

SCHOOL OF SLAVONIC AND EAST EUROPEAN STUDIES

ANDREI SINIAVSKII. A HERO OF HIS TIME?

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I, Eugenie Markesinis, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own.
Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has
been indicated in my thesis.

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18 March, 2010

Abstract

This thesis is an artistic biography of Andrei Siniavskii (1925-1997) as a writer in and of his time, showing how this subtle and complex author found his way in a society polarised into heroes and villains, patriots and traitors; how he progresses from identification with the value system and ideology of his time to reaction against it, his dissidence expressed in literary terms.

Beyond this, I hope to show how he moves to a new conception of the writer in the fusion of his creative and critical selves that is dominated neither by the voice of the collective 'we', nor by the voice of the individual 'I' but which leaves space in the text for engagement by the reader. Individual readers, passing manuscripts from hand to hand or reciting texts orally had assured the continuity of the Russian literary tradition during the long bleak years when literature seemed to mark time under the strictures of Soviet ideology and Socialist Realist aesthetics. Siniavskii's work is motivated by the passionate belief that the way forward for Russian literature lay in this same spark generated between individual reader and text.

My thesis is organised chronologically and is based on a close reading of Siniavskii's work. It explores the way his art does not simply reflect the circumstances of his life and times but is actively shaped by an intricate commerce between the two. I intend to show how Siniavskii's distancing himself, first ideologically then physically, from the Soviet system is counterbalanced by his creative reintegration with Russia through literature.

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Introduction

‘Может быть, некоторые читатели захотят узнать мое мнение о характере Печорина? – Мой ответ –заглавие этой книги. – “Да это злая ирония!” – скажут они. – Не знаю.’¹

In a landmark trial in 1966, Andrei Siniavskii, the respected Soviet scholar and literary critic, was sentenced to seven years hard labour for nothing more nor less than the content of his fictional work, written under the name of Abram Tertz. Siniavskii’s prosecution, intended by the authorities as a post-Stalinist show trial to signal the end of the brief Khrushchev thaw and a crackdown on Russian cultural life, misfired as both Siniavskii and his co-defendant Iulii Daniel’ declined to play along with the script and denied any wrong-doing. The trial gave focus to the nascent dissident movement in Russia and is widely recognised as having launched it in earnest.

Catapulted to overnight fame and notoriety, Siniavskii’s fate illustrates the difficulties that have long bedevilled the relationship between the writer and society in Russia, a society that, on the one hand, could raise up its writers as heroes but could just as easily damn them as villains and traitors. At the same time, as transcripts of the trial show, his experience reveals the difficulty of communication between writer and reader in a society in which the control of

¹ М. Иу. Лермонтов, *Geroi nashego vremeni*, in Лермонтов, *Sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh*, Moscow, 2000, 6, pp. 212-366 (p. 262)

language was vested in the organs of authority: the trial amounted to nothing more nor less than a dialogue of the deaf.

My thesis is an artistic biography of Siniavskii as a writer in and of his time. My line of enquiry will follow the way in which this subtle and complex author finds his voice and his path in a polarised, alien world of heroes and villains, patriots and traitors, how Siniavskii progresses from identification with the value system and ideology of his time to reaction against it, his dissidence expressed in literary terms. Simultaneously, I hope to show how Siniavskii's distancing of himself, first ideologically then physically, from the Soviet regime is counterbalanced by a creative reintegration with Russia through literature.

Through this approach to literature he moves towards a new conception of the role and identity of the writer in the fusion of the creative and critical selves that is dominated neither by the voice of the collective 'we' nor the voice of the individual 'I' but which leaves open space in the text for engagement by the reader. This progress evolves naturally from his circumstances, from the organic interaction between art and life, culminating in his little-known, posthumously published work, Koshkin dom (The Cats' House, 1998) to which the final part of my last chapter is devoted.

This is the reason for my choice of title, with its obvious reference to Lermontov's Geroi nashego vremeni (A Hero of Our Time, 1840). Though Lermontov and his novel will have little direct part in this narrative, it is there to make a dual point, Siniavskii's point: writing is not about heroes or villains, establishment or dissident authors, positive or negative character judgements.

Unlike Tolstoi, for example, or Solzhenitsyn, Siniavskii's hero is not 'Truth'. In Siniavskii's writing there is no hero, no objectively perceptible truth. What there is, is a passionate belief in the spark generated whenever a reader genuinely engages with a text. Try finding a hero here, at this invisible point of engagement – 'Ishchi vetra v pole'.²

It was the reader's engagement with the text that had secured the continuity of the Russian literary tradition during the Stalinist purges and through the long, bleak years when literature seemed to stagnate, stifled by the prescriptions and proscriptions of Soviet dogma and the aesthetic demands of Socialist Realism. Sometimes orally, sometimes in manuscript form, literature was handed on from one person to the next. Here, Siniavskii is demonstrably a child and man of his times.

The Russian response to Siniavskii's work has been dominated by the polemics of Soviet, post-Soviet and émigré literary politics, sparked in particular by his unorthodox treatment of Pushkin, which does little to enlighten the reader about the creative merits of Siniavskii's writing.³ Not only has this led to some tendentious interpretations of his work but at times a dis-inclination to discuss it

² Abram Tertz, Progulki s Pushkinym, London, 1975, p. 178. English translations from Strolls with Pushkin, trans. Catherine Theimer Nepomnyashchy and Slava I. Yastremski, New Haven CT and London, 1993 (p. 148).

³ As Petr Vail' put it, 'Siniavskii's uniqueness lies in the fact that his sharp and daring books drew retribution [kary] from the Soviet authorities, curses [rugan'] from post-Soviet Russia and, in between, the hostility and malice [nepriatie i zloba] of the anti-Soviet emigration'. Petr Vail', 'Abram Tertz, russkii flibuster', Sintaksis, 36 1995 (1998), pp. 7-22 (p. 12). Translations throughout, unless otherwise stated, are my own – E.M. The page references to the Russian original will be followed by page reference to the translation, separated by a forward slash.

altogether.⁴ Siniavskii remains for many a difficult and contentious subject so one could say that on the whole his work suffers from a kind of gentle neglect.

This is not to say that sympathetic and scholarly interpretations of his work do not exist. Sergei Bocharov, for example, has written in appreciation of Siniavskii's idea of pure art, while Georgii Gachev has produced a somewhat whimsical interpretation of Spokoinoi nochi (Goodnight!, 1984), supposedly in the Tertzian spirit.⁵ However, the most rewarding contributions on him have come from Russian émigré critics and writers such as Alexander Zholkovsky, Petr Vail', Alexander Genis and Natal'ia Rubinshtein. Early on, at the height of the furore over Progulki s Pushkinym (Strolls with Pushkin, 1975), in 1976, Rubinshtein gave a subtle reading of the work and Siniavskii's views on art.⁶ Vail' and Genis' perceptive appreciation of Siniavskii's work, avoiding the well beaten track of the Progulki s Pushkinym controversy (though they have spoken on this also) looks at him in a wider cultural context, acknowledging his considerable creative input.⁷ It may be that the perspective from another shore,

⁴ Alexander Zholkovsky cites a personal example from the mid-1990s. In an e-mail correspondence with an old Moscow friend and then editor of a linguistic journal (unnamed) about quoting from Zholkovsky on the subject of Pushkin or, as Zholkovsky himself somewhat coyly puts it, 'let's say my strolls about one of Russia's literary sacred objects', Zholkovsky was told in no uncertain terms to remove all allusions to Siniavskii's works on Pushkin and Gogol. As he says, 'To read that on a computer screen in Los Angeles in the mid-1990s was fantastic, absurd [dikovato]'. A.K. Zholkovsky, 'Vspominaia Siniavskogo', Sintaksis, 36, 1998 (1995), pp. 23-27 (p. 25).

⁵ S. G. Bocharov, 'Chistoe iskusstvo i sovetskaia istoria: v pamiati Andreia Donatovicha Siniavskogo' (hereafter, 'Chistoe iskusstvo'), in Siuzhety russkoi literatury, Moscow, 1999, pp. 551-56. Georgii Gachev, 'Andrei Siniavskii – Abram Tertz i ego roman *Spokoinoi nochi* (Ispovest)', Moskovskii vestnik, 1989, 1, pp. 235-66.

⁶ Natal'ia Rubinshtein, 'Abram Tertz i Aleksandr Pushkin. O knige Andreia Siniavskogo "Progulki s Pushkinym"' (hereafter, 'Abram Tertz i Aleksandr Pushkin'), Vremia i my, 9, July 1976, pp. 118-33.

⁷ See, for example, Piotr Vail', Alexander Genis, 'Labardan! (A. Siniavskii)', in Vail' and Genis, Sovremennaia russkaia proza, Ann Arbor MI, 1982 (hereafter, 'Labardan!') pp. 57-75. Also, Alexander Genis, 'Archaic Postmodernism: The Aesthetics of Andrei Sinyavsky', in Mikhail N. Epstein, Alexander A. Genis and Slobodanka M. Vladiv-Glover, Russian Postmodernism. New Perspectives on Post-Soviet Culture, New York and Oxford, 1999 (hereafter, 'Archaic Postmodernism'), pp. 185-96.

even though these writers and critics still spend time in Russia, allows for the broader viewpoint that Siniavskii deserves.

In the West, Siniavskii has not generated the cult following of a Pasternak or a Solzhenitsyn and the accompanying mass of critical literature. To date, there are four monographs on Siniavskii in English, two published in the 1970s: Margaret Dalton's Andrei Siniavskii and Julii Daniel': Two Soviet "Heretical Writers" (1973) and Richard Lourie's Letters to the Future: An Approach to Siniavsky-Tertz (1975); and two more recent, Catherine Theimer Nepomnyashchy's Abram Tertz and the Poetics of Crime (1995) and Walter F. Kolonosky's Literary Insinuations. Sorting out Siniavskii's Irreverence (2003).

Lourie, Nepomnyashchy and Kolonosky all treat, albeit from different angles, the question of the writer-reader relationship. Lourie provides a good introduction to Siniavskii's writing and the central notion of literature as a 'letter to the future', cast out at random in the hope of finding a single, sympathetic reader. Nepomnyashchy explores in depth the spiritual and metaphysical implications of the relationship between author, reader and text, while Kolonosky investigates Siniavskii's provocative and ludic engagement with the reader. To these extended studies may be added a number of scholarly essays and articles by, for example, Beth Holmgren, Marcus C. Levitt, Donald Fanger and Andrew J. Nussbaum, which all consider to a greater or lesser extent the idea of Siniavskii's self-transcendence as author.⁸

⁸ Beth Holmgren, 'The Transfiguring of Context in the Work of Abram Terts', *Slavic Review*, 50, 1991, 4, pp. 965-77; Marcus C. Levitt, 'Siniavskii's Alternative Autobiography *A Voice from the Chorus*,

My intention is to draw together these different approaches in order to explore how the communication, or spark, generated between reader and text is directed by Siniavskii into the active promotion of literature itself. Evolved and strengthened over the course of his life, this is the resounding theme of his last two published works, both penned by Tertz, the essay 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku' (Journey to Chernaia rechka, 1994) and the above-mentioned Koshkin dom. While there is one essay devoted to 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku' by Jane Grayson, to which I am indebted for my own reading of it, to my knowledge there has been no discussion of Koshkin dom, or of the three volumes of letters from the camps, 127 pisem o liubvi (127 Letters about Love, 2004), prepared and annotated by Siniavskii's widow.⁹ Both are crucial to an understanding of Siniavskii's work and in particular to the evolution and significance of the relationship between writer, reader and text.

Nepomnyashchy, paraphrasing an earlier quotation of Barthes, ends her book with the idea that Siniavskii-Tertz's 'death' in the text results in the liberation of the reader. While agreeing with that, I would take it further and say that from the liberation of the reader comes the possibility of the continuity and renewal of literature and that, ultimately, and not the fate of the writer, is what Siniavskii's writing is all about.

Canadian Slavonic Papers, 33, 1991, 1, pp. 46-61; Donald Fanger and Gordon Cohen, 'Abram Tertz: Dissidence, Diffidence and Russian Literary Tradition (hereafter, 'Abram Tertz') in Terry L. Thompson and Richard Sheldon (eds), Soviet Society and Culture: Essays in Honor of Vera S. Dunham, Boulder CO and London, 1988, pp.162-77; Andrew J. Nussbaum, 'Literary Selves: The Tertz-Sinyavsky Dialogue' (hereafter, 'Literary Selves'), in Jane Gary Harris (ed.), Autobiographical Statements in Twentieth-Century Russian Literature, Princeton NJ, 1990, pp. 238-59.

⁹ Jane Grayson, 'Back to the Future: Andrei Siniavskii and *Kapitanskaia Dochka*' (hereafter, 'Back to the Future') in Arnold McMillin (ed.), Reconstructing the Canon: Russian writing in the 1980s, Amsterdam, 2000, pp. 147-71.

Biographical background

Born in Moscow in 1925, Siniavskii died in Paris in 1997; his life thus encompassed the whole range of the twentieth century Russian experience from Soviet period during the Stalinist era, to the Thaw, Stagnation and eventual collapse of the Soviet Union. The corresponding phases of his life he lived as a Soviet man, a dissident and an émigré. Yet, while superficially his was a biographical pattern typical of many of the Russian intelligentsia of his generation, in other ways it diverged sharply; the significance of Siniavskii as a man and writer of his times lies precisely in these divergences.

Raised in what he describes as a 'healthy Soviet atmosphere, in a normal Soviet family' in the 1930s, Siniavskii refers to himself at the age of fifteen, on the eve of the war, as a 'devout' [istovym] communist-Marxist'.¹⁰ Like many later dissidents, Siniavskii came of a generation which, though born after the Revolution, still looked to it as something sacred, as a criterion 'against which to measure their own and others' political integrity'.¹¹ Writing as Tertz, Siniavskii would put it more emotively, equating the Revolution with romanticism, with 'our past, our youth for which we long', when 'the blazing élan towards a happy future and the world-wide significance of the Revolution were not yet regimented by strict political order'.¹² Allowance must be made for the fact that

¹⁰ Andrei Siniavskii, 'Dissidentstvo kak lichnyi opyt' (hereafter, 'Dissidentstvo'), Sintaksis, 15, 1986, pp. 131-47 (p. 134).

¹¹ Denis Kozlov, "'I Have Not Read But I Will Say": Soviet Literary Audiences and Changing Ideas of Social Membership, 1958-66' (hereafter, "'I Have Not Read But I Will Say'"), Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History, 7, 2006, 3, pp. 557-97 (p. 574).

¹² Abram Tertz, Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm, in Tertz, Fantasticheskii mir Abrama Tertza, New York, 1966, pp. 399-446 (p. 435). English translations from On Socialist Realism, trans. George Dennis, in

this was a disenchanted Siniavskii writing about a past whose attractions blazed all the brighter in comparison with what had become for him, by the mid-1950s, a decidedly less rosy present. Nonetheless, it expresses feelings which Kozlov's more soberly worded observations back up.

It is important to emphasise that the Revolution was not simply some abstract concept for Siniavskii but was brought home to him in a personal and very real form through his father. A scion of the minor nobility, Donat Evgenevich Siniavskii had broken with his family in 1909 to join the Left Socialist Revolutionaries. He maintained a fierce and steadfast loyalty to the ideals of the Revolution and its Bolshevik-Soviet heirs, long after they had perverted those ideals and in spite of the persecution he himself suffered as a result of backing the 'wrong' side. Donat Evgenevich's notions of honour and devotion to a cause, his almost quixotic asceticism would leave an indelible mark on Siniavskii: 'The dangerous life his father had lived endowed the ideals he fought for with an aura of romanticism and made the Revolution, and the social order it led to, sacred for Andrey'.¹³ The example of his father, together with his love of Russian literature of the early years of the twentieth century, would be the most formative influences on Siniavskii the writer, who would combine the irreverence of the iconoclast, a love of risk and adventure, with a romantic idealism and a steadfast devotion to literature.

Tertz, The Trial Begins and On Socialist Realism, Berkeley and Los Angeles CA, 1982, pp. 127-219 (p. 202).

¹³ Hélène Zamoyska, 'Sinyavsky, the Man and the Writer', in Leopold Labedz and Max Hayward, On Trial. The case of Sinyavsky (Tertz) and Daniel (Arzhak) London and New York, 1967, (hereafter, On Trial), pp. 46-69 (p. 49).

