spiritual revolutionary, the homeless writer who refuses to succumb to the entropic forces of philistinism.”¹⁵⁸

What is perhaps most interesting is that the arrival at this true knowledge occurs after a long, dreamlike journey through the corridors of the Ancient House (or, in Sharik’s case, a journey through the streets of Moscow). As he walks, he is only guided by his senses and not his rational mind. Several times he repeats the phrase “I don’t know” as he makes his way through the different halls and rooms. He says he is “cut off here,” and he likens the Ancient House’s corridors to the underground railways, which reminds him of the underground caves¹⁵⁹ where “they say many tried to save themselves during the Two Hundred Years’ War.”¹⁶⁰ At the end of this journey, D-503 “returned to consciousness in one of the innumerable nooks in the courtyard of the Ancient House,” with its “fence of earth with naked stone ribs and yellow teeth of walls half fallen to pieces.”¹⁶¹ This courtyard—an important symbol for both the Slavophiles and the Freemasons—littered with ruins is a place similar to the pastoral world of stray dogs which Sharik instinctively recalls as he submits to the experiment.

¹⁵⁸ Singleton, 98.

¹⁵⁹ The reference to the underground caves recalls not only Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave,” which shows that the path to true knowledge is by exiling oneself from the chains of conformity and looking directly into the light, but also Dostoevsky’s underground man, whose polemic against the tyranny of rationalism is developed in Dostoevsky’s later novels.

¹⁶⁰ Zamyatin, *We*, 92.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, 94.

Like Sharik, D-503 does eventually undergo the required operation which returns him to the clarity of daylight by making him “perfectly, absolutely healthy” so that “there is nothing foreign, nothing that prevents him from smiling.”¹⁶² But within the pages of his journal remains evidence of his soul, “that strange, ancient word that was forgotten long ago,”¹⁶³ which represents the preservation of nature and instinct. When D-503 is told that “apparently a soul has formed in you” in Record Sixteen, it is explained to him through the repeated metaphor of a mirror:

Then you see...imagine a plane, let us say this mirror. You and I are on its surface. You see? There we are, squinting our eyes to protect ourselves from the sunlight... All this is on the surface, is momentary only. Now imagine this very same surface softened by a flame so that nothing can glide over it any longer, so everything will instead penetrate into that mirror world which excites such curiosity in children. I assure you, children are not so foolish as we think they are! The surface becomes a volume, a body, a world. And inside the mirror—within you—there is the sunshine, and the whirlwind caused by the aero propeller, and your trembling lips and someone else’s lips also. You see, the cold mirror reflects, throws out, while this one absorbs; it keeps forever a trace of everything that touches it. Once you saw an imperceptible wrinkle on someone’s face, and this wrinkle is forever preserved within you. You may happen to hear in the silence a drop of water falling—and you will hear it forever.”¹⁶⁴

This analogy embodies the philosophical binary of D-503’s journey—the cold mirror represents the Enlightenment logic of the United State that leads to the material happiness of conformity, while the mirror softened by the flame signifies the individual freedom that is achieved by developing one’s own consciousness and imagination. Furthermore, the latter is associated with the innocence of childhood and is ascribed the faculty of

¹⁶² Ibid, 217.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 84.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 85.

memory, which is crucial for preserving the emotions and experiences that comprise not only individual personalities, but also communal and cultural ones. The choice is to either adhere to a memory of paradise or to blindly follow the revolution and essentially erase the memory of the past. For Zamyatin, as well as for Bulgakov, innocence is an internal concept that is found through investigation of one's consciousness.

Whereas D-503 was once frightened by the possibility of the square root of minus one's existence, he now embraces his freedom and the knowledge that his soul exists. Following his meandering journey through the underground passages of the Ancient House, he awakes to find that there are irrational forces all around him: "A fragment of sunshine coming from the mirror on my closet door shone into my eyes. This fragment did not permit me to sleep, being thus an obstacle in the way of fulfilling exactly the rules of the Tables."¹⁶⁵ When I-330 walks into his apartment, he writes: "I have become so accustomed of late to most improbable things that as far as I remember I was not even surprised."¹⁶⁶ That the sunlight enters through "a narrow crack of the door"¹⁶⁷ is a very fitting Dostoevskian¹⁶⁸ touch that symbolizes the existence of two worlds, one external and rational, and the other internal and spiritual. Moreover, while D-503 once only saw

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 95.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 95.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 96.

¹⁶⁸ Both Goryanchikov in *House of the Dead* and Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* both look through a crack in their respective prison walls, with the crack serving as a portal to a freer world.

the irrational world in dreams, he is now “no longer able to distinguish what is dream from what is actuality.”¹⁶⁹ This is the closest D-503 gets to living instinctively. He now sees that irrational numbers are an integral part of his inner self and not an external, ideological boundary. “Irrational numbers grow through my solid, habitual, tridimensional life; and instead of firm, polished surfaces, there is something shaggy and rough.”¹⁷⁰ And through his more highly developed consciousness he is also able to admit that just because you cannot see an irrational curve does not preclude its existence. He now believes that irrational equations do exist and “that they inevitably possess a whole immense world somewhere beneath the surface of our life” (96). This essentially blurs the lines between real and imaginary, making the latter seem more real than the former. Once D-503 knows that both worlds exist, he must make a conscious choice between happiness and freedom. For the individualist writer, it is impossible to remain a tame dreamer without betraying this newfound consciousness.

The investigation of these innocences associated with revolution seem to imply a binary—one can choose to be for or against. It is a choice between Wittgenstein’s rabbit or duck. Zamyatin and Bulgakov clearly chose the past, while Blok looked to the future. Although, if he had lived through the aftermath of the Revolution, perhaps he, too, would have changed his tune, as Mayakovsky eventually did. Although it is natural during

¹⁶⁹ Zamyatin, *We*, 96.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 96. This contrast suggesting that human nature is inherently flawed recalls both Dostoevsky’s aversion to the “twice two is four” of the Crystal Palace but also the masonic goal of “working the rough stone,” a phrase adopted by Douglas Smith as the title of his excellent book on the Masonic movement in 18th-century Russia.

particularly tumultuous times to look either to past or future ideals, the greatest irony is that life on the ground cannot be governed by an all-or-nothing ideology. The present forces us to make constant choices as we deal with the ambiguities of life. In the aftermath of revolution, is it right to valorize the idealist who romanticizes the old world (which was oppressive in its own right) and to condemn the rational citizen who sides with the victors in order to live better? This was a question that both Soviet artists and citizens faced throughout the twentieth century. Ultimately, it may be futile to judge one side favorably over the other. Perhaps the choices—arcadia and utopia—are too similar in that they both, to recall Eisenstein’s words, “would ‘interrupt’ and ‘overcome’ reality *as it was* and, implicitly, recast it *as it should be*.”¹⁷¹ Ksana Blank uses Wittgenstein’s rabbit-duck drawing to discuss two major approaches to ideological polarities: monistic and dualistic. Although she states that “philosophical monism is aware of the existence of the conflict [between opposite ideological poles] but strives to resolve it”¹⁷² through its search for unity, the Soviet regime did not attempt to create unity as much as it did uniformity, often through coercive measures. Furthermore, the individualist writers who clung to the old tsarist culture also did not try to achieve any unity between communists and anti-communists, since “the annulment of the conflict between thesis and antithesis

¹⁷¹ Widdis, 67.

¹⁷² Ksana Blank, “*The Rabbit and the Duck: Antinomic unity in Dostoevskij, the Russian religious tradition, and Mikhail Bakhtin,*” *Studies in East European Thought*, Vol. 59, Issue 1 (June 2007): 24.

[only] becomes possible in synthesis.”¹⁷³ The fact that it is difficult to unify conflicting ideologies might simply reaffirm the importance of the fall and of a hopeful return to innocence as a driving force of our daily choices, whether they reside in arcadia or utopia. As both Sharik and D-503 eventually succumb to the powers that be, and as the Soviet Union failed to deliver its great future, it seems that this return will remain perpetually futile outside of our dreams of the past and the future.

Thus, our heroes—D-503 and Sharik—can be considered superfluous men who attempt to mediate between ideological binaries through writing. This innate ability for higher consciousness through writing is also evidenced by the fact that, toward the end of *We*, inside The Bureau of Guardians “stood an endless chain of Numbers, holding small sheets of paper and heavy notebooks.”¹⁷⁴ D-503 seems surprised, and perhaps even annoyed, as his journal may not seem as unique if everyone else is doing the same thing. Of course, the fact that individuals perceive the world distinctly is precisely what makes writing interesting and necessary. The literary merits of D-503’s journal remain unchanged despite the initial blow to his ego that he experiences upon seeing the long line of Numbers, and the act of writing seems to serve as a “cure for this dream sickness [i.e. the experience of exile and the search for consciousness that accompanies it—C.C.],” “to make it rational, perhaps even useful.”¹⁷⁵ D-503 rightly notes that it is not

¹⁷³ Ibid, 25.

¹⁷⁴ Zamyatin, *We*, 212.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 117.

enough to simply possess consciousness; one must make it useful in some higher, anti-ideological way by reconnecting to others by striving toward *sobornost*. In Sharik's case, he is a dog, so he clearly does not keep a journal; however, he can be viewed metaphorically as an individualist writer with respect to his affinity for nature, his penchant for elegy, and his striving for higher consciousness.

Paradoxically, while their actions rebel against ideology, the severe ideological nature of the revolutionary era suggests that individualist writers such as Zamyatin and Bulgakov could not help but be considered anti-Bolshevik and, therefore, participants in the ideological struggle enacted through the search for both a literal home in the wake of the new Soviet housing policies and a cultural home following the apocalyptic leveling of the old world. All Soviet citizens were truly “thrown out of their own biographies like billiard balls out of their pockets,”¹⁷⁶ to use Mandelshtam's words. It is in this way that the nineteenth-century pattern discussed in the previous chapter—that is, the progression from type to individual—repeats itself, with communists and capitalists replacing the Slavophiles and Westernizers as the Soviet Union emerges as the new father that must indoctrinate and raise its innocent children.

¹⁷⁶ Osip Mandelshtam, “Konetz romana,” http://rvb.ru/mandelstam/dvuhtomnik/01text/vol_2/01prose/0644.htm. Accessed March 19, 2016.

CHAPTER THREE

Soviet Stagnation and the Escape from Time: A Pastoral Retreat in Cinema

Thirty million people. Many Americans like to claim that if it weren't for US forces in WWII, the free world would be speaking German. While D-Day was a major event that helped the Allied forces defeat the Nazis, the above statement is still quite exaggerated when we consider that the Soviet Union was involved in the war from start to finish and lost upward of thirty million souls in the process. The nation had experienced little but violence since the turn of the century—the Russo-Japanese War, the Russian Revolution of 1905, World War I, the 1917 Revolutions, the subsequent Civil War, and the Stalinist terror—before the Nazis decided to wage war on the Eastern front in June 1941. And if the violence was not physical, it was ideological, with the pre-revolutionary, tsarist culture being uprooted and forcibly transfigured into a new Communist world that promised a bright future, as was discussed in the preceding chapter. But while the Nazi aggression galvanized the country around Stalin, its leader and father, this chapter will focus not on the war period itself, but rather on the effect of the war period on the youth of that time. That is, the artists that will be presented in this chapter had their childhoods marred by the war and by evacuation and created their works in the following decades.

It is amidst this physical and ideological violence that we find our superfluous man in familiar surroundings. In the first chapter of this dissertation, we observed a movement from type to individual as the nineteenth century progressed. The root of this progression was Russia's late arrival onto the world stage, a homelessness centered upon the East-West question that prevented the nation from forming a distinct identity or personality. In the twentieth century, a similar pattern emerged. The Revolution erased any semblance of a personality that Russia may have had and replaced it with a new Soviet identity. This, as we have seen, required its newly minted citizens to be retrained, to be raised as children from ideological innocence to adulthood. The response to either look forward or to look back defined the Soviet or anti-Soviet types, many of whom were interested in merely surviving. This revolutionary period paralleled that of the early nineteenth century and the emergence of the superfluous type as a result of the burgeoning ideological struggle between East and West.

If the period of Nicholas I (1825-1855) was stifling and did not allow for dissent, causing the affected players to mostly look backward to German idealism, then the post-WWII era created a similar dynamic. After the euphoria of victory—tempered by severe human loss—subsided, there was a newfound confidence that the Soviet path was the ideologically correct one that liberated the masses from oppression (although quite ironically, since Stalin was killing and deporting his own people). Following Stalin's death in 1953, it seemed that the country was poised for more openness, exemplified by Khrushchev's Secret Speech in 1956 in which he denounced Stalin and proclaimed Leninism as the true (and less violent) Communist ideology.

However, this renewed promise in the Great Soviet Future soon devolved into severe stagnation. There was truly no end in sight as the second half of the century began, as the questions of Bolsheviks or Mensheviks and of monarchist or proletarian regime had long been decided. Instead, the ideological struggle pushed beyond the USSR's boundaries, first to Nazi Germany, and then to the United States, resulting in a long Cold War that could have easily turned hot at particular times. Inside the USSR, however, where was the Great Soviet Future? Even further removed from pre-revolutionary culture but with no ideological war to win on the ground at home, the Soviet Union moved from optimism to bitter pessimism as the 1950s elapsed and the 60s arrived. The sources of this pessimism, according to John Bushnell, were Soviet economic policy, middle-class materialism, and international comparisons between the USSR and both the "semi-mythical" West and Eastern Europe, "the principal standard against which the Soviet middle class measure[d] the performance of the Soviet system."¹

This retreat from post-war optimism presented artists with similar choices as they had before: arcadia or utopia. If utopia was marked by the move to cities and industrialization in the name of the future, then arcadia looked backward to a pre-modern time when human life was more directly connected to nature. In Chapter 2 we saw some of our individualist artists look back in this very way. But the major difference is that time and history were still up for grabs during the revolutionary era. The old tsarist world may have been leveled, but the future was still unclaimed. In the post-WWII era, the

¹ John Bushnell, "The 'New Soviet Man' Turns Pessimist," in *The Structure of Soviet History: Essays and Documents*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 366-68.

battle was long over. Yes, there were periods of Stalinism and then Khrushchev's attempts at reform; there were periods of terror and periods of thaw. But all of this ebb and flow was still firmly under the control of the Soviet regime, and "the Soviet citizen was called upon to submit completely to party leadership, to cultivate a collectivist ethic, and repress individualism, while at the same time becoming an enlightened and independent-minded individual who pursues knowledge and is inquisitive and creative."²

Alexey Yurchak calls this phenomenon "Lefort's paradox"—named after Claude Lefort—which is a "general paradox within the ideology of modernity: the split between *ideological enunciation* (which reflects the theoretical ideals of the Enlightenment) and *ideological rule* (manifest in the practical concerns of the modern state's political authority)."³ In other words, to fulfill its political function of reproducing power, the ideological discourse must claim to represent an "objective truth" that exists outside of it; however, the external nature of this "truth" renders the ideological discourse inherently lacking in the means to describe it in total, which can ultimately undermine its power and underlying ideological legitimacy.⁴ Lefort argues that this inherent contradiction can only be controlled by the figure of the "master," who, by being presented as standing *outside* ideological discourse and possessing *external* knowledge of the objective truth,

² Alexey Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 11.

³ *Ibid*, 10. Emphasis is Yurchak's.

⁴ *Ibid*, 10.

temporarily conceals the contradiction by allowing it “to appear through himself.”⁵ It is in this way that Andre Bazin, in his discussion of Soviet films such as *The Third Blow*, *The Battle of Stalingrad*, and *The Vow*, writes that Stalin:

is not, nor could he ever be, a particularly intelligent man or ‘genius leader,’ but rather a familiar god or incarnated transcendence. That is why, despite his real existence, his cinematic portrayal is possible today...because...the portrayal is no longer of a particular man, but of a social hypostasis, a transition toward transcendency—a myth... The phenomenon can be explained as arriving at the end of History. To make Stalin the principal hero and determiner of a real historic event while he is still alive, implies that from now on he is invulnerable to any weakness, that the meaning of his life has already and definitively been attained, and that he could never subsequently make a mistake or commit treason.⁶

This parallels the position that the tsar had occupied as both political leader and father figure. Traditionally, the tsar would make political decisions that would seem oppressive in their lack of popular representation; however, the Russian peasant was never interested in politics, so he was liberated from any political responsibility. He may have been bound to the tsar’s absolute rule, but that rule provided a protective shell under which the peasant could exert some individual influence in the social administration of the peasant *mir*. Achieving this dynamic was one of the goals of the Slavophiles in their preference to look back to pre-Petrine times as the proper path for Russia, as this system theoretically allowed for the development of both the nation and the individual. However, during the Soviet era, the individualist aspect never materialized, at least not in the

⁵ Claude Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), 211-12. Quoted in Yurchak, 10. Emphasis is Yurchak’s.

⁶ Andre Bazin, “The Stalin Myth in Soviet Cinema,” in *Movies and Methods, Volume II: An Anthology*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 36.

official sphere⁷ of Soviet life. Instead, art remained in control of the State, leaving artists with few options other than to toe the Party line.

By the 1970s, a severe stagnation had set into public life, and it was this stagnation that led artists to look backwards to a lost time, a lost childhood that represented a future of possibility in the face of a Soviet reality that felt timeless and endless. To paraphrase Yurchak—everything was still forever, and Soviet life became “a kind of postmodern universe where grounding in the real world was no longer possible, and where reality became reduced to discursive simulacra.”⁸ This atmosphere closely resembled that of the mid-nineteenth century, when individuality was not permitted by the regime, causing Russian thinkers to immerse themselves in German idealism. Similarly, the mid-late Soviet era became what Mikhail Epstein calls “a land of imagination”:

No one knows...whether the harvests reported in Stalin’s or Brezhnev’s Russia were ever actually reaped, but the fact that the number of tilled hectares or tons of milled grain was always reported down to the tenth of a percent gave these simulacra the character of hyperreality.... [A]ny reality that differed from the ideology simply ceased to exist—it was replaced by hyperreality, more tangible and reliable than anything else. In the Soviet land, “fairy tale became fact,”⁹ as in

⁷ The contrast between the official and unofficial spheres of Soviet life will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

⁸ Jean Baudrillard, “Simulacra and Simulations,” in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 166-84. Quoted in Yurchak, 75.

⁹ Quoted in Yurchak, 75. Words from a popular Soviet song: “*my rozhdeny, chtob skazku sdelat’ byl’yu* (we are born to turn fairy tale into fact).

that American paragon of hyperreality, Disneyland, where reality itself is designed as a “land of imagination.”¹⁰

It is in this “land of imagination” that Soviet filmmakers¹¹ Andrey Tarkovsky and Yuri Norstein operated. The films that will be discussed in this chapter, although produced in the 1970s, investigate the nature of Soviet childhood during WWII. Divorced from reality by the ideological forces described above, these artists resorted to searching for a lost paradise in the rupture of childhood innocence that they themselves experienced, since looking forward meant staring into the Soviet abyss with no future. It was clear that the revolutionary innocence of the 1920s had morphed into a jaded adulthood where most felt stuck. It is because this era was one of stagnation that it is analogous to the years of Nicholas I’s reign when forward action was impossible.

In a documentary film on Russian animation, Yuri Norstein says the following about his *Tale of Tales*:

You may say I reconstructed it as they reconstruct a fallen fresco. That is, sensations were combined with some sort of pre-memory, that is, something which is beyond my own self; everybody has it. When you make a gesture and

¹⁰ Mikhail Epstein, “Postmodernism, Communism, and Sots-Art,” in *Endquote: Sots-Art Literature and Soviet Grand Style*, eds. Marina Balina, Nancy Condee, and Evgeny Dobrenko (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 5-6. Quoted in Yurchak, 75.

¹¹ Sergey Paradjanov is another Soviet filmmaker who uses the image of the childhood home in his film *The Color of Pomegranates*, as well as other motifs of the pastoral. He is omitted from this discussion for two main reasons: (1) he was born in 1924 and thus was not a child during WWII and (2) although he spent several years in Moscow and was subject to the same Soviet censorship as Tarkovsky and Norstein, he lived mostly outside of Russia (Georgia, Armenia, and Ukraine). His experience would necessitate the discussion of life in those countries in order to provide context, which unfortunately falls outside the scope of this chapter and dissertation.

suddenly you say to yourself “It has already happened...it has happened one time,” though maybe it didn’t happen to you.¹²

The longing for the Arcadian bliss of childhood had plagued the nostalgic artist long before the dawn of the vicious 20th century. Responding to his exile, whether internal or external, from his native land, the nostalgic is characterized by the fact that he is not only possessed by “a mania of longing” that became a “single-minded obsession.”¹³ Yuri Norstein’s *Tale of Tales* and Andrey Tarkovsky’s *Mirror* both explore the emotions associated with the loss of innocence through the use of pastoral imagery. The use of the pastoral represents an anti-rational, anti-intellectual approach to the task of commemoration. It is an emotional process, often accessed through mundane objects that we do not expect to have such transcendental power.

The success of these films in expressing the emotional bliss of childhood and its subsequent loss is grounded in their pastoral setting, whose psychological root is “a double longing after innocence and happiness, to be recovered not through conversion or regeneration but merely through a retreat.”¹⁴ During World War II, this psychological retreat was often accompanied by a literal retreat necessitated by evacuation. Thus, artists like Norstein and Tarkovsky set out to battle not only the existential crisis bestowed upon every human being when innocence is lost, but also the historical obstacle presented by

¹² The portion on Norstein from the documentary on Russian animation entitled *Magia Russica* by Yonathan and Masha Zur can be found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQYfcA_4bak. Accessed December 6, 2010.

¹³ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 4.

¹⁴ Renato Poggioli, *The Oaten Flute: Essays on Pastoral Poetry and the Pastoral Ideal* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 1.

their particular place and time that intensified the pursuit of this lost paradise. The “oblivion, blissful arrest of motion, and innocence of timelessness”¹⁵ of the pastoral provide a natural refuge for these filmmakers, who offer a vehicle through which the viewer can connect to the emotional triggers portrayed, providing an antidote for both the existential and the historical struggle associated with adulthood and with modern existence. Thus, the tendency toward nostalgia and the pastoral can often be found accompanied by a great pain or trauma from which the victim suffers. For Soviet artists, this personal trauma was also a communal one that was experienced by many fellow citizens. But while such a trauma might be commonplace amongst people living in a totalitarian state, its expression in art is far from trivial or mundane. While studying its effects on soldiers, some doctors associated nostalgia with sickness or paranoia. However, the nostalgic was also found to have “an amazing capacity for remembering sensations, tastes, sounds, smells, the minutiae and trivia of the lost paradise that those who remained home never noticed.”¹⁶ It is the pain of having fallen and of being exiled from our homes that allows us to experience our worlds more poignantly and therefore to achieve a higher level of consciousness through the process of reconstructing the fallen fresco that Norstein describes.

The pastoral, or paradise myth, has a rich tradition in Russian literature that is grounded in the eighteenth century. Peter the Great repeatedly referred to Petersburg as “paradise,” and, although he used the Western word *paradiz*, he “was also preserving a

¹⁵ Ibid, 14.

¹⁶ Boym, 4.

precedent from Kievan times when some rulers called their homes or towns *Rai*.”¹⁷ In fact, “the eighteenth-century paradise myth was the product of a gradual merger...of various classical, biblical, and patristic traditions of perfect times and places into a single ‘megamyth’—a compendium of the historical myths depicting the good life.”¹⁸ Stephen Lessing Baehr writes that, by the time they reached Russia in the eighteenth century, most of these historical myths had become interchangeable. Whether it was termed paradise, golden age, Elysium, promised land, Fortunate Islands, Eden, heaven on earth, Arcadia, or peaceable kingdom, “the ideal place and time was often defined or described through identical details.”¹⁹ These common details included motifs such as eternal spring, communal property,...the presence on Earth of Astraea (the virgin goddess of justice who left the earth when mankind became corrupt and whose return would signal a new golden age), rivers of milk and honey, swords beaten into plowshares, the wolf lying with the lamb, and abundant food without work.”²⁰ The myth included depictions of “the rhetorical topos of *locus amoenus* (the pleasant place)”—gardens, flowers, birds, warm breezes, and spring. “The myth thrived on detail, mirroring on the lexical level the essence of paradisaic content—abundance.”²¹

¹⁷ Stephen Lessing Baehr, *The Paradise Myth in Eighteenth-Century Russia: Utopian Patterns in Early Secular Russian Literature and Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 1.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 2.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 2.

²¹ *Ibid*, 2.

Interestingly, one of the most important lexical patterns of the paradise myth was the negative formula, which defined ideal places and times not through the presence of positive qualities but through the absence of negative ones.²² The negative formula provided a particularly good vehicle for social criticism, picturing paradise as excluding undesirable qualities present in the society of the author (which was often implicitly compared to hell).²³ For example, Ovid in *Metamorphoses* defined the golden age as having no war, work, poverty, laws, judges, or foreign travel. Baehr notes that this latter detail reflects the idea that foreign travel could corrupt perfection through bad examples and thus could taint morals.²⁴ We can recall from Chapter One Karamzin's statement that a domestic education was preferable to a foreign one for these same reasons. Thus:

the myth frequently depicted the creation of an ideal community where nature (including human nature) is benevolent, emphasizing such themes as the renewed friendship between man and beast (as in Virgil's Fourth Eclogue or the Book of Isaiah); the return of a lost prelapsarian language allowing complete communication between man and nature; the existence of an *axis mundi* in the form of a tree, mountain, or cosmic pillar connecting, and hence unifying, heaven and earth (such as that appearing in Bacon's *New Atlantis*, which draws the narrator's attention to the Book of Solomon); the return of androgynous beings (unifying both sexes in themselves as Adam supposedly had before the creation of

²² Ibid, 3.