During the 1930s, the period of Siniavskii's youth, a different model of heroism prevailed. This was the age of high Stalinism, when notions of the hero and heroism acquired different connotations as heroism was enshrined as what amounted to an official virtue. It was no longer the case of a cause to be won but of the entrenchment of the new order, whatever the cost, typified in the dictum that the ends justify the means. The realities of building a new, Soviet Russia demanded the cultivation of a new breed of men, idealised and typified in the Soviet hero. As the first Five Year Plan and the so-called 'Cultural Revolution' drew to a close, 'the culture settled into an extended period of self-glorification and celebration of its own achievements, as manifested by the outstanding individuals of the nation [...] An entire industry for the manufacture of heroes started up'.¹⁴ As Siniavskii was to put it, 'the cult of the heroic is inherent in Soviet civilisation'.¹⁵

These Soviet heroes of Siniavskii's youth, whether the Stakhanovites and aviators or their literary counterparts, the Positive Heroes of Socialist Realism, were men of action, whose images were burnished and embellished to make them accord with official mythology and to provide fitting models for society at large.¹⁶ Their every effort proclaimed their total identification with the Soviet State and the furtherance of its cause, making conformity and unanimity the order of the day. In the Manichean world that was the model of Soviet society,

¹⁴ Catriona Kelly, *Comrade Pavlik. The Rise and Fall of a Soviet Boy Hero*, London, 2005, hereafter, *Comrade Pavlik*, p.6.

¹⁵ Andrei Siniavskii, *Osnovy sovetskoi tsivilizatsii*, Moscow, 2001 (hereafter, *Osnovy*), p. 165.

¹⁶ See, for example, Jeffrey Brooks, 'Socialist Realism in *Pravda*: Read All about it!' (hereafter, 'Socialist Realism in *Pravda*'), *Slavic Review*, 53, 1994, 4, pp. 973-91 (p. 978). Also, Kelly, *Comrade Pavlik*, p. 43. Siniavskii also comments on the leading role of the Soviet press in shaping the new 'official' language of heroism. Siniavskii, *Osnovy*, p. 293.

those who did not strive in this way were not merely seen by the State as failing but as irredeemably hostile to it. The Soviet regime, assiduous in its cultivation of the heroic, was no less single-minded in the identification and prosecution of its perceived enemies, transforming them into evil monsters: ‘suddenly the whole country was swarming with some sort of invisible (and therefore all the more dangerous) vermin, snakes and scorpions’.¹⁷ This would be the tactic employed during Siniavskii’s own prosecution and the orchestrated propaganda leading up to it in the press, where he and Daniel’ were referred to as ‘turncoats’ [perevertyshi] and ‘werewolves’ [oborotni].

This was the official line, the hero – and the villain – as constructs of a regime intent on pushing forward with its political and social plans and for whom the need to motivate the public at large was of prime importance. This is not to say that within this paradigm notions of the heroic were entirely static. As Catriona Kelly, in her discussion of Pavlik Morozov as boy hero and phenomenon of his times has shown, the image of the hero was surprisingly fluid, adjustable and adjusted to accommodate shifts in the ideological climate and the changing social and political priorities of the State.

Neither were certain attributes of heroism accepted unquestioningly, as the case of Pavlik Morozov shows, raising as it does troubling questions about the morality of certain so-called heroic acts: when is it appropriate to put duty towards the State over and above all other loyalties, especially the ties of family? When is it appropriate to denounce or kill in the name of an idea? Pavlik

¹⁷ Abram Tertz, ‘Literaturnyi protsess v Rossii’, Kontinent, 1, 1974, pp. 143-90 (p. 161).

Morozov's denunciation of his own father was not accepted unquestioningly or unanimously at whatever level of society and across the generational divide.

Doubts and choices of a similar order were to face Siniavskii in the late 1940s and early 1950s but up until then, until such questions impinged directly on his own life, he remained convinced of the moral, social and historical rightness of communism.

The War

In Siniavskii's day, 'Paradoxically, the fathers were the revolutionaries, not the sons'. Siniavskii's generation had not had to fight for their beliefs but were expected simply to accept the status quo bequeathed to them. Many, Siniavskii included, felt an unspoken frustration in this respect.¹⁸ The Great Patriotic war offered the younger generation, a generation that had not taken part in the Revolution, the opportunity to prove itself. After the Revolution, the war, as its Russian name implies, was the next most significant event to become a 'defining factor of national consciousness'.¹⁹

However, unlike that of Daniel' and other of his contemporaries, Siniavskii's participation in the war was far removed from the field of conflict, something noted at his trial: 'Now Daniel – he fought in the war, he was wounded, but you had a very easy war...'.²⁰ One could argue that Siniavskii's age militated against

¹⁸ Zamoyska, 'Sinyavsky, the Man and the Writer', p. 50.

¹⁹ Kozlov, "'I Have Not Read, but I Will Say'", p. 587.

²⁰ This observation was made by the presiding judge, L.N. Smirnov, chairman of the Supreme Court of the RSFSR. See, 'Dopros Siniavskogo' in Aleksandr Ginzburg (ed.), Belaia kniga po delu A. Siniavskogo i Iu. Danielia, Frankfurt am Main, 1967 (hereafter, Belaia kniga), pp. 203-07 and 219-52 (p. 246). English translations from 'Examination of Andrei Siniavskii' in Labeledz and Hayward (eds), On Trial, pp. 184-222 (p. 216).

his playing much of a role in the conflict; he was, after all only fifteen at its outbreak; however, younger men than he have distinguished themselves on the battlefields of history. He was drafted in towards the end of the war and trained at the Moscow Aviation School for eighteen months before serving as a radio technician at an airfield outside of Moscow during its last year, well out of the way of the line of fire. It is unclear what prevented him playing a more active role. Most likely, it was pure chance, his allocation by the army to a post that he was quite content to fulfil. At the same time, one might speculate that such a relatively sheltered posting gave him the opportunity to turn his mind to literary matters. It is clear that even before the end of the hostilities he had already determined where his future would lie and had enrolled on a correspondence course at the Philology Faculty of Moscow State University, where he turned up in 1946, still dressed in his army greatcoat.²¹

The Thaw

By the time that Siniavskii reached adulthood and embarked on his career as a literary scholar and critic, the Khrushchev thaw was to offer an opportunity for heroism of a different kind, heroism defined not in Soviet terms but as a reaction against it, and which took shape in the dissident movement. Most observers and analysts of Russian history situate the start of the movement in 1956, tying it to

²¹ See, 'Dopros svidetelia Duvakina', in A. Ginzburg (ed.), *Belaia kniga*, pp. 276-77 (p. 276). English translations from 'Examination of the witness Duvakin' in Labeledz and Hayward (eds), *On Trial*, pp. 238-39 (p. 238).

the revelations about Stalin in Khrushchev's 'secret' speech to the Twentieth Party Congress.²²

A devastating revelation for most, the speech led individuals to question, often for the first time, the basic beliefs and tenets of the Soviet system. In this context, Siniavskii's trial, with its echoes of the recent Stalinist past and the courage he and Daniel' both displayed in not recanting or admitting any guilt, should have made him a hero in the eyes of his fellow Russian intellectuals. However, the matter was not clear-cut on a variety of levels. There could be no assumption, first of all, that in a society for so many years inculcated with Soviet ideals and practices, that the notion of opposition to the State of whatever sort and on whatever grounds would be welcomed. Viewed more cynically, it is certain that many writers, fully integrated into the machinery of the State and enjoying its manifold benefits, were loath to jeopardise their positions not to mention, quite simply, their ability to earn a living.²³

For whichever reason, the most vituperative assaults against Siniavskii and Daniel' came from fellow writers such as Zoia Kedrina. A one-time colleague of Siniavskii's at IMLI, she helped to stir up public opinion against him and Daniel' in the government-organised press campaign leading up to his trial and would officiate at it as one of the 'Public Accusers' [obshchestvennye obviniteli], nominated by the Soviet Writers' Union.²⁴ Moreover, it was

²² See, for example, Stephen Lovell and Rosalind Marsh, 'Culture and Crisis: The Intelligentsia and Literature after 1953' (hereafter, 'Culture and Crisis'), in Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd (eds). Russian Cultural Studies. An Introduction, Oxford, 1998, pp. 56-87 (pp. 58-59).

²³ See, John and Carol Garrard, Inside the Soviet Writers' Union, London, 1990, pp. 129 and 136.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 141-42. Also, Labeledz and Hayward, On Trial, p. 149, n. 3. Kedrina's article 'Nasledniki Smerdiakova' (Literaturnaia gazeta, 22 January, 1966, pp. 2 and 4) is translated and reproduced in On Trial (pp. 96-107) as is another scabrous article, 'Perevertys'hi' by Dmitrii Eremin (pp. 89-96), originally

members of the Union, via its First Secretary Konstantin Fedin, who called for harsher treatment of Siniavskii and Daniel' than the Party itself might have been inclined to mete out.

These reactions were representative of conservative elements among the literary community and in their vehemence and style of rhetoric, recalled the show trials of the 1930s, decided in terms of 'who is not with us is against us'. However, the picture was a more complex one and reactions to Siniavskii and Daniel' reflected the wider uncertainties of the period as a whole, with on the one hand the internal changes of the Thaw and, on the other, the pressures brought to bear by the Cold War.

Even the more liberal-minded intellectuals, those who, one might assume, would have been more inclined to support him, viewed Siniavskii's conduct with ambivalence. For many the fact that he had despatched his manuscripts abroad was reason enough to condemn him. To abhor the excesses of Stalinism did not make one anti-Soviet; on the contrary. In the conditions of the Cold War there was a feeling that Siniavskii and Daniel' had given comfort to the enemy, a feeling shared by many of the public at large.²⁵ This had not been Siniavskii's intention; indeed, well aware that his work might be used in the West for the

published in *Izvestiia*, on 13 January. Eremin was the then Secretary of the Board of the Moscow Branch of the RSFSR Writers' Union.

²⁵ As Dennis Kozlov has pointed out, speaking about the reactions of the public at large to the trial, 'opinions were divided and complex. There was none of the uniformity and unanimity that the KGB reports sought to depict'. Kozlov attributes this to what he calls the "'Solzhenitsyn factor'": 'following the renewed attack on Stalin and the purges at the 22nd Party Congress (1961), a broad and fairly open polemic about the terror started in the realm of literature and the press'. This meant that while many decried what Siniavskii and Daniel' had done in sending their works to be published in the West, tantamount to treachery in the conditions of the Cold War ('in this world, unauthorized publishing in the West placed the Soviet writer, perhaps against his will, in the camp of his country's strategic rivals'), many also defended them, if not out of personal sympathy so much as out of a 'fear' of further political violence and a desire to avoid it'. Kozlov, "'I Have Not Read, but I Will Say'", pp. 574-95.

purposes of anti-Soviet propaganda, he had been at pains to ensure that it was not handed over to a publisher who would exploit it in this way.²⁶

Be that as it may, the view that he had sold out to the West, encouraged by government propaganda, gained currency. It was a view taken also by more independent-minded individuals such as the influential editor of the journal Novyi mir, Aleksandr Tvardovskii. An admirer of Siniavskii's work as a literary critic, Tvardovskii had published a number of his articles. However, apart from the fact that Tertz's work was not to his taste, he was disgusted that Siniavskii and Daniel' should have sent their works to the West, referring to them in his diary as 'these rogues' [eti mazuriki].²⁷ After the unexpectedly harsh sentences were passed on them, however, this sense of outrage evaporated at the prospect of a resurgence of Stalinist-type excesses.²⁸

The fear of a return to the past accounted for another aspect of the liberal intelligentsia's ambivalence towards Siniavskii and Daniel', fear of the repercussions such an action might have on the social and political situation when everything, so it seemed, still hung in the balance.²⁹ With memories of Stalin still fresh in the minds of many and the changes introduced during the thaw still fragile, opinions in liberal circles were 'sharply divided'. Some,

²⁶ Zamoyska, 'Sinyavsky, the Man and the Writer', p. 62.

²⁷ A. T. Tvardovskii, 'Rabochie tetradi 60-kh godov', Znamia, 4, 2002, pp. 136-85 (p. 143) (entry of 18 January 1966). Tvardovskii referred to Liubimov, as 'complete rubbish' [murentsiia]. Tvardovskii, *ibid.*, Znamia, 2, 2002, pp. 114-65 (p. 154) (entry of 13 November, 1965).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Znamia, 4, 2002, p. 145, (entry of 15 February, 1966).

²⁹ See, Ludmilla Alexeyeva and Paul Goldberg, The Thaw Generation. Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era, Pittsburgh PA, 1993 (hereafter, The Thaw Generation), pp. 166-67. The same sense of uncertainty, of not knowing which way things would go, remained for a short while even after the Siniavskii-Daniel trial. The invasion of Czechoslovakia by Soviet troops in August 1968 is the moment when the scales tipped for many, marking the end of the thaw. Alexeyeva conveys the starkness of the choice with which Soviet intellectuals were then confronted: 'the first was to toe the party line and be allowed to advance professionally; the second was to put a career on hold and wait for another thaw; the third was to stay the course of the thaw and accept the consequences: an aborted career and the life of a pariah'. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

anxious not to rock the boat, expressed themselves in terms similar to those of the authorities, if for quite other reasons, seeing Siniavskii and Daniel' as 'traitors': "After all, we had already achieved nearly everything, tomorrow the real thaw would begin but they betrayed us and now everything will be destroyed!". Others took the opposite view, judging that Siniavskii and Daniel' 'were not [...] sufficiently anti-Soviet as writers'.³⁰ The fact remains that Siniavskii and Daniel', with their trial and display of integrity, put the intellectual community as a whole on the spot; for many this moral pressure was decidedly uncomfortable, however heroic they might privately consider the conduct of the two authors.³¹ In the event, nearly all those who hesitated to act at the time of the arrest later signed a letter of protest to the authorities.³²

Post-trial. The camps and emigration.

Nearly six years hard labour in the camps (1966-1971) should have confirmed Siniavskii's dissident credentials as well as making him very much a man of his times: the Terror and the Soviet system of repression first revealed by Khrushchev's revelations, had overtaken both the Revolution and the war as defining factors of national consciousness when the publication of camp literature, starting with Solzhenitsyn's Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha in 1962,

³⁰ See, R. Nudel'man, 'Dvadtsat' let spustia', interview conducted with Mark Azbel' and Aleksandr and Nina Voronel', Dvadtsat' dva, 46, Jan.- Mar. 1986, pp. 132-77 (pp. 150-51).

³¹ Ibid..

³² Ibid., p. 150. The one notable exception was Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

and the discussion of such matters in the press opened them up to public debate.³³

Yet Siniavskii's experience of the camps was to prove another source of controversy in which his name was bandied about with renewed venom. This time his 'trial' was initiated not by the Soviet authorities but by his fellow intellectuals in emigration. However, behind it was a similar issue, namely the notion of accepted patterns of conduct (albeit this time dissident ones) and Siniavskii's failure to live up to them.

Once free of the Soviet Union, not only did Siniavskii not involve himself in the human rights movement, he also vigorously resisted attempts to draw him into social or political groups of any kind, notably the neo-conservative, nationalist camp headed by Solzhenitsyn. It was not simply that he disagreed with certain ideas espoused by Solzhenitsyn, it was the notion of conformity per se that he rejected. His decision to write as Tertz had been just as much a revolt against the conformist ethics of Soviet society as it was a repudiation of the cultural straitjacket of Socialist Realism.

Having rebelled against the constricting forces of Soviet orthodoxy, he was horrified to find similar powers at work in the émigré community. For Siniavskii dissidence by its very nature was "liberal and democratic". Moreover, dissidence was understood by him in its broadest sense as the ability to think independently and carried the ethical responsibility of remaining true to oneself

³³ See, Kozlov, "I Have Not Read, but I Will Say", pp. 585-56. See, also, Leona Toker, Return from the Archipelago. Narratives of Gulag Survivors, Bloomington and Indianapolis IN, 2000 (hereafter, Return from the Archipelago), p. 49. Toker points out (as does Kozlov) the sensational effect of Solzhenitsyn's work, but also draws attention to the fact that control was still exercised over how much camp material was published and the slant that was given to discussions in the press.

and one's beliefs.³⁴ To bow down before some new authority would have been to undermine the integrity he had already defended at great cost. Speaking of himself and Daniel', he said: 'We managed to remain ourselves, outside Soviet "unity"'.³⁵

Siniavskii also fell short of expectations in his failure to bear witness to the repression and suffering still taking place in Russia. The very fact that he had managed to gather material for not one but three books in the camps suggested to certain fellow émigrés that he had not done time at all or, at the very least, that he had done a deal with the KGB.³⁶ No one who had been in the camps, so went their reasoning, would have had the opportunity, the wherewithal or the sheer stamina to write at all, let alone so much. The publication of his letters from the camps in three volumes by his wife, Mariia Vasilievna, in 2004 was no doubt partially motivated by the need to quell such ideas once and for all.