²³ Baehr notes Horace's *Epode XVI* as an example, in which the paradisaic Islands of the Blessed are contrasted with Rome in the civil-war period. The islands are described through both positive and negative conventions of the paradise myth: a place where "the vine ripens, unpruned, its clusters into wine, . . . and fields unplowed their wealth on man bestow," where "herds and flocks unbidden bring their milky offering" with "no wolf around the sheepfold striding"; Rome, on the other hand, is described as the opposite—a hell destined to be abandoned to "mountain wolf" and "barbarian" as a result of the civil war. See DeVere translation in Horace, *The Complete Works*, ed. Casper J. Kraemer, Jr. (New York, 1936), 118-20.

²⁴ Ibid, 3.

Eve); and the use of alchemy to restore base metals to gold (through a process called *coniunctio* or the unification of male and female opposites.²⁵

In such works, groups were given precedence over individuals, the social over the personal, the communal over the private. The words “mine” and “yours” were associated with the undesirable and the word “ours” with the good. “We” predominated over “I,” and the individual was considered “good” only to the extent that he fulfilled the norms and needs of the community.²⁶

In its representation of the total victory of good over evil, the myth often portrayed a symbolic re-creation of the world in the place enjoying the good life—a restoration of the paradisaical conditions of the first age of man, which is associated with the transition from darkness to light, images of brightness and sun, and Eden’s location in the East. These images were often accompanied by themes and imagery of ideal beginnings (including virginity), childhood (the time before corruption), and primitivism (the preservation of the beginning state of mankind by simple people like shepherds or noble savages.²⁷ Womb symbols and other symbols of birth, rebirth, or re-beginning were used, along with a complete absence of time since chaos and evil cannot exist in the timeless perpetuity of paradise. Interestingly, works using this myth were often plotless, as plot depends on change and disequilibrium. The sacred place that is so central to the paradise myth must be a place separated from the rest of the universe by some physical or

²⁵ Ibid, 9.

²⁶ In Zamyatin’s *We*, D-503 refers to the inhabitant of paradise or utopia as “not one but one of.” Similarly, Chapter Four of this dissertation will discuss the implications of Sergey Dovlatov’s book *Ours: A Russian Family Album (Nashi)*.

²⁷ Baehr, 10.

symbolic boundary that provides an ethical demarcation between good and evil or between the sacred and the profane. Thus, such works were often set on inaccessible islands, on the moon, in paradisaal lands in faraway places where men had no communication or commerce with other civilizations.²⁸

In Russia, the paradise myth was strongly shaped by the Orthodox church and its Byzantine heritage. Within the Eastern church, the ability to return to a paradisaal state was emphasized far more than in the Western church.²⁹ Imagery of heaven on earth and the earthly paradise was central to the theology of the Eastern church, frequently symbolizing the church itself or linked with its rituals.³⁰ Literary reflections of this theme appeared in Russia as early as the Primary Chronicle, where the emissaries of Prince Vladimir reported to their prince about their experience in a Greek Orthodox church: “We did not know whether we were in heaven or on earth because there is no such sight and no such beauty on earth and we do not know how to tell about it. We only know that God dwells there with men.”³¹

Eventually, the Orthodox idea of the church as heaven on earth was usurped by the state, with the tsar becoming “the living icon of God just as the whole empire is the

²⁸ Ibid, 10.

²⁹ Gerhart B. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), Chapter 3. Quoted in Baehr, 14.

³⁰ Baehr, 14-15.

³¹ Ibid, 15.

icon of the heavenly world.”³² The biblical idea that God made man in His own image and likeness contributed to this transfer. According to Richard Pipes, the secular paradise myth in eighteenth-century Russia was characterized by the Muscovite “ideal of royal absolutism,” which consisted of four elements: the idea of Moscow as the Third Rome; “the imperial idea” connecting the rulers of Moscow to the imperial line of the Roman Emperor Augustus; the depiction of Russian monarchs as universal Christian sovereigns; and the ideology that the Muscovite sovereigns received their authority from God.³³

With the fall of Byzantium, the paradise myth began to appear explicitly in secular Russian literature. At first, it was used primarily as ecclesiastical propaganda, but then became part of official state propaganda thanks in large part to the power struggle between Patriarch Nikon and Tsar Alexis, who deposed the former and proclaimed the superiority of the state over the church. Reacting to Nikon’s depiction of the church as a “second state” and its patriarch as a “second tsar,” Peter I (Alexis’s son) substituted a

³² George P. Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind: Kievan Christianity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 208. Quoted in Baehr, 17.

³³ Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1974), 232-33. Quoted in Baehr, 18. Baehr notes that these Byzantine-influenced ideas became particularly strong in Muscovite Russia as a result of a number of factors: the immigration to Russia in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries of many prominent Bulgarian and Serbian intellectuals, who produced new Russian translations of Byzantine political tracts that helped bolster Muscovite sacred imperialism (including Agapetus’s “Hortatory Chapters”); the fall of Byzantium (the “Second Rome”) to the Turks in 1453; the marriage of Ivan III to the niece of the last Byzantine emperor in 1472, leading to claims that Moscow was the successor of the Byzantine empire; and the final Russian rejection of the domination of the Mongol Horde in 1480. Together, these factors helped infect Muscovy with messianism. From this time forward, the tendency of Russia to depict itself as a “perfected theocracy” and to idealize its present situation—two mainstays of the paradise myth in eighteenth-century Russia—became particularly well developed.

state-controlled synod for the Patriarchate. In his 1721 Ecclesiastical Regulation, Peter wrote:

The common people, not knowing the difference between the spiritual and the autocratic power, and being impressed by the greatness and fame of the supreme pastor [patriarch], think him a second sovereign, equal or even superior in power to the autocrat, and believe the church to be another and higher state.³⁴

The paradise myth, which frequently served to idealize, propagandize, and mythologize autocracy, often tried to reverse this perception by portraying the state as another and higher church: “After Nikon, Russia no longer had a church: It had a religion of state. From there to state religion it required but one step.”³⁵ By portraying the Russian state, instead of the church, as heaven on earth, the tsar as an “earthly god” or the “icon of God,” and his Russia (the “new Zion”) as transfigured through his efforts, the myth strongly contributed to the “one religion—that of directing all citizens equally toward the good of the state.”³⁶ Interestingly, this resembles quite closely both the messianic philosophy of the Slavophiles and the state religion that was constructed by the Soviets in the twentieth century, with Lenin or Stalin as the earthly God and the Soviet state as heaven on earth. It becomes a fascinating paradox, then, that the Soviet regime that repelled the likes of Tarkovsky and Norstein used similar imagery and themes as the paradisaal communities to which those artists retreated,³⁷ as evidenced by the titles of

³⁴ Baehr, 21.

³⁵ Ibid, 21.

³⁶ Quoted in Gregory L. Freeze, *The Russian Levites: Parish Clergy in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 13.

³⁷ Though both use similar themes and imagery, throughout this dissertation (mainly in Chapters 2 and 3) I have been using the term “utopia” to mean looking forward in the

socialist realist works of the 1940s and 1950s such as *Happiness*, *Light in Koordi*, *Light on Earth*, *Verkhovina Our Light*, *Light over the Fields*, *The Knight of the Golden Star*, *New Horizons*, *The Future*, *The Dawn*, *The Dawn of a Great Construction Site*, *The Sun that Never Sets*, *The Moscow Dawns*, and *Far from Moscow*.³⁸ Thus the Petrine reforms indicated the birth of a “new people”³⁹ and a “new Russian world of order, peace, and perfection [that] was filled with divine grace and celebrated the sanctification of God’s image on earth.”⁴⁰ In fact, Peter himself was often depicted as a gardener in the act of transplanting and re-rooting, which signifies the search for roots as an integral component of Russian intellectual history, as has been discussed.

But while the eighteenth-century paradise myth focused on the development of a collective identity, the implications were particularly important for the gentry. Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, and continuing through the nineteenth, a large portion of the Russian nobility became enamored with the idea of retreating from the clamor and the complexity of the larger, civilized world in order to heed Voltaire’s famous dictum to

hopes of building a perfect society and “arcadia/paradise” to mean looking backward to re-create a past golden age.

³⁸ Thomas Lahusen, *How Life Writes the Book: Real Socialism and Socialist Realism in Stalin’s Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 26.

³⁹ Prince Antioch Kantemir, satire 2, line 284, quoted in Baehr 41. Baehr cites this from Lotman and Uspensky, “Myth-Name-Culture,” in *Semiotics and Structuralism: Readings from the Soviet Union*, ed. Henryk Baran (White Plains, NY: International Arts and Sciences Press, 1974), 17. Cf. their comment that the Petrine period is marked by a “profound belief in the complete and absolute rebirth of the country, a belief that naturally stresses the magical role of Peter the Great.”

⁴⁰ Baehr, 29. See Baehr, especially chapters 2, 3, and 4 for various examples of eighteenth-century Russian poets and their works that glorify the Russian state and its leaders.

“cultivate one’s garden,” drawing themselves inward into the self and into the family. In his book on Andrey Bolotov and the Russian pastoral, Thomas Newlin discusses the “crisis of vocation or calling that many enlightened noblemen [experienced] in the wake of Peter III’s celebrated decree of 1762, which released the nobility once and for all from obligatory service and opened the way for them to return...to the pastoral peace and quiet of their estates.”⁴¹ While this did allow the nobleman a higher degree of freedom, it also created a rift between the gentry and Russian society that would widen throughout the nineteenth century. In other words, it signified the birth of our superfluous man. Instead of “marking the nobility’s ‘victory’ over the state,...[the decree] marked the state’s declaration of ‘independence’ from the service of the nobility.”⁴² Newlin writes that Bolotov, like many who chose to return to their estates after the 1762 decree, “must have experienced a paradoxical gamut of emotions: he was both suddenly free and suddenly abandoned.”⁴³ This was the primary reason that these “newly free citizens [needed] to reimagine and redefine their notion of service after their return to their pastoral garden-estates.”⁴⁴

As I argue throughout this dissertation, the superfluous man embodied this new definition of service through the literary act. The challenge of making this argument lies

⁴¹ Thomas Newlin, *The Voice in the Garden: Andrey Bolotov and the Anxieties of the Russian Pastoral, 1738-1833* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 12.

⁴² Marc Raeff, *The Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia: The Eighteenth-Century Nobility* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966), 109.

⁴³ Newlin, 12.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 13.

in the fact that not all of these noblemen wrote and in the probability that they most likely did not understand the historical significance of their abandonment at the time. Bolotov's first contact with his superfluity appeared during a walk he took in 1754 on his Dvoryaninovo estate in the Tula province when he heard a voice in the garden that called him by name. He answered the voice, but then the voice went silent, producing a terror that caused him to run back to his house. Gogol's "Old-World Landowners" and Dostoevsky's "Peasant Marey" convey similar experiences. Although Newlin acknowledges that the three instances are not exactly the same, there are some fundamental parallels: overcome by a sense of existential horror, the young nobleman flees in panic from the solitary, Edenic space where he heard the voice and regains his composure only after abandoning the idyllic realm and reentering the traditionally unidyllic realm of society."⁴⁵ Eventually individuals like Bolotov came to enjoy the space that life on the estate provided for intellectual pursuits. In a 1761 letter, Bolotov writes that he now finds the government office to be stuffy and full of unenlightened souls that only know how to complain. He feels that they do this because they do not know what to do with their spare time, while he is never bored anymore because his thoughts allow him to escape the earthly world and find both tranquility and spiritual happiness in his intellectual immersion in lofty ideas:

Up until this time I avoided moments of solitude; they seemed like a prison to me. Now I know of nothing more pleasant. I seek them out, and am vexed when something prevents me from doing so... What a yearning has taken hold inside of me since then to devote myself to this useful task and to observe myself making

⁴⁵ Newlin, 6.

steady progress therein. No, dear friend, I would not exchange this advantage for any treasure on earth.⁴⁶

Writing, then, acts as a way for individuals like Bolotov to investigate, like Proust in search of the meaning of his madeleine, the sources of this mystical sensory input. Despite the fact that Bolotov writes in his memoirs that he only lacked one thing—an interlocutor;⁴⁷ that “letter writing [is] a private affair”;⁴⁸ and that “the epistolary exchange that Bolotov proposed—between himself and himself—was doubly interiorized,”⁴⁹ the mere process of putting oneself on paper was in some sense an important act of exteriorization.⁵⁰

As it relates to our current discussion of our superfluous man, this investigation is vital because it “is conjured out of an array of binary opposites [such as here and there, then and now, city and country, individual and society, and, stemming from these, Western civilization and Russian rural life, culture and provincialism, and enlightenment

⁴⁶ Bolotov, “Pis'ma k Tulub'evu,” quoted in Newlin, 23. Interestingly, this 1761 realization occurs seven years after his experience of hearing the “voice in the garden.” Seven years, an age used frequently by Dostoevsky in his works, indicates the age at which a child can recognize his own sin/guilt according to the Russian Orthodox Church, an age at which the individual reaches a certain level of consciousness.

⁴⁷ Newlin, 44.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 53.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 53. This was characteristic of the nobleman’s “newfound propensity for inner *dedoublement*. In an anonymous essay published in December 1757 in *Monthly Compositions for Profit and Amusement*, the author writes that he has “acquired the habit of conferring with my own self, and dividing myself into two persons, one of whom asks questions, and the other of whom provides answers.” Quoted in Newlin, 55.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 53.

and ignorance].”⁵¹ That this solitary search⁵² is the most productive for him indicates that he is engaged in “useful work” through the development of his personality. This nebulous, unrecognized, and often overwhelming task of investigation allows the superfluous man to mediate between these binaries, thereby liberating himself from their ideological chains. We must note, however, that this does not mean an avoidance of civilization in favor of the simple, pastoral life:

The eighteenth-century Russian pastoral dreamer, while quick to voice his discontent with city and court life and with the perceived ‘corruption of morals’ brought on by Western influences,...was by no means willing to forgo the intellectual and aesthetic stimulation offered by Western culture or to repudiate the sophistication, the polish, and the creature comforts he had acquired while out in the larger world.⁵³

This illustrates the danger of blindly accepting either side of the binary. It just as harmful to dwell permanently in the pastoral life as it is to fully conform to societal norms without investigating how they affect one’s individual self. It was this lack of soul searching that

⁵¹ Ibid, 19-20.

⁵² Newlin argues that “Bolotov’s epistolary zeal is in itself a telling manifestation of the pastoral psyche’s essential self-absorption and self-indulgence, and that in his early letters we begin to discern, in embryonic form, a new and important tendency in Russian literature that would find its purest and most extreme expression in the poetry of Fet: the privileging and celebration of the lyric ‘I’” (27). Newlin’s comparison to Fet is based on his observation that this “dreamy, lyric ‘I’” seems out of place in both “the state-dominated Russia of 1760 as it does in the Bazarovite Russia of 1860.” Similarly, as I argue in the current chapter, the 1960s, like the 1760s and 1860s, were a similar time of stagnation for “superfluous” artists such as Norstein and Tarkovsky who retreated into the pastoral. There are plenty of other artists that celebrate this lyric “I”—most notably Baratynsky and Esenin, both of whom considered themselves the “last poet” in their pastoral musings. I decided not to include them in this discussion and to remain with Bolotov because the eras of Baratynsky and Esenin were much more tumultuous (as discussed in Chapter 2) and do not fit the response to societal stagnation that we observe in the likes of Bolotov, Norstein, and Tarkovsky.

⁵³ Ibid, 41.

led to the failure of the nineteenth-century tendency of some intelligentsia members to go to the peasants; they understood neither the peasants nor their own selves.

In response to the suffering of the nobleman confined to his estate and the existential and social impotence that accompanied it, the childhood myth acquired a new significance. It is not coincidence that these abandoned souls looked back to their childhoods because this was the only firsthand experience that they had with any semblance of a private life.⁵⁴ Although there were traces of the conception of childhood in the eighteenth century,⁵⁵ Andrew Wachtel argues that “until [the publication of Tolstoy’s *Childhood* in September 1852 in the journal *Contemporary*] Russian culture lacked a coherent integral model for the expression and interpretation of this stage of life... In short, for the Russian imagination, childhood was a gigantic *terra incognita*, waiting to be discovered.”⁵⁶ Additionally, a more extensive exploration of childhood emerged in the mid-nineteenth century because most of the great estates had been broken up by the 1820’s and 1830’s (through a combination of the French invasion, spendthrift

⁵⁴ Newlin, 21.

⁵⁵ Aside from what we have already seen in the writings of noblemen like Bolotov, Russian sentimentalism in the 1790s provided what Wachtel calls “a competing model for rural paradise” in the sense that “nature was still idealized, but the ideal became the less formal English park, in place of the perfectly geometrical French garden. Authors such as Karamzin extolled the beauties of “real” nature, depicting a less stylized natural environment than that of classicism, thereby providing the bridge that linked the real world of the Russian estate with the pastoral ideals of the Enlightenment (118-19). For more on the influence of classicism and the Enlightenment on the Russian pastoral, see Newlin on Bolotov, Baehr on the eighteenth-century paradise myth, and Rudolf Neuhauser, *Towards the Romantic Age: Essays on Sentimental and Preromantic Literature in Russia* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974).

⁵⁶ Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *The Battle for Childhood: Creation of a Russian Myth* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 2-3.

heirs, and the lack of primogeniture in Russia).⁵⁷ The typical estate was now smaller, but “the new generation of writers had grown up on the estate and, instead of seeing it as a temporary escape from social life, knew it as a way of life.”⁵⁸ This new generation included writers such as Tolstoy, Herzen, Glinsky, Aksakov, and Goncharov and their readers, who understood “the importance of nature and the ability to commune with it...as the legacy of a rural childhood”:

Adult narrators consistently see nature as an antidote to society and the disappointments of life. Nature’s intimate connection to childhood, the period before such disappointments begin, only strengthens its role: “Those who passed their early childhood in the country are very fortunate. It is only in the country that a person can learn to love nature with all her heart, and that love for mother nature remains with you for your whole life.”⁵⁹ For many an adult looking back on childhood, it was the isolation of the estate, the vast expanse of forest or fields surrounding it, that made the greatest impression.⁶⁰

And although Russian gentry children had been growing up on such estates at least since the previous century, “they did not learn to express their joyous memories until Goncharov, Tolstoy, and Aksakov had given literary form to childhood in a concrete historical situation,”⁶¹ further emphasizing the significance of the literary act as a means of both expression and commemoration of a particular time and place in history. These memories were made more valuable by the changing political and social circumstances in

⁵⁷ Ibid, 119.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 119.

⁵⁹ A. K. Lelong, “Vospominaniya,” *Russkiy arkhiv*, 1913, bk. 2, no. 7, p. 67. Quoted in Wachtel, 121.

⁶⁰ Wachtel, 121.

⁶¹ Ibid, 124.

the countryside after the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, an event which “convinced many people that the type of childhood they had experienced would never again be possible.”⁶² Thus, “personal desire for a re-creation (albeit literary) of paradise lost joined with a certain class consciousness induced by the psychological jolt of emancipation, and the result was a flood of idealized biographies.”⁶³

While the pastoral scenes of nineteenth-century Russian literary works—such as Tolstoy’s *Childhood*, Goncharov’s “Oblomov’s Dream,” and Aksakov’s *Childhood Years of Bagrov’s Grandson*—were connected to the happy childhoods experienced on the gentry estate, the brutality of the 20th century, specifically that of the Eastern front in World War II, caused many childhoods to be marred by wartime scarcity, evacuation, and death. If each adult is, by definition, fated to organically lose his innocence, the reality of events such as world war forced the premature loss of that innocence for children of that era. Of course, literary explorations of this theme did not cease. Proust’s madeleine, for one, beautifully shows how the trivial can serve as an object of transcendence. And cinematic representations are certainly not limited to Russian filmmakers. We can look to Citizen Kane’s beloved “Rosebud” to illustrate this type of longing for childhood bliss. But the pairing together here of Tarkovsky and Norstein is justified, not only by their common exploration of the existential crisis inherent in adulthood, but also by the specific community created by the nostalgic search for lost Soviet childhoods, in particular. Although the nostalgic can be viewed simply as an individual who holds on to

⁶² Ibid, 124.

⁶³ Ibid, 124.

“erroneous notions” that cause him to lose touch with the present, “nostalgia goes beyond individual psychology”:

At first glance, nostalgia is a longing for a place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time—the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams. In a broader sense, nostalgia is a rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress. The nostalgic desires to obliterate history and turn it into a private or collective mythology, to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition.⁶⁴

Nostalgia, then, escapes the melancholic solipsism of individual desires and memory through its focus on childhood and on its device of the pseudo-autobiography, which work together to create a sense of collective memory and longing that is created by the emotions attached to artifacts and relics that hold shared meaning.

While the “portable nature of [these] relics (such as souvenirs, mementos, and other memorabilia) means that they can help us recall past events without our having to be physically present at the place where they actually occurred,”⁶⁵ Norstein and Tarkovsky rely on the image of the childhood home and courtyard to serve as an emotional trigger for the viewer. The actual home is not portable, of course, but the cinematic image of the house certainly is. In this sense, cinema has a unique ability to trigger the viewer’s involuntary memory containing the essence of the past by combining aural and visual representations that defy what Norstein calls “a quotidian logic,” and that strive for:

⁶⁴ Boym, 3.

⁶⁵ Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 43.

something interior, something musical...like the feelings of childhood. Then everything around you will become a part of your everyday existence and no longer appear unusual...The problem is that we've destroyed our sense of hearing. Herzen's words are totally true here—before the freedom of speech you must have the freedom of hearing.⁶⁶

Hearing the music implies the subordination of reason in one's perception of the world. (To this end, Norstein himself rebelled against the use of computers in the film industry.) It is no coincidence, then, that films such as *Tale of Tales* and *Mirror* rely on Bach's music to help convey the emotions associated with our lost innocence. In his book *Russian Nights* (1844), which explores the human desire for knowledge in conjunction with the elusive nature of our integral knowledge, Vladimir Odoevsky praises Bach as the supreme example of an artist. "To music he brings his astounding genius and the inner peace that only Faith and Love can give... Bach calmly and methodically expresses in traditional forms the inspiration within him. Yet even the highest artistic achievement is not an adequate answer to the ideal of human life."⁶⁷ Tarkovsky also makes Bach a prominent part of his musical score for *Mirror*. But although Bach's music cannot sustain the transcendent feeling it creates, it represents the fact that we do possess the memory of our lost paradise that these two films try to re-create.

In an attempt to rehabilitate this sense of hearing, Norstein uses the famous lullaby—"The Little Grey Wolf Will Come"—that played a vital role in the childhoods of millions of Soviet children. Along with "many other unrealized childhood dreams the

⁶⁶ Quoted in David MacFadyen, *Yellow Crocodiles and Blue Oranges: Russian Animated Film Since World War Two* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 120.

⁶⁷ Ralph E. Matlaw, Introduction to Vladimir Odoevsky's *Russian Nights* (New York: E.P. Dutton, & Co., Inc., 1965), 19.

wolf was forgotten. He went off into our store of memories, to be suddenly remembered—perhaps because of a particular aroma, the scraping of a door.” The wolf would then “live for a moment, bringing a sharp, physically perceptible pain in one’s heart, before disappearing again for years, perhaps forever.”⁶⁸ Similarly, Tarkovsky’s use of Bach’s music and of his father’s poetry as aural accompaniments to the visual portrayal of the pastoral elevates the emotional response in the viewer, connecting the viewing experience with childhood memory. It is the cinematic portrayal of these relics that aids the artist (and viewer) in temporarily overcoming the existential and historical crises that they face.

Childhood happiness, then, is a natural thematic fit for these two filmmakers, as it opposes the logic and reason of adulthood and of historical progress. Norstein’s film opens with the wolf, himself a relic of the Soviet childhood experience, who makes eye contact with the child, connecting memory to the earthly world. A beam of light emerges from the open door of the house, drawing the wolf inside. In this sense, the house plays the same role as the Masonic temple, a place that is isolated from the sin and vice of the rational world where one can achieve both individual purification and spiritual community. The wolf passes through the threshold and is transported to a harmonious world in which man and nature commune. The poet and his harp recall a pastoral scene that represents the innocence that is suppressed and stamped out by the cold logic of the external world. For Norstein, the childhood home is the primary object that acts as a

⁶⁸ Clare Kitson, *Yuri Norstein and “Tale of Tales”: An Animator’s Journey* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 13.

trigger that can mythically transform the earthly realm into the paradise of the ideal state of humanity. As in the story of Apollo and Daphne, the object becomes “a consoling sign that carries in itself the reminder of the loss on which it has been founded.”⁶⁹

Like Norstein, Tarkovsky, too, was confronted with evacuation and the horrors of war, and sought to resurrect the emotional purity of his childhood home. *Mirror* explores this loss and the hope of a return to childhood through memory. Tarkovsky uses the dacha to establish the serenity and emotional security of childhood before contrasting it with the emptiness of the city apartment. After the early scene at the dacha, Tarkovsky’s narrator is heard speaking in his Moscow apartment. We don’t see him, only the icy, blue tones of the room to denote emptiness, silence, and abandonment, which opposes the peace of nature combined with the emotional tone of the poetry that was simultaneously heard in the country. In the apartment, we hear the narrator talk on the phone with his mother, asking her about his childhood. At the end of the conversation, he asks forgiveness, because, in our adult lives, we can’t re-create that precious space that we hold dear. But it is the memory of that space that allows us to be freed from the chains of modern life, enabling us to exist on a higher, spiritual plane. However, this memory cannot be sustained. One of “happiest” moments for the children in the film is when the father returns from war and they embrace. The emptiness that pervades the earlier scenes (along with the mother’s tears) is accentuated when the father returns. Then again, they are there in evacuation, which represents the world of logic and reason that disrupts the

⁶⁹ Peter M. Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 5.

characters' ability to maintain any kind of organic *sobornost'*, to use the early Slavophile phrase. Tarkovsky uses the burning down of the house or the collapsing of the ceiling to visually demonstrate the chasm left in the artist's biography at the hands of history. (Similarly, in *Stalker*, Tarkovsky also uses destruction as an event that precedes the creation of a space—the Zone—in which the characters search for a lost identity and spirituality.)

In *Tale of Tales*, the peace of the boy's communion with nature (the crows) is juxtaposed with his parents sitting nearby on the bench. The father is drinking and the mother eventually drags the boy away, tearing him from his paradise and forcing him to participate in the corruption and degradation of the adult world. The boy instinctively resists, longingly gazing back at the fallen apple. But, due to the persistent force of the mother, he inevitably falls in line, as if he is a wild animal in the process of being tamed.⁷⁰ Paradoxically, the child is being taken away from the paradise that is his nature. A Napoleonic hat appears on the drunken father's head, associating him with the "conceit of reason" common to Napoleonic representatives in Russian literature such as Raskolnikov or Pushkin's Hermann, as was discussed in the first chapter. Once the boy falls in line, he passes in front of the mother and walks on the heels of his father, abandoning the nurturing ability of the feminine pole for the logical and destructive machinations of the masculine. The Napoleonic hat then appears on the boy's head, foreshadowing the violent influence of the adult world on the innocent youth, an inevitable influence that infringes upon and shapes the latter's personality and will. It is

⁷⁰ Recall the discussion of tame and wild citizens in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

precisely the corruption of the boy and his loss of innocence that leads to the development of his capacity for memory.⁷¹

Though it may be true that “the most beautiful memories are those of childhood,”⁷² simply rebuilding or returning to the actual structure of the childhood home is not sufficient. The thing and the memory of the thing are not the same, and Tarkovsky is correct in saying that:

a memory evoked in every detail merely gives rise to a bitter feeling of disappointment. There’s an enormous difference, after all, between the way you remember the house in which you were born and which you haven’t seen for years, and the actual sight of the house after a prolonged absence. Usually, the poetry of the memory is destroyed by confrontation with its origin.⁷³

In place of the actual physical structure, the emotional attachment to the childhood home is the basis for our longing for the past.⁷⁴ Furthermore, sometimes it is impossible to

⁷¹ Interestingly, a distinct parallel can be drawn to *Citizen Kane*’s childhood scene, where the boy is playing in the snow. The adults are looking from the inside of the house toward the outside, where the boy/nostalgic exile communes with nature. He is then taken away by his new benefactor. His sled, the relic of his happiness, is left behind and is slowly buried by the falling snow.

⁷² Tarkovsky, 29.

⁷³ Ibid, 29.

⁷⁴ Bolotov, too, experienced a similar “confrontation” when he re-entered his childhood home after returning from military service. “Since he had been orphaned in his early teens and had no kin waiting for him at Dvoryaninovo, he was walking into a house that had remained empty from the time he had left eight years before: ‘I cannot forget the moment I first entered the front room of my house, and the feeling which flooded into my whole soul then. No matter how dear and how beloved this, the home of my ancestors and my own home in my childhood, was to me, in returning to it now, not only fully grown but, one might say, from the great wide world, and having seen more than my share of great things, I looked at everything with completely different eyes; and inasmuch as I was already accustomed to living in well-lit and fine houses, this, my house, now seemed to me small, squalid, and a veritable prison, which indeed it was.’” Quoted in Newlin, 41.

revisit this origin, as we observe in the cases of the gentry whose homes were broken up in the 1820's and 1830's, citizens whose homes were confiscated and redistributed by the new Soviet regime in the aftermath of the Revolution, and those like Tarkovsky and Norstein whose lives were disrupted by the Nazi invasion.

It is toward this combination of personal history and sensory experience that the device of the pseudo-autobiography is used, as it allows the artist to use material from his own life yet also relieves him of the obligation to be completely bound by truth, enabling him to create a fictional world to which the viewer, having had his own similar experience in the face of both the existential and historical crises, can relate.⁷⁵ As children, the bliss that we experience can be attributed to the fact that we have nothing with which to compare it. The adult narrator, however, reflects back to the protagonist's present-day, allowing him to temporarily leave his contemporary world for what he perceives to be a better time. Both Norstein's and Tarkovsky's choice to seek Eden in the confines of childhood memory presupposes the bitter irony of knowing that this search is futile, since our search for this lost innocence is only possible because we have traded innocence for knowledge. As adults, we only recognize the existence of the innocence we once had because of the loneliness and indifference, if not brutality, of the external world we have been forced to know. And while the *toska* that results from this experience is always present, it is greatly sharpened during times of extreme and horrific historical events. Thus, the historical event is experienced through our emotions, and it is the

⁷⁵ Wachtel, 18.

emotional scar that causes us to remember. Memory and knowledge only exist outside of Eden.

Of course, each film is extremely personal to its respective creator. *Tale of Tales* originated from Norstein's description of his childhood environment, including the summer evenings, the smell of wet foliage, and the song "Utomylyonnoe solntse," only to end with the void that accompanies the absence of these things. For Norstein, the anti-Semitism he constantly experienced, along with the death of his father when he was only fifteen, exacerbated his need to seek solace in memory. The environment created by the Brezhnev era also contributed to his immersion in his own soul. Norstein said of that period: "In one word—it was stuffy. We didn't have enough air. But the strange thing is that when a lot of things outside you are closed off you go inside yourself and find the freedom you need,"⁷⁶ a solution that echoes precisely what the *Vekhi* authors criticized the nineteenth-century Russian intelligentsia for not having done. That Norstein worked in animation helped him a great deal, since the atmosphere in those studios was more relaxed. "For one thing, animation had rarely dealt with contemporary, recognizable life—in fact it rarely even dealt with human characters... Nobody seemed to take animation seriously."⁷⁷ However, animation succeeds in its use of metaphor to "resist logical developments" and to "achieve transformations in figures and objects, detailing their intrinsic capabilities."⁷⁸ Thus, animated films were perhaps able to convey human

⁷⁶ Kitson, 32.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 33.

⁷⁸ MacFadyan, 43.

memory more effectively than films made with human actors that were forced to express Soviet dogma. The combination of these conditions created the space for Norstein to explore the emotions involved with returning to one's childhood innocence in the face of the rigidity of Soviet ideology and the propaganda campaigns against Solzhenitsyn and Sakharov in the 1970's.

Tarkovsky also based his film on his upbringing, with the childhood house playing a primary role. Although the Soviet censors made it extremely difficult for filmmakers to produce works dealing with topics that were considered controversial or subversive, Tarkovsky's was able to make his films that investigate conscience and memory. Upon visiting a Moscow hospital to see his father, who had lost his leg in the war, a young Tarkovsky suddenly said, "I often dream of my childhood home."⁷⁹ That this image of the childhood home is central to *Mirror* supports Vlada Petric's statement that the film is "a dream film *par excellence*"⁸⁰ in its reflection of Tarkovsky's own reminiscences of his youth by evoking "emotional, often highly visceral responses in the viewer, instead of triggering ideas meant to support a particular attitude toward society and history."⁸¹

By directing the viewer's attention away from linear time and concrete historical events, which Tarkovsky weaves into his film to solidify the contrast, his work produces

⁷⁹ Marina Tarkovskaya, "Ya mogu govorit'," <http://tarkovskiy.su/texty/vospominania/MAMemoires.html>. Accessed November 15, 2012.

⁸⁰ Vlada Petric, "Tarkovsky's Dream Imagery," *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Winter, 1989-1990): 28.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 28.

precisely the opposite effect as the image of Stalin as the mythical father. That image of Stalin (although not portrayed in Tarkovsky's own films) and, by proxy, Soviet ideology, is weakened when confronted with Tarkovsky's cinematic sequences that:

contain many features characteristic of dream process, such as the bizarreness of the situation, strong physical motion, obfuscated peripheral vision (elimination of the image's borders), the flickering effect (light pulsation), an unexpected change of chromatic tonality, spatial-temporal discontinuity, pictorial distortion of objects, decelerated motion, a fluctuating focus (blurring)—all of which contribute to the acceptance of unusual occurrences taking place on the screen...[creating a] balance between the ontological authenticity of the film's image and its phenomenological obliqueness, which helps his dream imagery transcend the film 'language' as a system of signs, reaching the level of audiovisual abstraction.⁸²

These features, rooted in Tarkovsky's ability to convey his inner state in response to the stuffiness of Soviet life, bring *Mirror* closer to Norstein's world of animation in its visual suspension of reality by enabling the audience to experience an "alienating effect in relation to the reflected referent's image."⁸³ It is this audiovisual abstraction that allows Tarkovsky to "achieve poetic dream imagery within the narrative genre" by expressing "the most intense feeling of spirituality...that represent the author's 'impressions created by the logic of dream, and formed in a way most appropriate to the thinking or dreaming process.'"⁸⁴

These personal origins are woven into the plot of *Mirror*. The potentially blissful winter environment of Ignat's father's reminiscences is ruined when placed against the

⁸² Ibid, 29.

⁸³ Ibid, 30.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 34. The inner citation is quoted in Petric and was taken from Tarkovsky's 1982 celebrated lectures delivered at the Centro Sperimentale in Rome, as recorded in Donatella Baglivo's video tape *Andrey Tarkovsky: A Poet in Cinema* (1983).

backdrop of war. The bird flies up and sits on the boy's hat, and the red-haired girl with whom the father fell in love appears, but rather than linger in the bucolic innocence provided by nature, the brutality of civilization forces the boys to undergo military training, scarring the youth with its determination toward knowledge at the expense of innocence. Throughout the film, it appears that pastoral bliss in the countryside is possible. Children are communing in nature and Arseniy Tarkovsky's poetry is heard as a voice-over. But what should be a joyous experience for the children is no match for the indifference of historical destruction, which Tarkovsky portrays by juxtaposing his pseudo-autobiographical plot with documentary footage of the Spanish Civil War, disruptions on the Chinese-Russian border, and the Soviet Army crossing Lake Sivash. The personal loss of innocence is tragic in its own right, but the tragedy is deepened by the cold advance of history and material progress that moves us further and further away from our preferred paradise of youth.

The historical events of the day disrupt the idyllic scene in *Tale of Tales*, too, as the film returns the viewer from the pastoral to the material world. The peace of the harmony felt by the wolf while in paradise is broken by the cacophony of cars that suddenly appear and the train that speeds through the picture. The couples dancing to the song "Utomlyonnoe solntse" are destroyed systematically, as the integral spirit of the home is destroyed by the methodical progress of reason that is detached from any human emotion. The terror of wartime contradicts the idyllic memory previously conveyed, as death notices flash on the screen and uniformed soldiers march off in the rain and snow. Norstein transports the viewer back through the house to the heartwarming pastoral scene

of the boy eating the paradisiacal apple in the snow. But since memory is only recalled through the destruction of the pastoral order in our lives, these devastating events are what enable us to maintain our connection, however vague, to the paradise of our memories. Thus, the harmonious scene of the boy eating the apple, sharing the apple with the two crows, with his arm around one crow, must be disrupted in order for memory to be recalled, since memory is not necessary in a permanent state of paradise.

That modern life can disrupt our paradisiacal memories represents Norstein's own dislike for technology: "I'm considered to be the last wild man, who, wearing skins and holding a club in his hand, doesn't know how to talk."⁸⁵ He can communicate intuitively, but his lack of learned linguistic skills recalls Dostoevsky's "Dream of a Ridiculous Man," where man only began to speak in different languages because his focus on reason had caused his desire for isolation and for reordering the world through the creation of law and justice systems (Dostoevsky 733-34). Similarly, Tarkovsky opens *Mirror* with a scene of a young man who cannot speak. When the young man says, "I can speak," the film begins and we are whisked into the contemporary world, scarring the characters through loss and leaving them longing for the now-unattainable peace and unity of childhood.

⁸⁵ Quoted in a documentary on Russian animation entitled *Magia Russica* by Yonathan and Masha Zur, found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQYfcA_4bak. Accessed December 6, 2010.

It is no coincidence that the original title of *Mirror* was “White, White, Day,” the name of one of Arseniy Tarkovsky’s poems.⁸⁶ Not only is white a symbol of purity, but the poem includes the famous line: “To return is impossible, and to tell about it is forbidden.”⁸⁷ When the narrator dreams of his childhood home, he tells us:

And now, when I dream of those log walls, darkened from the passage of time, and the white trim on the windows, and the half-opened door that I see from the front steps into the darkened entryway, I already know in my dream that I am only dreaming, and the exhausting happiness of my return home is clouded by my anticipated awakening. But when the leaves rustle under my feet as I approach the steps, a feeling of real melancholy over my return vanquishes that happiness, and my awakening is always sad... And through the tall birch trees I see the two-storey wooden house, the house in which I was born and where my grandfather Nikolai Matveevich would pick me up and put me on top of the table covered in a starched tablecloth forty years ago. And the dream is so convincing and authentic that it seems more real than reality.

The boy that we see on the screen as we hear these words approaches the house, but cannot open the door. Our memory of childhood seems more real than reality, which is why the knowledge of the memory’s unsustainability, coldly confirmed by our inevitable return to reality, is accompanied by such a deep sense of despair and emptiness.

Moreover, these physical and metaphorical movements between history and dream convey, as Vladimir Golstein writes, not only the anxiety of the historical period, but also of the “most pertinent questions of existence: where are we going, from where did we come, and who are we,” the same questions that were asked during the second quarter of the nineteenth century:

⁸⁶ The title of the poem derives from one of its lines: “A stone lies by the jasmine. / Under the stone, a treasure. / Father stands by the road. / A white, white day.”

⁸⁷ «Вернуться туда невозможно и рассказать нельзя...»

What characterizes [moments of movement in Tarkovsky, such as the crossing of Lake Sivash mentioned above—C. C.] is not so much a destination, but rather the journey itself, the negotiation of distances, of crossing the lines, connecting the dots—transferring, transposing, transforming, and expanding.... In Tarkovsky's films anxiety is produced by all sorts of movement, not just the one that takes a person from point A to point B.... Life and death, cold and warmth, stasis and movement, non-human and human—all possible boundaries appear to be crossed during this moment... These scenes are energetic not only because their violence provides some sort of adrenalin boost or catharsis, but because their confusion and rapid negotiation of alternative states provokes a sense of alarm and anxiety, coupled with the sense of expanded vision, of a higher degree of awareness, and of the renewed energy that one needs to negotiate such complexities and tensions.⁸⁸

This expansion of vision, which Golstein suggests that Tarkovsky learned from Dovzhenko (especially from his film, *Earth*), is characteristic of artists who look inward so they can “go beyond the limitations of linear logic in order to convey that special essence of imperceptible linkages and hidden phenomenon of life, in all its profound complexity and truth.”⁸⁹ It is in this way that Tarkovsky and our superfluous man in general act as a mediator between the material world and the realm of higher consciousness in an attempt to unify the two, both for himself and for his audience.

Similarly, although Norstein's childhood scene is re-created, only some of the dance partners return, and the accordion player now has only one leg. Even in the world of animation, the movement of history and the subsequent anxiety that it produces disrupt the dream world. When the wolf returns once more to the pastoral scene, the ox jumps rope alone, as opposed to the earlier participation of the young girl and the tree. The unity of man's lost paradise has disappeared, and the poet sits alone at the table. Because the

⁸⁸ Vladimir Golstein, “The Energy of Anxiety,” in *Tarkovsky*, ed. Nathan Dunne (London: Black Dog Press, 2008), 186.

⁸⁹ Tarkovsky, quoted in Golstein, 200.

wolf cannot re-establish this environment, he must resort to memory via the fire's embers in order to access his former happiness. That our former state cannot be sustained in the world is certainly tragic, but it is tacitly accepted by humanity in exchange for knowledge. The utmost despair, however, is when paradise laments itself, as Norstein portrays here. Even paradise has attained the ability to recognize that it cannot be sustained.

The lack of unity shown here indicates the individual's inability to re-create childhood bliss in his adult life. A visitor is invited to Norstein's pastoral table, but when he goes on his way, he disappears over the hill, only to have a seemingly endless path revealed to him that extends to the horizon. In Tarkovsky's city scenes, Ignat is almost always pictured alone, trying to entertain himself as does Norstein's ox. With the exception of being chaperoned by a parent, Ignat is never shown as a member of any kind of community. Those ties have been severed with his loss of the childhood home. The ephemeral nature of life is exposed, reiterating that, in life, we walk down a road that ineluctably leads us away from paradise. Moreover, the solitary road ahead not only leads to an unknown and unforeseeable destination, but it severs the ties between the individual and paradise, only adding to the modern individual's feeling of alienation.

These scenes confer the extreme responsibility not only of humans, in general, to continue the process of life, no matter what historical events may occur, but also of the artist to protect and to carry out the creative act itself. The wolf quickly learns that regeneration carries a grave responsibility. The paper that the wolf steals from the poet turns into an infant, which the wolf must now care for. He runs away from civilization

into the feral surroundings of the woods. He rocks the child to sleep, singing the lullaby that features himself as the main character. Recalling the myth of Apollo and Daphne: “What Apollo or the poet pursues turns into a sign not only of his lost love but also of his very pursuit.”⁹⁰ The artist laments the lost object and sees it in the sign, but, more importantly, his pursuit is what keeps that object from dwelling permanently in the realm of ideas.⁹¹ In the film, the wolf fervently and desperately rocks the baby to sleep in the hopes of keeping him in his paradisiacal, dreamlike state from which each person eventually awakens. Once the baby wakes up, he will inevitably participate in the human process of life after the fall and will forever search for his lost paradise in his childhood memories. Once this happens, the only way to return to paradise is through memory and through the creative process.

Of course, the paradox remains—the deepest meaning of the childhood home is only recognized because it was destroyed. While the *dacha* scenes in *Mirror* represent the pastoral innocence of nature, the family is only living there because war has forced them to evacuate their city apartment. The artist’s futile effort to reclaim his innocence, then, is ultimately epistemological. In his book, *Sculpting in Time*, Tarkovsky outlines his epistemological beliefs as he discusses the film *Ivan’s Childhood*:

It is worth saying that the indisputably functional role of art lies in the idea of *knowing*, where the effect is expressed as shock, as catharsis... And so art, like science, is a means of assimilating the world, as instrument for knowing it in the course of a man’s journey towards what is called ‘absolute truth’... By means of

⁹⁰ Sacks 5.

⁹¹ Newlin writes that “the very act of writing...becomes a sort of mental *locus amoenus* (the pleasant place) for the world-weary, work-weary Bolotov (18).

art man takes over reality through a subjective experience... Through the image is sustained an awareness of the infinite: the eternal within the finite, the spiritual within matter, the limitless given form. Art could be said to be a symbol of the universe, being linked with that absolute spiritual truth which is hidden from us in our positivistic, pragmatic activities.⁹²

Just as paradise has attained the knowledge that it cannot be sustained, Norstein's little grey wolf now knows his nature as a destroyer of paradise, since the wolf usually eats the lamb and does not lie with it, as in the paradise myth. By stealing the paper from the poet and the baby from the clutches of civilization, he attempts to circumvent his fate and to preserve the "infinite: "the eternal within the finite, the spiritual within matter, the limitless given form," as Tarkovsky describes here. The function of art, then, serves as a contrast to Lefort's paradox and the absolute truth of ideological "master" discussed earlier in this chapter. It is through the artist's juxtaposition of historical movement and spiritual truth that he is able to transcend the anxieties associated with the former.

The attempt at this type of unity recalls the era of the early Slavophiles, whose efforts were relegated to pure philosophy during the first half of the nineteenth century. I would like to return to Odoevsky's *Russian Nights*, not only for its similar goal of unity as Tarkovsky's and Norstein's cinematic efforts, but also for the historical parallels between the stifling age of Nicholas I and the period of Soviet stagnation in which our filmmakers lived and worked. Other than Schelling, who Odoevsky called "the Christopher Columbus of the 19th century" for disclosing to man an unknown part of his

⁹² Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 36-37.

world—man’s own soul,”⁹³ Plotinus was perhaps the greatest influence on Odoevsky. In Plotinus’s thought, “absolute unity functions both as a source and supreme mode of all existence and as the locus and criterion of all value.”⁹⁴ To answer the question of the existence of multiplicity and evil in the world, Plotinus solves this with his concept of “emanation.” The undifferentiated One, by virtue of the fullness of its perfection, overflows (without diminishing itself) into another, and so on into all existing things, through a series of stages, or “hypostases”—first, mind, then soul, and at the farthest possible limit, the material universe.⁹⁵

For Plotinus, moral evil and vice are held to be the result of a “fall” or “descent” in which the individual human soul turns its desires from the One to the material, becomes self-centered and self-concerned, and undertakes to be self-sufficient. There comes a state at which individual souls:

become partial and self-centered; in a weary desire of standing apart they find their way, each to a place of its very own. This state long maintained, the Soul is a deserter from the All; its differentiation has severed it; its vision is no longer set in the Intellectual; it is a partial thing, isolated, weakened, full of care, intent upon the fragment; severed from the whole...it nestles in one form of being; for this, it abandons all else, entering into and caring for only the one, for a thing buffered about by a worldful of things...it has fallen.⁹⁶

⁹³ Vladimir Odoevsky, *Russian Nights*, trans. Olga Koshansky-Olyenikov and Ralph E. Matlaw (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1965), 43.

⁹⁴ M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1971), 147.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 147.

⁹⁶ Plotinus, *The Six Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna and B.S. Page (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), IV, viii, 4.

This idea has interesting implications for our superfluous man as we track his evolution from type to individual. In his attempt to establish an individual identity, he runs the risk of becoming partial and self-centered, as Plotinus writes. This risk is especially high in the case of our filmmakers because the “pastoral is part of the poetry of illusion,”⁹⁷ as “we must use some illusion...in exposing the best side only of a shepherd’s life, and in concealing its miseries.”⁹⁸ Thus, while becoming a personality is an important step in this evolution, our superfluous man cannot stop at this stage. Eventually, the individual must rejoin the collective in order to make himself whole and to avoid dwelling in, at best, a delusional state and, at worst, a depressive, solitary one. With respect to the pastoral, one could argue that this second step of communion occurs in the individual’s relationship with nature. But as we see in the films being discussed, a human connection ultimately needs to be re-established (and is often done so through art). Even Thoreau abandoned Walden Pond after a couple of years.

In an attempt to resolve the problem of “emanation,” Plotinus counters with the opposing process of “epistrophe,” or the return to the source. “To Real Being we go back, all that we have and are; to that we return as from that we came.”⁹⁹ This return “is achievable in this life, but only if a man by long discipline succeeds in turning from the outer world inward, in an ecstasy of union in which all division vanishes.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Laurence Lerner, *The Uses of Nostalgia: Studies in Pastoral Poetry* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), 80.

⁹⁸ Alexander Pope, quoted in Lerner, 80.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, VI, v, 7.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, VI, ix, 9.

Plotinus associates this return with a return to the Fatherland, and cites *The Iliad* in an attempt to answer this question:

”Let us flee to the beloved Fatherland—this is the soundest counsel. But what is the flight? How are we to gain the open sea? For Odysseus is surely a parable to us when he commands the flight from the sorceries of Circe or Calypso—not content to linger for all the pleasure offered to his eyes and all the delight of sense filling his days...The Fatherland to us is There whence we have come, and there is The Father.”¹⁰¹

For the generation that grew up during WWII, this return to the father refers both to nation and family, to Stalin and to biological fathers, many of whom perished during the war.¹⁰² Similarly, the characters of Odoevsky’s *Russian Nights* feel themselves to be “on the border of two worlds: the past and the present”¹⁰³ as they search for their roots in the face of political stagnation and historical indifference. They talk not only of Greece having restored the power of civilization and having saved mankind from destruction, but

¹⁰¹ Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. by Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), II, 140.

¹⁰² This loss of the father is depicted in film throughout the second half of the twentieth century. If we view the following films (and others like it) as a progression, then we can see how profound this loss was for Russian society: *Zhdi menya* (1943) and other war films show the father going off to war; *Rodnya* (1982) shows three generations of women (grandmother, mother, and daughter) trying to cope as the men go off to Afghanistan; *Taxi Blues* (1990) and the *Brat* trilogy (1997, 2000, and 2001) show the state of the Russian male as the end of the Soviet era approaches and passes; then in *Vozvrashchenie* (2003) and *Koktebel* (2003) we see the father return to the Russian family. This progression proves even more fascinating when viewed in light of Dostoevsky’s (and other nineteenth-century writers’) search for the new Russian father (*An Accidental Family*, *The Brothers Karamazov*) that stems from Chaadaev’s statement that Russians are “illegitimate children without a heritage, without a link with the men who preceded [them] on earth.” The topic of fatherhood will be discussed further at the end of this dissertation.)

¹⁰³ Odoevsky, 211.

also of the current need for “a young and innocent nation”¹⁰⁴ that is worthy of the great mission of saving civilization:

Great is our calling and difficult is our task! We have to revive everything. We have to enter our spirit into the history of human mind, as our name is entered on the rolls of victory. Another, higher victory—the victory of science, art, and faith—is awaiting us on the ruins of enfeebled Europe.¹⁰⁵

In other words, it is Russia’s mission to manifest the unity of Plotinus with its return to Russia’s true nature, which lies in liberation from ideology discussed in Odoevsky’s novel. In this manifestation lies the return to “The Father” as advocated by Plotinus. This attempt at liberation links the two eras discussed here, both echoing a critique of the West, which has become too fragmented and possesses no unity. The existence of individual elements is not enough; there must be a unity of them in order to approach the One or the Good of Plotinus.