However, even those works written later in the West, notably his 'fantastic autobiography', *Spokoinoi nochi* (Goodnight!, 1984), published at a time when a veritable 'avalanche' of camp literature appeared for publication, bear only tangential references to the camps, concentrating instead on questions of art. This was a point taken up by the Russian émigré scholar, Leona Toker. While conceding that Siniavskii 'bears witness' in his own way, she points to the 'belatedness' both of his experience and of his testimony: 'A determined non-joiner, Sinyavsky could well afford to reject the conventions of Gulag testimony:

³⁴ Siniavskii, 'Dissidentstvo', pp. 137-42.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 137.

³⁶ See, below, chapter 2. Such doubts were still being voiced in the early 1990s. See, Dmitri Urnov, in 'Obsuzhdenie knigi Abrama Tertza "Progulki s Pushkinym"' (hereafter, 'Obsuzhdenie knigi Abrama Tertza'), *Voprosy literatury*, 10, October 1990, pp. 77-153 (pp. 137-43 (p. 142)).

the main work of testimony had been done by others'. She therefore concludes that his 'ability to claim exemption from it was a matter of propitious timing rather than of artistic courage'.³⁷ This might be considered a fair comment on his writing if that were all Siniavskii was trying to do.

Among fellow Russians what he did say, in particular about Pushkin, was to prove as controversial as what he did not say. This was equally true of the émigré community, when Progulki s Pushkinym (Strolls with Pushkin, 1975) was published in London, as of Russians at home when an extract first appeared in Russia in 1989. As with his trial, timing had much to do with it, particularly in the latter case. His unorthodox treatment of Russia's leading poet and unofficial patron saint represented for many an unseemly if not a downright blasphemous attack on Russian cultural values (a parallel was even drawn with Salman Rushdie's Satanic Verses), on a symbol of Russian identity to which Russians abroad could look with pride.³⁸ Similarly, for those in Russia at the end of the twentieth century, Pushkin was the one certainty in a world cast adrift by the break-up of the Soviet Union.³⁹

At the end of his life, Siniavskii found himself once again the focal point of polemic and controversy. The question of 'heroes and villains' far from disappearing once he had quit the Soviet Union would continue to polarise the Russian intellectual community and he was more often than not the sounding board and channel for this polarisation.

³⁷ Toker, Return from the Archipelago, pp. 239 and 240.

³⁸ Igor Shafarevich, 'Fenomen emigratsii', Literaturnaia Rossiia, 36, 8 September, 1989, pp. 4 -5 (p. 5).

³⁹ See, Catherine Theimer Nepomnyashchy, 'Andrei Sinyavsky's "Return" to the Soviet Union' (hereafter, 'Andrei Sinyavsky's "Return"'), Formations, 6, Spring 1991, pp. 24-44 (p. 35).

Art and Dissidence

The rebuke aimed at Siniavskii by the judge at his trial about his lack of a war record would sound remarkably similar to the reproaches of fellow intellectuals who, apart from his trial, saw him take no active part in the dissident and human rights movements. The fact is that Siniavskii was not an activist in either of these senses. In order to understand Siniavskii's path, in many ways representative of that of many of the Russian intelligentsia of his age yet in other respects very different, it is necessary to backtrack to the late 1940s, to examine the roots of his dissent.

In terms of a watershed moment, of an epiphany, what 1956 was for most of the Russian intelligentsia, 1946 was for Siniavskii. His disillusionment with the Soviet system started far earlier than for the majority of his contemporaries and was specifically connected with writing and literature. His dissidence was prompted by despair at Zhdanov's crackdown against writers such as Anna Akhmatova and Mikhail Zoshchenko whose work he admired, and Russian cultural life in general at the precise moment when his own lifelong commitment to literature was being forged. As he would say, 'I saw these purges as the death of culture and of any original thought in Russia. In my inner dispute between politics and art I chose art and rejected politics'. It was through art not politics that Siniavskii came to question the values of the Soviet regime: 'I started to look closely at the nature of the Soviet State in general – in the light of the devastation it had caused in life and in culture'.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Siniavskii, 'Dissentstvo', p. 136.

Viewing Siniavskii's life and career from this perspective, one that he himself determined, is to see them not in the narrow context of Soviet versus dissident or Soviet versus Western models and values but in terms that are at once Russian and timeless. The controversies and scandals that surrounded Siniavskii and his work were as much to do with the nature and function of art and the role of the writer in Russian society as they were about Siniavskii personally and as such formed part of an ongoing debate that had accompanied the emergence of modern Russian literature and was carried over into the Soviet period.

The atmosphere of heated, not to say at times hysterical debate provoked by Siniavskii and his work, illustrates the significance ascribed to literature and the writer peculiar to Russian culture, a significance unknown in the West.⁴¹ Russian veneration of the written word that goes back to its origins in Holy writ had long assured literature a particular place in Russian society, where it operated as a sort of alternative government within a 'kind of second reality, quite often more immediate and actual than real life'.⁴²

A natural consequence of this was the tension that arose because of the expectations vested in literature above and beyond its function as art, whether by writers themselves (for example, Gogol and Tolstoy in their later years and, in modern times Solzhenitsyn), by critics (Belinskii and the radical critics of the 1860s) or by the State (the Soviet regime's officially prescribed Socialist

⁴¹ See, Rufus W. Mathewson Jr., The Positive Hero in Russian Literature, 2nd ed., Evanston IL, 2000 (hereafter, The Positive Hero), p. 4.

⁴² Anatoly Naiman, 'From prayer to howl. The Russianness of Russian Literature' (hereafter, 'From prayer to howl'), Times Literary Supplement (hereafter, TLS), 4 September, 1992, pp. 3-5 (p. 3).

Realism). In this sense, the rhetoric of ‘betrayal’ deployed at Siniavskii’s trial in 1966 may be seen as directed not only at his supposed treachery towards the State but also at his undermining of the ‘correct’, social function of art.

Whereas in the debate that divided the Russian literary establishment in the nineteenth century civic art had not been the victor, with the advent of Soviet power in the twentieth century there was no possibility of discussion and no room for anything other than socially committed art. Siniavskii’s argument with the Soviet regime not only concerned its specific attack on strands of Russian culture to which he was drawn, such as modernism, but also on its more generalised insistence that art serve a useful purpose.⁴³ Siniavskii rebelled against this utilitarian imperative which he considered inimical to creativity, putting forward the case for pure art; not in the sense of ‘art for art’s sake’, with its connotations of the late nineteenth century’s somewhat precious aestheticism, but pure art in a much broader sense, art that was free of any social, political or ideological imperatives; art whose truth lay not in a single narrow equation with realism – Socialist or otherwise – but in the broadest possible interpretation of reality. As he said in his final plea at the trial, ‘You lawyers are concerned with terms which must be narrowly defined, the more narrow the more precise they are. By contrast, in the case of a literary image, the wider its meaning the more it is exact’.⁴⁴ Siniavskii’s notion of pure art was not art that was separate from life – ‘God save us from aestheticism. An artist cannot and should not be a snob’ –

⁴³ Siniavskii, ‘Dissentstvo’, p. 136.

⁴⁴ Andrei Siniavskii, ‘Poslednee slovo Andreia Siniavskogo’ (hereafter, ‘Poslednee slovo’), in A. Ginzburg (ed.), *Belaia kniga*, pp. 301-06 (p.306). English translations from ‘Final plea by Sinyavsky’ (hereafter, ‘Final plea’), in Labeledz and Hayward (eds), *On Trial*, pp. 260-68 (p.268).

but art that was free to embrace life on its own terms.⁴⁵ For him writing was an act of dissidence inasmuch as it was an expression of that freedom.⁴⁶

The Writer

Siniavskii's trial, though very much an event of its time, also set him within the broader Russian cultural tradition in which the writer becomes a secular saint or martyr, persecuted by the State. It was writers themselves who had created and perpetuated this image, starting with Lermontov's 'Smert' poeta' (Death of the Poet, 1837), dedicated to Pushkin. Projecting Pushkin's death in the emotive terms of post-Byronic romanticism, Lermontov's poem laid the blame for his death squarely at the door of the Court, society and the authorities, enshrining Pushkin as a martyr in the popular consciousness. Lermontov established a line in which he too would take his place and into which many other writers and poets would be inscribed, gaining legitimacy by association. The idea of the writer as victim of the State was to acquire renewed meaning in the twentieth century with the Soviet regime's persecution of numerous authors, Siniavskii included.

However, under Soviet rule the writer's function in society would undergo radical change when control of his work, as of his image, passed into the hands of the State. This had much to do with the role the writer was expected to assume in educating and shaping the reading public or 'masses', their interests

⁴⁵ Abram Tertz, *Spokoinoi noch'i*, in Tertz, *Sobranie sochinenii v dvukh tomakh*, Moscow, 1992, 2, pp. 337-609 (p. 565). Translations from *Goodnight!*, trans. Richard Lourie, New York, 1989, (p. 306). See, also, Catherine Theimer Nepomnyashchy, 'An Interview with Andrei Sinyavsky' (hereafter, 'Interview'), *Formations*, 6, spring 1991, 1, pp. 6-23 (p. 11).

⁴⁶ Siniavskii, 'Dissidentstvo', p. 147.

now wholly identified with those of the Soviet regime, with which the writer, too, was expected to align himself. From incarnating the freedom of intellectual and spiritual enquiry, the writer was now meant to toe the line, to speak in the name of the authorities and to assume a collective identity.⁴⁷ Without membership of the Griboedov Club in Master i Margarita a writer is not a writer. Without membership of the Soviet Writers' Union a writer was denied access to publishers. He was thus deprived of the means of earning a living and of vital contact with his readers.⁴⁸ This is what had prompted the desperate acts of Zamiatin and Bulgakov, who both had turned directly to Stalin to ask him to intervene. For this same reason Siniavskii quit Russia for France after his release from the camps.

Belief in the importance of artistic freedom would have been natural for authors such as Bulgakov and Pasternak, who had grown up with pre-Soviet Russian values. It was a less obvious stance for someone like Siniavskii, reared in the Soviet system. However, though he was Soviet by education, by character and in terms of his literary tastes Siniavskii felt a greater kinship with the Russian Silver Age, with modernism and Revolutionary romanticism. The importance of the artist's individual voice, its independence from any official identity was therefore at the forefront of his thinking and of his image of himself as a writer.

In his challenging of the Soviet system, always defined by him in literary terms as 'aesthetic disagreements' [esteticheskie raznoglasiia], Siniavskii saw

⁴⁷ See, Evgenii Dobrenko, The Making of the State Reader. Social and Aesthetic Contexts of the Reception of Soviet Literature, Stanford CA, 1997 (hereafter, The Making of the State Reader), p. 23.

⁴⁸ See, John and Carol Garrard, Inside the Soviet Writers' Union, p. 136.

himself as belonging not so much to the dissident movement that arose as a specific historical phenomenon in the mid-1950s, as following in the tradition of ‘thinking differently’ [inakomyslie] established by writers and poets such as Akhmatova, Tsvetaeva, Mandel’stam and Pasternak.⁴⁹ Dissidents, according to Siniavskii’s definition, were those who were born into and were the products of Soviet society and were thus reacting against it from within. Authors such as Pasternak and his contemporaries could not be considered dissidents, in Siniavskii’s opinion, because ‘they were linked through their roots with the past, with pre-Revolutionary traditions of Russian culture’; they were thus reacting to Soviet society and Soviet notions of culture from a different, broader perspective, from outside the strictures of Soviet reality.

Underscoring this distinction, Siniavskii calls them the ‘heretics’ of Russian literature who, in their inakomyslie, had paved the way for dissidents – in other words, his natural forebears. Though he never refers to himself as a heretic, one can see, here, Siniavskii positing an alternative lineage for himself, a conscious distancing of himself from Soviet culture and values. At the same time, by-passing the terminology of the 1960s with its political accretions, the notion of heresy sets Siniavskii’s dissidence firmly in the literary context.

The concept of the writer as heretic reflects a specific acknowledgement of Zamiatin and the innovative literature of the early-to-mid 1920s, as well as establishing more comprehensive links with the past. In its prime meaning of religious dissent, it suggests not only Siniavskii’s departure from Soviet

⁴⁹ Siniavskii, ‘Dissentstvo’, p. 132.

orthodoxy but also acknowledges the spiritual beliefs that would increasingly if unobtrusively inform his life and work from the late 1950s on.

Not only did writers and poets such as Akhmatova, Tsvetaeva, Mandel'stam and Pasternak provide an example of independent thought and artistic integrity, they also represented in a way that was both tangible and symbolic a continuity with Russia's cultural past. For Siniavskii they were the bridge, spanning the 'abyss, thirty to forty years wide, when to all intents and purposes there was no literature in Russia [...] and no confidence that there would ever be any again'.⁵⁰ They were the 'tiny thread of life uniting the future of Russian literature with its heroic past!'.⁵¹ For Siniavskii, this 'heroic past' led backwards, from the creative ferment of the Revolutionary years, its idealistic origins as yet untainted by its Soviet heirs, to the turn of the century thinkers with their abandonment of positivist philosophy in favour of the irrational and subjective, on to Russia's Golden Age and further back still to the origins of Russian culture in folklore and the fairy tale.

At the same time they belonged to a line of writers who did not incarnate the idea of the writer as prophet or teacher. A natural concomitant of the elevated place accorded to literature in Russian culture, it was a role that had its counterpart in the Soviet view that the writer should be an 'engineer of human souls' whose function was to educate and form the masses, in other words, to speak with the voice of authority. This was equally true of the Soviet critic. By contrast, authors such as Pasternak and Akhmatova, did not set out to instruct or

⁵⁰ Abram Tertz, 'Literaturnyi protsess v Rossii', p. 157.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 156-57.

preach but spoke with and on behalf of their individual readers. Akhmatova's 'Rekviem' (Requiem, 1957) is perhaps the most moving and famous example of this, while the guiding spirit of Pasternak's work, whether his poetry, his prose or his translations, was self-effacement.

This was the line that Siniavskii would follow as a writer but he came to it through his work as a critic. The dual identity of Siniavskii-Tertz, should not be regarded as a split between critic and writer so much as an exploration of the possibilities of literature to which both contributed. As Siniavskii gained in confidence, so the collaboration between his two sides became more evident and concurrently the distinction between the work of Siniavskii and Tertz became less marked so that Tertz's final works are a seamless blend of literature and literary criticism.

From mediating directly between author, text and reader Siniavskii would move towards a less obtrusive but no less effective role. This meant, as far as his subject was concerned, not talking about him so much as identifying and speaking with him. As regards the reader, it meant retreating and not only leaving him space for his own interpretation but encouraging him to take an active role in ensuring the further life of the text. The text is viewed not as a finished object about which the author (or critic) has the final word but as an on-going process, occurring organically through the coincidence of art and life. Literature for him was in every sense something alive and vital.

Methodology

Siniavskii's progressive self-effacement as author, the spaces he would leave for reader participation in the creation of the text naturally prompt questions about a similarity between his ideas and aspects of contemporary Western literary critical theory, such as Roland Barthes' 'Death of the Author', questions explored by Mikhail Epstein in his article, 'Siniavskii kak myslitel'.⁵²

However, as Epstein shows and Catherine Nepomnyashchy points out, Siniavskii's writing is rooted in a completely different 'intellectual, religious and literary tradition' while Alexander Zholkovsky describes Siniavskii as a 'Russian Barthes and Derrida rolled into one' but whose ideas originated in Rozanov.⁵³ While Nepomnyashchy highlights the Orthodox, religious influences in Siniavskii's work, Epstein stresses the difference between the discrete notions of philosophy and literature in Western culture and the multi-faceted, fluid notion of 'thought' in the Russian cultural tradition.

Siniavskii's withdrawal from a position of authority in the text reflects not a dethroning of the author-as-God in a secular society but, rather, Christian notions of self-sacrifice. Moreover, in the Russian context the 'death of the author' carries literal connotations that have no corresponding point of reference in the western tradition.⁵⁴

⁵² See, Mikhail Epstein, 'Siniavskii kak myslitel'. (Otryvki)' (hereafter, Siniavskii kak myslitel'), *Sintaksis*, 36, 1995, pp. 86-105.