In the fragment, “Desiderata,” Odoevsky lists several disciplines, which, by themselves, bring us to the door of knowledge, but do not lead us through. In the search for happiness, we have devoted our energies to the study of disciplines, but according to Odoevsky, not properly. In terms of medicine, we have studied corpses and understand the body in death, but do not understand what makes an organism live. Mathematics brings us to the doors of truth, but does not open them. Physics tells us about forces such as gravity, but only of the negative side of them, in other words, the fall. Living gravitation...that by which living individuals seek each other...is hidden from physicists.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 209.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 211.

Chemistry allows us to decompose all nature's products, but cannot restore any of them. Astronomy had succeeded in comparing nature to a lifeless clock, accurately describing all its wheels, gears, and springs, yet astronomy lacks the key to wind this clock. People have tried to figure out the laws of society by which people can live happily, yet the clash of ideologies leads only to war, death, and destruction of the people whose happiness is sought.¹⁰⁶ Odoevsky's work discusses the need for the unity of these fields, not the abstract progression of the individual disciplines, as transpires in the West.

The binaries investigated by Tarkovsky and Norstein resemble these of the nineteenth century, which ultimately led from philosophical and ideological truths to the need for the individual to answer the question of happiness or freedom. Faust, the moderator of Odoevsky's discussion, reads from a manuscript, which states:

Only one thing is needed for man's happiness: a bright and extensive axiom, which would embrace everything and save him from the pain of doubt... The need for complete bliss indicates the existence of such a bliss; the need for shining truth indicated the existence of such truth... Man's striving to understand the cause of causes, to penetrate the force of all beings, the need for awe indicate that there is something into which a soul can immerse itself with confidence. The desire for a full life indicates the possibility of such a life; it indicates that only in it can man's soul find its peace.¹⁰⁷

Of course, the origins of Dostoevsky's underground man and his "twice two makes four" resound here. While most individuals cling to such axioms of conformity and happiness (or, at least its pursuit), it is the charge of the artist to remain in the doubt-filled mediation process that toggles between ideological binaries.

¹⁰⁶ Odoevsky, 48-54.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 44.

The nature of the above epistemological question can, however, lead to madness, since words cannot express integral knowledge. The need for synthesis is representative of the breakdown in communication that is inherent in human life. In following the path laid out by those that came before us, we must take it. But the question of “who are we?” and “Is there really anything left to say?” can cause the existential strife that many people of both Odoevsky’s and Tarkovsky’s generation experienced. Odoevsky’s character, Vyacheslav, says, “And why should it be said? All this is nonsense, gentlemen. Speakers need listeners, and the age of listening is over.”¹⁰⁸ Coupled with the idea that “there is no opinion the contrary of which could not be affirmed with all the proof possible to man,”¹⁰⁹ the lack of a listener can lead to madness.¹¹⁰ The poet is often considered mad, because madness is one all-consuming thought.

All their concepts, all their feelings are gathered at one focal point. The particular power of one certain thought in them attracts to itself everything allied to that thought from the entire world. The madman has the ability of tearing off parts from objects which are tightly united for a normal person, and of concentrating them in some sort of symbol... Isn’t what we frequently call madness and delirium sometimes the highest degree of intellectual human instinct, a degree so high that it becomes completely incomprehensible, unattainable to ordinary observation?¹¹¹

That the artist can become mad in his attempt to reconcile the two ideological poles reiterates the importance of his eventual need for community and of the difficulty of the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 40.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 208.

¹¹⁰ Recall the discussion of Sharik in Chapter Two of this dissertation with respect to elegy and the poet’s need for a listener.

¹¹¹ Odoevsky, 55-56.

mediation process itself. The act of undertaking this challenging task—through the creative act—is what makes the superfluous man an active agent and not simply a pawn that is manipulated and eventually brushed aside by ideological forces.

Any individual thought is an entity made up of fragments and is a fragment itself. But, more importantly, it takes the listener to be able to synthesize this thought, in other words, for the speaker to be understood. The theme of madness is not uncommon in Russian literature. We can look to Chaadaev's "Apology of a Madman," Gogol's "Diary of a Madman," several of Dostoevsky's works involving feverish characters, such as Raskolnikov and Ivan Karamazov, and Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita* as suitable examples. Additionally, Thomas Newlin associates madness with the experience of hearing voices that manifest in certain works of Nabokov, Bolotov, Gogol, and Dostoevsky.¹¹² Most of our superfluous characters, from Onegin to Pechorin to the underground man to Oblomov, exhibit some degree of this madness, although it is usually the society that misjudges him that calls him mad. Madness, in Odoevsky's view, is as Romantic trait that asserts the primacy of the individual poet's thought. It can be seen as a refuge for the artist who is suffering within the despotic state's bounds. For Odoevsky, he echoes Schelling in his concurrent stress on the inadequacy of language and the universal capacity of poetry, both of which make the cinematic choices discussed in this chapter so effective at transcending that inadequacy.

¹¹² Newlin, 3-15 provides his initial analysis of the "voice in the garden" that serves as the foundation for his entire book.

Because of fragmentary nature of life, there is no set of values to apply to each and every individual. Each receives a verdict in *Russian Nights*, but only with regards to what the person did not do in his life, accentuating the fact that Western justice is associated with absence, just as the scientific disciplines in “Desiderata” are evaluated only by their negative aspects. The economist, who “gave his soul to the people, only forgot myself,” is condemned because his “life belonged to (himself) and not to the people.” The “City Without a Name,” or the society based on Bentham’s utilitarianism, is condemned because “your life belonged not to you, but to feeling.” The “Improvisatore” loved his life passionately, but the court’s verdict is that his “life belonged to art, and not to (himself)!”¹¹³ As we see, there is no unity in the judgment of a life; each fragmentary character receives a unique verdict that often contradicts that of another character. In Odoevsky’s attempt to find a universal purpose for life, we constantly move further and further away from the One. This is the plight of the Romantic hero, the superfluous man, and the Soviet exile, all of whom attempt to attain a higher consciousness than the ruling official ideology allows.

Herein lies the task of the poet. Luckily, the artist’s inner world is connected to the common emotions associated with childhood, thereby making the individual work accessible to viewers through the emotions associated to the chosen symbols. Although the nostalgic exile is like Norstein’s visitor who is sent away from paradise, his is not merely an individual struggle. In fact:

¹¹³ Odoevsky, 199-200.

national awareness comes from outside the community rather than from within... The vantage point of the stranger informs the native idyll. The nostalgic is never a native but a displaced person who mediates between the local and the universal.¹¹⁴

The notion that national awareness originates from outside the community is similar to Benedict Anderson's idea that "nationality, nation-ness, and as well as nationalism, are cultural artifacts of a particular kind" and that "nationalism invents nations where they do not exist."¹¹⁵ We can look to communities such as the Russian intelligentsia, the Slavophiles, or the Freemasons as examples of Anderson's principle of a community that invents itself and is held together by an inner principle. If Chaadaev tells us that Russians are illegitimate children with no heritage and strangers to themselves who "come to this world without patrimony,"¹¹⁶ then the search for paradise in the face of a common historical tragedy binds fellow victims together into a group unified by a strong emotional bond.

Returning to our filmmakers, it is no coincidence that Tarkovsky includes the scene of Ignat reading aloud Pushkin's letter to Chaadaev, in which he writes: "I swear, that for nothing in the world would I want to trade my nationality or have a different history other than the one of our ancestors, the one that was given to us by God." The historical event itself disrupts the order of the world. It negates the world because it

¹¹⁴ Boym, 12.

¹¹⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 6-7.

¹¹⁶ Pyotr Chaadaev, *The Major Works of Peter Chaadaev*, trans. Raymond T. McNally (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 37.

makes the world unmanageable. It is the emotions attached to the event, then, that work to reorder the world that has been corrupted. The actual event is over, but the emotions of experiencing the event, preserved in memory, are what remain. It is in this way that the emotions that arise from a historical event can unify people, even if they had no previous connection. The shared experience is what reminds us of the integral knowledge that we possess, allowing us to transcend the order of the world (in our consciousness) based on reason. Furthermore, it is the failure of reason, that is, the unmanageable nature of the world that enables us to achieve spiritual communion. The violence of the twentieth century, a modern era in which the individual became more and more isolated and alienated while he simultaneously became less and less spiritual, led for an even greater need for the *tsel'nost'* and *sobornost'* of the early Slavophiles than ever before.

Thus, our two films do not simply deal with the inevitable exchange of innocence for knowledge, but they create a community of Soviet nostalgic exiles through the use of specific artifacts, such as the space of the Russian house, the courtyard, and the little grey wolf. Claire Kitson, in her book on Norstein, writes that the lullaby used in the film “has the status of a folk-memory”¹¹⁷ and that, “like the lullaby, the culture of the yard is not just a Norstein memory—it is a national preoccupation.”¹¹⁸ Similarly, Tarkovsky writes about letters that he received from audience members throughout the Soviet Union who had seen *Mirror*. The overwhelming response was that viewers felt the film was about

¹¹⁷ Kitson, 12.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 13.

their own lives. “My childhood was like that...Only how did you know about it?”¹¹⁹ Some expressed bewilderment, asking, “The episodes in themselves are really good, but how can one find what holds them together?”¹²⁰ The answer, perhaps, lies in Tarkovsky’s own words, that “poetry is an awareness of the world, a particular way of relating to reality.”¹²¹ The artist, then, holds this “imagined community” together through the poetry and emotions associated with the artifacts of Soviet existence. Tarkovsky and Norstein, Ignat and the little grey wolf, play the role of shepherd, working to hold together their flock of viewers who themselves are battling the same existential and historical crises faced by the artists.

That we remember certain moments from our childhoods is certainly poignant, but the fact that these memories will not be manifested in our lives elevates this poignancy exponentially. Norstein’s film ends with shot of the hill that we saw in the beginning. The hill is illuminated by a lamp. However, instead of the hill appearing in the paradisiacal scene, it is placed in the middle of a town, with a railroad passing underneath it. This image could be viewed as the corruption of nature by its placement within the contemporary urban world, but it also serves as an affirmation that the paradisaical, though it cannot be retained in its entirety, can be assimilated into modern life. In both *Tale of Tales* and *Mirror*, the pastoral happiness of childhood has been permanently tainted, but symbols of that lost world still exist. No, Apollo can never reincarnate his beloved

¹¹⁹ Tarkovsky, 10.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 8.

¹²¹ Ibid, 21.

Daphne. As Peter Sacks writes in his work on elegy: to further exacerbate the poet's position, the "unnatural severing of the tree and an artificial entwining of its cut leaves, seems not only to suggest a move from organic nature to the item of an unnatural, societal code but also to enforce and confirm that Apollo's consoling sign can never enjoy a purely organic relation to the object that it signifies, or for which it substitutes."¹²² Although the remnants of Norstein's and Tarkovsky's lost paradise are similarly severed and inorganically entwined with the external world, these objects, however fleeting, give us the hope that it remains in the memories of our childhood and in the artist's noble, yet undeniably futile pursuit. To an empiricist, a dream or a memory that reminds us of our inherent love of mankind is irrational, and therefore cannot possess the knowledge that science provides. Dostoevsky provides a mystical response to this in "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man:" "But what does it matter whether it was a dream or not, so long as that dream revealed the Truth to me? For once you have recognized the truth and seen it, you know it is the one and only truth and that there can be no other."¹²³ This dream blurs the boundaries between fantasy and reality, and allows us to perceive the dream to be more "real" than the reality of our daily lives. Furthermore, Dostoevsky's hero argues that this dream is what saved him from suicide and "revealed a new, grand, regenerated, strong life."¹²⁴ Nevertheless, the dream remains elusive, and we are always returned to the present moment and the *toska* that signifies the dream's absence. Thus,

¹²² Sacks, 5.

¹²³ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Great Short Works of Fyodor Dostoevsky* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1968), 724.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 724.

while we will never permanently grasp our lost paradise, because «Вернуться туда невозможно и рассказать нельзя...», we can access it and, from time-to-time, by walking toward the light and through the door of our childhood homes and be reminded of the communal paradise that once was.

If the 1920s involved a battle for time and history, with each side proposing an ideological system that would best fit the needs of the artist and the people, then the post-WWII era embodied an escape from time and a retreat toward arcadia in search of a truth to counter the ideological truth of the Soviet regime. While this might provide some comfort to the artist and his audience, it is ultimately an unsatisfying solution, despite the work done by the artist to arrive there. Although a pastoral retreat might temporarily remove the ideological component from one's life, it always remains, waiting for the artist to return to the reality of day, which he inevitably must do. Making the choice out of desperation, the pastoral retreat is a sign of the lack of agency ascribed to the individual, leaving him still as an anti-ideological type in the binary that we have been discussing:

If only we could look now, with different eyes, at the homeland of our childhood, at that cramped yard, where the earth was so trampled that the grass only pierced a way through around the edges, where the wind-blown earth floor glistened in the sun, glistened with tiny shards of glass – where did all those different colored bits of glass come from in those days? And where did all that happiness come from in those days?¹²⁵

¹²⁵ From the film treatment for *Tale of Tales* written by Norstein and Lyudmila Petrushevskaya. Quoted in Kitson, 13. As noted earlier in this chapter, Andrey Bolotov also wishes to view his childhood home with different eyes, since his return to the physical house does not live up to his anticipation and imagination.

This happiness, unfortunately, remains beyond the door to our childhood homes, since “only our memories can be eternal. That is where everything ends up that you remember all your life. The soldiers who failed to make it back from the war. The tree under your window. The Little Wolf mother used to sing about. And the light at the end of the corridor.”¹²⁶ Despite the beauty and lyricism of arcadia, the pastoral is just as timeless as the perception of Soviet life, forming another binary. As we have seen throughout this dissertation, remaining purely to one side of the binary, while perhaps a temporary solution, never provides a long-term and satisfying result. Some sort of reconciliation is needed, the type of mediation that the writings (or films) of the superfluous man provide. However, historical forces must be considered; because this period was one of stagnation (similar to the era of Nicholas I), a more effective solution to the problem of the superfluous man’s exile was required to complete his development from type to individual.

¹²⁶ Kitson, 7.

CHAPTER FOUR

Stop Me If You've Heard This One: Sergey Dovlatov's Redemption at the End of Time

“Do you understand, young man, do you understand what it means to have nowhere left to turn to?”¹ Marmeladov poses this question to Raskolnikov in Chapter Two of *Crime and Punishment*. For Dostoevsky, this was the point that he desired all humans to reach, for this was the true measure of good and evil. With nowhere to turn, Dostoevsky's characters choose God or the devil, who fight in the hearts of men. In *Freedom and the Tragic Life*, Vyacheslav Ivanov discusses the tragedy hidden in “the dualism of necessity and free will as components of human destiny.”² According to him, “the main direction of the path that each individual takes is laid down for him by his inmost will – whether resting in God or opposing itself to God.”³ What was prescribed to pure destiny in Sophocles and Shakespeare is appropriated by Dostoevsky and transformed into a question of “a supra-conscious act of will by the human soul”⁴ that

¹ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. Jessie Coulson, ed. George Gibian (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989), 13.

² Vyacheslav Ivanov, *Freedom and the Tragic Life: A Study in Dostoevsky*, trans. Norman Cameron (New York: The Noonday Press, 1971), 17.

³ *Ibid*, 17.

⁴ *Ibid*, 18.

either turns toward or away from God. Pascal's *Pensées* provides a similar contrast between the misery of man without God and the happiness of man with God. He justifies this by stating that nature is corrupt, which is proved by nature itself and that there is a Redeemer, which is proved by Scripture.

Immediately, we can see the main issue with the approach of our artists in the previous chapters to look to the past or to the future in order to solve the existential angst of man living in this world. Neither arcadia nor utopia is grounded in present reality:

The bucolic dream...has no other reality than that of imagination and art, which is why it is often accused of insincerity, because it requires no experience. The testimony that the shepherd bears is simply that it is easier to reach moral truth and peace of mind (innocence and happiness) by abandoning the strife of civil and social living and the ordeal of human fellowship for a solitary existence in communion with nature.⁵

Poggioli is writing about the pastoral here, but this lack of reality also applies to our utopian dreamers as well. What corrupts this experience of moral truth and innocence is reality (admittedly a loaded term, but here will signify present-day human actions) and cannot be ignored. In the introduction to his book *Lermontov's Narratives of Heroism*, Vladimir Golstein writes that this polemic or binary between individualism and *sobornost* 'ignores "the nature of everyday human behavior in contemporary society,"⁶ which can lead to opposing natures within a single individual revealing themselves at different times, as demonstrated by characters such as Raskolnikov or, more broadly, by people in everyday life.

⁵ Renato Poggioli, *The Oaten Flute: Essays on Pastoral Poetry and the Pastoral Ideal* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 2.

⁶ Vladimir Golstein, *Narratives of Heroism* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 18-19.

With respect to our Soviet artists, we remain in the 1970s. However, instead of looking back to a childhood marred by war, as did Norstein and Tarkovsky, this chapter will focus on the present experience of the individual writer/superfluous man. The stagnation that began late in the Khrushchev era continued throughout the 1970s and submerged the individual writer, leaving him to answer Marmeladov's question: Where could one turn? The Soviet experiment had been in motion for over fifty years already, with no end in sight. Confining oneself to the realm of art, like the Romantics, Symbolists, or our pastoral elegists, was not a satisfying alternative. Just as Kavelin's 1880 letter articulated that the Slavophile-Westernizer question had been settled with the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, the ideological question of the twentieth century had also already been answered (and is rendered especially irrelevant if we notice just how similar the USSR and US really were). What was needed was not so much individual expression in a vacuum, but rather an individual approach to unity, one that could incorporate both poles of the ideological spectrum—the individual and the communal—thereby transcending the conflict.

Our discussion of Camus from Chapter One might aid us in reconciling these two poles. Camus discusses the “why” that arises from the monotony of the mechanical routine of life, leading to consciousness. Although this process can alienate the individual—or perhaps more accurately, arises out of the alienation of the individual—it also raises him to a higher level than the average person who clings to that routine out of fear or out of a desire for comfort. Camus writes that this fear is tied to our association with time:

We live on the future,...and [man] situates himself in relation to time. He takes his place in it. He admits that he stands at a certain point on a curve that he acknowledges having to travel to its end. He belongs to time, and by the horror that seizes him, he recognizes his worst enemy. Tomorrow, he was longing for tomorrow, whereas everything in his ought to reject it. That revolt of the flesh is called the absurd.⁷

Being seized by the horror of belonging to time is what leads people to choose one of our poles on the ideological binary. This is what relegates the individual to a type, either revolutionary or anti-revolutionary, Soviet or anti-Soviet, arcadian or utopian. As we have seen, choosing either side produces an unsatisfying or incomplete result because it does not effectively integrate both poles.

Understanding that the answer did not lie in tomorrow (or, for our pastoralists, in the past) was the first step in overcoming the fundamental problem of the individual—how to avoid being relegated to a type. According to Georg Simmel, the challenge lies in the fact that “man’s position in the world is defined by the fact that in every dimension of his being and his behavior he stands at every moment *between two boundaries*”:

This participation in realities, tendencies, and ideas which involve a plus and a minus, a this side and a that side of our here and now, may well be obscure and fragmentary; but it gives life two complementary, if often also contradictory, values: richness and determinacy... However, this property of determinacy forms only the point of departure. For, although the boundary as such is necessary, every single determinate boundary can be stepped over, every enclosure can be blasted, and every such act, of course, finds or creates a new boundary. The pair of statements—that the boundary is unconditional, in that its existence is constitutive of our given position in the world, but that no boundary is unconditional, since every one can on principle be altered, reached over, gotten around—this pair of statements appears as the explication of the inner unity of vital action.⁸

⁷ Albert Camus, “An Absurd Reasoning,” in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* (New York Vintage Books, 1955), 10-11.

⁸ Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 353-354. Other examples of transcending boundaries are

The conscious individual's task is to transcend these boundaries, not conform to them, and he can do so depending on his view of time. If one separates past, present, and future, as we have seen our superfluous man do to this point, then one is bound more restrictively to the temporal aspect. But to Simmel, "life at any given moment transcends itself" since the "essential structure of life...signifies a continual reaching out beyond itself as something in the present."⁹ The antinomial relationship through which life continually reaches beyond itself is the "ultimate, metaphysically problematic condition of life: that it is boundless continuity and at the same time boundary-determined ego."¹⁰

Life's streaming is bounded by each individual "I" (i.e., form), but:

since its further flowing is not to be stopped, since the persisting centrality of the total organism, of the "I," or of its respective contents, cannot nullify the essential continuity of the flowing, there arises the idea that life pushes out beyond the given organic, or spiritual, or objective form; that it overflows that dam.... Life is at once flux without pause and yet something enclosed in bearers and contents, formed about midpoints, individualized, and therefore always a bounded form which continually jumps its bounds... [T]ranscendence is immanent in life.¹¹

Since life is continually flowing, the choice to remain fixated on what may happen in the future or on what has happened in the past essentially denies life. In other words, ascribing to any particular ideological binary prevents life from occurring organically through its formation and transcendence of its boundaries.

Dostoevsky, Edmund Burke (pain-indifference-pleasure), August Cieszkowski, Bakhtin, amongst others.

⁹ Ibid, 361-362.

¹⁰ Ibid, 362.

¹¹ Ibid, 363.

Interestingly, Camus writes in *The Rebel* about an aesthetic component to this rebellion against the forces that limit the individual. “In every rebellion is to be found the metaphysical demand for unity, the impossibility of capturing it, and the construction of a substitute universe. Rebellion is a fabricator of universes.”¹² But simply creating an alternate universe while disregarding reality is not what Camus advocates:

Man cannot affirm the total hideousness of the world. To create beauty, he must simultaneously reject reality and exalt certain of its aspects. Art disputes reality, but does not hide from it. Nietzsche could deny any form of transcendence, whether moral or divine, by saying that transcendence drove one to slander this world and this life. But perhaps there is a living transcendence, of which beauty carries the promise, which can make this mortal and limited world preferable to and more appealing than any other. Art thus leads us back to the origins of rebellion, to the extent that it tries to give its form to an elusive value which the future perpetually promises, but of which the artist has a presentiment and wishes to snatch from the grasp of history.¹³

The “living transcendence” that Camus sponsors is similar to Simmel’s and allows the artistic world that springs from it to fulfill its promise of unity more fully than those that simply reject life on the ground in favor of an arcadian or utopian dream.

In fact, it is the attempt to create this type of unity that occupies the superfluous man with his search for “formulas or attitudes that will give his existence the unity it lacks”:

Appearance and action, the dandy and the revolutionary, all demand unity in order to exist, and in order to exist on this earth... It is not sufficient to live, there must be a destiny that does not have to wait for death. It is therefore justifiable to say that man has an idea of a better world than this. But better does not mean different, it means unified. This passion which lifts the mind above the commonplaces of a dispersed world, from which it nevertheless cannot free itself,

¹² Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, <https://libcom.org/files/The-Rebel-Albert-Camus.pdf> , 127, accessed October 11, 2014.

¹³ *Ibid*, 128.

is the passion for unity. It does not result in mediocre efforts to escape, however, but in the most obstinate demands. Religion or crime, every human endeavor in fact, finally obeys this unreasonable desire and claims to give life a form it does not have. The same impulse, which can lead to the adoration of the heavens or the destruction of man, also leads to creative literature, which derives its serious content from this source.¹⁴

This is perhaps the most direct statement that we have seen which supports the superfluous man's agency through his writing. He may be, like all individuals, a pawn that is subjected to political, social, or economic forces that are beyond his control. As we saw in Chapter One, this is how the superfluous man has traditionally been received, both by the nineteenth-century intellectuals who used him as an ornament to support or refute their political and social ideals and by the majority of literary scholars who have interpreted the works in which he appears. But he also raises himself above "the adoration of the heavens or the destruction of man" through the literary act that serves to mediate between the two boundaries that limit us and that beg us to transcend them. But while we have discussed several cases of this literary act, not all are equally successful in allowing the individual to exert his will while also creating a community that is based in reality. What follows will be a discussion of one writer who, in my view, achieved this difficult goal—Sergey Dovlatov, who Alexander Genis calls "the voice of the last Soviet generation."¹⁵

Leading up to the mid-1950s, the Soviet doctrine of socialist realism had controlled both the content and technique of writers who wished to be published and had

¹⁴ Ibid, 130.

¹⁵ Alexander Genis, *Dovlatov i okresnosti: filologicheski roman* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2001), 13.

led to “the disappearance from literature of the hero capable of independent thought”¹⁶ since the author was forced to play the role of judge in the name of either the ruling ideology or its dissenters. The thaw period relaxed these constraints, and “literature, almost entirely lacking themes of a political or industrial nature, discovered the *feeling man*.”¹⁷ This change was manifested in the emergence of a new generation of writers and the appearance of new translations of Western writers, most notably Hemingway and Salinger. In fact, Pyotr Vail’ and Alexander Genis considered Hemingway to be “the most important American in Soviet history”¹⁸ because his ideals and style of prose shaped the outlook of an entire generation. Jekaterina Young writes that “Hemingway’s prose was felt as a rebellion against ideological constraints in the name of immediate physical experience.”¹⁹ Although reading Hemingway did not translate into actual rebellion, “it at least constituted a notional alternative approach to reality.”²⁰

Although an author was still expected to make his moral sympathies clear during the thaw, there was a great deal of literary experimentation, especially with the return of the first-person narrative into mainstream literature in the 1960s [that] gave authors the

¹⁶ V. M. Piskunov, *Chisty ritm mnemoziny* (Moscow: Al’fa-M, 2005), 446.

¹⁷ Boris Ivanov, *Evolyutsiya literaturnykh dvizhenii v pyatidesyatye-vos’midesyatye gody*,” in *Istoriya leningradskoi nepodtsenzurnoi literatury: 1950-1980-e gody*, ed. B. I. Ivanov (St. Petersburg: Dean, 2000), 21-22.