⁵³ Ibid.. Also, Nepomnyashchy, *Abram Tertz and the Poetics of Crime*, p.38 and A.K. Zholkovsky, 'Vspominaia Siniavskogo', *Sintaksis*, 36, (1995) 1998, pp. 23-27 (p. 25).

⁵⁴ See, Svetlana Boym, *Death in Quotation Marks. Cultural Myths of the Modern Poet*, Cambridge MA and London, 1991 (hereafter, *Death in Quotation Marks*), p. 10.

Equally, one could find instances of contact between Siniavskii's ideas and the reader-reception theories of the Konstanz school, such as those of Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss, in which the 'empty spaces' left by the author-narrator invite the reader to discover the workings of the text, to enter actively into its co-authorship. Although the result is an opening up of the multiple possibilities of the text, something that Siniavskii also strives for, it is undertaken in the spirit that is 'programmatic and relatively impersonal', representing an approach to literature that is more 'systematic'.⁵⁵ Similarly, in the approach of the French deconstructionists, for all that they attempt to 're-connect philosophy and literature, term with metaphor, thinking with play', there is an inherent discipline that is alien to the traditions of Russian thought.⁵⁶

For Siniavskii, set firmly within this tradition, the notion of 'system' per se runs counter to his ideas about the necessary freedom of art while abstract theorising he sees as inimical to the engagement of reader with text. This is clearly demonstrated by his reaction to some papers by Tartu scholars sent to him while he was in the camps, as he comments that 'the machine-like mechanicalness [mashinopodobnaia mekhanichnost'] of all these semiotics is off-putting'.⁵⁷

This is why, in line with Siniavskii's own beliefs about the importance of direct engagement with the text, I shall proceed from a close reading of his works, showing how Siniavskii's understanding of the writer-reader-text

⁵⁵ Paul de Man, 'Introduction' in Hans Robert Jauss, Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, trans. Timothy Bahti, Brighton, 1982, pp. vii-xxv (pp. vii -viii).

⁵⁶ Epstein, 'Siniavskii kak myslitel', p.101.

⁵⁷ Andrei Siniavskii, 127 pisem o liubvi, 3 vols., Moscow, 2004 (hereafter, Pis'ma), 2, p. 74.

relationship springs unmediated from the Russian cultural tradition, from literature itself, from writers such as Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoevskii, Maiakovskii and Pasternak and thinkers such as Shestov, Rozanov and Fedorov.

Breakdown of Chapters

The four main chapters are set out chronologically, corresponding to the different periods of Siniavskii's life and work.

Chapter I

This chapter covers the period from the end of the 1940s up until the mid-1960s and Siniavskii's trial. Starting with his time as a student at MGU it traces the origins of his divergence from the Soviet State and its system of values and his subsequent precarious existence from the early to mid-1950s, in what amounted to a balancing act between his career as a respected (and published) Soviet literary critic and his unofficial, alternative writing as Tertz.

The works considered under the name of Siniavskii are: his university research paper on Maiakovskii (his diplomnaia rabota) later published as two articles, 'Ob estetike Maiakovskogo' (On Maiakovskii's Aesthetics, 1950) and 'Osnovnye printsipy estetiki V.V. Maiakovskogo' (The Fundamental Principles of the Aesthetics of V.V. Maiakovskii, 1950); and his unpublished thesis for the degree of kandidat filologicheskikh nauk on Gor'kii: Roman M. Gor'kogo "Zhizn' Klima Samgina" i istoriia russkoi obshchestvennoi mysli kontsa XIX –

nachala XX veka, defended in 1952; his articles, in particular those written for Novyi mir (some co-authored with A. Men'shutin); Poeziia pervykh let revoliutsii: 1917-1920 (Poetry of the First Years of the Revolution, 1964) ,(also co-authored with Men'shutin) and his introduction to a new edition of Pasternak's poetry, 'Poeziia Pasternaka' (The Poetry of Pasternak, 1965). Works by Tertz include Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm (On Socialist Realism, 1960), Fantasticheskie povesti (Fantastic Tales, 1961), Mysli vrasplokh (Thoughts Unaware, 1965) and Liubimov (The Makepeace Experiment, 1964).

Chapter II

This chapter covers the period of Siniavskii's imprisonment, from his arrest in 1965 until his release from the camps in 1971. The works discussed are, by Siniavskii, the letters he wrote to his wife Mariia Vasilievna, posthumously published in three volumes as 127 pisem o liubvi with reference also to Ivan-durak. Ocherk russkoi narodnoi very (Ivan the Fool, 1991). Tertz's works of this period are Progulki s Pushkinym, V teni Gogolia (In Gogol's Shadow, 1975) and Golos iz khora (A Voice from the Chorus, 1973). Progulki s Pushkinym was completed in the camps; V teni Gogolia was wholly conceived there but only the first chapter was actually written there; it was completed after his release. Golos iz khora is made up of passages all written in the camps but selected and put together as a book, again, after his release.

Chapter III

This chapter deals with Siniavskii's life in emigration in Paris, from 1973 until roughly the end of the 1980s. Works by Siniavskii to be examined are his articles, particularly those published in the journal Sintaksis which he founded with Mariia Vasilievna and his books Kroshka Tsores (Little Jinx, 1980), 'Opavshie list'ia V.V. Rozanova (V.V. Rozanov's 'Fallen Leaves', 1982), Ivan-durak and Osnovy sovetskoi tsivilizatsii (Soviet Civilisation, 1988). The second part of the chapter will be devoted to his 'fantastic autobiography', Spokoinoi nochi.

Chapter IV

This chapter covers roughly the last decade of Siniavskii's life in emigration, against the backdrop of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. It is divided equally between his two last works, the essay, 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku' and the novel, Koshkin dom both by Tertz, with reference also to Siniavskii's Intelligentsia i vlast' (The Russian Intelligentsia, 1997).

Chapter I

“Once, in 1947, I asked him what he saw as his own personal aim in life. He replied: “to be at the axis of our time and to describe it.”⁵⁸

Chance or intention? Was Siniavskii a self-deprecating and unwilling hero cast up on the shore of twentieth century Russia at a pivotal moment in its history or someone with a keen sense of himself and his times, the part he might play? The answer is both. The opportunity offered by the Thaw that enabled Siniavskii to make his mark as Tertz would have meant nothing had he not already started consciously to evolve an identity for himself as a writer, as a deliberate response to the Stalinist era in which he had grown up. Siniavskii might protest, as he did at his trial, that he never set out to be a hero, that he was a hero ‘ponevole’, but he did choose to be a writer, with all that that implies in the Russian context.

Idiosyncratic, paradoxical, an author who insisted that he wrote only for a few, he nonetheless sent his work abroad, ensuring its publication; a writer whose credo was pure art, art free of the political and social demands traditionally placed on it in Russia, yet his art embroiled him in the heated polemics of literary politics; a writer who came to be viewed by many Russians at home and abroad as a Russophobe, still his lodestar throughout his life remained Russia – or, rather, Russian culture. Difficult to pin down on every

⁵⁸ Zamoyska, ‘Sinyavsky, the Man and the Writer’, p. 55.

level, Siniavskii is nowhere more elusive than in his image and biography as a writer.

Not one writer but two, the one 'official', the other, Tertz, unofficial; the one a retiring Russian academic, the other a louche, flamboyant petty criminal and a Jew. How does one separate one from the other, fact from fiction, Siniavskii's life from the more controversial, not to say notorious one that he fabricated for himself as Tertz but which, in effect, became his own as soon as Tertz's work put him in the public spotlight of the trial? Who was the real hero in this – Tertz or Siniavskii, the fictional alter ego or his real life counterpart?

To try and disentangle the two, though necessary up to a point, is to mistake Siniavskii's spirit and intentions. Tertz allowed him to play the hero – or, rather, the anti-hero – whose activities set Siniavskii up as a martyr in the Russian literary tradition. Certain of Siniavskii's writings seem to suggest that if he did not actively seek out persecution in the camps, he uncannily – notably in Sud idet (The Trial Begins, 1960) – foresaw his fate. As Gladkov wrote about Pasternak, however, 'There is all the difference in the world between knowing that something is inevitable and actually *wanting* it to come about'.⁵⁹

For Siniavskii the outcome of the trial was inevitable. He had been on a collision course with the Soviet regime from the late 1940s, when the post-war cultural retrenchment instigated by Zhdanov that targeted in particular two

⁵⁹ Alexander Gladkov, Meetings with Pasternak, trans. and ed. Max Hayward, London, 1977 (hereafter, Meetings with Pasternak), p. 155. Gladkov made this observation about what Pasternak had written in his poem 'Hamlet' from Doktor Zhivago. Composed twelve years before 'the grim autumn of 1958', and the reprisals against him after he had been awarded the Nobel prize for literature for his novel, ' "Hamlet is remarkable for its foreboding of his own fate" '.

writers with pre-Soviet links whom he admired, Anna Akhmatova and Mikhail Zoshchenko, prompted him to question the values of the regime as a whole.

Literature was both the cause – its preservation in the face of philistine assault – and the means by which he would take on the Soviet system. A young man frustrated by the post-war crack-down, who had seen no real action in the war and for whom the Revolution, with its romantic aura and heroic feats was now a distant dream, Siniavskii's idealism needed an outlet.⁶⁰ That outlet was to be literature. Literature was to be not merely an occupation, a means of earning a living, but his 'vocation', his 'life's work' [*moe zhiznennoe prizvanie*].⁶¹

But was literature a valid sphere of action? Later, when Stalin's death and the Thaw encouraged others onto the streets, Siniavskii's withdrawal into the world of books would be viewed askance by fellow members of the intelligentsia, leaving a tinge of guilt but above all a sense of injustice that would rankle for years to come: "We're going to end up in the camps [...] and you, you, Andrei, are you going to sit it out in your ivory tower?!"⁶²

The question for Siniavskii at the start of his career was not whether to be a writer but what sort of a writer. The days when the writer – and the critic – could be the active voice of independent thought and popular conscience were long gone. Siniavskii's notion of the writer as the voice of intellectual and spiritual freedom ran directly counter to the Soviet model of the writer as the 'engineer of human souls'. Equally inimical to him was the traditional Russian view of the

⁶⁰ See, Zamoyska, 'Sinyavsky, the Man and the Writer', p. 50.

⁶¹ Andrei Siniavskii, 'Dopros Siniavskogo', in Ginzburg, (ed.), *Belaja kniga* pp. 203-207 and 219-252 (p. 241). English translations will be from, 'Examination of Andrey Sinyavsky' (hereafter, 'Examination of Sinyavsky'), in Labeledz and Hayward, *On Tria*, pp. 184-222 (p. 210).

⁶² Tertz, *Spokoinoi nochi*, p. 562 / p. 302.

writer as the voice of authority, as a teacher or prophet with a monopolistic claim to the truth. These early years see him beginning to evolve his own style and identity by reacting against convention and prevailing norms. His image and biography, from the start, were as integral a part of his polemics as his writing.

His first move was to write poetry. A short-lived phase, with no published work and no references made to it beyond his small circle of student friends, one might think it unworthy of note and yet it is a phase to which Siniavskii himself draws attention, albeit with characteristic disclaimer and self-deprecation, in his autobiographical novel, Spokoinoi nochi.⁶³ Given the location of this reference, some caution is needed as one is deep into the territory, here, of the later Siniavskii. The account comes from the perspective of a good forty years, from the fantastic pen of Tertz, and is coloured by the polemics that erupted in the wake of his publication of Progulki s Pushkinym. Part apologia, part self-mythologisation, it is a complex interweaving of the lives of Siniavskii and Tertz, each complicit in the promotion of the other's image. Nevertheless, the fact that Siniavskii not only refers to his verse but actually quotes fragments of it and that he does so in the final chapter of Spokoinoi nochi, which focuses on his transformation into Tertz, indicates the importance he attached to it in the context of his becoming a writer. It shows how, by contracting into the Russian poetic tradition in his student years, he was already thinking in terms of an image and a role for himself. The persona of the poet is also worth retaining for another reason: it is closely related to the figure of the entertainer and minstrel

⁶³ For reference to Siniavskii's poetry, see Zamoyska, 'Sinyavsky, the Man and the Writer', p. 54.

[skomorokh] who later emerges as a latter-day incarnation of the writer in Siniavskii's work.

His poetry of his student years was a deliberate reaching out to the past and specifically to the Silver Age, as he composed verses in the style of Blok, Maiakovskii and the Imagists, among others.⁶⁴ Though this is the older Siniavskii reinforcing his literary credentials, the idea of continuity, of the writer as the living conduit of his cultural heritage, is not mere polemic but what he would come to see as a fundamental principle of his role as an author: the transmission of Russia's rich cultural reserve through his own work.

Siniavskii's poetry should be read equally as a rejection of the existing order.⁶⁵ Attempts to re-ignite links with a past that had been proscribed was, in itself, a challenging move; to play the 'Decadent' poet was as provocative a gesture as could be found to defy the pedestrian norms, and muscular heroism of Socialist Realism. That it was connected with Tertz, already an active part of his being, is clear: between two of his poems he speculates, once again in self-parodic manner, '[S]omewhere behind a wall, the wall of my soul (?!), a double had long since taken up residence and was keeping an implacable record of my entire ideological breakdown'.⁶⁶

Poetry was not for Tertz though it remained the unspoken inspiration of his prose. His real act of rebellion was still to come in his literary criticism. He

⁶⁴ He gives an example of a poem he wrote in imitation of Maiakovskii in Tertz, *Spokoinoi nochi*, p. 535 / p. 266 and some written in the Imagist style, *ibid.*, pp. 584-85 / pp. 331-32.

⁶⁵ Writing about Zamiatin's *My*, T.R.N. Edwards has drawn attention to the connection between heresy and poetry. T.R.N. Edwards, *Three Russian writers and the irrational. Zamyatin, Pil'nyak and Bulgakov*, Cambridge, 1982 (hereafter, *Three Russian writers and the irrational*), pp. 70-71.

⁶⁶ Tertz, *Spokoinoi nochi*, p. 535 / p. 333.

spoke at his trial of the difficulties he faced as a critic, of the procrastination of publishers even over commissioned articles – by which he meant, among other things, the lengthy struggle he had with the editorial board of Biblioteka poeta over his introduction to a new edition of Pasternak's poetry that came out in the year of his arrest⁶⁷. Here is an indication that he had been finding a way both to follow his own path and to express his repudiation of the existing order, its aesthetic and ethical values, not through unpublished verse but through his published scholarly and critical work.

My contention is that Siniavskii's work as a scholar and critic remained the strength and focus of his writing, fantastic as well as academic, throughout his life. It has been pointed out – not least by Siniavskii himself – that there was a close correlation between his work and that of Abram Tertz.⁶⁸ Tertz, for all his pronounced differences from Siniavskii – stylistic and otherwise – was the extreme and most daring side of the literary critic; his wildest and, at the same time, his most calculated fantasy of what might be achieved in the name of Russian literature.

Tertz's dispatch of manuscripts abroad was Siniavskii's act of defiance against the Soviet regime and the system of values it represented, even though he maintained that his work had been sent out in order to preserve it and not as an act of anti-Soviet publicity and that he had specifically charged H  l  ne Peltier

⁶⁷ Siniavskii, 'Dopros Siniavskogo', p. 241 / p. 210.

⁶⁸ Ibid.. See also, Laszlo Tikos and Murray Peppard, 'Introduction' (hereafter, 'Introduction') in Andrei Siniavsky, For Freedom of Imagination, trans. Laszlo Tikos and Murray Peppard, New York, Chicago IL and San Francisco CA, 1971, pp. vii-xxvii (p. xvii); Neil Cornwell, 'At the Circus with Olesha and Siniavskii' (hereafter, 'At the Circus'), SEER, 71, 1993,1, pp. 1-13 (pp. 12-13) and Kolonosky, Literary Insinuations, pp. 55-66.

(later Zamoyska) with finding a Western publisher who was not anti-Soviet. He might say, as he did at his trial, that he was well enough acquainted with the Soviet literary world to know that his fictional work would never be acceptable for publication in Russia but, unlike Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn, he never even made the attempt to have it published there.⁶⁹

The smuggling of his work abroad amounted to a statement of his belief in the freedom of art, art that was separate from politics and narrow social obligations. Playing the Soviet regime at its own game, he realised the metaphor of his own ‘criminal’ life as a writer of imaginative and therefore unacceptable literature, turning it into a fantastic story of crime and adventure with Tertz as the leading man.