¹⁸ Pyotr Vail’ and Alexander Genis, *60-e: Mir sovetskogo cheloveka* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe Obozrenie, 1996), 280.

¹⁹ Jekaterina Young, *Sergei Dovlatov and His Narrative Masks* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 5.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 5.

possibility of using honestly the subjectivity of the storyteller protagonist, who was...the hero of what came to be called ‘confessional prose.’”²¹ In her book entitled *Sergei Dovlatov’s Narrative Masks*, Jekaterina Young discusses several writers of this generation whose “experimentation with the short-story form typifies this period”: Vasily Aksenov “introduces a new hero who is not restricted by ideological dogmas” and also “experiments with forms of storytelling”; Vasily Shukshin “developed *skaz* technique, allowing his characters to tell their own stories in their own language and from their own point of view”; Andrey Bitov’s protagonist “is a person whose difficulty in coming to terms with reality has existential rather than ideological roots”; Fazil’ Iskander “experimented with narrative point of view” and continued “the traditions of Rabelais and Cervantes”; and Valery Popov constructed his stories based on travelogues, emphasizing “the narrator’s complex reactions and the construction of a world that is unusual and even absurd. Popov was less interested in telling the story about a specific character than about “the intonation and rhythmic precision of his stories, almost all of which are first-person narratives.”²² This confessional prose bears a strong resemblance to the writings of our traditional superfluous man, such as Pechorin’s journal, the diary of Turgenev’s superfluous man, and the private rants of Dostoevsky’s underground man.

Sergey Dovlatov was a writer of this particular generation that used both the aforementioned Soviet and American writers as models. From the Americans, he learned to “give priority, first and foremost, to the plasticity of the languages over the expression

²¹ Ibid, 8.

²² Ibid, 8-10.

of ideas.”²³ Similarly, Dovlatov adopted the new Soviet generation’s “use of colloquial speech and...slang; their experiments in point of view; [and] their exploration of the newly permissible theme of the personal.”²⁴ However, as much as he embraced the innovative aspect of these Soviet writers, he disliked how they portrayed only the positive attributes of their heroes:

They had all taken it upon themselves to describe city boys from good families, well-read and educated, who were seeking their place in life. I knew dozens like that, and even now I still meet them. All the general regime camps and light security camps are full of lads like that. In books they come out charming, witty, and smart. But it seems to me that if you’re going to write about them then you need to write about how they suffer from VD as well, how they contract unsuitable marriages, smash up other people’s cars when they’re drunk, get involved in speculation, abandon their pregnant girlfriends, that is, to write about all the tragic outcomes to which idleness and the extended quest for one’s place in life always lead. Thanks to all these Aksenovs our generation (I mean—mine) will enter history under the rubric “the generation of boys.”²⁵

²³ Alexander Genis, “*Sad kamnei: Sergey Dovlatov*,” *Zvezda* 7 (1997): 236.

²⁴ Young, 10.

²⁵ Sergey Dovlatov, *Skvoz' dzhungli bezumnoi zhizni: Pis'ma k rodnym i druz'yam* (St. Petersburg: Zvezda, 2003), 101. Dostoevsky also found it difficult to present a really good man in a positive form. With respect to his designs for *The Idiot*, he felt that “there is nothing in the world more difficult to do than this” because “beauty is an ideal; yet neither [Russia’s] ideal nor that of civilized Europe is even in the remotest degree perfected... Of all the beautiful figures in Christian literature, Don Quixote is the most complete. Don Quixote, however, is beautiful only because he is at the same time absurd.” Quoted in Ivanov, 86. Ivanov agrees that the presentation of this type of man is difficult: “The positive type that Dostoevsky sought must either present a countenance of perfect holiness, amazingly transcending the limitations of humanity—but such a countenance would be the subject of a mystery, not of a realistic life story; or it must produce a tragi-comic effect—by reason of its discordance or, one might say, its incommensurability with its human environment, combined with its inward oneness with this environment in virtue of the common law of life that governs both.” Ivanov, 87.

That he characterizes these writers and characters as boys connects to our earlier themes of childhood and innocence, illustrating the need for maturation from childhood to adulthood and fatherhood that will be discussed later in this chapter.

Another group of writers that was particularly significant for Dovlatov was the *Gorozhane* (Urbanists), a free literary association operating in Leningrad in the mid-1960s whose opposition to the Soviet regime was not political, but primarily aesthetic.²⁶ Igor' Efimov, one of the *Gorozhane* members, explained why Leningrad writers focused more on their style and language:

Leningrad writers, even at the best time in the mid-sixties, had about four times fewer opportunities to publish than Muscovites. And perhaps because of this situation of greater hopelessness, of greater restriction by the censorship, they developed a slightly more chamber style, with greater concentration on the inner world of the human being and with greater attention to the details of a person's psychological condition.

Initially, the group had four members: Boris Vakhtin, Vladimir Maramzin, Vladimir Gubin, and Efimov, but later Dovlatov joined them. They apparently chose their name as an act of opposition to the trend of village prose, but the group maintains that “it was not so much a question of opposition, as of the definition of ‘spheres of influence.’”²⁷ It was also not a question of literature where the plot is tied to a specific location (such as a factory, university, or communal apartment), but rather of a literature “that preserves the traditions of Russian urban writing with its tendency to the phantasmagorical and its depiction of psychological states specific to urban life. The urbanists were less concerned

²⁶ Young, 11.

²⁷ Igor' Efimov, “Rasshiryaya granitsy vozmozhnogo: Interv'yu Alekseya Mitaeva,” *Novyi bereg* 10 (2005), <http://magazines.russ.ru/bereg/2005/10/ef19-pr.html>, accessed January 10, 2015.

with the tragedy of Russian people's alienation from the land, and more with that of their alienation from their language."²⁸ In the *Gorozhane*'s own conception of itself, we see a turn inward in response to the ideological nature of Soviet life. If we recall, this is precisely what the *Vekhi* authors wrote that the Russian intelligentsia of the nineteenth century should have done instead of going to the peasants. In 1960s Leningrad, the *Gorozhane* did not respond to the trend of village prose—which might have been easier since “in public consciousness the village was often perceived as the keeper of the nation's spiritual values”²⁹—but rather started their own trend that corresponded to their everyday reality of living, not only in a city, but in Leningrad, whose reality was distinct from that of other cities, especially of Moscow. Not only were Leningrad writers published less frequently than Moscow writers, but urban writers were not published in journals such as Tvardovsky's *Novyi mir* when village prose was flourishing.³⁰ These Leningrad writers could indeed be considered superfluous according to the official sphere of Soviet life.

Furthermore, the relaxation of censorship did not last long, as the relatively liberal Soviet policy toward the arts soon reverted back to its pre-thaw stance. As was noted in the previous chapter, the mid-1960s brought about a period of stagnation that would essentially last for the remainder of the Soviet Union's existence. Young authors during this time were faced with the following three choices: capitulating to the ideological

²⁸ Young, 13.

²⁹ Ibid, 13.

³⁰ Ibid, 14. See Young's first chapter (“Dovlatov in Leningrad”) for more details on specific works published by the *Gorozhane*.

ensorship, abandoning literature completely, or joining the underground authors of *samizdat*.³¹ Those who chose the third path effectively removed themselves from official life, as they realized that aligning themselves with that life was incompatible with creative freedom:

Many unofficial artists and authors lived in a sealed world and were unable, because of political, ideological, and aesthetic censorship, either to exhibit or to publish. In this almost “cosmic” isolation, such artists were completely thrown back on their own devices, and became for each other what other people should have been for them: viewers, critics, connoisseurs, historians, and even collectors, or as Dovlatov called it, a “second cultural reality,”³² which was essentially not a choice³³ for writers who would not conform to Soviet ideological and aesthetic dictates in order to try to combine literature with material comfort.³⁴

Like our nineteenth-century superfluous man, the unofficial Soviet artist responded to the social and political conditions that tried to silence him and to reduce him to a nonentity. In this sense, the Soviet superfluous man of the mid-1960s and 1970s can be viewed as a weak individual who cannot find a place in official life, just as the likes of Onegin, Pechorin, and Dostoevsky’s underground man were viewed in the preceding century. But while these writers may have been forced into superfluity by the ruling ideology, they are not passive agents who submitted to the pressure of Soviet censorship. Instead, they redirected their efforts and resorted to *samizdat* in order to preserve the lesson in individual freedom that they learned from Boris Pasternak, who embodied for them

³¹ Ibid, 20.

³² Sergey Dovaltov, *Sobranie sochinenii v chetyrekh tomakh*, ed. A. Yu. Ar’ev (St. Petersburg: Azbuka, 2000), 3:16.

³³ Andrey Sinyavsky, “Dissidentstvo kak lichnyi opyt,” in *Sintaksis* 15 (1986): 146.

³⁴ Young, 20.

“fidelity to aesthetics itself and the philosophy of freedom, handed down to us by the great Russian culture of the past—from Pushkin to Blok, from Chaadaev to Berdyaev.”³⁵ Thus, a retreat from the official sphere of life is not an admission of defeat, but rather a positive affirmation of both individual freedom and communal culture (Russian, not Soviet) that is not based on a destructive ideology.

This choice, of course, brought about certain consequences. Although these writers who belonged to the “second cultural reality” did so to preserve their individual freedom, the *samizdat* process was far from perfect. The “communal, uncontrolled *samizdat* process meant that the individual author could not determine the life of the text,” since “the system of editing, copying, and recopying for transmission acquired a life independent of the original author.”³⁶ For Dovlatov, whose literary works depend so heavily on the internal rhythm of his sentences, this was especially difficult. Additionally, the Soviet regime made no distinction between this “second culture,” which had no designs on regime change, with the official dissident movement that was driven by political motives. The Soviet authorities saw all “cultural nonconformism as simply another form of political dissidence.”³⁷ Nonconformist writers had “stopped fighting for the official status of a writer...and preferred to work at the social periphery as lift operators, night watchmen, and boiler room attendants.”³⁸ The government began to

³⁵ Piskunov, *Chistyĭ ritm mnemoziny*, 429.

³⁶ Young, 24.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 24-25.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 25.

pressure nonconformists into emigration, and Dovlatov eventually fell into this category and had trouble finding even menial work. But while much of the world was participating in perhaps the greatest ideological struggle in human history, Dovlatov and his milieu only wanted to live *vnye*, which Alexei Yurchak defines in his book *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, as a life untainted by anti-system discourse:

We never spoke about the dissidents. Everyone understood everything, so why speak about that. It was not interesting... We were different...because for us they were simply a change from plus to minus... The pro-system and anti-system types—they were all just Soviet people. And [we] never thought of [ourselves] as Soviet [people]. We were organically different. This is true. We were simply *vnye*.³⁹

Embedded within this concept of *vnye* was an element of hope that Dovlatov found in emigration, hope that he would find what he could not in the USSR—a space in which he could finally write in peace. However, he found the same absurdity in America that he experienced in the Soviet Union. In America, Dovlatov's greatest disappointment was that the State-sponsored ideology that prevented him from being published did not disappear; it simply morphed into the consumerist indifference of American society. In America, one was free in the political or the civic sense, but Dovlatov learns that, although he revered American writers like Hemingway and Salinger, being a writer in America was not as prestigious as in the Soviet Union. Moreover, he feels the need to serve two, even three different audiences—Soviet, American, and émigré. Dostoevsky once wrote that Herzen was born an émigré. But in emigration, Herzen realized that he was not. He was Russian. Similarly, we could say that Dovlatov was born an American, or at least with a partial American soul, given his affinities for American literature and

³⁹ Yurchak, 129.

jazz. But, like Herzen, Dovlatov realizes that he is not American. The ongoing Russian questions of East versus West and of finding a home followed him from the Soviet Union to New York.

Much more can be said about Dovlatov's personal biography and about the nonconformist writers of the 1960s and 1970s, but at this point I would like to turn to one of Dovlatov's works to show how his aesthetic principle embodied his anti-ideological worldview, his striving for individual freedom, and his attempt to unite his fellow émigré writers and his readers by preserving a Russian culture that the Soviets had been trying to destroy for most of the twentieth century. Although Dovlatov lived and wrote during the same era as Norstein and Tarkovsky, he had a much different experience, as seen from the above discussion. He not only looks back to a culture that is lost, but he grounds his work in present-day reality and not in an arcadian or utopian dream. To this end, he uses the anecdote as his preferred literary device. And while Dovlatov regularly employed this device throughout his literary career, I will limit my discussion primarily to his work *Nashi*, although some other works will be mentioned.

Written after Dovlatov had already emigrated to New York, *Nashi* is not only an autobiographical work documenting his family history, but also his chronicle of Soviet life. The work reads like a detailed family tree, beginning with his peasant great-grandfather, Moses. Dovlatov's reminiscences about each figure in his family consist of anecdotes from their lives. Just as the anecdote changes the viewpoint of the reader through its punchline, so does each chapter of *Nashi* turn sharply from a humorous event from the daily lives of his relatives into a serious and often poignant moment that carries

great meaning for Dovlatov himself, as well as for the reader. Given that Dovlatov's anecdote serves as a narrative of Soviet life, one might expect his stories to resemble dissident literature that directly opposes the ruling ideology. But the nature of the anecdote is such that it functions as a device that inherently nullifies ideology. It is for this reason that Dovlatov chooses it as his primary literary device. While the anecdote plays a prominent role in many of Dovlatov's works, this article will focus on its function in *Nashi*.

The characteristics of the anecdote are well documented and widely agreed upon. Igor' Sukhikh writes: "The anecdote is anonymous and light..., it grows out of daily life but always lives on the border of what is permitted and reaches toward the absurd."⁴⁰ Alexei Yurchak defines the anecdote as a "short, formulaic joke that can be repeated by different people in different contexts" and as "a genre of folklore without an author."⁴¹ The essence of the anecdote is that it is comprised of unusual, unexpected, improbable, yet real events from daily life. However, it cannot be effective without a sharp punchline. Efim Kurganov writes: "What is most important is that the anecdote ends, not in comedy, not in laughter, but with the energy of its punchline, in the collision of irreconcilable worldviews."⁴² The punchline is:

⁴⁰ Igor' Sukhikh, *Sergey Dovlatov: vremiya, mesto, sud'ba* (St. Petersburg: Kul't-inform Press, 1996), 46-47.

⁴¹ Yurchak, 273.

⁴² Efim Kurganov, *Literaturnyi anekdot pushkinskoi epokhi* (Helsinki: Slavica Helsingiensia, 1995), 19.

The final change in the point of view (of the protagonist or the reader) in relation to the one held at the outset of the story. Moreover, this turn is associated with a new, unexpected occurrence, which clearly opposes the logic of the preceding development of the story.⁴³

While this device can be used in a variety of forms (such as *ostrota*, the anecdote, and the novella, which differ mostly in their length and level of development, all of which are used by Dovlatov in *Nashi*), they are all effective thanks to the punchline. In the anecdote, the storyline builds and accelerates toward its finish where, with the help of the punchline, it decisively changes the point of view of the hero and of the reader by concluding in divergent worldviews.

Dovlatov relies primarily on the energy of the punchline in *Nashi*. For example, Dovlatov opens Chapter Nine, which is devoted to his cousin Borya, as follows: “Life turned my cousin into a criminal. I think he was lucky. Otherwise he would have inevitably become a prominent Party functionary.”⁴⁴ While becoming a high-ranking Party official was considered, within the official sphere of ideology, to be a goal toward which one should strive, Dovlatov disassembles that ideological hierarchy by saying that his cousin is lucky because life turned him into a criminal instead. Because the punchline “opposes the logic” of the expected outcome of a story, the anecdote becomes an important vehicle for the neutralization of ideology.

⁴³ N. D. Tamarchenko, *Teoria literatury. Srednye formy: novella, povest', rasskaz. V pechati*.

⁴⁴ Sergey Dovlatov, *Nashi* (St. Petersburg: Azbuka-klassika, 2004), 85.

As a literary genre, the anecdote occupies a mediating position between folklore and written literature⁴⁵ and emerges from two sources—from “above,” that is from the influence of the classical European culture of the elite, and from “below,” or from traditional popular culture.⁴⁶ “When Russia, having Europeanized, adopted the genre of salon culture—the anecdote, it combined with Russian national tradition, with the folkloric texts that were passed down from epoch to epoch.”⁴⁷ During the Soviet period, the anecdote as a genre of urban folklore and oral speech became a unique manifestation of Soviet culture. “Over the period of seventy years of the totalitarian regime’s existence, the anecdote was a release valve that at least partially weakened the ideological vice and provided the masses with an outlet for spontaneous protest. In this sense, humor was compensation for the absence of freedom.”⁴⁸ While the large majority of Soviet citizens abided by the ruling dogma, anecdotes exchanged by Soviet citizens around their kitchen tables served as perhaps their only way to escape from the ideological stronghold that gripped them in all official aspects of their lives.

Thus, the anecdote during the Soviet era filled the same role as the carnival during the Middle Ages, as described in Mikhail Bakhtin’s book *Rabelais and His World*. Like Soviet citizens, the masses of the Middle Ages lived under repressive regimes. Despite

⁴⁵ Kurganov 1995, 11.

⁴⁶ V. V. Khimik, “Anekdot kak fenomen kul’turny,” in *Material kruglovo stola 16 noyabrya 2002* (St. Petersburg: Sankt- Peterburgskoe filosofskoe obshchestvo, 2002), 19.

⁴⁷ Kurganov 1995, 39.

⁴⁸ O. S. Issers and N. A. Kuzmina, “Anekdot i kognitivnye operatsii refreimirovanie: lingvodidacticheski aspekt,” in *Miscellania: pamyat’ A. B. Mordovinova* (Omsk: Omskiy gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2000), 143.

the fact that these masses had no power in the official sphere of life, those in power understood that the people had a tendency toward revolution and that they needed to give the masses some sort of release so this tendency was not realized. Enter the carnival, where laughter, the grotesque, and mockery ruled. The carnival destroyed the ideological hierarchy of everyday existence specifically because it was the only manifestation of the unofficial sphere of life:

In the Middle Ages folk humor existed and developed outside the official sphere of high ideology and literature, but precisely because of its unofficial existence, it was marked by exceptional radicalism, freedom, and ruthlessness. Having on the one hand forbidden laughter in every official sphere of life and ideology, the Middle Ages on the other hand bestowed exceptional privileges of license and lawlessness outside these spheres.... From the wearing of clothes turned inside out and trousers slipped on over the head to the election of mock kings and popes the same topographical logic is put to work: shifting from top to bottom.... These changes were placed into an essential relation with time and with social and historical change. The element of relativity and of becoming was emphasized, in opposition to the immovable and extratemporal stability of the medieval hierarchy.... But the medieval culture of folk humor actually belonged to all of the people. The truth of laughter embraced and carried away everyone; nobody could resist it.⁴⁹

This laughter is what overcomes the fear and violence invoked and utilized by the totalitarian regime to suppress the masses in the official sphere because laughter is both limitless and organic. The anecdote is very similar to the carnival described by Bakhtin in that it gave the Soviet people their only outlet to parody the authorities and offered a freedom that the official sphere did not.

⁴⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 71, 81, 82.

The ability of the anecdote to transcend a repressive ideology is contained in its anonymity, its oral form, and the fact that it is reproduced many times by many different people.⁵⁰ For example:

- I killed five flies today, said Ranevskaya. Two males and three females.
- How could you tell them apart?
- Two landed on a beer bottle, and three on a mirror.⁵¹

Or, “where will we buy bread if communism is built in America?”⁵² Although it is not required, the anecdote (or *ostrota*, here) often has political or historical value and reflects the everyday problems and moods of the masses.⁵³ Additionally, it is crucial that the anecdote is considered “alive” and that it comes from everyday life, not from the realm of fantasy (such as arcadia or utopia). This is also why the anecdote generally has a short shelf life, aging and exiting the stage in favor of newer, fresher anecdotes.⁵⁴ The life of an anecdote is connected to the Russian kitchen, where Muscovites gathered to freely (yet secretly) discuss daily life. Frequently, this discussion took place with the help of the anecdote and its sharp, humorous punchline. The question: “Have you heard the newest anecdote?” was asked constantly, and new anecdotes spread so rapidly that during the course of a day one could hear the same anecdote being told by dozens of different

⁵⁰ Khimik, 30.

⁵¹ F. G. Ranevskaya, *Sluchai. Shutki. Aforizmy*. (Moscow, 1998), 64.

⁵² “Anekdoty pro Brezhneva,” <https://www.anekdot.ru/tags/Брежнев>, accessed March 11, 2016.

⁵³ Rashit Yangirov, “Anekdot ‘s borodoi:’ Materialy k istorii nepodtsenzurnovo sovetskogo fol’klora 1918-1934,” *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 31 (1998): 156.

⁵⁴ As evidenced by the title of Yangirov’s article “Anekdot ‘s borodoi.’”

people.⁵⁵ In this way, the entire Soviet population was transformed into passive dissidents⁵⁶ in that one of the main results of the anecdote is the establishment of a worldview that opposes the repressive regime.

Another result is laughter, which is crucial for the nullification of ideology in that “humor is a collective action.”⁵⁷ Similarly, Bergson writes that “laughter should have a social meaning,” since it reflects the needs of human life.⁵⁸ Interestingly, laughter creates the type of collective that was intended by the Soviet authorities. Commenting on Bergson’s work, A. V. Dmitriev agrees that “laughter always belongs to the group,”⁵⁹ which refers both to a small group gathered in someone’s kitchen and to the Soviet masses as a whole:

Laughter is an emotional reaction to a paradoxical situation, a positive reaction to the wholeness of the world, which contrary to the incompatible poles of dual opposition (that is, the official Soviet ideology and the unofficial sphere shared by the masses—C. C.) carry with it the opportunity and necessity of their coexistence. In this sense, laughter opposes violence in that it strives toward the liquidation of one of the poles (the official sphere—C. C.).⁶⁰

Throughout the Soviet era there were varying levels of terror and fear. Of course, there was more repression during the Stalinist terror than Khrushchev’s thaw, but some level of

⁵⁵ Yangirov, 155.

⁵⁶ Emil Draitser, “Sociological Aspects of the Russian Jewish Jokes of the Exodus,” *Humor* Vol. 7, No. 3: 245-267.

⁵⁷ Genis, *Dovlatov i okrestnosti*, 22.

⁵⁸ A. Bergson, *Smekh* (Moscow, 1992), 126.

⁵⁹ A. V. Dmitriev, *Sotsiologia yumora* (Moscow: Rossiiskaya Akademia Nauk, 1996), 23.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 31.

fear always existed. The value of the anecdote lies in its incompatible worldviews and in its laughter, both of which work to nullify the ideology that subjects its citizens to fear and violence on a daily basis.

Dovlatov appropriated the anecdote as a way to liberate himself from ideology's clutches. This seems to have occurred naturally, as Dovlatov was known for his deep voice that was made for storytelling. Alexander Genis writes: "Sergey wrote orally and released a sentence only when it sounded flawless... His voice was his handwriting. No less than poets, Dovlatov valued the ability of sound to preserve that which was lost when written."⁶¹ Dovlatov's writing can be characterized more as an oral performance than as literature. If his voice was his handwriting, then his anecdotes were the form of the stories that he told. Additionally, it is important that Dovlatov considered himself a storyteller, and not a writer. "A writer deals with serious problems—He writes about what people live for, about how people should live. A storyteller writes about HOW people live."⁶² Additionally, he refrains from passing judgment upon his characters, deciding to show them as they are in life, not as they should be or might have been. "History allows us to uncover mysteries, politics—to guess at them: only the future will tell. Of the present, all there is to tell about is what people know. That's what Dovlatov did."⁶³ To this end, Dovlatov appropriates the anecdote as his primary literary device

⁶¹ Genis, *Dovlatov i okrestnosti*, 269.

⁶² Sergey Dovlatov, "Dar organicheskogo bezzlobiya (Interv'yū Viktoriy Erofeevy)," *Sobranie prozy v tryokh tomakh* (St. Petersburg: Limbus-Press, 1995), t. 3, 352.

⁶³ Genis, *Dovlatov i okrestnosti*, 267.

since it provides the most effective way to preserve the life that he himself is trying to comprehend.

In an effort to undermine ideology's finished, perfected ideal, Dovlatov frequently emphasizes the importance of imperfection. "People were the alphabet of his poetics,"⁶⁴ and, because he is a "storyteller" and not a "writer," Dovlatov presents people as they are, that is, flawed. "Dovlatov writes only from nature. And nature is us."⁶⁵ Nature is filled with imperfections, and the anecdote overcomes ideology by creating an opposing and unexpected worldview, one that focuses on the truth of how people actually live rather than on the way that people should live under the ruling dogma.

Dovlatov's anecdotes battle against ideology and remind the reader that "a world without mistakes is dangerous, like any utopian, totalitarian fantasy."⁶⁶ Since people are clearly not perfect, then the mistakes that they make should be reflected in their lives and, subsequently, in the stories told about them. In Chapter Five of *Nashi*, dedicated to his Aunt Marya, a proofreader by profession, Dovlatov discusses the importance of being the author of one's own mistakes, giving the following examples:

In one of his novels, Dostoevsky wrote: "Nearby was a round table of oval form..."

Someone read the work in manuscript form and said:

—Fyodor Mikhailovich, you misspoke. It needs to be corrected.

Dostoevsky thought for a moment and said:

—Leave it as it is...

⁶⁴ Ibid, 121.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 104.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 66.

In one of his early stories, Gogol used the word *shchekaturka* (for the word “plaster”). One time Aksakov said to him:

—Why are you writing *shchekaturka*?

—What should I write? – asked Gogol.

—*Shtukaturka*.

—I don’t think so, – said Gogol.

—Look it up in the dictionary.