In this challenging of the bounds of the permissible the inextricable ties that bind Siniavskii and Tertz become evident. Risk-taking for the sheer thrill of it, the artist is a consummate showman – like Kostia, the protagonist of one of Tertz’s first stories, ‘V tsirke’ (At the Circus, 1955). Risk, a strong creative stimulus, is the measure of his skill. It is also the ethical gauge of his undertaking, a matter of principle, a mark of independence and freedom of thought.⁷⁰ Jumping ahead to one of his last works, ‘Puteshestvie na Chernuiu

⁶⁹ Siniavskii, ‘Dopros Siniavskogo’, pp. 240-41 / pp. 209-10. Solzhenitsyn’s Odin den’ Ivana Denisovicha was published by Novyi mir in 1962. This was a time, as Siniavskii said, that he was finding it easier to have his work published. As a contributor to Novyi mir, he might conceivably have judged it a propitious moment to submit his own imaginative work for publication there. However, by 1962, the die was cast and he had already sent Tertz’s work abroad.

⁷⁰ Later, writing about ‘thieves’ songs’ (blatnye pesni) Siniavskii noted ‘Risk and a thirst for risk’ as part of the popular psyche, something that had been lost as the sense of the individual voice had been swallowed up in a collective identity. Abram Tertz, ‘Otechestvo. Blatnaia pesnia...’ (hereafter, ‘Otechestvo. Blatnaia pesnia...’), Sintaksis, 4, 1979, pp. 72-118 (pp. 74-77). The importance of risk in Siniavskii’s creative thinking was noted early on by Michel Aucouturier, his student and then his friend from 1954: ‘he held that the exercise of the mind, of thoughts that were truly independent and original, should, if it were not to

rechku' (Journey to Chernaia rechka, 1994), he is still repeating, 'Ne boites' riskovat'!' – literary criticism must be bold and daring if Russian literature is to be kept alive.⁷¹

University years. Evolution of a method

Tertz did not come about as the result of the Thaw; he had been maturing in Siniavskii's mind for some time previously.⁷² The change of political climate simply gave him the necessary opening to act. Though it was as Tertz that he made the break with the Soviet system, Siniavskii had been trying no less strenuously to batter at its doors in his own name and would continue to do so long after he developed Tertz as an alter ego, right through the 1950s and early 1960s.

In the late 1940s, with Tertz still to emerge, Siniavskii's university research, first in his diplomnaia rabota on Maiakovskii and then in his kandidatskaia on

become a useless luxury, involve some risk'. Michel Aucouturier, 'Andrey Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel', in Labedz and Hayward, On Trial, pp. 332-37 (p. 336). Siniavskii's understanding of the multi-faceted, creative significance of risk comes remarkably close to Pasternak's in the mid-1930s. In his speech at the third plenary meeting of the Board of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1936, Pasternak argued against the complacency and mediocrity that he saw leading to stagnation in Soviet literature. What he said foreshadows much of what Siniavskii was to say – in his own name as well as Tertz's – in the late 1950's and early 1960s. Boris Pasternak, 'Vystuplenie na III plenumе pravleniia soiuzа pisatelei SSSR' (hereafter, 'O skromnosti i smelosti'), in Pasternak, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, 11 vols, Moscow, 2003-2005, 5, pp. 230-36. Translations from Boris Pasternak, "'On Modesty and Daring": Speech at the third plenary meeting of the Board of the Union of Soviet Writers (1936)' (hereafter, "'On Modesty and Daring'"), in Angela Livingstone (ed.), Pasternak on art and creativity, Cambridge and New York, 1985, pp. 173-78 (p. 177). Siniavskii's familiarity with the speech is confirmed by his quotation from it in his introductory essay to Pasternak's poetry published in 1965. Henry Gifford makes a similar point about Pasternak. Discussing Pasternak's idea of courage, he writes, 'In Pasternak's understanding of art, the aesthetic demand bears a moral weight: "to be alive to the end" requires that life should have the courage to risk all'. Henry Gifford, Pasternak, Bristol, 1991, p. 239. A similar understanding of 'risk' and 'courage' are identified by Lesley Milne in Bulgakov's work of the late 1920's and early 1930's. See, Lesley Milne, Mikhail Bulgakov. A Critical Biography, Cambridge, 1990, (hereafter, Mikhail Bulgakov), pp. 184-86.

⁷¹ Abram Tertz, 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku', p. 20.

⁷² See, for example, Nepomnyashchy, 'Interview', pp. 7-8.

Gor'kii, shows signs of what was to come.⁷³ As a literary scholar, his subjects were naturally writers and poets. What distinguished him were his choices and the way he learnt to speak not so much about them as with them. One or two authors would simply be a means to an end, a way of testing his own ideas by reacting against them. With others – Pushkin, Gogol, Rozanov, Maiakovskii and Pasternak – he was to develop life-long relationships; not only building bridges through them to Russia's cultural past but picking up and continuing an on-going dialogue in which he himself would increasingly take part.

The use of the term 'dialogue' inevitably prompts questions about the possible influence of Siniavskii's contemporary, Bakhtin. Siniavskii himself, as far as it is possible to ascertain, never used this term himself in a Bakhtinian sense; neither did he acknowledge any direct influence, though he was familiar with some of Bakhtin's work, having read his books on Rabelais and Dostoevskii before he was arrested. Rather, any similarity in their ideas might be ascribed to their 'common context'.⁷⁴

In applying the term to Siniavskii's work, the notion of dialogue that I wish to highlight is different from that of Bakhtin. Bakhtin's starting point was the

⁷³ The fruit of Siniavskii's research on Maiakovskii was published in two articles: 'Ob estetike Maiakovskogo', *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta*, 1, 1950, pp. 129-39 and 'Osnovnye printsipy estetiki V.V. Maiakovskogo', *Znamia*, 2, 1950, pp. 151-57. His thesis on Gor'kii is entitled: Roman M. Gor'kogo 'Zhizn' Klima Samgina' i istoriia russkoi obshchestvennoi mysli kontsa XIX – nachala XX veka, unpublished dissertation for the degree of kandidat filologicheskikh nauk, Moscow State University (MGU), 1952 (hereafter, Roman M. Gor'kogo 'Zhizn' Klima Samgina').

⁷⁴ See Nepomnyashchy, 'Interview', pp. 13-14. Catherine Nepomnyashchy asks Siniavskii specifically about Tertz as 'an example of carnivalization' – which he acknowledges but does not tie to any direct influence of Bakhtin, setting it, rather in the wider context of art in general. She refers to the possible connection between the ideas of the two men again in her book Abram Tertz and the Poetics of Crime and cites other writers who have referred to this, but concludes, 'I have chosen not to address this issue in this book primarily because I believe the connections between the two figures to be primarily the result of their common context, rather than of "influence"'. Nepomnyashchy, Abram Tertz and the Poetics of Crime, pp. 331-2. Donald Fanger and Gordon Cohen have also drawn attention to similarities between Siniavskii and Bakhtin – without suggesting any mutual influence. See, Fanger and Cohen, 'Abram Tertz', pp. 169-71.

novel and the novelist's relationship to his characters, whereas Siniavskii's perspective was that of a literary critic writing about other authors. The idea of a creative dynamic in the exchange of voices between the author and those he writes about is certainly present in Siniavskii's writing.⁷⁵ However, in his work it takes the form not of a clash of competing voices but of a process of mutual enrichment that is cumulative, the exchanges built upon and the relationship deepened over the course of his life and the entire range of his works.

His approach is closer to what he discerned in Pasternak's work as a translator, where the writer is both medium and active contributor to the work he is translating: Pasternak's 'qualities' are akin to Shakespeare's so that

“The influence of the original” [...] in this case began long before his actual work on Shakespeare's tragedies and to some extent coincided with his own interests and plans. This is why Shakespeare took root so deeply in Pasternak, and why his translating work, which was influenced by his predilections and manner as a poet, had in its turn an influence on his original work. In this close and extremely free commerce with Shakespeare, whose greatness and power he sought to convey “in its own unrepeatability”, he realized in practice his theoretical conviction that “translations are not a method of getting acquainted with particular works, but a medium of the age-old intercourse of cultures and peoples”.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ In his kandidatskaia thesis on Gor'kii Siniavskii also discusses polyphony (mnogogolosie), a term now most closely associated with Bakhtin. See, for example, Siniavskii, Roman M. Gor'kogo 'Zhizn' Klima Samgina', p. 325. This and other coincidences with Bakhtinian terminology and ideas in the thesis have been pointed out by Walter Kolonosky, but he goes no further than to draw attention to them. See, Kolonosky, Literary Insinuations, pp. 48-49.

⁷⁶ A. Siniavskii, 'Poeziia Pasternaka', introductory article to B. Pasternak, Stikhotvoreniia i poemy, Moscow and Leningrad, 1965, pp. 9-62 (p. 52). English Translations from Andrei Siniavskii, 'Boris

Siniavskii's dialogue is intended not only to re-knit the broken threads of Russian cultural intercourse but to invigorate it and, in so doing, transform himself from an onlooker and commentator into an active and equal participant (back to his view of literature and literary criticism not as a passive option but as a positive and legitimate field of action): 'Be on equal terms. Yes! On equal terms with that same literature which you are writing about'.⁷⁷

Gor'kii and Maiakovskii

Siniavskii's university research papers on Maiakovskii and Gor'kii are evidence of how he was already seeking out these writers. Maiakovskii was to be a lifelong inspiration and companion.⁷⁸ Gor'kii was to be not so much a companion as a means of focussing and channelling Siniavskii's disillusionment with the Soviet system. As the grand old man of Soviet literature, Gor'kii offered the protection of his officially approved status to Siniavskii the scholar while Gor'kii the writer offered himself as whipping boy to the scathing pen of the dissenter and writer of fantastic prose, Tertz.⁷⁹

Pasternak ', in Donald Davie and Angela Livingstone (eds and trans), *Pasternak* London, 1969, pp. 154-219 (p. 208). The quotation is taken from Pasternak's address at the International Congress of Writers in the Defence of Culture in Paris. June, 1935. See Davie and Livingstone, *ibid.*, p. 219, n. 1.

⁷⁷ Tertz, 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku', p. 20.

⁷⁸ In an interview to mark his seventieth birthday, Siniavskii talks of his plans for writing something on Maiakovskii, a kind of 'mixture of criticism and memoirs'. Andrei Siniavskii, 'Stil' – eto sud'ba', unattributed interview, *Sintaksis*, 37, 2001, pp. 127-31 (p. 131).

⁷⁹ This becomes obvious when comparing Siniavskii's laudatory assessment of Gor'kii in his *kandidatskaia* thesis defended in 1952, with his less than complimentary references to him in his first work as Tertz, *Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm*, written just four years later in 1956 – a discrepancy not lost on the prosecution at his trial. Siniavskii, 'Dopros Siniavskogo, p. 206 / p. 237. In the second piece Gor'kii is not merely criticized but openly caricatured as the arch-proponent of Socialist Realism. The few pieces subsequently devoted to Gor'kii by Siniavskii represent a useful reflection of his evolution as a literary critic, as well as a barometer of the changing political – and therefore cultural – climate in Russia. These were: 'O khudozhestvennoi strukture romana "Zhizn' Klima Samgina"', in *Tvorchestvo M. Gor'kogo i voprosy sotsialisticheskogo realizma*, Moscow, 1958 (pp. 132-74) and 'A.M. Gor'kii' in *Istoriia russkoi*

The importance of the Gor'kii thesis lies in its not obvious but very real proximity to Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm (On Socialist Realism, 1960), Siniavskii's first work as Tertz. This is usually paired with Sud idet for the perfectly valid reason that the story is seen as the realisation of Tertz's artistic credo formulated in Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm (and no doubt also for the practical reason that the thesis has not long been available to the reading public).⁸⁰ However, leaving aside the fact that Siniavskii later expressed some doubts about the artistic merits of Sud idet, it seems to me a less telling juxtaposition, comparing like with like, Tertz with Tertz.⁸¹ The thesis, on the other hand, offers the opportunity of viewing the creative interaction of Siniavskii and Tertz at the very outset of their combined career, of discerning in the work of the scholar what would feed and be transformed by the pen of the writer.⁸²

sovetskoi literatury, vol. 1, (pp. 99-167), also published in 1958. In 1988, Siniavskii published 'Roman M. Gor'kogo *Mat* – kak ranni obrazets sotsialisticheskogo realizma', *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique*, 29, 1988, 1, pp. 33-40. The central – and best – part of his thesis on Zhizn' Klima Samgina, where he provides an original and skilful analysis of the work's structure and artistic composition, is reproduced in the first of these pieces, its more obvious political and ideological references either toned down or edited out, reflecting the evolving cultural environment of the Thaw years. In the later article of 1988 on Gor'kii's Mat 'as an early example of Socialist Realism', it is possible to see a mellowing of Siniavskii's position. Long since free of the system and having laid the demons connected with it to rest, Siniavskii produces a far more balanced assessment. Though he raises the same objections to the Socialist Realist aspects of Mat – for example, its indiscriminate mixture of styles, its didactic aim – his tone is measured and he is at pains to give Gor'kii his due, while feeling free even to inject notes of humour from time to time. He is also able to indulge in an original and serious discussion of the intermingling in it of Christian symbolism and Revolutionary ideology, impossible even during the Thaw years, as he found out when his attempts to discuss in print the Gospel themes of Pasternak's 'Zhivago' poems met with defeat.

⁸⁰ I was fortunate enough to obtain a photocopy of the thesis thanks to the help of the late Professor Roy Mersky, law librarian at the University of Texas at Austin.

⁸¹ See, Andrei Siniavskii, 'My life as a writer' (hereafter, 'My life as a writer'), Interview with Sally Laird, *Formations*, 15, 6, 1986, pp. 7-14 (p. 8): 'I don't like my first book very much – I think it's too intellectual. [...] When I wrote *The Trial Goes On* I sensed that it might perhaps be my first and last book. So I tried to put everything in there – everything that I felt about Soviet power, Soviet life. The result was somehow too deliberate, too thought-out'.

⁸² The two pieces should be viewed as effective contemporaries of one another. Though the opportunity for publishing Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm only came with the Thaw, it was clearly ready in

Both works show how his writing gains from an active interchange with his life. Both are informed by and reflect in their different ways, the particularly stressful nature of Siniavskii's personal circumstances at this time: the arrest of his father on some trumped-up charge in 1951 and his departure for internal exile the following year, events that served to confirm Siniavskii's disillusionment with the Soviet system.⁸³ Unable to react directly, Siniavskii translates the effect of these events aesthetically, into the double-voicedness of the thesis, the ironic, shifting viewpoint of the omnipresent 'we' in Tertz's work. In turn this lack of a single authoritative position begins to open up a space for the attentive reader as different levels of meaning become apparent. At this stage an unconscious feature of Siniavskii's writing, it is a sign of things to come.

The ground for Tertz's work was laid in Siniavskii's reading for his kandidatskaia on the work of early twentieth century Russian thinkers, and in particular Berdiaev, Shestov and Rozanov, also well-known as writers. In their work Siniavskii found validation of his belief that there was a means other than that of direct action by which to express his disaffection, namely to write and he turns to them in his discussion of Gor'kii.

Their work, with its rejection of the Western materialist philosophy to which they had been drawn in their youth, and its inspiration in Russian religious

manuscript form before then and the idea, if only hypothetical, had been in Siniavskii's mind since at least 1952; it is therefore likely that even while he was writing the thesis, ideas relating to the far more explosive Tertzian work were fermenting in his mind. (See, Nepomnyashchy, 'Interview', p. 7. and Kolonosky, Literary Insinuations, p. 2).

⁸³ His father's totally undeserved persecution was the last decisive factor in determining Siniavskii's break with the Soviet regime. The other factors were the Zhdanov crack-down, already mentioned, and the pressure consistently put on Siniavskii in the late forties by the KGB to entrap and betray his fellow student, the daughter of the French naval attaché, Hélène Peltier (Zamoyska). This came to a head in 1952, at precisely the time his father's exile began.

teaching, offered an alternative vision to Soviet, purpose-led ideology and an alternative means of expression. As writers their ideas were not separate from but organically linked to their forms and modes of discourse: their challenging of accepted norms is expressed in terms that are as much artistic as they are philosophical. And they acknowledged, as did Siniavskii, the influence of Dostoevskii.