Dalya grabbed a dictionary. They looked it up and it really was *shtukaturka*.

Subsequently Gogol invariably wrote *shtukaturka*. But in reprinted editions of his early stories the word wasn’t corrected...

Why didn’t Dostoevsky want to liquidate what was clearly an error?

Why did Alexander Dumas name his novel “The Three Musketeers,” although there are clearly four of them?

There are hundreds of such examples.

Obviously, errors and inaccuracies are dear to the writer. Which means they are also dear to the reader.⁶⁷

A mistake is important to a writer precisely because it is his own mistake, which represents his personal view of the world. It is interesting that Dovlatov writes that Dostoevsky didn’t want to “liquidate” his obvious error, as if Dovlatov is describing a totalitarian regime that wishes to eliminate certain dissidents or political opposition that may be involved in provocation. These “mistakes” are symbols of human diversity, a natural antidote for the uniformity of ideology. When a person, especially a writer, errs, no matter how absurd it appears, he is fighting against the strict, repressive, uniform world that is trying to stamp out difference. The importance of preserving individual differences occurs to Dovlatov after his Aunt Marya dies, when he remembers how she once read to him “the poems of a certain poetess”:

“Life has surpassed its middle,

⁶⁷ Dovlatov, *Nashi*, 46-47.

And I still think that I'll move mountains,
Sow the fields, irrigate the valleys,
But life has long since moved past its middle..."

I think that she wrote them herself. The poems, of course, are awkward. The first line is a direct quote from Dante.

But still those poems touched me.

"Life has surpassed its middle,
And I still think that I'll move mountains,"

My aunt was mistaken.
Life had already come to its end.
Correcting the mistake at that point was impossible...⁶⁸

Correcting the mistake was impossible, of course, because its author was no longer alive, and no one other than the author can attach a different value to that mistake. Dovlatov objectively presents the mistakes and flaws of the people he writes about without passing judgment. "A mistake is a symbol of the natural... A defect played the role of the mistake, without which a person as a figure of fate and nature would appear as unrealistic and false."⁶⁹ Dovlatov places such an importance on an imperfection because it opposes the ruling ideology's worldview and strives to de-conceptualize it. The anecdote's purpose is to destroy the forgone conclusions of dogma and to present the unexpected to the reader; therefore it becomes Dovlatov's most effective vehicle for achieving this aim.

Moreover, Dovlatov presents the mistake, not only as an opposition to the official Soviet ideology (or any ideology, for that matter), but also as a representation of the truth. In Chapter Seven of *Nashi* devoted to his mother, Dovlatov recounts her work as a

⁶⁸ Ibid, 50.

⁶⁹ Genis, *Dovlatov i okrestnosti*, 65-66.

newspaper editor, introducing the notion that a misprint is the only thing in a Soviet newspaper that carries any semblance of truth. He writes: “It pays to leave out a single letter.”⁷⁰ He gives the following examples: “Sign of a shit-in-chief” (*признак гавнокомандующего*) instead of “Sign of a commander-in-chief” (*признак главнокомандующего*), “Communists denounce the Party’s decision” (*коммунисты осуждают решения партии*) instead of “discuss” (*обсуждают*), and “Bolshevik penal servitude” (*большевистская каторга*) instead of “cohort” (*когорта*). And then, the punchline: “As everyone knows, in our newspapers only the misprints are truthful.”⁷¹ The reader laughs, of course, because the “misprints,” in fact, did contain the truth about the Soviet government. But the anecdote also serves to accentuate the serious nature of the times. To his humorous quips, Dovlatov adds: “In the last twenty years, they don’t shoot you for that. My mother worked as a proofreader thirty years ago.”⁷²

The above example emphasizes yet another characteristic of the anecdote, that is, some kind of shared knowledge that the reader or listener must possess in order to understand the joke. Without this knowledge, the historical importance and the comic effect of the punchline are wasted. “The ability to understand humor includes the possession of background knowledge that communicates commonly held information that

⁷⁰ Dovlatov, *Nashi*, 62.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 62.

⁷² *Ibid*, 63. Many will remember the scene in Andrey Tarkovsky’s *Zerkalo* when the narrator’s mother rushes back to her job at a printing house because she is terrified at the thought that she let a typo through to the printer.

is known only to certain people belonging to one family or to a small group.”⁷³ The anecdote, then, serves to unify the people within this inner circle of understanding. The unity produced when an anecdote is shared and understood by a small group of people transcends official dogma. In this sense, the anecdote succeeds in placing human connections above ideological ones. Dovlatov uses the device in *Nashi* to achieve precisely this effect to tell his family history.

Through this emphasis on community, Dovlatov is connected to the tradition of *skaz* in Russian literature. *Skaz* is an oral narrative that lies “on neutral ground somewhere between the *skazka*...and the *byl'*.”⁷⁴ In other words, it lies between an unreal, fantastical story and a tale whose contents can be labeled as “true.” The *skaz* is “a form of reminiscence” that borders on “an ordinary speech event,” such as a personal anecdote, and “work of oral narrative art destined to survive and be transmitted by others.”⁷⁵ Thus, Dovlatov’s work can be viewed as a continuation of the tradition established by such authors as Gogol, Leskov, Chekhov, and Zoshchenko.

The connection to *skaz* is perhaps more significant in our discussion of the communal aspect of the anecdote due to the connection between the speaker (or, in Dovlatov’s case, the writer) and the listener (or reader). In terms of the narrator’s oral performance, “the *skaz* makes the word physically palpable. The reader enters into the

⁷³ A. D. Shmelev and E. Y. Shmeleva, “Fonovye znania v russkom anecdote,” *Doklady mezhdunarodnogo seminara ‘Dialog 2003’ po komp’yuternoj lingvistike*, 2003.

⁷⁴ Hugh McLean, “Skaz,” *Handbook of Russian Literature*, ed. Victor Terras (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 420.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 420.

story, begins to articulate, gesticulate, and smile; he no longer reads the story, but plays it.”⁷⁶ The participation of the reader is crucial, since, according to our definitions above, the anecdote is anonymous and does not have an author. The inclusion of the reader/listener as a participant equal to the author/speaker⁷⁷ makes the anecdote perhaps the most democratic form of storytelling. But although the anecdote is based on an event from life, this does not mean that it is true or autobiographical. For example, across Dovlatov’s oeuvre, a reader can find several accounts of how he met his wife, Elena. When asked in an interview which of these versions is actually true, Elena says that all of them are equally true.⁷⁸ The anecdote thereby levels the hierarchy between author and reader. The reader does not enjoy the anecdote because it gives a unique account of the author’s life; the reader is connected to the anecdote because it portrays an event that could very well have happened in his own life.

While the genre of oral narrative has a long and rich history, its popularity reached its peak in the late-Soviet period. “The collective ritual of ‘reeling out,’ or telling endless rounds of anecdotes in a group, became a ubiquitous part of daily *obshchenie*.”⁷⁹ Of course, reeling out in an environment defined by the official rules of ideology was not possible. The hierarchical chains of command were too rigidly enforced to allow for any

⁷⁶ Ibid, 420.

⁷⁷ For the purposes of this article, the words “speaker” and “(story)teller” will be used interchangeably with “author” and “writer,” and the word “listener” will be used interchangeably with “reader.”

⁷⁸ I am indebted to Yasha Klots for pointing this out to me.

⁷⁹ Yurchak, 274.

kind of democratization in the official sphere. But outside of these contexts, “anecdotes were told relatively openly. A boss could ‘reel out’ with his or her employees, and a Komsomol secretary could ‘reel out’ with the rank and file.”⁸⁰ The presence of the anecdote, then, signified the absence of ideology, since “reeling out” could only occur amongst people who were equally participating in the collective ritual, regardless of what positions they held in their official lives. If the official sphere of ideology concentrated on results, the participants in reeling out sessions were more concerned with the process of the ritual. The importance of repeating jokes many times during this ritual indicates the extent to which process dwarfed product. “Most anecdotes were heard by a person more than once; people took part in the reeling out not only to hear new jokes, or any particular ‘type’ of jokes, but to participate in this enjoyable collective ritual itself that contributed to producing the group’s *svoi*.”⁸¹ Dvlatov’s choice of title for this work—*Nashi*—not only refers to the author’s biological family, but also to the collective consciousness involved in the ritual of reeling out.

With the help of these reeling out sessions, the anecdote became an antidote for the absurdity of the Soviet official sphere. The absurdity of Soviet life was the foundation upon which the collective ritual described above was built and was experienced by virtually everyone, accounting for the popularity of the anecdote during these times. For Dvlatov, whose stories were refused publication in the Soviet Union, the absurd became his refuge from the futility of Soviet life—his answer to Marmeladov’s question—, and

⁸⁰ Ibid, 274.

⁸¹ Yurchak, 275.

the laughter produced by that absurdity symbolizes not only Dovlatov's estrangement from his homeland, but also the average Soviet citizen's.

Interestingly, Dovlatov compiles his chapters in order to project the same effect as a single anecdote—an unexpected finale, laughter, and opposing and changing viewpoints of the characters involved and of the reader. Just as a single anecdote builds and reaches its crescendo, so does the cumulative effect of *Nashi's* thirteen chapters. Dovlatov wants his life, and life in general, to have meaning. Yet all he finds is that this meaning consists of his obligation to continue the absurd life that his predecessors have passed down to him. In turn, his charge is to write down these episodes so that his family's future generations will know how their recent ancestors once lived. But since the anecdote conveys information about an ordinary life, and not only about one individual's, Dovlatov's stories serve as a general chronicle of the late-Soviet period.

We immediately see the effect of the anecdote in Chapter One, where we meet Dovlatov's grandfather, Isaac. The chapter hinges on the fact that Isaac is physically enormous. "Grandpa was about seven feet tall. He could fit an entire apple in his mouth. His moustache reached his shoulders."⁸² Of course, a person can be that large, but such a description appears quite exaggerated and even grotesque to the reader. It reminds the reader of certain characters from Gogol, Rabelais, or Olesha. This introduction to Isaac, appearing on the first page of *Nashi*, makes it clear that the absurd will play an important role for Dovlatov:

⁸² Dovlatov, *Nashi*, 6.

Grandpa Isaac ate a ton. Rather than slice bread normally, he cut the entire loaf lengthwise. When at other peoples' homes, Grandma Raya was constantly embarrassed because of him. Before going to visit people, Grandpa ate a big lunch. It didn't help. He piled up several pieces of bread. He drank vodka from a soda glass. During dessert, he asked the host not to clear the main course from the table. Having returned home, he ate dinner with a feeling of relief.⁸³

Dovlatov tells this episode in a way that builds and peaks at the end. The reader can actually feel his stomach getting full as the episode progresses, as if he is eating all of this food himself, and is already stuffed upon reaching the last line: "Having returned home, he ate dinner with a feeling of relief."

Through the anecdote, Dovlatov develops the tendency to tell a series of comedic stories, and then sharply changes the tone to one of a much more serious nature. At the end of Chapter One, Dovlatov makes just such a turn from humorous to serious, as he recounts how his grandfather was arrested and shot. Dovlatov asks: "In the name of what was this absurd and amusing life cut short?"⁸⁴ Dovlatov is not simply offering this question to his reader, but is struggling to find an answer for himself. In the anecdote, teller and listener are equal.

But the significance of his grandfather's stories becomes clear to Dovlatov only at the end of the chapter when he includes parallel commentary about his own life. At this point, Dovlatov becomes a character in his own work in order to show the reader why he chose to include the anecdotes about his grandfather. He thinks of his grandfather when one of his friends is surprised and asks: "How can you drink rum out of a coffee mug?"

⁸³ Ibid, 8.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 10.

or when his wife says to him: “We’re invited to the Dombrovsky’s today. You need to eat beforehand.”⁸⁵ Why are these anecdotes so precious to Dovlatov? Because, looking at a photograph of his grandfather, he ends the chapter: “When my grandkids flip through the photo album, they will confuse the two of us.”⁸⁶ Dovlatov understands that the absurd, alone, is his inheritance, which must be preserved. And the anecdote is the most effective way to do so.

Dovlatov’s conveyance of ideology’s ineffectiveness is expressed in a variety of scenarios involving different personages, but his use of the anecdote remains constant. In the fourth chapter, Dovlatov writes about his stop in Vienna as he was emigrating from the Soviet Union to America. He meets his uncle, Leopold, and, as the story unfolds, we see that they represent opposing viewpoints. Uncle Leopold, who has lived in Europe for years, has adopted a capitalistic worldview. For example, Dovlatov writes:

Leopold depicted his poverty in the following way:
“My house needs to be repaired. My garage hasn’t been renovated in four years.”⁸⁷

For a person that has lived his entire life behind the walls of the Soviet Union, this image of “poverty” is obviously ridiculous. Leopold then proceeds to ask Dovlatov questions that seem more appropriate for a child than for a grown man; these exchanges demonstrate that Leopold is so entrenched in Western values that he cannot comprehend the essence of Soviet life, even though he had grown up there himself: “Do you like

⁸⁵ Ibid, 10.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 10.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 32.

restaurants?” Or, “Are there big stores in Leningrad?”⁸⁸ They clearly cannot understand each other, even though they are relatives with the same heritage and upbringing. Dovlatov is disappointed because he is seeking someone who shares his understanding of life. If this event were described in the terms of the anecdote, it could not be considered one, since Leopold’s ideology prevents him from participating in the ritual of reeling out.

Though the chapter is dedicated to Dovlatov’s meeting with his uncle, another relationship also emerges when the author meets Reinhardt, the German owner of the small Viennese hotel at which Dovlatov is staying. Naturally, the reader, recalling the historical context of World War II, instinctively expects Reinhardt to be Dovlatov’s enemy. However, the true paradox is that Dovlatov and Reinhardt are able to understand each other, thereby destroying any trace of the ideological struggle that consumed the two nations during World War II. Here is an example of their conversation:

Reinhardt asks:

—Were you in the Party?

—No.

—What about the youth union?

—Yes. That happened automatically.

—I understand. Do you like the West?

—After prison, I like everything.

—My father was arrested in 1940. He called Hitler a “brown *shvein*.”

—He was a Communist?

—No, he wasn’t a Commie. Just an educated person...Would you like a shot of vodka?

—Sure.

—I’ll get some sandwiches.

—Those are superfluous.

—You’re right...⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Ibid, 36.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 34-35.

In this short exchange, we see that Dovlatov finds everything in Reinhardt that he had hoped to find in his relative, Leopold. Although Reinhardt is a German, he understands Dovlatov, as they learn that they both have had similar life experiences living under repressive regimes and both have family members who did not subscribe to the ruling ideology. One gets the sense that Reinhardt could write his own version of *Nashi* with his own anecdotes about his family's life in Nazi Germany. The anecdote becomes a vehicle for humanity, making the ineffable accessible, if only for the duration of the anecdote itself. In the dialogue between Dovlatov and Reinhardt, the border between the two ideologies is eliminated, and they comprehend each other simply as individuals, and not as representative stereotypes of their respective nationalities. When Dovlatov says that the sandwiches are "superfluous," he is speaking not only of a complement to their vodka; his real message, through the anecdote, is that the ideologies themselves are superfluous.

Leopold could not possibly comprehend such a conversation, because he is too ensconced in his Western lifestyle to notice any greater message about humanity. This becomes clear when Leopold asks Dovlatov about his own parents. Dovlatov informs Leopold that his father was arrested. Leopold replies:

- Arrested? For what? Was he against the Communists?
- I don't think so.
- Why was he arrested?
- He just was.
- My God, what a wild country...explain it to me.
- I'm afraid I can't. Dozens of books have been written about it.
- I don't have time to read books. I work too much...⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Ibid, 38.

After this conversation, Dovlatov knows that they will not see eye-to-eye precisely because Leopold's ideological values prevent him from seeing the reality, not only of Dovlatov's life, but also of the realities of Soviet existence. More accurately, Leopold is not capable of rising above ideology in order to see the greater lesson of humanity. We should add here that it is of no significance that Leopold subscribes specifically to capitalism. However, Dovlatov's message is that those who serve any ideology will not be able to perceive the essence of life, which lies in its absurd nature. Dovlatov emphasizes this at the end of the chapter when he writes, "life is absurd because a German is closer to me than my own uncle."⁹¹ Considering that this is a book about Dovlatov's heritage and family, the poignancy of this statement is heightened significantly. Again, we can look to the title of the work. *Nashi* implies a blood connection, yet Reinhardt, the German, is closer to Dovlatov than his own family member. The anecdote not only erases ideological boundaries, but also national and familial ones as well.

While many of the chapters involve the frustrations of Soviet life or the juxtaposition of ideological expectations, Dovlatov did not strive to be a dissident. He refused this struggle, saying: "After the Communists, I hate anti-Communists most of all."⁹² According to him, any life is absurd, not only Soviet life. The anecdote, with its humorous and unexpected punchline, is the most effective way to express life's nonsensical tendencies, and becomes perhaps the only method of successfully opposing

⁹¹ Ibid, 42.

⁹² Genis, *Dovlatov i okrestnosti*, 18.

the Soviet authorities, who prohibited Dovlatov from being published in his homeland. His anecdotes will unify those who share the laughter produced by the punchline, since “laughter must have a communal meaning.”⁹³ In doing so, however, Dovlatov devises a more effective strategy than if he had become a dissident. In his work entitled *Remeslo*, he writes: “The Soviet regime is like a sensitive woman. It is bad for those who insult her. But it is much worse for those who ignore her.”⁹⁴ His—and the urbanists’—goal is not to challenge the ruling ideology, but rather to ignore it and to be freed from any ideology whatsoever.

In utilizing the anecdote to preserve the absurdity of life, Dovlatov encapsulates his family history so that it is continued and passed down to future generations. But continuing the theater of life under the repressive conditions of the Soviet regime was difficult and required a certain degree of responsibility from each of the actors. Since his focus is on how people lived and not how they should live, Dovlatov does not blame those who acquiesced to the demands of the official sphere. For example, he writes: “My aunt was a member of the Party. I don’t blame her. Many worthwhile and honest people found themselves in the Party ranks. They are not to blame. They just wanted to live better.”⁹⁵ This statement also helps us to understand how easy it was for people of different ranks to participate in reeling out sessions together. People knew that Party affiliation was only part of the game of their official lives and not a defining factor of

⁹³ Bergson, 126.

⁹⁴ Dovlatov, *Sobranie prozy*, t. 2, 23.

⁹⁵ Dovlatov, *Nashi*, 49.

their humanity. Instead of judging people for joining the Communist Party, Dovlatov uses the anecdote to portray the ongoing theater of life, in which both actors and audience participate equally, regardless of rank.

Dovlatov does, however, accentuate the responsibility required to transcend ideological conflict. In Chapter Eight, Dovlatov describes his relationship with his father. If Dovlatov was interested in real life, then his father was equally focused on the world of theater, or an escape from life. His father wrote for the stage, and one time recited a witty poem about the lack of pickles in State stores. Dovlatov recounts his mother's reaction to the poem:

- Well, what do you think? – my father asked.
- Pickles are sold on every corner – said my mother.
- So what?
- So...it's not true to life.
- What's not true to life? What, specifically, is not true to life?
- That there are no pickles in stores. You'd be better off writing about beef sausage.
- What does beef sausage have to do with anything?! I'm not your housekeeper! Your petty life doesn't interest me one bit!⁹⁶

The above anecdote suggests that Dovlatov and his father are polar opposites. To Dovlatov, life is the most important thing, but his father's goal is the rejection of reality. Dovlatov writes: "My father had some sort of deep and stubborn misunderstanding of real life."⁹⁷ Dovlatov's father perceives life to be one ongoing performance that builds to its climax. But once Dovlatov finishes the story of his father, he turns to his own thoughts. With the help of the anecdote, we are told that life does not have a finale, and

⁹⁶ Ibid, 77.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 83.

does not move towards one. Even after one's death, that person remains in the memories of those that knew him or her.⁹⁸ As Dovlatov was preparing to emigrate, his father was fired from his job in the theater:

—Fine, —I said, —We'll go together.
—Where?
—Wherever you'd like. To the capitalistic jungle.
—What will we do there?
—Nothing. Grow old...

My father got angry. Yeah, right—abandon the stage during the third act! Three minutes before the applause!...

What could I say to him? That we're not on stage, but in the audience?⁹⁹

Although their perceptions of life do not coincide, there is still a theatrical element present in both. The performer needs the audience, just as the teller of an anecdote depends on his listeners and a writer depends on his readers. And the nature of the anecdote is such that actor and audience are equal participants. At the end of the chapter, Dovlatov writes:

And only one thing bothers me...It doesn't bother me, but rather it surprises me...My wife, whenever she gets a chance...if there's some event or literary gathering...In short, no matter what I do, my wife always says:

—My God, you're exactly like your father!...(84)¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ I cannot help but recall the final stanza of Pasternak's poem «Свидание»:

Но кто мы и откуда, / Когда от всех тех лет / Остались пересуды, / А нас на свете нет.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 83.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 84.

This paradox fulfills the main requirement of the anecdote, in other words, the change in perception of the hero and the reader. Although Dovlatov does not share the opinion of his father, he understands, through the words of his wife, that he actually resembles his father quite closely. His father saw the world as theater precisely because he knew that life is absurd. But Dovlatov only hints at the intersection of their worldviews. Dovlatov writes: “my mother hated the person who fired [his father] from the theater for her entire life. My father went drinking with him a month later.”¹⁰¹ As the chapter unfolds, it appears that Dovlatov is juxtaposing his worldview with his father’s. Ultimately, however, they both have the same view of Soviet life. Dovlatov’s father understands that the person who fired him was only acting as he needed to under the expectations of the official ideology. That did not stop them from seeing each other as people, and their drinking together represents the reeling out sessions where any sense of hierarchy is eliminated. When Dovlatov's wife tells him: “My God, you’re exactly like your father,” the reader understands that the two men share the same conception of Soviet life.

A third personage adds to the ability of the anecdote to serve as a vehicle for the theater of life. Chapter Nine of *Nashi* is devoted to Dovlatov’s cousin, Borya. This is by far the longest chapter in the book, thus a full discussion of it is not possible here. But Borya’s chapter is crucial for our understanding of Dovlatov’s theater of life and of the absurd. Dovlatov describes several phases of Borya’s life, and each of these phases is structured in the same way. First, Borya is portrayed as a model individual, whether it be a student, Komsomol member, or Lenfilm employee. Borya distinguishes himself by

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 79.

outperforming everyone else at each stage. These notable beginnings suggest to the reader that Borya is a person who abides by the rules of the Soviet system in order to promote himself. But during each phase, Dovlatov also tells the reader how Borya urinates on the school principal's head because he would not respect himself otherwise; how Borya committed twelve robberies after receiving his diploma with honors and being offered a job in the theater; and how, after serving a prison sentence, Borya climbed the ladder at Lenfilm, only to then begin drinking and finding himself in suspicious company. At each stage of his life, Borya "built a career and simultaneously destroyed it."¹⁰²

Parallel to the anecdotes about Borya, Dovlatov portrays himself at similar stages. He never succeeds, as does Borya, and it appears that the two are complete opposites. Dovlatov was not a good student, worked as a prison guard, then was fired and could not get any work whatsoever. He drank, wrote stories, and lived on his mother's pension. While Dovlatov could never seem to get his life off the ground, he envies Borya and wonders why he always squanders the careers that are seemingly built for him.

He eventually understands that Borya could "only act in extreme situations" and could "only live in captivity."¹⁰³ This, too, is a function of the absurdity of Soviet life. For Borya, to live is to wear a mask and to play a theatrical role. If there is no drama, then Borya cannot survive, therefore he continually creates drama so as not to fall in line with the rest of those who serve the ruling ideology. Without creating this drama, he most

¹⁰² Ibid, 97.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 111-112.

certainly would have become a “prominent Party functionary,” as Dovlatov quips to open the chapter. Dovlatov chooses not to play this role, preferring to remain as true to his beliefs as possible. Of course, this is a recipe for disaster in the official sphere of Soviet ideology. But, then again, so is Borya’s approach. And this is the paradox that Dovlatov eventually realizes. While Dovlatov spends most of the chapter accentuating how opposite their lives are, the chapter ends with the author realizing their similarities, just as his wife reminds him how much he resembles his father. As Dovlatov prepares to emigrate, Borya chooses to remain in the Soviet Union, since he knows that he cannot survive in freedom. He tells Dovlatov: “How strange! I’m half Russian, you’re half Jewish. But we both love vodka with beer.”¹⁰⁴ As always, the absurdity of this statement conveys the ultimate truth about humanity—ideologies do not matter. If Dovlatov’s encounter with Reinhardt teaches us that nationalities are irrelevant, then Borya tells us that ethnicities are just as insignificant. The human connections are all that matter. Ideology cannot convey these connections, but the anecdote can. For this reason, Dovlatov chooses not to tell the reader about events such as the time he was a guard at the prison where Borya was held captive because it would be “too literary.”¹⁰⁵

Since we have been discussing the theatrical elements of the anecdote and of life, it should be noted that an interesting moment occurs in Borya’s chapter. Although *Nashi* is composed of thirteen chapters, each dedicated to an individual family member, the work can be read as one theatrical piece. As Dovlatov describes the different phases of

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 112.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 94.

Borya's life and the ebb and flow of his successes and his intentional self-sabotage, Dovlatov and his family members show their concern for Borya. As Borya winds up in the police station time and time again (before he eventually ends up going to prison for killing a police officer with his car while he was driving drunk), Dovlatov writes: "We waited to see how this would all end."¹⁰⁶ This seemingly innocuous statement is a testament to the theatrical nature of the work and, in general, of the anecdote, with the listeners participating on equal footing with the storytellers. Dovlatov says this on page 98, which is exactly two-thirds of the way through the book (152 total pages). If *Nashi* were, in fact, a theatrical production, this moment would occur at the end of Act II of a three-act play, at a point when the audience members *would* be anticipating the ending and trying to guess how it would turn out during the second intermission.

The difference is that, in the theater, one does see the ending of the play, whereas in life we do not. The drama never ends. The absurdity of life continues perpetually, even after each individual passes away. The line—"We waited to see how this would all end"—shows the effectiveness of the anecdote to neutralize ideology. In the official sphere, we know how things will (or should) end because the entire system is predicated upon advertised goals toward which the mechanism strives. Ideology must have a defined end point; otherwise the necessary hierarchy could not be maintained and perpetuated. The end goal must be announced so that the leadership can convince its constituents, usually through fear, to follow behind them. First, the strategy is conceived, and then the tactics are determined. The anecdote, however, reverses the principle which propels the

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 98.

ideological structure. The end cannot be announced. The story's details build, pointing toward one conclusion. The listener anticipates that conclusion, until the punchline delivers an unexpected one. Furthermore, the ritual of reeling out dictates that an anecdote be told repeatedly, so there can never be any end to the story.

Returning to our three theatrical players, they each find their own way to cope with their Soviet life. The anecdote is anti-ideological because it does not demand that each person adopt the same coping mechanism. Dovlatov's father escapes from life via the theater, Borya "escapes" by staying in the Soviet Union where he can continue to thrive amidst chaos, and Dovlatov escapes, first via the anecdote, and then, literally, via emigration. This acts on our comprehension of Dovlatov's worldview and accentuates the ability of the anecdote to change our perception of life in a much more significant way than does subscribing to a particular ideology. More importantly, the anecdote succeeds in unifying people—even those who at first seem irreconcilable—much more effectively and genuinely than mutual subscription to any ideology, which only proves that two people agree to abide by an external set of rules. Participating in an anecdote, as teller or listener, does not so much make us human as it provides a space for our inherent humanity to express itself; this space is not afforded to us by the vanity of our daily lives governed by the expectations placed on us by ideology. The anecdote is not a movement toward an external goal, but rather an expression of our internal beings. Individuals pass on, but the theater of life continues perpetually. The anecdote, then, is used to capture that life. It is a snapshot of a particular time, place, and era that will never recur, but can

only be experienced through our stories, which are representations of our dialogical interactions.

For Dovlatov, emigration was an attempt to escape from the absurdity of life, but that absurdity resiliently and relentlessly followed him to New York. In Chapter Eleven of *Nashi*, he leaves his homeland with the obligation to continue the perpetual banality of human existence. Although after emigrating to New York, Dovlatov is finally convinced of the primary paradox of life. He learns that he is bound to continue in his struggle, not with the Soviet regime, but with life itself. His journey illustrates that the anecdote eliminates geographical boundaries, as well as national, ethnic, and familial ones. He writes about his relationship with his wife, Lena. Though he tells us the story of how they married, Dovlatov writes: “I arrived in America with a dream of getting divorced.”¹⁰⁷ Upon reaching New York and reuniting with his wife, who flew to America earlier than her husband, Dovlatov says to her:

—There’s nowhere to run...I’d prefer to stay here. I hope that’s possible?...

—Of course. If you love us...

—The Colonel says that I love you.¹⁰⁸

—If you love us, then stay. We’re not against it...

—What does love have to do with anything...Love is for teenagers. This isn’t about love here, but fate...¹⁰⁹

Dovlatov was tormented in the Soviet Union, where he couldn’t become a writer on his terms and where he was forced to take menial jobs in order to survive. He arrives in

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 126.

¹⁰⁸ This refers to an earlier episode before Dovlatov emigrates, when the OVIR official asks him if he loves his wife and daughter.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 143-144.

America, thinking that he will be free from all obligations, yet he is once again confronted with the same absurdity, although in different forms. In the above anecdote, the absurd lies in the fact that even in “freedom,” in America, he cannot do what he wishes, and that is to get divorced. In New York, he is faced with the fact that literature does not carry the same meaning as in the Soviet Union, that he still must spend his days working as a journalist in order to pay the bills, that he doesn’t know English, a reality that distances him from his physical surroundings and, especially, from his children. Moreover, it is only in America where Dovlatov finally understands that there is no ideology, but only fate, which demands that each person not only carry out their task of continuing the theater of the absurd in their daily lives, but also that he preserves this ineluctable fact in order to tell the story of one's family and of one's homeland. Dovlatov's son is born an American citizen, and he knows that the absurdity of life is inescapable. Struggling against this integral fact is futile, and it is a fact with which Dovlatov finally comes to terms. At the end of Chapter Twelve, his daughter explains this essence quite clearly:

Not long ago she said...How can I best express it?...In short, I heard the following phrase:
—They’re finally publishing you. What has changed?
—Nothing, —I said. Nothing.¹¹⁰

It may have seemed that Dovlatov’s struggle was with the Soviet regime or with the fact that he was never published in the Soviet Union. However, his struggle, like everyone else’s, is solely with the absurdity of life.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 151.

It is telling that the final chapter, Chapter Thirteen, dedicated to Dovlatov's American-born son, is only one paragraph long:

In front of you is my family history. I hope that it is ordinary enough. All that is left is to add a few words. My son was born on December 23, 1981 in New York. He's an American, a citizen of the United States. His name is—can you believe this—Mister Nicholas Dowley.

This is what became of my family and our homeland.¹¹¹

That Dovlatov hopes his family history is ordinary enough emphasizes the fundamental element of the anecdote discussed in this chapter. The story must be something that the listening or reading community can relate to. It must be ordinary enough for the reader to feel that he is reading about his own life and not about the unique life of another. It must be communally understood before it can be endlessly retold.

But perhaps the most fascinating aspect of Chapter Thirteen is that there is no anecdote present. There is no story. There is no full-length chapter with punchlines that change the outcome from predictable and expected to absurd and unexpected. Why does Dovlatov go to such lengths to incorporate a literary device in twelve chapters, only to discard it in the final chapter—to steal a line from him—“three minutes before the applause?”

The answer is, simply, that the anecdote has died. The power of the anecdote to neutralize ideology is eliminated when there is no more ideology to oppose. In the Soviet Union, the genre simply disappeared following perestroika, when “it seemed no longer relevant to tell anecdotes about the recent Soviet past, and there were very few new

¹¹¹ Ibid, 152.

anecdotes about the present.”¹¹² If humor and the anecdote exploded during the late Soviet period, it was because it served a great need of the masses who were suffocating in their official lives. “The meaning of anecdotes, especially political anecdotes, has often been associated with ‘resistance’ to the system, ironic subversion of its dogmas or a clandestine statement of ‘truth,’ of what one ‘really thinks.’”¹¹³ The jokes told and retold during reeling out sessions were the only method by which the people in these small communities could participate in the truth. These sessions were the lone opportunity for people to have “a meaningful, creative, ethical life in the spaces and zones that traversed the boundaries between support and opposition, and therefore they became yet another technique in the ongoing de-territorialization of Soviet reality.”¹¹⁴

Once that Soviet reality crumbled and collapsed, the anecdote lost its relevance. Instead of anecdotes being relished in face-to-face conversation and spread by word of mouth, they were “multiplied in lousy booklets and fat tomes” and “totally disappeared from everyday life.”¹¹⁵ Igor’ Sukhikh notes that the anecdote dies when it is “published, nailed to the page, in a way elevated to the status of literature.”¹¹⁶ But despite this characteristic of the anecdote—that it perishes when published—Dovlatov nevertheless chooses it as his primary literary device. Unlike anecdotes about Brezhnev or Chapaev,

¹¹² Yurchak, 275-276.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 277.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 281.

¹¹⁵ Yurchak, 276.

¹¹⁶ Sukhikh, 55.

Dovlatov's published anecdotes remain alive in spite of the fact that they are now "nailed to the page." While a single, isolated anecdote about a historical figure or epoch can get old and lose its punch, a series of anecdotes woven together to tell a dramatic story will not. If Chekhov "made the anecdote into literature," then Dovlatov "returned the anecdote from a particularly literary space back to reality."¹¹⁷ Dovlatov's anecdote is the foundation of the theater in which he lived and it manages to preserve the drama and the character of the individual lives that he depicts through them. Yes, drama is meant to be performed live and not to be read. But why do millions of people continue to read the plays of Shakespeare, Chekhov, Ibsen, and Miller? When viewing a live performance is not possible, then experiencing the play in written form suffices, and the reader is still able to immerse himself in the play, laughing and crying, living and dying along with the characters on the page, becoming an active participant in the play itself.

Thus, reincarnating the players of his anecdotes is the task of Dovlatov's written works. Mainly, he wanted to show his kids what his Soviet life was like, since they do not need anecdotes in their democratic, American lives. In one interview, Dovlatov answered the question: "What is literature and for whom do we write?" He replied:

Personally, I write for my children, so that, after my death, they will read everything and understand who their father was. And then, finally, belated tears of repentance will gush from their shameless, American eyes.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Efim Kurganov, "Sergey Dovlatov i liniya anekdota v russkoi proze," in *Sergey Dovlatov: tvorchestvo, lichnost', sud'ba—Itogi Pervoi mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii "Dovlatovskoe chteniya* (St. Petersburg: Zhurnal "Zvezda," 1999), 211.

¹¹⁸ Dovlatov, *Sobranie prozy*, t. 3, 346.

Dovlatov's written works serve to resurrect the players in the theater of the anecdote. It may be true that, once written, the anecdote dies. But Dovlatov's children and their future families need the written accounts in order for their father's era to come alive and to remain known. The anecdote defines Dovlatov's time in the Soviet Union and becomes his chosen device so that he can preserve that period of his life. The written anecdote, then, acts as a time capsule for the theater of the absurd that governed Dovlatov's life; through it, his children will be able to experience the life that their father led as best they can.

Hence, the title is "Ours," not "Mine." These stories were written, not for the author himself, for anecdotes have no author. If they have no author, then they can still be told and circulated after Dovlatov's death. Then again, Dovlatov is not an author, but a storyteller. It is not surprising that the word "author" is the root of the word "authoritarian." Both authors and authoritarian regimes strive toward the realization of an ideology, both focusing on the finished product. Dovlatov's anecdote strives toward nothing. It simply tells a story of what was. Actors tell that story, the audience listens, and the story lives on. While the thirteen chapters of *Nashi* take Dovlatov's family members as their subjects, the book is written to preserve the life in which they, and many others during the late Soviet period, were forced to become actors. *Nashi* includes actor and audience, ancestor and descendant, all of whom are part of the perpetual drama of the absurd that is human life.

That Dovlatov "returned the anecdote [typically considered a lower literary genre] from a particularly literary space back to reality" connects to our discussion of types and

individuals, namely the historical development from the former to the latter. As we recall from Chapter One, the debates over Russian types permeated literary criticism of the mid-nineteenth century. Dostoevsky contended that these types were “authentic because they are true to a deeper historical, social, moral, and spiritual reality; because they carry us beyond mere surface and local reality; because, finally, they are imbued with a unifying poetic ideal.”¹¹⁹ In his 1861 critique of Nikolai Uspensky’s stories, Dostoevsky “affirms that the photographic approach to reality excludes all possibility of poetic idealization, generalization, representation of typical phenomenon in art,”¹²⁰ and reproaches critics (specifically alluding to Chernyshevsky) who praise Uspensky for analyzing society “directly, as it is, because society is still not ready for a correct view of the people.”¹²¹ Dostoevsky’s ultimate fear is “art without ideals.”¹²²

From a late-Soviet era perspective, however, what kind of ideal could be sought? After having witnessed the horrific violence of world wars, revolution, internal terror, and the suppression of truth and art, how could an artist bring himself to continue to idealize the people or to reach for poetic ideals? The value of the superfluous man and his literary act, then, is directly tied to both his individual consciousness and the historical developments of his time. Contemporary artists can look forward or backward to preserve their individuality, which is not necessarily invalid, but more likely delusional, especially

¹¹⁹ Robert Louis Jackson, *Dostoevsky’s Quest for Form: A Study of His Philosophy of Art* (Bloomington, IN: Phylssardt Publishers, 1978), 94.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 96.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 97.

¹²² *Ibid*, 97.

as we enter the age of globalization and technology. Instead, the superfluous man—such as Dovlatov, Eduard Limonov, Venedikt Erofeev, and Vladimir Voinovich—documents all sides of life so that his work will be included in our version of Zamyatin’s *Integral in We*. This is why there are so many documentaries, memories, and autobiographies today, but no characters. Where are our Raskolnikovs or Holden Caulfields or Anna Kareninas or Yuri Zhivagos? This lack of fictional character and focus on the author is indicative of modern life in the West, especially in America, which was noted by Ivan Kireevsky in his “Survey of the Contemporary State of Literature” even in 1845. He saw America as having no inner development, but only a focus on the external and material:

The experiment has already been performed. What a brilliant fate seemed to belong to the United States of America, built on such a rational base, after such an auspicious beginning!—And what came of it? Only the external forms of society developed, and deprived of the inner source of life, they crushed man under a surface mechanism. The literature of the United States...[is]...an enormous factory of inept verse, without the least trace of poesy; stale epithets expressing nothing and nevertheless constantly repeated; a total insensitivity to everything artistic; a blatant contempt for all thinking not conducive to material gain;...the profanation of the sacred words, *philanthropy*, *fatherland*, *the common good*, *nationality* to the point that their use has connoted not even hypocrisy, but a simple, commonly-understood mark of ulterior motives... If a Russian must be condemned, for some unrepented sins, to exchange his great future for the one-sided life of the West, then I would rather...turn into a stone with an Englishman and his stubborn, unaccountable customs than suffocate in this prose of factory relations, in this machinery of selfish fret.¹²³

¹²³ Ivan Kireevsky, “Survey of the Contemporary State of Literature (1845),” quoted in Dale E. Peterson, Solzhenitsyn’s Image of America: The Survival of a Slavophile Idea,” *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Spring 1978): 148-149. Kireevsky’s view was influenced by French critics of American “go-aheadism” and entrepreneurial democracy after 1830. See for example, Philarete Chasles, “The Origin and Progress of Literature and Eloquence in the United States,” in *Etudes sur la littérature et les mœurs des Anglo-Américains au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1851), 9: “The United States of America, so remarkable and so prominent in many respects, is essentially modern; its people’s genius is mechanical and materialist, their power arises from their common sense, from the

Dovlatov was similarly condemned to life in this “inorganic factory.”¹²⁴ He grew up in the USSR, was forced to leave, and ended up in America with nowhere else to go, since America is the final frontier. He cannot return to his homeland (although he “returned” posthumously when his literary works were finally published there), which destroyed Russian culture and which was itself disintegrating at the end of Dovlatov’s life. He knew that he would never fully integrate into American life because he identified both with prerevolutionary Russian culture and with the phenomenon of the anecdote that was unique to Soviet *byt*. So, what could he do? What ideals were left for him? The delusional thing would be to keep moving, to continue trying to find a more appropriate home or to dream up a better world. But Dovlatov knew that he could not outrun the absurdity of human life. Thus, the anecdote, in my view, gets raised to level of literature. It is a genre, not only of anti-ideological truth, but also, in a sense, of resignation in the face of the knowledge that one has reached the end of the world, as we see in *Oedipus at Colonus* and in Camus’ “The Myth of Sisyphus.” Dovlatov’s resignation is not one of weakness, however, but one that resembles Schiller’s maxim to “toil ceaselessly to give thy natural powers their full development, knowing that nothing is worth having but a full

steadfastness of their attention and industry. It is (we are coming to admit) a country without imagination because it is a country without memories.” This image of America as an “inorganic factory” entered Russian literature with the publication of Odoevsky’s *Russian Nights* (1844).

¹²⁴ Philarete Chasles, “The Origin and Progress of Literature and Eloquence in the United States,” in *Etudes sur la littérature et les mœurs des Anglo-Américains au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1851), 9. Quoted in Peterson, 150.

consciousness of all that thou hast of good, now latent and unknown within thee,”¹²⁵ echoing Herzen’s advice to his son in *From the Other Shore*. Perhaps the bloom of “life’s youthful May” has wilted and vanished, but the prize, which Schiller reserves specifically for the exile, is “a home outspread” that will “end the meek man’s thorny path of strife.” Residing in this home is “a godlike child, whose name was Truth, . . . known but to few, from whom the many fled.”¹²⁶ Schiller’s exile is, according to Josiah Royce, “the man who fears no toil in the service of the highest, who knows that there is something of the divine in him, who restlessly strives to fulfill his destiny, and who at last ascends to the sight and knowledge of the truly perfect.”¹²⁷

As the last Soviet generation was giving way to the unknown future, Dovlatov worked to build a monument to a dying country so that his children would know their own roots. Once the human voices die out, one cannot rely on ideologically-driven textbooks, either American or Soviet, to teach his kids what Soviet life and the life of an émigré was actually like on the ground. This responsibility is imbued with the difficulties and challenges of making a conscious effort to build a sense of home for a family and for a culture that has moved to a foreign land and that has ceased to exist as such. During his life, the émigré father can only do his best to teach his children who he is, with no guarantee that the children, especially with their primarily American childhood

¹²⁵ Josiah Royce, “The Decay of Earnestness,” in *Estimating Emerson: An Anthology of Criticism from Carlyle to Cavell*, ed. David LaRocca (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 267.

¹²⁶ From Schiller’s poem, “Resignation.”

¹²⁷ Royce, 267.

experiences, will carry the torch any further than the father was able to take it. Dovatov carried out the responsibility of continuing the theater of life with great suffering. He once wrote: “A person is born, suffers, and dies, invariably, like the formula for water – H₂O.”¹²⁸ Dovatov expected suffering out of life. It is unavoidable, whether one occupies a high political post or writes dissident literature, whether one grew up in the Soviet Union or in the capitalist jungle. It is a shame that Dovatov died at such a relatively young age. But for those who remain in this world, Dovatov's life is preserved in his literary works, in his chosen device of the anecdote, which rises above ideology to show our true humanity. In this sense, our conversation with the great storyteller, Sergey Dovatov, carries on perpetually, as does our absurd human existence.

¹²⁸ Genis, *Dovatov i okrestnosti*, 129.

CONCLUSION

The Good Place, or the Place that Doesn't Exist

In his essay “An Absurd Reasoning,” Camus writes that “in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land.”¹ This disconnect between man and his life, between his inner self and his external setting, is the feeling of the absurd, which is noticeable in virtually all of our superfluous men, from the nineteenth century through the twentieth. Although he is deemed an outcast and swept aside by the societal currents of the times, the superfluous man wants to find a place for himself, since “to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul.”²

But how does one become rooted in modern life when national traditions are not renewed, when the worker only has time to focus on his pay, and when formal education and participation in culture requires mostly rote memorization and blind acceptance as opposed to looking up to the heavens and observing for ourselves.³ Modernity naturally

¹ Albert Camus, “An Absurd Reasoning,” in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O’Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 5.

² Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties toward Mankind* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1952), 44.

³ *Ibid*, 44-45.

alienates and uproots individuals, and ideology preys on their uprootedness, conquering them, making them slaves, and ensuring that they become severed from world and indifferent to truth.⁴ Simone Weil notes that there are two choices for these homeless souls: either to fall into a spiritual lethargy resembling death,...or to hurl themselves into some form of activity designed to uproot others, usually by violence.⁵

In our search for roots, we often look to the past or the future, but Weil argues that viewing these as opposites is absurd because:

the future brings us nothing, gives us nothing; it is we who in order to build it have to give it everything, our very life. But to be able to give, one has to possess; and we possess no other life, no other living sap, than the treasures stored up from the past and digested, assimilated, and created afresh by us. Of all the human soul's needs, none is more vital than this one of the past.... A tree whose roots are almost entirely eaten away falls at the first blow.⁶

When we think of roots, we think of family and nation, but Weil argues that the family no longer exists because people think neither of their ancestors who died before them nor of their future descendants.⁷ Instead, the nation plays “the part which constitutes the supreme mission of society toward the individual human being, namely, maintaining throughout the present the links with the past and the future. In this sense, one may say that it is the only form of collectivity existing in the world at the present time.”⁸ When the nation is destroyed, or in today's world (Weil published *The Need for Roots* in 1952),

⁴ Ibid, 46.

⁵ Ibid, 47.

⁶ Ibid, 48, 51.

⁷ Ibid, 100.

⁸ Ibid, 99.

when globalization transcends the importance of nation, the boundaries become even more confusing, thereby increasing our need for something firm.

In the cold, dark, unspeakably violent universe, humans need to cling to something. They are thrust upon the stage and clamor against the forces that have been discussed throughout this dissertation—history, nation, culture, home, ideology. It is a lot for humans to bear, and, despite our increases in technology, humans are more alienated than ever, mostly because everyone is too obsessed with advertising their own selves on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or the latest smartphone app. People are still cut off from each other, even though they are more “connected” than ever. The chaos and chance factor in life, along with the forces mentioned above, make all of us superfluous. This concept was grasped by the existential philosophers of the 20th century and exemplified in the proliferation of violence aided by technology. Humans have always perpetuated violence—perhaps it’s a biological impulse, as many phenomena are, although this explanation goes unnoticed as we fly across the globe, drive cars that parallel park themselves, and plug in to an astonishing number of devices that take our attention away from our origins and toward a future that will eradicate the need for human beings altogether. Standing up to the system—while possible for a few dedicated men centuries ago—is virtually impossible now, especially given the ease with which we are all monitored, coded, tagged, and tracked. Zamyatin’s United State may arrive much earlier than the twenty-ninth century. It is already here in many ways. And humans are more disoriented and less conscious and self-aware than ever. Technological progress is

advancing, but human, emotional, and spiritual progress lags far behind, regressing toward a more barbaric era.⁹

Despite how radically different today's world looks, we face the same question as did the nineteenth-century superfluous man: freedom or satiety through conformity? Our actions are largely dictated by the same historical and social forces that rendered the superfluous man powerless. Our options are the same as his. We can recall Ivan Karamazov's words:

Man is tormented by no greater anxiety than to find someone quickly to whom he can hand over that gift of freedom with which that ill-fated creature is born... For the secret of man's being is not only to live but to have something to live for. Without a stable conception of the object of life, man would not consent to go on living, and would rather destroy himself than remain on earth, though he had bread in abundance... Didst Thou forget that man prefers peace, and even death, to freedom of choice in the knowledge of good and evil? Nothing is more seductive for man than his freedom of conscience, but nothing is a greater cause of suffering.¹⁰

Given the frailty and precarious nature of human existence, what can one do? One can either tether oneself to a particular belief or ideology, whether it be political, social, financial, physical, spiritual, or any other. Or one can choose neither of the ideological binaries and can turn inward in order to develop one's consciousness. The superfluous man may stand alone, but what greater monument to humanity can there be than one individual's inner thoughts and perceptions, his victories and his defeats at the hands of the world and his fellow humans that try to annihilate him. This is the more arduous path

⁹ See, for example, Erich Fromm's essay "Disobedience as a Psychological and Moral Problem," or his book *The Revolution of Hope: Toward a Humanized Technology*.

¹⁰ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1976), 235.

to finding one's roots, but also the more rewarding. Freedom brings evil and suffering, but sometimes it also brings redemption, as in the fates of Raskolnikov or Pierre Bezukhov, amongst others.

The individual's search for roots, however, is not only about developing himself as an individual, but also about achieving the *sobornost'* of the early Slavophiles. Weil's mention of family recalls Dostoevsky's call for a new family and a new Russian father. Is this merely another utopian dream? Should we file it away under the heading of ideology along with the other theories that don't work in practice? Dostoevsky would say "no," and I would agree. Contemporary Western society needs it. The Russian 20th century needed it, as evidenced not only by literary works such as Dovlatov's, but films that depict the loss of the Russian father and its subsequent effects on the family and society. Of course, Tarkovsky's *Mirror* belongs here, but also the films that show Russian men go off to war, such as *Zhdi menya*, women trying to hold the family together, such as *Rodnya*, men living in isolation or without fathers, as in *Taxi Blues* and *Brat*, and the father's attempted, yet unsuccessful return to the family, as seen in *The Return* and *Koktebel'*. As the likes of Chaadaev and Dostoevsky rightly identified the lack of heritage and the absence of a father as the major shortcomings of Russian society, this rift continues into and throughout the twentieth century.

Furthermore, technology is weakening what ties are left. Given most people's preference to interact via screens, one could surmise that Ivan Karamazov's statement in "Rebellion" that loving one's neighbors is only possible in the abstract or at a distance¹¹

¹¹ Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 217-218.

is alive and well. In fact, humanity may just be further away from love than it was in Dostoevsky's era. This is disheartening given all the talk about contemporary progress that we hear. Dostoevsky wrote passionately about the consequences of the family's demise. Did it ever exist? Where are our models? In the past or in the future? This is the fundamental question that all of our superfluous artists have undertaken in their search for roots. Dostoevsky's musings on this question were the seed for *The Brothers Karamazov*, to borrow the sentiment from his epigraph. However, for all of his labor and, yes, love that went into the 700+ pages of one of the deepest, most significant novels of all time, his hero, Alyosha, is slated not to become the new father as the novel hopes and projects, but rather a terrorist deigning to destroy the very society that he is supposed to save through brotherhood. Perhaps because Alyosha embodies Dostoevsky's own statement that "finally, their children matriculate in universities, but there is no father, there is no family; the boy enters life alone because his heart has not lived, *it is not bound with the youth's past, with family or childhood...children are altogether left to the mercy of chance.*"¹² Would Alyosha, then, have been better off had he stayed in the monastery? He had to go into the world, first to experience it, and then to change it. (Quite poetically, Zosima's life moves in the opposite direction.) He does well, for the most part, in the novel itself, justifying the Author's Preface that he is, in fact, the work's hero. But left to chance, which determines the outcome of so many events in Dostoevsky's novels, Alyosha's mission fails. The failure, however, is not entirely Alyosha's, but also ours.