Discussing in particular Shestov and Rozanov's use of language – at some length and with a degree of absorption that belies his apparent attempt to discredit them – Siniavskii shows how, in their writing form becomes the vehicle of their ethical beliefs. The open-endedness of aphorisms, a favoured genre of both Shestov and Rozanov, is interpreted by him as the expression of their freedom of thought and of the subjective truth that emerges from random associations rather than truth imposed by authoritative pronouncements.⁸⁴ Siniavskii would later use the aphoristic form when writing as Tertz, notably in Mysli vrasplokh and Golos iz khora, both of which, especially the former, come close to being his *profession de foi*.

The thesis is the work of someone who, though apparently still an insider, is clearly testing his wings, who is entertaining doubts about the status quo but can express them at best obliquely, by implication. The complex, multi-voiced approach characteristic of Tertz is there in embryo but the tone is uneven, veering between the expertly handled but somewhat mechanical assertion of the

⁸⁴ Siniavskii reflects the thoughts of Shestov. See, Lev Shestov, Apofeoz bespochvennosti (opyt adogmaticeskogo myshleniia), in Shestov, Sochineniia, Moscow, 1995 (hereafter, Apofeoz bespochvennosti), pp. 176-318 (pp. 176-81). See, Siniavskii, Roman M. Gor'kogo 'Zhizn' Klima Samgina', pp. 347-50 (he quotes directly from Shestov on p. 249).

official ideological position, suitably bolstered by quotations from Lenin and Stalin, and calmer passages of skilful and sensitive literary criticism where Siniavskii's gifts as a scholar come into their own. This is particularly true of Part II, which concentrates on the artistic structure of Gor'kii's work and the influence of the thinkers.

Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm, though its near contemporary, comes with all the force of the break made and the emotional intensity of personal engagement. Writing under the protective mask of Tertz, he is able to give vent to the impact on him of his father's arrest. His offensive is assured, at once controlled and passionate. Cool analysis is deployed alongside devastating irony, his critique of the system amplified by a countervailing affirmation of the romantic ideals of the Revolution, always associated for him with his father.

At the same time there is bitter acknowledgement of the collective responsibility of the intelligentsia for what had come to pass since: the ambiguous 'we' places Siniavskii as a member of this intelligentsia, a member of the generation who had betrayed the Revolutionary ideals of their fathers. However, the sense of guilt, of complicity by omission in the horrors of the Stalin era, felt by many members of the intelligentsia after the revelations of Khrushchev's speech to the twentieth Party Congress in 1956, for Siniavskii came as an echo of views already expressed by thinkers such as Berdiaev and Shestov in the seminal collection of essays, Vekhi (Milestones, 1909), written in the wake of the 1905 revolution.⁸⁵ When he passes judgement on the

⁸⁵ In a later interview with Catherine Nepomnyashchy, when asked why he had not mentioned Khrushchev's speech in Tertz's first story, Sud idet, Siniavskii replied, 'the speech didn't reveal anything

intelligentsia in Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm for having paved the way for the bloody consequences of the Revolution, he not only echoes the fundamental thesis of the Vekhi authors, but comes close to paraphrasing their very words.⁸⁶

If Siniavskii's passionate defence of Revolutionary ideals at the beginning of Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm can be read as a defence of his father, at the end it is associated with Maiakovskii. In this way he brings about a significant shift of emphasis. By attaching these ideals to Maiakovskii, Siniavskii makes it clear that he is taking up the Revolutionary baton passed on by his father but that his feat will be not political but literary.

Although Siniavskii's literary companions remained constant throughout his life, their prominence varied according to his circumstances. While the Siniavskii of the camps looked more to Pushkin for confirmation of the freedom of art, the young Siniavskii, fired up with the idealistic enthusiasm of Revolutionary romanticism, turned naturally to Maiakovskii, whose image and

new to me. Just the opposite. All around everyone was horrified, sobbing, weeping, while I had known it all before. I don't think Khrushchev opened my eyes to anything'. Nepomnyashchy, 'Interview', p. 8.

⁸⁶ I have in mind a passage of Berdiaev's, where he attacks the contradictions inherent in the intelligentsia's position: 'our intelligentsia prized *freedom* and professed a philosophy that did not allow for freedom; it prized the *individual* and professed a philosophy that did not allow for the individual personality; it prized the *idea of progress* and professed a philosophy that did not allow for the idea of progress; it prized the *brotherhood of man* and professed a philosophy that did not allow for the brotherhood of man; it prized *justice* and all manner of high sentiments and professed a philosophy that allowed for neither for justice nor for anything else ennobling.' N. Berdiaev, 'Philosophic Truth and Moral Truth', in Boris Shragin and Albert Todd (eds), Landmarks. A Collection of Essays on the Russian Intelligentsia – 1909, trans. Marian Schwartz, New York, 1977, pp. 3-22 (p. 20). In Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm Siniavskii uses the same technique, reinforced by Tertz's powerful irony, born of the horror at the reality of the bloodshed brought about by the Revolution – bloodshed that the Vekhi authors could only guess at. See Tertz, Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm, p. 411 / p. 162: 'So that prisons should vanish for ever, we built new prisons. So that all frontiers should fall, we surrounded ourselves with a Chinese Wall. So that work should become a rest and a pleasure, we introduced forced labor. So that not one drop of blood be shed any more, we killed and killed and killed'.

biography as a poet were to be as much of an inspiration to him as his work. In this Maiakovskii provided a spiritual link to Lermontov, a connection later made explicit by Siniavskii when he singled out Lermontov as Maiakovskii's natural predecessor, as an artist who 'constructed his biography as a poet as the spectacle of an exclusive personality and fate, the spectacle of a lonely and lawless comet'.⁸⁷ A further connection is concealed here, namely to Pasternak, who first applied the notion of the 'spectacular conception of biography' to Maiakovskii in his own autobiographical essay, Okhrannaia gramota (Safe Conduct, 1931). Pasternak would assume increasing prominence in Siniavskii's work and life and these verbal connections would become real as the 1940s gave way to the 1950s and 1960s.

As a rebel within the established order, Maiakovskii was a beacon of non-conformism during the Stalin years. An artist embraced by the Soviet State – he was never to shake off the effects of Stalin's pronouncement that he “was and remained the best, most talented poet of the age” – he was none the less a rallying point for those at odds with it.⁸⁸ For Siniavskii, who defined his differences with the Soviet regime as 'stylistic', Maiakovskii offered the example of someone who had challenged the status quo in artistic terms,

⁸⁷ Andrei Siniavskii, Hoover Institution Archives, Andrei Siniavskii Collection (hereafter, HIA), box 19, folder 12, lecture 13, p. 24. The Russian original reads: '[...] stroil svoiu biografiiu poeta kak zrelishe iskliuchitel'noi lichnosti i sud'by, zrelishe odinokoi i bezzakonnoi komety'.

⁸⁸ See, Tertz, Spokoinoi noch'i, p. 581 /p. 327. Stalin's accolade had appeared in the 5 December, 1935 edition of Pravda. The translation comes from Boris Pasternak, People and Propositions. The Voice of Prose: Volume Two, trans. and ed. Christopher Barnes, Edinburgh, 1990 (hereafter People and Propositions), pp. 26-86 (p. 73). Pasternak concludes the passage with the observation: 'Then Mayakovsky began to be introduced forcibly, like potatoes under Catherine the Great. This was his second death. He had no hand in it'. Pasternak at this period had been gaining in favour with the powers-that-be. Anxious about the kiss of death that such official endorsement might prove to be for his artistic creativity he had written a personal letter thanking Stalin for the statement about Maiakovskii, 'because it freed me from an inflated notion of my importance that had begun to affect me in the mid-1930s'.

someone who, to that day, continued to be accepted ‘politically rather than poetically’.⁸⁹

Siniavskii’s enthusiasm for Maiakovskii was in large part fuelled by the seminars conducted by Professor Viktor Dmitrievich Duvakin, himself a living role model for having the courage of his convictions. According to Siniavskii he was alone as a scholar in daring to depart at that time from the official line on Maiakovskii as a ‘Soviet’ poet and he was to display similar integrity when appearing as a witness for the defence at Siniavskii’s trial.⁹⁰

Duvakin’s seminars and their role in Siniavskii’s development as a writer go further than that, however. Using them as a starting point it is possible to trace various threads in Siniavskii’s life at this time, threads that would come together to shape the fabric both of his art and of his ideas about the image and role of the writer.

Not least among them is the importance of the spoken word. Extending the seminars as informal gatherings late into the night, Siniavskii and his fellow students created their own kind of ‘Dead Poets’ Society’:

Going around in a circle, each of us would recite poems in his own fashion, a ritual that would last the entire night. That was what I would now define as a rite invoked to galvanize the force of poetry, which was also present in the darkening blue of the windows. We did not read poems, we lived them, with everything we had. The poets would change as we

⁸⁹ Tertz, Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm, p. 441 / p. 211.

⁹⁰ See, Labeledz and Hayward, On Trial, pp. 238-9. Siniavskii pays tribute to Duvakin as both teacher and friend in Spokoinoi noch'i, where he reveals that Duvakin’s defence of him cost him his job. Tertz, Spokoinoi noch'i, p. 579 / p. 325.

went around the circle, first Blok, then Gumilev. The vodka would be all gone after the first glass, but our shamanistic incantations never ceased...⁹¹

Removed from the official sphere and the authority of the printed page, language was a potent and magical force, both liberating and life giving.⁹²

From 'live' poetry it was a small step to the thieves' songs [blatnye pesni] and anecdotes [anekdoty] which were exchanged at similar impromptu gatherings in the Siniavskii apartment, where Siniavskii welcomed his own students from IMLI and the studio school of the Moscow Arts Theatre (MKhAT) during the 1950s.

The role of the oral tradition as an alternative to official culture, in not only providing a safety valve, an outlet for humorous and subversive commentary on the Soviet system but also preserving Russian popular culture, is well documented.⁹³ For Siniavskii, important though these aspects were, the significance of the anecdote extended further and has much to do with Siniavskii's understanding of the term 'unofficial': 'For Siniavskii [...] "unofficial" has never been so narrowly bound to its political opposite; it denotes, rather, a free, undetermined *alternative* to the prescriptions as well as

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 581 /p. 327.

⁹² The importance of the spoken word, its power to transform, in both a miraculous and magical sense, recurs throughout Siniavskii's work. His most extended discussion of this occurs in his later work, Ivan-durak (Ivan the Fool, 1990) in the context of the fairy tale. Andrei Siniavskii, Ivan-durak. Ocherk russkoi narodnoi very Moscow, 2001 (hereafter, Ivan-durak) in particular, Part I, chapters 7-9 (pp. 76-101).

⁹³ See, for example, Geoffrey Hosking, Beyond Socialist Realism. Soviet Fiction since Ivan Denisovich, London, 1980 (hereafter, Beyond Socialist Realism), pp. 29-30. Also, Alexei Yurchak, Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More. The Last Soviet Generation, Princeton NJ and Oxford, 2006 (hereafter, Everything Was Forever), pp. 273-76. Yurchak is concerned more, here, with anecdotes in the 'late-socialist' period, in other words, the 1960s to the 1980s. Siniavskii traces the lineage of the anecdote back to its origins in folklore, in the byliny, sagas and fairy tales. Abram Tertz, 'Anekdot v anekdote', Sintaksis, 1, 1978, pp. 77-95 (p. 77).

the proscriptions (from whatever quarter) alleged to be incumbent on a Russian writer'.⁹⁴ The anecdote had implications that were aesthetic, ethical and even spiritual; in this they have something in common with the aphorism.⁹⁵

A self-generating genre (there is no 'author' and by extension there is no pretension at authoritative speech: it has no such ambitions), the anecdote circulates by word of mouth. Flourishing on forbidden soil, devoid of any moral lesson, the anecdote was the living exemplar of what Siniavskii himself stood for: pure art, art for its own sake. Unassuming though it was as a genre – a reflection of Siniavskii's own preference for a 'zanizhennaia pozitsia' as an author – it none the less contained within itself the miraculous healing power of art. In its 'reverse' logic, its back-to-front form, the anecdote testifies to the reversibility of all things; 'as a result the anecdote becomes a counsellor, helper, an explanation and consolation for us when times are at their most critical'.⁹⁶

Coming full circle, one can look to the ending of one of Siniavskii's later works, Ivan-durak where he describes the repetition of the Scriptures from memory by members of religious sects in the camps. Each, taking up the recitation where the other left off, passed the baton on to the next in an unbroken chain:

It was culture in its oral transmission, in its primary essence, continuing to

⁹⁴ Fanger and Cohen, 'Abram Tertz', p.165. Fanger and Cohen make the point that Siniavskii's interpretation of 'unofficial' in this, its broadest sense, is the opposite of that found in Solzhenitsyn's work, where it is narrowly political, "“forbidden by the authorities””.

⁹⁵ Tertz, 'Anekdot v anekdote', pp. 92- 93. Siniavskii writes of the anecdote's 'philosophical attitude to the world'. He also identifies it as a source of wisdom and truth (istina). Truth that is not absolute and one-dimensional but has multiple layers of meaning. (p. 94). Looking at his thesis on Gor'kii one finds passages that refer to the 'simplicity' of the aphorism, to the aphorism as 'the precise formulation of a certain idea, as a "wise utterance"’ [mudroe izrechenie] that has a wide, generalising meaning'. Siniavskii, Roman M. Gor'kogo 'Zhizn' Klima Samgina', p. 345.

⁹⁶ Tertz, 'Anekdot v anekdote', p. 93.

exist at the lowest level, underground and at its most primitive. Culture was transmitted like a chain, from mouth to mouth, from hand to hand. From generation to generation. From labour camp to labour camp. But this is culture and perhaps in one of its purest and most elevated forms. And if these people and this relay did not exist, man's life on earth would not have the slightest sense.⁹⁷

The human links forged through the gatherings at the Siniavskii home were equally important. A student of Siniavskii's at the studio school of MKhAT from 1957-8, the actor, poet and singer Vladimir Vysotskii, became a regular visitor at the Siniavskii's.⁹⁸ Hailed by many as the 'living conscience of his time', Vysotskii occupied an 'ambivalent niche' in Soviet culture: though not openly dissident, his songs challenged the status quo in that they 'suggested alienating and dehumanizing aspects of Soviet reality'.⁹⁹ As with Tertz's writing, it was often not so much the content of his songs as the style which was unacceptable.¹⁰⁰

For Siniavskii, Vysotskii was one of those modern-day 'beranzherov, troubadours and minstrels' whose songs, like anecdotes, ensured the continuation of Russian literature at a time 'when it does not have the strength to

⁹⁷ Andrei Siniavskii, Ivan-durak, p. 461. The 'reeling out' of anekdoty from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s had a similarly 'ritualised' form. See, Yurchak, Everything Was Forever, pp. 273-75.

⁹⁸ This was long before he became a household name. He started giving regular concerts from about 1968. See, Gerald Stanton Smith, Songs to Seven Strings. Russian Guitar Poetry and Soviet "Mass Song", Bloomington IN, 1984 (hereafter, Songs to Seven Strings), p. 153.

⁹⁹ Alexander Gershkovich, The Theatre of Yuri Lyubimov. Art and Politics at the Taganka Theatre in Moscow, trans. Michael Yurieff, New York, 1989 (hereafter, The Theatre of Yuri Lyubimov, p. 129. see also, Yurchak, Everything Was Forever, p.123 and Hosking, Beyond Socialist Realism, p. 29.

¹⁰⁰ Smith, Songs to Seven Strings, p. 173.

spread its wings in a book and subsists on oral forms'.¹⁰¹ Like the anecdote these songs were not formulaic or static but exuded a creative energy born of their hybrid and inventive nature: 'The traditions of the ancient urban romances and thieves' [blatnoi] lyric came together here and gave birth to a very particular artistic genre, as yet unknown to us, that replaced the impersonal folkloric element with the individual, author's voice, the voice of a poet who dared to speak in the name of a living and not imaginary Russia.'¹⁰²

While Vysotskii regaled Siniavskii with the latest anekdoty, blatnye pesni and his own 'author's' songs (many given their first airing in the Siniavskii apartment), through Siniavskii Vysotskii first learnt of Pasternak's work.¹⁰³ This was a creative exchange that left an indelible mark on its time when, from 1971 to 1980, when his early death put a stop to the production, Vysotskii played the title role in Pasternak's translation of Hamlet at the Taganka theatre under the direction of Yurii Liubimov.¹⁰⁴ Accompanying himself on his guitar, he opened

¹⁰¹ Tertz, 'Literaturnyi protsess v Rossii', p. 166.