¹² Dostoevsky, *A Writer's Diary: Volume 2, 1877-1881*, trans. Kenneth Lantz (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 759-761.

This is tragic in the obvious sense, but also fitting for Dostoevsky, as lives cannot be planned out and ruled judiciously by an idea.

Is there any hope, then? Given that we are in the 21st century and the family has only deteriorated, maybe we should just all become Numbers of the United State. Many already have. I would argue, ultimately, that this is precisely why we still need literature to illustrate this hope, that it may be planted in our heads as a seed for future good. That seed may never bear fruit, but at least there is always a chance. Hence, the purpose of the superfluous man is not to wear the mask of a sullen, pathetic husk of a human being, but to raise our consciousness, to alert us to the perils of blind conformity, to show us that—as Dostoevsky’s ridiculous man would say—it does not matter if love and hope appear only in dreams. While this dissertation is dedicated to all superfluous men, perhaps I, too, should name a single hero—Sergey Dovlatov—although like Dostoevsky’s Karamazov brothers, it is the combination of all three brothers that tell the entire story of the family, and thus of humanity. Ultimately, however, the “second cultural reality” that results from living *vnye* and attaining the freedom to create one’s own community on a higher level of consciousness is a third choice for the uprooted individual that is more successful in creating a meaningful life—one that unifies our internal and external worlds—than the other two given by Weil.

More broadly, Dovlatov’s anecdote and the absurd, along with the de-territorialization of Soviet life encapsulated by the ideological battle played out in the official sphere, are tied to the ongoing search for home that has plagued the superfluous man and Russian society dating back to the development of the East-West binary

described in the first chapter of this dissertation. Home can be defined in many ways. It can be a physical structure, a national identity, a familiar smell, a comforting memory, a common language, a childhood toy, or a family heirloom. The way that Hermann Hesse defines “home” in his novel *Demian* as follows: “One never reaches home. But wherever friendly paths intersect, the whole world feels like home for a time.”¹³ There are several important components to Hesse’s definition—the lack of a specific place and the function of time. Most importantly, it relies on human interaction, a place where “friendly paths intersect,” regardless of any of the artificial borders that we create. We require that a kindred soul notice our Odyssean scars.

While the house is a physical structure, “home” is associated directly with human existence and the distinct identity of the individual. In her book entitled *Noplace like Home: The Literary Artist and Russia’s Search for Cultural Identity*, Amy Singleton discusses how “people invest the space they inhabit with meaning,”¹⁴ invoking Heidegger’s “dwelling function,” which transforms space into “symbolic, meaningful place.”¹⁵ Home becomes “the quintessential symbol of the self”¹⁶ and “the foundation of our identity as individuals and members of a community.”¹⁷ Home is not simply “the

¹³ Hermann Hesse, *Demian*, trans. W. J. Strachan (London: Picador, 1995), 155-156.

¹⁴ Amy C. Singleton, *Noplace Like Home: The Literary Artist and Russia’s Search for Cultural Identity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 2.

¹⁵ Quoted in Singleton, 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 2.

¹⁷ Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976), 40.

house you happen to live in...but an irreplaceable center of significance.”¹⁸ It is “our corner of the world...our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word.”¹⁹

While the need for home is universal, Singleton relies on four Russian novels²⁰ to tell her tale of home, and it is no coincidence that all four of the authors and heroes fall under the category of the superfluous man, who perhaps best embodies this state of homelessness that has long been considered an organic quality of the Russian character. Erich Fromm writes that “the basic passions of man are not rooted in his instinctive needs, but in the specific conditions of human existence.”²¹ For the superfluous man of the 19th century, these conditions were more closely associated with Russia’s origins and with its historical mission driven by the sense that Russia was still becoming. This mission was epitomized by the Slavophile-Westernizer debate, which centered on the notion of fatherhood. Chaadaev wrote that Russians were fatherless, Turgenev pitted the fathers against their children, and Dostoevsky led the mystical search for a new Russian father.

By the 20th century, however, that ideological struggle was more clearly defined by the Soviet experiment and, by association, the opposite pole of American democracy. As the century soldiered on and it became clear that the Soviet Union was on its last legs, the primary questions of the Russian émigré changed. The nation was not still becoming,

¹⁸ Ibid, 40.

¹⁹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (New York: Orion, 1964), 7.

²⁰ In her book, Singleton analyzes the concept of home in Gogol’s *Dead Souls*, Goncharov’s *Oblomov*, Zamyatin’s *We*, and Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita*.

²¹ Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society* (New York: Avon, 1965), vii.

but, in a sense, was ending. In the process, the ideological violence of the USSR not only claimed millions of Soviet lives—WWI, Civil War, Stalin’s purges, WWII, Afghanistan, and, later, Chechnya—but also caused millions of others to emigrate. The overall effect was an enormous void created by the disappearance of the father in Russian society.

While many participated in perhaps the greatest ideological struggle in human history, Dovlatov wanted nothing more than the freedom to publish his stories, as evidenced by his choice to live *vnye*, which led to his emigration. Although he “came to America dreaming of getting divorced,”²² his life in America did not produce the freedom that he sought, at least not as he envisioned it prior to his arrival. He is annoyed by his wife’s imperturbable nature, and he dreams of a life of freedom from familial obligations. But when he arrives, his wife’s unflappability transforms into a metaphor for life in America. He is divorced from ideology and state intervention in his literary endeavors, but this interference is replaced by complete indifference. He is not read by his Soviet counterparts back home, and his lack of English presents a major barrier to accessing the American reading public, which he can only reach via a translator. Furthermore, there are great difficulties to assimilating into a foreign culture. Without command of the native language, émigrés usually gather in the same neighborhoods. And when his wife says that he can stay “if you love us,” Dovlatov concludes that “love is for teenagers”²³ and that what preserves his marriage is fate; he sees that there is no escape, not from Soviet absurdity, but from human absurdity. Despite the fact that he is free to publish, his

²² Sergey Dovlatov, *Nashi* (St. Petersburg: Azbuka-klassika, 2004), 126.

²³ Dovlatov, *Nashi*, 143-144.

divorce from his former life will not give him the level of freedom that he desires. Furthermore, not only does Dovlatov have trouble setting up a life in America, he also has trouble bridging the gap between himself and his kids. He makes the point in *Nashi* that his daughter looks at him with scorn, as he “is raggedly dressed, can’t drive a car, (is) not interested in rock music, and, most importantly, knows English poorly.”²⁴ Life is so absurd that his son is an American citizen and has an Americanized name. Not coincidentally, this chapter is labelled the conclusion, as if both his family and his country have reached their ends.

In a sense, Dovlatov is imagining his own death and, more importantly, what will happen to his and his family’s history once he is gone. In his forward to *Chemodan*, a collection of stories centered on various items that he brought with him when he emigrated, he tells us of his surprise that his thirty-six years of Soviet existence fit into one suitcase. Furthermore, the suitcase is simply tossed into a closet upon arrival in America and remains untouched for four years. Clearly, his Soviet possessions are unnecessary for him in New York, that is, until his kids begin to grow up. He writes: “Our family was re-established. My daughter became a young American girl. My son was born, grew, and began to act up. One time my wife, having lost her patience, cried: ‘Get in the closet, now!’ My son spent about three minutes in the closet. Then I let him out and asked: ‘Were you scared? Did you cry?’ His son replies: ‘No. I sat on top of a suitcase.’”²⁵ At this point, Dovlatov pulls out the suitcase and inspects its contents. Each

²⁴ Dovlatov, *Nashi*, 151.

²⁵ Dovlatov, *Chemodan* (St. Petersburg: Azbuka, 2001), 9.

item then receives a complete story about how it was attained. All of these stories take place in the Soviet Union.

Unfortunately, an examination of the stories themselves is not possible here. Conceptually, though, it is significant that Dovlatov's Soviet life becomes of vital importance once his kids begin to come of age. They will have no idea what life was like in the USSR, so they must be taught. It is interesting that his son's discovery of the suitcase is related to a punishment, as if to indicate Dovlatov's concern that his kids will not care about their Soviet roots and must be forced to learn about them. The objects themselves are useless in America even to Dovlatov, so they will certainly not be useful to his children, although perhaps they will be valued for their kitsch quotient as the children become adults. However, in both the conclusion to *Nashi* and the forward to *Chemodan*, we see that Dovlatov considers it his responsibility to remind his kids that, although they are in America now, their father was raised in a different place. Dovlatov seeks to document his Soviet life in his stories to be used as instructional materials for his children.

The need to instruct is not only a parental instinct, but is a response to the cultural purgatory that the émigré may feel. Just as the urbanists and others who lived *vnye* ignored the ideological struggle of Soviet life, this is ironically what occurs to the émigré in his new country—he is ignored by America. The émigré realizes that his new home is no different than his old in many ways. And a sharp familial rift develops in that his kids now belong to a different place than he does. The only remaining option is to turn inward—to document and to teach—not only the story of individual families, not only the

story of Soviet life, but also of Russian culture. In their writings on the Russian émigré experience, Pyotr Vail' and Alexander Genis discuss their lost paradise and their views on America. In *Poteryannyi rai*, they write: “And finally we have come to the sad realization, which sooner or later dawns on wise men, ascetics, and drunks, that man is alone and only answers for himself. Five-year plans, dissidents, American democracy—none of it can help a person be himself. That always happens from within, not from without.”²⁶ Dovlatov felt this end, too, not only of his homeland, but of his own life. In a letter to Lyudmila Shtern, Dovlatov writes: “My disorientation is much more comprehensive than the average émigré feelings... In Leningrad, in spite of all the horrors, there was a feeling of purpose. Or rather, of prospects... Now I have the feeling of a physical end, a limit.”²⁷

It is this feeling of approaching the end that drives the exile and, historically, the superfluous man, to literary activity. Many of the characters traditionally recognized as superfluous men take up writing to express their internal feelings that the world inhabited by Plato's cavedwellers does not see or value. As a documentarian of the late-Soviet period, Dovlatov and his writings take on special importance as he is not only writing about an individual life that will soon cease to exist, but also a homeland. Hence, the statement at the end of *Nashi* that this is the end to which both his family and his country have come, as well as the need to teach his children about their father's life. In discussing

²⁶ Pyotr Vail' and Alexander Genis, *Poteryannyi rai* in *Sobranie sochinenii v dvukh tomakh* (Ekaterinburg: Y-Faktoriya, 2003), t. 2, 196.

²⁷ Quoted in Jekaterina Young, *Sergei Dovlatov and His Narrative Masks* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 44.

how he dreamed of having a son, Dovlatov writes: “I accomplished some things in life. My son will do more. I pass down the experience of my failures... In a way I will transform into my son. That is, I will die.”²⁸

Vail’ and Genis also write about this realization: “Geography has reached its limit; what begins now is a long and complex process of remodeling of the soul. And there is only one direction: from the Soviet person to the person as such.”²⁹ This turn inward is significant because the literal retreat of emigration is accompanied by an ideological retreat, both in the decision to live *vnye* with respect to Soviet and anti-Soviet dogma and in the realization that America is just as ideologically indifferent to the individual, contrary to what the émigré expects. The fact that Dovlatov and many other émigrés chose to remain in New York City is also significant. In their *Amerikana* essays, Vail’ and Genis label New York as the “city of outcasts.”³⁰ Additionally, they describe New York as a city with no parallels in Europe or in history, pointing out its lack of ideological spaces and monuments as a unique feature of its layout. This absence of a common denominator makes it easier to become oneself³¹; it also makes it more difficult to grow roots. Dovlatov’s book titles alone indicate a similar inner search for self-definition that is not bound by ideology—*Nashi*, *Chemodan*, *Filial*, *Nevidimaya kniga*, *Inostranka*, and *Zapovednik*. While Petersburg does have such ideological spaces and

²⁸ Dovlatov, *Nashi*, 147.

²⁹ Vail’ and Genis, *Poteryannyi rai*, 197.

³⁰ Vail’ and Genis, *Amerikana in Sobranie sochinenii*, t. 2, 627.

³¹ *Ibid*, 629.

monuments, Dovlatov and his fellow Leningrad writers felt more connected to the apartments where the city's greatest writers had lived. The title of one of Dovlatov's novels—*Fiveways* (*Pyat' uglov*, 1973), which refers to a particular intersection in the center of the city near Vladimirskaya ploshchad' close to where he and many of his writer friends lived—shows a “clear allegiance to the Petersburg tradition in Russian literature...going back to the foundation of the city itself..., but associated particularly with Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoevsky, and Bely in the prerevolutionary period, and with poets such as Akhmatova, Mandelstam, and Brodsky since.”³² This is at least part of the reason why Dovlatov and his literary colleagues called themselves “urbanists.” Although Andrey Bitov felt that “Petersburg is a very strange place” because it was “a planned system, in the same way that socialism was a planned system,...what helped us is that we shared the same physical space as its past inhabitants... [W]e were cut off from our own culture, we had no way of reading even our own literature, still we lived in the same space as our cultural ancestors, in the very same buildings.”³³ Dovlatov's *Zapovednik*, in which he works as a tour guide at Pushkinskie Gory, located near Pushkin's famous Mikhailovskoe estate, illustrates a similar difference between tourists memorizing superficial facts about the great Russian poet and a fellow writer connecting on a higher level with Pushkin's soul through his literary works.

³² Young, 35.

³³ Sally Laird, *Voices of Russian Literature: Interviews with Ten Contemporary Writers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 81.

The émigré's turn inward is significant is that it connects the exile more closely to his roots. The conflict between the Soviet and American poles at the end of history mirrors the Slavophile-Westernizer debate over the historical direction of Russia that began once Peter the Great built his window to Europe. The precise critique of the 19th-century Russian intelligentsia by the *Vekhi* authors in 1909 was that they were too focused on external concerns—running to the peasant and looking to the West—and did not direct its activity and consciousness inward toward the personality. By living *vnye* and by focusing on his responsibility to teach future generations about how Soviet people lived, Dovlatov builds a monument to his home and to the absurdity of life in his literary works. This could be said for the Russian diaspora as a whole, which “strives to maintain a traditional identity or to create a new one that remains distinct, unassimilated and anchored in specific institutions and practices that may be, for example, religious or linguistic... It sustains the hope of actual or symbolic return to the homeland.”³⁴ Part of the motivation for the literary production of emigres is tied to Ivan Bunin's 1919 statement that mourned the end of Russian history and the Russian state,³⁵ as evidenced by their attempt to “compensate for the loss with a conscious dedication to the continuity

³⁴ Khachig Toloyan, “The American Model of Diaspora Discourse,” in *Diasporas and Ethnic Migrants: Germany, Israel, and Post-Soviet Successor States in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Rainer Munz and Rainer Ohliger (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003), 59.

³⁵ “There was Russian history, there was a Russian state, and now there is none. The Kostomarovs, the Klyuchevskys, the Karamzins wrote Russian history, but now there's no history whatsoever.” Ivan Bunin quoted in *Literatura russkogo zarubezh'ya: 1920-1940*, ed. O. N. Mikhailov (Moscow: Nasledie: IMLI RAN, 1993), 53.

of the national culture,”³⁶ which was “an essential aspect of their national identity, of their identity as educated Russian people.”³⁷ It is vital to note that they were trying to preserve their Russian—not Soviet—identities, connecting back to our initial problem of the nature of Russianness that was appropriated by the ideological struggle of the nineteenth century and later destroyed by that of the twentieth.

Surely these emigres preserved some aspects of Russian culture in their daily lives, but this act of commemoration was primarily enacted in literature, echoing Dmitri Merezhkovsky’s statement on the exile’s mission: “Russian literature is our Holy Writ, our Bible—it is not books, but the Book, not words, but Logos. The logos of the national spirit. The Word is Deed. ‘In the beginning was the Word.’”³⁸ Furthermore, invoking Pushkin in his works, especially in *Zapovednik*, as many émigrés do, more closely connects Dovlatov to the theme of monument building that was so vital to Pushkin’s literary efforts, perhaps most notably in “Exegi monumentum,” which denotes the presence of a *lived* biography³⁹. Dovlatov’s invocation of Pushkin in his literary works reiterated his (and his fellow writers’) rejection of Soviet culture in favor of Russian culture since “Pushkin gave [Russians] adult speech and taught them how to desire and

³⁶ Greta N. Slobin, *Russians Abroad: Literary and Cultural Politics of Diaspora, 1919-1939* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013), 23.

³⁷ Marc Raeff, *Russia Abroad: A Cultural History of the Russian Emigration, 1919-1930* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 10.

³⁸ Dmitri Merezhkovsky quoted in *Literaturnaya zhizn’ russkogo Parizha za polveka (1924-1974): Esse, vospominaniya, stat’i*, ed. Yu. Terapiano (Paris: Al’batros, 1987), 48.

³⁹ David M. Bethea, *Realizing Metaphors: Alexander Pushkin and the Life of the Poet* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 221.

dream in a world haunted by arbitrary rule, injustice, massive illiteracy among the general population, and the constant embarrassment of civic impotence. Pushkin gave to Russians an inner world almost as rich in promise as their outer world was rich in denial.”⁴⁰ Associating himself as a cultural descendent of Pushkin aids Dovlatov in overcoming the futile ideological binary since “Pushkin is beyond good and evil: he is the world discovering itself, becoming self-aware, never feeling shame in his language or in its right to fabricate. His trajectory, carved out of a cruel epoch, is the very opposite of solipsism and retreat to inwardness.”⁴¹ Ultimately, Dovlatov connects to his Russian roots through Pushkin, “not because he was a monarchist or a conspirator or a Christian, but because he was only a poet, a genius who felt the movement of life in its entirety.”⁴² And by doing this, Dovlatov and his readers form a lineage that enables them to rise above the violent and indifferent forces of time and history that define their earthly existence, since “their seemingly personal recollections may in fact be merely personalized manifestations of a single common *collective memory*”⁴³ and since “language allows memories to actually pass from one person to another even when there is no direct contact between them.”⁴⁴ It is in this way that individuals can free themselves

⁴⁰ Ibid, 6.

⁴¹ Ibid, 7.

⁴² Alexander Genis, *Dovlatov i okrestnosti* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2001), 192.

⁴³ Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 4.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 6.

from the oppressive nature of time's "single, unmistakably uniform direction"⁴⁵ and experience time as moving in circles.⁴⁶

This process is an expression of "another freedom,"⁴⁷ a personal declaration of independence that is "at once an affirmation of literal truth and of a right to ambivalence."⁴⁸ It entails finding a "vantage point somewhere between nostalgia and progress, between the ruins of the past and the abyss of the future,"⁴⁹ as Tocqueville writes in *Democracy in America*: "Placed in the middle of a rapid stream, we obstinately fix our eyes on the ruins that may still be descried upon the shore we have left while the current drags us backwards toward the abyss."⁵⁰ As Herzen warned, we may not find answers on the shore that we left behind or the shore toward which we sail, since "providence had not created mankind entirely independent or entirely free. It is true that around every man a fatal circle is traced beyond which he cannot pass but within the wide verge of the circle he is powerful and free."⁵¹ It is the conscious individual's purpose to find the limits of this circle, transcending them when necessary, although its bounds move as he does since they are ultimately existential and spiritual, and not geographical.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 18.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 23.

⁴⁷ *Inaya svoboda*, a line from Pushkin's poem "From Pindemonte" (1836).

⁴⁸ Svetlana Boym, *Another Freedom: The Alternative History of an Idea* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 89.

⁴⁹ Boym, 90.

⁵⁰ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1994), 1:7.

⁵¹ Ibid, 1:7.

Though the sole focus on the self can be harmful, Tocqueville notes that individualism is not selfishness, but rather “a mature and calm feeling which disposes every member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellows and to dream apart with his family and his friends so that after he has thus formed a little circle of his own, he can willingly leave society at large to itself.”⁵² Recalling both Emerson (Chapter One) and Plotinus (Chapter Three), the motif of the circle indicates, then, both a return to the free self and to the community freed from ideology that the individual self creates.

Ideology, and anything that binds us to an artificial responsibility, will always attempt to undermine the freedom of the individual. In Chapter Six of *Nashi*, Dovlatov tells the story of his uncle, Aaron, who firmly believed in the ideology of the Soviet regime and is surprised when Dovlatov tells him that most Soviet citizens do not, although they choose not to speak out against it. Dovlatov uses the metaphor of a fence to illustrate the effectiveness of ideology and also the simplicity of overcoming it, if the individual simply chooses to do so: “Do you know what torments me? When we lived in Novorossisk, there was a fence. A tall, brown fence. Every day, I walked along that fence. What was inside, I have no idea. I never asked. I didn’t think it was important...Then my uncle died... And the thought of that tall, brown fence doesn’t give me any peace.”⁵³ Dostoevsky’s Raskolnikov, his Goryanchikov, Zamyatin’s D-503, and Bulgakov’s Sharik all peered through the cracks in this fence. The voice in the garden that Bolotov heard—the voice of impending death, in other words, a call to find meaning

⁵² Ibid, 2:98.

⁵³ Dovlatov, *Nashi*, 58-59.

in life—was similar to death that was looking at us through the fence in Derzhavin’s “Invitation to Dinner” (1795). It was the *toska* associated with the memory of the childhood home in Tarkovsky and Norstein. Dovlatov was faced not only with the fence described above, but also with the fence that prevented true freedom and independence in America.⁵⁴ It was this fence that Dovaltov scaled, with the help of the anecdote, and overcame in the name of Pushkin’s singular freedom, which is antithetical to freedoms⁵⁵ in the plural. In his poem “From Pindemonte,” Pushkin rejects earthly rights associated with the Enlightenment such as the freedom to dispute taxes, to interfere with kings at war, or to fight censorship. These are all “words, words, words,” and instead he advocates for “another freedom” found in one’s inner self, in one’s conscience, and in art that brings true happiness. It is through the writing process that Dovlatov, and our superfluous man, is liberated in his attainment of this individual consciousness that is freed from ideology and his communal development that is grounded in Russian culture.

For many reasons, we can never resurrect the past, although we carry our pasts with us through the present and into the future. I will end my monument to the Russian superfluous man with the final scene from Dovlatov’s *Zapovednik*—which is repeated in the *Nashi* scene where Dovlatov reunites with his wife in New York, since the anecdote

⁵⁴ Tocqueville, 1: ch. 15, 263. “I know of no other country in which, speaking generally, there is less independence of mind and a true freedom of discussion than in America... In America the majority has enclosed thought within a formidable fence... We need seek no other reason for the absence of great writers in America so far; literary genius cannot exist without freedom of spirit, and there is no freedom of spirit in America.”

⁵⁵ Again, this refers to Pushkin’s “From Pindemonte.”

can be endlessly retold—in which his wife has already emigrated and phones him from Vienna. Dovatov asks her:

—Will we meet again?

—Yes...If you love us.

I didn't even ask where we would meet. It was irrelevant. Maybe in paradise. Because paradise is the place of meetings. And nothing more. A nondescript room where it's possible to meet those closest to you.

Suddenly I saw the world as a unified whole. Everything occurred simultaneously. Everything manifested in my eyes...

My wife said:

—Yes, if you love us...

—What does love have to do with it?

Then I added:

—Love—that's for teenagers. For soldiers and athletes...For us, it's much more complicated. For us, it's no longer love, but fate.

Then something shuttered, and everything became silent.

Now I need to fall asleep in this empty and cramped room.⁵⁶

Although the story takes place when he was still in Leningrad, he published it in 1983, when he was free in America yet bounded by the exterior walls of his room and his life, whether Soviet, American, or simply human. Ultimately, no strategy is successful for overcoming our existential chains. But, for the time being, the anecdote portrays real life—its joys and its tragedies—as it is and not as it might be. It also creates an organic community of listeners and readers who use this relationship to connect to a past heritage and incorporate it into their daily lives. As Chaadaev writes in his “First Philosophical Letter”:

⁵⁶ Dovatov, *Zapovednik* in *Sobranie prozy v tryokh tomakh* (St. Petersburg: Limbus-Press, 1995), t. 1, 415.

Peoples live only by the strong impressions which the past leaves upon their minds and by contact with other peoples. Thus, each individual senses his relationship to humanity as a whole. “What is the life of man worth,” asks Cicero, “if the memory of past facts fails to succeed in integrating the present with the past?”⁵⁷

Of course, there is always a limit to this effort, since “almighty Time...crushes all to nothing”⁵⁸ in the end. It is fitting that the cruelty of human existence prevents both Oedipus from living out his days in Thebes and his daughters from knowing the location of their father’s tomb, although they are granted their final wish is to return “home to [their] old ancestral house.”⁵⁹ Perhaps it is irrelevant, since we can never return to the physical home as we remember it. And perhaps this is actually beneficial to us in the end, for “when the images of earth cling too tightly to memory,...it happens that melancholy rises in man’s heart: this is the rock’s victory.”⁶⁰ Oedipus’ tragedy begins without him even knowing it, and although the only thing linking his blind, elderly self to the world is his daughter’s hand, he concludes that all is well. Similarly, Camus notes that we can find Sisyphus’ silent joy in this victory of the absurd over the rock. Like Camus’ Sisyphus, the superfluous man always seems to be struggling to push the boulder up the hill, since “one always finds one’s burden again”; but “the struggle itself toward the heights is enough to

⁵⁷ Pyotr Chaadaev, *The Major Works of Peter Chaadaev*, trans. Raymond T. McNally (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 31.

⁵⁸ Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus* in *The Three Theban Plays*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 322.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 388.

⁶⁰ Albert Camus, “The Myth of Sisyphus,” in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, 90.

fill a man's heart."⁶¹ And like Sisyphus, we must imagine our superfluous man happy,⁶² or at the very least, redeemed.

⁶¹ Ibid, 91.

⁶² Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus," 91.

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