¹⁰² Ibid., pp. 167-68.

¹⁰³ See, M. Rozanova, 'Abram da Mar'ia', Sintaksis, 34, 1994, pp. 125-49 (pp 129-30). When the KGB searched the Siniavskii apartment after his arrest, Mariia Vasilievna used her original Vysotskii tapes as a bargaining point. Ironically, it was a bargain in which Mariia Vasilievna agreed to 'overlook' the fact that a three volume edition of Pasternak had also disappeared if the Vysotskii tapes were returned to her. Vysotskii's second wife, Ludmilla Abramova, confirms that Siniavskii was a great influence on Vysotskii: not only introducing Pasternak's work to him for the first time, but also as the first person who taught him to see Russian culture as a whole. Private conversation, Moscow, 2005. A photograph of Siniavskii hangs in the Vysotskii museum in Moscow, testament both to Vysotskii's respect for Siniavskii as a teacher and his affection for him as a friend.

¹⁰⁴ Pasternak's Hamlet was first staged in 1954 by the film director Grigory Kozintsev who 'consciously attempted to play up the work's openly antityrannical connotations'. Artistically, too, it conveyed a strong statement against the status quo: with sets by Natan Altman and music by Dmitrii Shostakovich, not to mention Kozintsev's own input, it represented a renewal of the avant-garde traditions of Soviet theatre. Lazar Fleishman, Boris Pasternak. The Poet and His Politics, Cambridge MA and London, 1990 (hereafter, Boris Pasternak) pp. 270-71.

the play not with Shakespeare's words but with Pasternak's poem 'Hamlet' from the banned Doktor Zhivago.¹⁰⁵

In a remarkable way Siniavskii was realising in life the continuity of Russian culture that was at the heart of his writing. At the same time, he was living out in practice what would become a consciously developed principle, namely retreating from the privileged position of author in favour of a collaborative interchange with others in which culture becomes a gesture of friendship, entrusted by one individual to another. By serving as both go-between and meeting point, linking the formal and informal, the older generation and the younger, the smena, Siniavskii was making himself the conduit not only for the continuity but the regeneration of Russian culture – to Pasternak's lyrical Hamlet, Vysotskii brought the raw energy of popular culture. Concurrently, in Siniavskii's thinking, Vysotskii as entertainer-cum-social-and-political-commentator was a natural successor of Maiakovskii, whose performances were described by Siniavskii as a 'poetic bouffonade'.¹⁰⁶

The critic and the writer

'Art is unthinkable without risk and spiritual self-sacrifice; freedom and boldness of imagination have to be gained in practice'.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Anthony B. Dawson, Hamlet, Manchester and New York, 1995 (hereafter, Hamlet), p. 235.

¹⁰⁶ A. Siniavskii, A. Men'shutina, Poeziia pervykh let revoliutsii: 1917-1920, Moscow, 1964 (hereafter, Poeziia pervykh let revoliutsii), p. 325. Edward J. Brown, comparing the reception of Maiakovskii and Esenin by their contemporaries, observes, 'there is no doubt that readers and hearers of poetry in the Soviet Union usually responded to Yesenin with spontaneous sympathy, while Mayakovsky was often enough not understood or was regarded as no more than a talented buffoon'. Edward J. Brown, Mayakovsky. A Poet in the Revolution, Princeton NJ, 1973 (hereafter, Mayakovsky), p. 313.

¹⁰⁷ Pasternak, 'O skromnosti i smelosti', p. 235 / p.177.

The years from the mid-1950's until his arrest in 1965 represent for Siniavskii a period of extraordinary energy and creative tension; all the more pronounced, perhaps, in that one side of this work was being carried out secretly, in the knowledge that at any time he might be found out and all writing, of whatever sort, would come to an end. While the fate of literature and the fate of the writer are the dominant leitmotif in the works of both Siniavskii and Tertz, the reader begins to acquire increasing significance.

It is at this stage that a shift of emphasis may be traced in his literary allegiances; a shift from Maiakovskii to Pasternak; a shift not so much *away from* Maiakovskii as *towards* Pasternak. Approaching Pasternak as a critic, Siniavskii came to identify with him as an individual and as a writer. An admirer of Pasternak's poetry, Siniavskii had been working on it seriously from at least the mid-1950s when, as he said himself, 'there was no serious literary research on the subject' – no doubt, for the reason that Pasternak had been out of favour with the Soviet regime since the mid-1940s.¹⁰⁸ Siniavskii was therefore going out on a limb in making known his interest in him.

An article that he wrote on Pasternak's poetry led to a meeting of the two men in 1957, a meeting that left a lasting impression on Siniavskii.¹⁰⁹ Just after this, Pasternak's persecution at the hands of the Soviet literary and political establishment following the publication abroad of Doktor Zhivago and the subsequent furore over the award to him of the Nobel prize caused their fates to

¹⁰⁸ Andrei Siniavskii, 'Odin den' s Pasternakom' (hereafter, 'Odin den' s Pasternakom'), Sintaksis, 6, 1980, pp. 131-39 (p. 131). For the problematic relationship between Pasternak and the Soviet authorities during this period see, Fleishman, Boris Pasternak, pp. 247-272.

¹⁰⁹ In fact Siniavskii volunteered to write the article for a three-volume Istoriia russkoi literatury to be prepared by IMLI. Siniavskii, 'Odin den' s Pasternakom', p. 131 and Nepomnyashchy, 'Interview', p. 15.

be entwined: Siniavskii was threatened with dismissal from his post at IMLI for his (unpublished) article, while there were calls to exile Pasternak.¹¹⁰ It was perhaps with this in mind that, in the early 1960s, after Pasternak's death and when the political climate again offered Siniavskii the opportunity to write on his poetry, Siniavskii's tenacious behind-the-scenes struggle to have his text published undistorted by official demands, made the preservation of his own integrity as a critic synonymous with his defence of Pasternak and his art.¹¹¹

Siniavskii's struggle with Biblioteka poeta was essentially about freedom of expression, about the freedom of art from politics – the right to dissent not in a political sense but as a moral right and a creative necessity. In this respect he was echoing ideas already expressed by Zamiatin in the 1920s, ideas Siniavskii would link directly with Pasternak, when he later referred to him as a 'heretic' of

¹¹⁰ Ibid.. See also, Siniavskii, 'Dissidentstvo', p. 132.

¹¹¹ The text in question was the article originally written in 1957 – see Fleishman, Boris Pasternak, p. 349 (n. 28) – which was to form the introduction to a new collection of the poet's work published by Biblioteka poeta (A. Siniavskii, 'Poeziia Pasternaka'. Commissioned in 1962, the volume did not appear until 1965, a delay in large part occasioned by Siniavskii's refusal to compromise his views on Pasternak's art, and especially to subordinate them to political considerations. The extent to which he resisted efforts to direct his writing on Pasternak may be gauged from the correspondence conducted between him and the editorial board of Biblioteka poeta, much of which is preserved in the Andrei Siniavskii Collection at the Hoover Institution Archives at Stanford. Though most of the letters found here are letters to Siniavskii from the editorial board of Biblioteka poeta, the following extract from a letter of Siniavskii's fully conveys his sense of principle and his determination: 'The main point is [...] the unacceptability for me of the editorial board's new proposals which go against my understanding of Pasternak's work. I would tolerate a few cuts here and there or suggested changes of wording. But to write about Pasternak's political and philosophical mistakes I consider both wrong and for me, personally, impossible'. Siniavskii, undated (and unsigned) letter to Galina Mikhailovna Tsurikova, senior editor of Biblioteka poeta, HIA, box 58, folder 11. The likelihood is that this letter was composed in 1963 when the article had already been written but the authorities were still dragging their feet, all the while putting the blame on Siniavskii for holding up proceedings with his 'idiosyncratic' views. In a letter dated 21 February 1964, Siniavskii, still sticking to his guns, reiterates the responsibility he feels incumbent upon him (he refers to 'us' but clearly he is talking about himself) in the matter of Pasternak and his art: 'In the present circumstances there is no established point of view on Pasternak and so, to a large extent, the way in which it will be established depends on us'. Ibid., letter to Vladimir Nikolaevich Orlov, editor-in-chief of Biblioteka poeta at the time. It should be said that Siniavskii had already published in 1962 a review of a Goslitizdat collection (sbornik) of Pasternak's work, which he criticised for its corrections and above all its omissions especially of the later poems – by which he no doubt meant the Gospel poems from Doktor Zhivago, also a bone of contention as regards his later article. Andrei Siniavskii, 'Poeticheskii sbornik B. Pasternaka', Novyi mir, 1962, 3, pp. 261-63.

Russian literature.¹¹² That this was a major preoccupation of Siniavskii's in the early 1960s and one through which he identified with Pasternak is evident: his defence of 'otherness' is carried through as a theme of his critical articles and also Tertz's fiction.¹¹³

An article published by Siniavskii in Novyi mir in 1961, a year after Pasternak's death, comes to the rescue of the poet Voznesenskii, attacked for his unconventional style by two Party stalwarts, V. Bushin and K. Lisovskii.¹¹⁴ With the knowledge of hindsight, for Voznesenskii one may read Siniavskii. Though himself not uncritical of Voznesenskii, Siniavskii rounds on Lisovskii for producing something that more nearly resembles 'an accusation by the public prosecutor' than a professional, critical appraisal. That 'difference' in and of itself could be viewed as little short of criminal had already been demonstrated by Pasternak's 'trial' in absentia in 1958 where he was condemned at a meeting

¹¹² '[...] real literature can only exist when it is created not by trustworthy civil servants but by madmen, heretics, dreamers, rebels and sceptics'. Evgenii Zamiatin, 'Ia boius'', in Zamiatin, Litsa, New York, 1967, pp. 183-90 (p. 189). Siniavskii's reference to Pasternak – together with Mandel'stam, Tsvetaeva and Akhmatova – as 'heretics of Russian literature' occurs in: Siniavskii, 'Dissidentstvo', p. 134. His naming them as heretics occurs precisely in the context of a discussion of the nature of his own dissidence, embodied in Tertz who, he maintains, is a dissident '*stylistically* [the emphasis is Siniavskii's]. But a dissident who is insolent and incorrigible, who provokes indignation and revulsion in a conservative and conformist society'. Ibid., pp. 132-3. In Mysli vrasplokh he approaches the same idea from the opposite direction to atheistic communism, from the Church: 'The besetting sin of the Church today is that it is so well-mannered [...] As a result, everything alive and exciting has been grabbed by vice, and virtue is left sighing and weeping into its pocket handkerchief. It has forgotten the fiery language of Biblical abuse. Yet Christianity has the duty to be bold and to call things by their name'. Tertz, Mysli vrasplokh, in Siniavskii/Tertz, Sobranie sochinenii, 1, pp. 313-38 (p. 336). English translations from Siniavskii, Unguarded Thoughts, trans. Manya Harari, London 1972 (p. 88). This is an almost exact parallel with what he wrote in Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm: the energy of the writing of the Revolutionary period that was daring enough to be 'coarse and unrestrained' as against the 'refined manners' of Socialist Realism. Tertz, Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm, p. 440 / p. 208.

¹¹³ Tertz's 'Fantastic stories' ('Fantasticheskie povesti) were written between 1955 and 1963. The first, Sud idet, was finished in 1955-56, followed by 'V tsirke' (see, Nepomnyashchy, 'Interview', p. 7). Then came 'Ty i ia' and 'Kvartiranty' (1959), 'Grafomany', 'Goloditsa' and 'Pkhentz' (1961). Liubimov a more substantial work and not included in the 'povesti', was written in 1962-63.

¹¹⁴ A. Men'shutin, A. Siniavskii, 'Davaite govorit' professional'no', Novyi mir, 37, 1961, 8, pp. 248-52.

by his fellow writers.¹¹⁵ Siniavskii's own trial in 1966 was to prove the case. The overlap of Pasternak's experience with Siniavskii's prescience of his own fate, as well as the interrelationship of Tertz's work and Siniavskii's is illustrated by Tertz's fantastic story, 'Pkhentz'. Published abroad in 1961, the same year as the Novyi mir article that refers to Voznesenskii, it was later acknowledged by Siniavskii as the most autobiographical of Tertz's stories.¹¹⁶

Pasternak had, among other things, been branded 'alien' by his colleagues. Translating this into a modern idiom – and simultaneously giving an object lesson to Soviet writers on the art of science fiction writing – Siniavskii's protagonist is an extraterrestrial, Sushinskii, who finds himself by some unfortunate accident living in a Soviet city.¹¹⁷ In a metaphorical inversion, stylistic differences are made flesh, Sushinskii's extraordinary form becoming a symbolic rendering of the writer's otherness. His native language, the essence of his identity but meaningless to his Soviet neighbours, represents the final barrier of non-communication.¹¹⁸ The feeling of alienation is mutual: Sushinskii is

¹¹⁵ The significance of this for Siniavskii is demonstrated by the fact that he kept a 'stenogram' copy of the proceedings of this 'General Meeting of Writers' of 31 October, 1958, now preserved in his archive at Stanford. Many – if not most – of the accusations against Pasternak were the same as those used against Siniavskii less than a decade later, in particular his defence of 'pure art'. HIA, Box 58, folder 3.

¹¹⁶ In fact, his later Kroshka Tsores, intended, originally, as part of Spokoinoi nochi, was equally autobiographical. In Kroshka tsores, the first person narrator, now called Siniavskii, is similarly an alien in his Soviet milieu but his characterization, unmediated by twentieth century science fiction imagery, owes its inspiration explicitly to Hoffmann and his story, 'Kleine Zaches'. Abram Tertz, Kroshka Tsores, Paris, 1980.

¹¹⁷ Siniavskii had a serious interest in science fiction and had written a critical article on the subject at roughly the same time: A. Siniavskii, 'Bez skidok', Voprosy literatury, 1960, 1, pp. 45-59.

¹¹⁸ Michel Aucouturier has pointed out that Sushinskii's language (among other examples of Siniavskii's experimental writing) is a kind of 'Tertzian' zuum. This further identifies him with Siniavskii whose work was influenced by his love of Russian modernism, something in itself regarded as reprehensible: 'Unfortunately for me, in art I loved modernism and everything that at the time was being destroyed'. Siniavskii, 'Dissentstvo', p. 136. Michel Aucouturier, 'Writer and Text in the Works of Abram Terc (An ontology of writing and a poetics of prose)' (hereafter, 'Writer and Text') in Henrik Birnbaum and Thomas Eekman (eds), Fiction and Drama in Eastern and Southeastern Europe: Evolution and Experiment in the Postwar Period, trans. Alexandre Guérard, Columbus OH, 1980, pp. 1-10 (p.6.).

isolated as much by his own aesthetic sensibilities, as by the suspicion and non-comprehension of those around him.

Sushinskii is a harmless, plant-like being.¹¹⁹ Siniavskii, in the orchestrated press campaign leading up to his trial, would be called a perevertysh and an oboroten’, sinister creatures from Russian folklore.¹²⁰ Quoting directly from ‘Pkhentz’ in his final plea, Siniavskii uses words that are almost identical to the ones he had used to defend Voznesenskii: “Just think, simply because I am different from others, they have to start cursing me”. He continues, ‘Well, I am different. But I do not regard myself as an enemy; I am a Soviet man, and my works are not hostile works. In this fantastic, electrified atmosphere anybody who is “different” may be picked on as an enemy, but this is not an objective way of arriving at the truth’.¹²¹

It was precisely because Siniavskii attempted to tell the ‘truth’ about his times in way that corresponded to its ‘fantastic, electrified atmosphere’, a way that diverged radically from the narrow, politicised meaning imposed on it by Socialist Realism that he would be hounded by the establishment.

¹¹⁹ There is an interesting coincidence between Siniavskii’s portrayal of Sushinskii as a strange, plant-like alien and a description of Mandel’stam – another literary ‘heretic’ – that he reads while he is in the camps. Were it not for the fact that this description is taken from an article by the artist VI. Milashevskii, published in 1970, it would be tempting to see in it his inspiration for Sushinskii. See Tertz, Golos iz khora, in Siniavskii/Tertz, Sobranie Sochinenii, 1, pp. 647-49. English translations from Tertz, A Voice from the Chorus, trans. Kyril Fitzlyon and Max Hayward, New Haven CT and London, 1976 (pp. 296-97) and Siniavskii, Pis’ma, 3, pp. 357-58.

¹²⁰ These terms show the extent to which Siniavskii’s ‘otherness’ caused not only anger and suspicion but also fear. For the manifold implications of this, see: Stephanie Sandler, ‘Sex, Death and Nation in the *Strolls with Pushkin* Controversy’ (hereafter, ‘Sex, Death and Nation’), Slavic Review, 51, 2, 1992, pp. 294-308. Also, Nepomnyashchy, Abram Tertz and the Poetics of Crime, pp. 5-6.

¹²¹ Andrei Siniavskii, ‘Poslednee slovo’, p. 306 / p. 267. Siniavskii spoke up for Voznesenskii in the following terms: ‘One can disagree about matters of taste. However, one should not see in a style that is alien, “unlike” one’s own, something criminal’. Men’shutina and Siniavskii, ‘Davaite govorit’ professional’no’, p. 251.

Siniavskii's work as a whole during this period may be read as a defence of 'otherness' as a necessary creative stance if Russian literature were to survive. He himself tested the bounds of the permissible as far as he dared in his critical writing, as the piece on Voznesenskii shows. His choice of Novyi mir as the forum for much of his work placed him in the liberal camp of the Soviet literary world, his work for the journal – he was a contributor from 1959 until his arrest in 1965 – coinciding with its peak as the leading literary journal of its day under the editorship of Aleksandr Tvardovskii.¹²²

Like Pasternak in the 1930s (and Zamiatin in the 1920s), Siniavskii spoke out in his articles against the moribund state of a literature subject to government control. The mutual stimulus between writer and critic, reader and writer that occurs in a free and lively literary debate was lacking in the Soviet system where everything was ordered by conformity and the strict adherence to the prescriptions of Socialist Realism. Official calls for 'bold creative initiatives' during the Thaw had done little other than encourage shallow, unconvincing

¹²² Tvardovskii had two phases as editor of Novyi mir. The first, from 1950 to 1954 ended when he was dismissed for what was viewed as the journal's overly liberal viewpoint – it had published V. Pomerantsev's 'On Sincerity in Literature' in December 1953 and Tvardovskii himself had submitted the first version of his [satirical] poem, 'Tiorkin in the Other World' (Tiorkin na tom svete) to the Central Committee for its approval. With Stalin only recently dead and Khrushchev's speech yet to come, it was clearly still too early for such moves. Tvardovskii was re-instated in 1958 and remained as editor until 1970. See, Linda Aldwinckle, 'The Politics of *Novyi Mir* under Tvardovsky' (hereafter, 'The Politics of *Novyi Mir*') in Vladimir Lakshin, Solzhenitsyn, Tvardovsky, and *Novyi Mir*, trans. and ed., Michael Glenny, pp. 139-74. Aldwinckle describes Novyi mir under Tvardovskii as 'a mouthpiece of the liberal intelligentsia'. (p. 170). The relationship that defined this era of Novyi mir, was the one between Tvardovskii and Solzhenitsyn that started with Tvardovskii's sensational publication of Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha in 1962. Solzhenitsyn's one-sided account of this in his 'memoir', Bodalsia telenok s dubom (The Oak and the Calf, 1975), his promotion of himself at the expense of Tvardovskii in the matter of taking on the authorities, was questioned by many and none more than Tvardovskii's sub-editor, Vladimir Lakshin. Lakshin later did his utmost to redress the imbalance, pointing out that given that Novyi mir was not an independent journal – it was 'an organ of the Union of Writers [...] and [...] printed on the presses of *Izvestiia*' – 'Within the bounds of the possible, *Novyi mir* did virtually everything that it could have done to sustain the confidence of its readers in literature and in its capacity for telling the truth.' Vladimir Lakshin, 'Solzhenitsyn, Tvardovsky, and *Novyi Mir*', in Lakshin, 'Solzhenitsyn, Tvardovsky, and *Novyi Mir*', trans. and ed. Michael Glenny, Cambridge MA, 1980, pp. 1-89 (pp. 79-80).

attempts at innovation.¹²³ Playing it safe, authors (and critics) contented themselves with the banal and the mediocre, with the result that art in the Soviet Union, as Tertz had pointed out in Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm, was simply ‘marking time’.¹²⁴

Tertz’s take on this is the story, ‘Grafomany’. In scenes reminiscent of Bulgakov’s satirical portrayal of the Writers’ Union in Master i Margarita, a motley group of self-important, would-be writers produce work that ‘abroad’ would immediately

be spotted as crap. No one reads it and no one buys it, so the [author] takes up useful work like energetics or stomatology...But we live our whole life in pleasant ignorance, flattering ourselves with hopes [...] the state itself gives you the right [...] to regard yourself as an unacknowledged genius.¹²⁵

Reading the above in conjunction with Siniavskii and Men’shutina’s Poeziia pervykh let revoliutsii: 1917-1920 the full implication of Siniavskii’s point emerges.¹²⁶ While Siniavskii’s articles are militant in tone and Tertz’s ‘Grafomany’ is humorously scathing, the book is apparently non-polemical. It is a notable scholarly achievement, a sensitive and meticulous analysis of the

¹²³ See, ‘Ot redaktsii’ (hereafter, ‘Ot redaktsii’), Novyi mir, 8, 1961, pp. 253-57 (p. 253). Tvardovskii’s reiteration of this call from the Party had been what prompted Solzhenitsyn to send him Odin den’ Ivana Denisovicha.

¹²⁴ See, A. Men’shutina, A. Siniavskii, “‘Den’ russkoi poezii’”, Novyi mir, 2, 1959, pp. 211-22 (p. 219). Tertz, Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm, p. 445 / p. 217.

¹²⁵ Abram Tertz, ‘Grafomany’, in Tertz, Sobranie sochinenii, 1, pp. 154-79 p. 157. English translations from ‘Graphomaniacs’, trans. Ronald Hingley, in Tertz, Fantastic Stories, pp. 169-214 (p. 176). Master i Margarita had yet to surface when Siniavskii wrote this, so there is no question of influence.

¹²⁶ A. Men’shutina, a literary historian and specialist on Chaadaev was Siniavskii’s friend and colleague at IMLI. They collaborated on a number of works including the articles for Novyi mir mentioned above, and most notably on Poeziia pervykh let revoliutsii: 1917-1920. When asked subsequently how he and Men’shutina had apportioned the work on the different poets, Siniavskii said he could not recall which of them had written about which poet.

complex, shifting poetic scene of the Revolutionary years. Yet, alongside the articles and Tertz's story, the full force of its intention becomes apparent.

Not only does Poeziia pervykh let revoliutsii effect for the first time a cautious rehabilitation of Pasternak and other major poets of the Silver Age, such as Tsvetaeva and Mandel'stam, ushering them in through protective comparisons with Maiakovskii; compared to the lacklustre state of literature of Siniavskii's own time, it paints a picture of turbulence and renewal as the artistic currents of the out-going era met the torrent of the Revolution head-on. Though, in Siniavskii's view, the attempts of many poets to assimilate and express the spirit of the new age failed, as was also the case in the period of the Thaw, the freedom to experiment still enjoyed in the years immediately surrounding the Revolution, coupled with the electrifying atmosphere, had resulted in some extraordinary new departures. One such, explored at length by Siniavskii, was the transformation of the leading Symbolist poet, Aleksandr Blok, into the voice of the new era with his poem Dvenadtsat' (The Twelve, 1918).¹²⁷ The conclusion to be drawn from Men'shutin and Siniavskii's exploration of the creative élan of the Revolutionary era is self-evident: compared to the situation of the late 1950s and early 1960s, it illustrates what spontaneous originality was able to achieve.

¹²⁷ Men'shutin and Siniavskii, Poeziia pervykh let revoliutsii, pp. 257-76. Joseph Frank has drawn attention to the personal significance of Dvenadtsat' for Siniavskii in the context of his father as a Left Socialist Revolutionary. Frank notes the correspondence between Blok's views about the Revolution and the "ecstatic cult of the revolution" of the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, 'who also believed in the spontaneity of the masses and opposed the Bolsheviks' assumption of dictatorial powers'. Joseph Frank, 'The Triumph of Abram Tertz', New York Review of Books, vol. xxxvii, 27 June, 1991, 12, pp. 35-43 (p. 38). Siniavskii makes clear his father's position as an SR in 'Dissentstvo' (p. 134) and in Spokoinoi nochi (p. 461 / p. 168). He notes the importance of Blok as an influence on Pasternak, in his introduction to Pasternak's poetry. See Siniavskii, 'Poeziia Pasternaka', pp. 26-27 / pp. 175-76.

Tertz's works of this time, his 'Fantastic Stories', can be read as a complement to and extension of Siniavskii's critical writing. Whereas Siniavskii's critical articles were directed at writers and critics, the stories would make equal demands on the reader.

Siniavskii's hopes for the future of Russian literature were vested in the culture of the past and in particular with alternative, non-realist trends in Russian and Western European culture. Siniavskii's love of the irrational, an intrinsic feature of Tertz's art, is an act of dissent on his part, implying a rejection of the materialist and positivist interpretations of realism adopted by the State. In this he was following not only in the footsteps of thinkers such as Shestov and Rozanov but also in those of writers of the early part of the twentieth century such as Zamiatin and Pil'niak.¹²⁸ Giving his imagination its head, he allies modernist ideas and techniques with themes that draw not only on the fantastic and irrational in the works of Gogol and Dostoevskii but also on Western European Romanticism, for example the use of the double in 'Ty i ia', the hallucinatory shifts between reality and illusion.

Modernists had been among those most actively targeted by the Soviet regime; modernism, with its energetic response to its times, its artistic boldness and independent creative spirit appealed in particular to Siniavskii. When he came to write as Tertz, he therefore naturally drew on the themes and techniques

¹²⁸ T.R.N. Edwards has explored the 'identification of Russian dissidence with an attachment to the irrational in its many forms' in relation to the works of Zamiatin, Pil'niak and Bulgakov. As he puts it: 'This conflict between the rationality of the State and the claims of a different view of man and the world is an antithesis by no means simply political, arising out of the particular nature of Soviet Communism and the opposition it provokes; it is also a philosophical and religious conflict with wider implications, organically related to similar tensions between artist and State, individual and society, irrationalist and rationalist, in tsarist Russia; indeed, it is in the Russia of the 1860s that we see a criterion of the irrational for the 1920s and 1930s.' T.R.N. Edwards, Three Russian writers and the irrational, p. 1.

associated with his favourite modernist writers, including Zamiatin, Babel', Olesha and Bulgakov.

A notable feature of modernism had been its inclination to hybrid forms, to a blurring of the boundaries between the literature and the visual arts.¹²⁹ This is reflected in Tertz's stories as his technique of 'making strange' is often effected with a painterly or cinematic touch. The sudden violent shifts of time and place with which 'Gololeditsa' begins, suddenly transform the familiar urban landscape of Moscow into an ice-age wasteland peopled with monsters, monsters that suddenly re-assume their original form as trams when the hero is jolted out of his reverie. In the same story there is the deconstruction of reality in the form of a sequence of events, taken frame by frame but speeded up and spliced together in reverse order.¹³⁰

Often, Siniavskii does not simply re-direct the reader's apprehension of reality but shocks his sensibilities in the extreme. Exploiting the established trope of the outsider's view to defamiliarise what is accepted as everyday normality in one's own society, he presents a deconstructed picture of the woman Veronica in 'Pkhentz' that is cubist in its technique. A grotesque re-interpretation of the female form it is at once disturbing and humorous.

There is undoubtedly, here, an element of Siniavskii setting out to *épater les bourgeois*, a gleeful enjoyment of the blatant infringement of the laws of good

¹²⁹ See, Catriona Kelly and Stephen Lovell, 'Introduction: boundaries of the spectacular' (hereafter 'Introduction') in Kelly and Lovell (eds), Russian Literature, Modernism and the Visual Arts, Cambridge, 2000, pp. 1-20.

¹³⁰ Abram Tertz, 'Gololeditsa', in Tertz, Sobranie sochinenii, 1, pp. 179-233 (p. 196). English translations from 'The Icicle', trans. Max Hayward, in Tertz, Fantastic Stories, Evanston IL, 1987, pp. 33-121 (pp. 62-63).

taste as well as those of realism (he comes back time and again to link the two in the po-faced decorum of Socialist Realism), just as his disruption of temporal sequence and his treatment of the text in spatial terms represents a challenge to the linear, goal-oriented Socialist Realism.¹³¹

However, his transgression of the bounds of the acceptable and conventional is not an end in itself but a creative act. As he wrote about the art of the French Cubists, 'this manipulation of forms often served them merely as a means of penetrating new aspects of reality'.¹³² The move in his own works to a spatially-oriented treatment of the text that led naturally to an opening up of 'space' for the reader's involvement in it, can be traced in large measure to these early, modernist influences.

Tertz's fantastic stories are, on one level, essays in imaginative writing, experimental prose that re-connects to a rich and innovative past not simply by re-working existing idioms but by supplying additional layers of meaning when they are set in the context of the present and, additionally, through the implicit relationship to Siniavskii's life. On another level they are works of literary criticism, literary criticism that sets new standards and possibilities of engagement between writer and reader, reader and text. It is left up to the reader to make the connections between the different layers of literary echoes and real-life allusions which give the text its full weight and significance.

¹³¹ See, Kelly and Lovell, 'Introduction', p. 5, where they draw attention to the modernist 'dethronement' of the traditional narrative in literary texts and the erosion of the 'traditional division between literature as temporally defined and art as spatially defined'.

¹³² I. Golomstock, A. Siniavskii, Picasso, Moscow, 1960, p. 23.

Biography as spectacle. Biography as life lived.

During this period Siniavskii's increasing activity as a writer, leads him to consider the question of the writer's biography and its expression in artistic terms. His critical work highlights the paradoxical need to promote genuine individual expression, the 'individual voice' while at the same time ensuring that the artist's ego and personality do not prevail at the expense of his art. In his view this is both an artistic and a moral imperative: 'the transformation of one's life into [poetry] is a very complex and responsible matter'.¹³³

Siniavskii's reference points are the contrasting examples of Maiakovskii and Pasternak, the spectacular concept of biography, versus the idea of biography not as spectacle but as life lived. My belief is that Siniavskii succeeded over the years in reconciling these two seemingly polar opposites, achieving a synthesis in the approach to biography he would evolve for himself as a writer. Just as he would use Pushkin and Gogol as foils for each other, as much to suggest similarities as to highlight their differences as writers so, too, he would now separate Pasternak and Maiakovskii, now bring them together, not denying the one in favour of the other but using each in order to view the other from a new perspective.

The spectacular concept of biography, in Pasternak's opinion, had been inherent in his age – the era of the Revolution – an idea which is taken up by Siniavskii. Not only Maiakovskii, but other of its most gifted poets were distinguished by their ability not 'just [to] sit and write poetry [but to create]

¹³³ Men'shutin and Siniavskii, 'Davaite govorit' professional'no', p. 249.

their own biographies in verse'.¹³⁴ It was this intimate relationship that was lacking, in Siniavskii's view, in the writing of his own (near) contemporaries such as Evtushenko and Voznesenskii, the sense of the 'poet's destiny [as] something providential and not to be resisted [...] that would allow him to develop his own biography like a legend, in which personal life is raised to the level of a unique saga, half real, half invented, and created day by day before an astonished public'.¹³⁵

Implicit in the notion of biography as spectacle is the poet's 'fate', the inevitability of a violent or untimely end as the distinguishing and authenticating feature of a writer's life and work that inscribed him into a tradition initiated by Pushkin. Pasternak had suggested this in relation to Maiakovskii in Okhrannaia gramota, blurring the boundaries between Maiakovskii's death and the death of Pushkin nearly a hundred years earlier. Siniavskii puts forward a similar idea in Tertz's Mysli vrasplokh: 'In art human destiny is best portrayed by tragedy, which of course moves in the direction of death. Here death becomes the goal and stimulus of the action through which the hero's personality is wholly revealed and, in attaining its fulfilment, plays out its pre-ordained role'.¹³⁶

Siniavskii suggests that his times, unlike the Revolutionary era, are not conducive to such biographies, implying that the age itself is not heroic, and leads to what he calls a 'disparity' in Evtushenko, 'in the very conception of

¹³⁴ Siniavskii, 'My life as a writer', p. 8. Siniavskii is not referring here to a particular work by either poet but to the general expression of themselves in their verse.

¹³⁵ Siniavskii, 'V zashchitu piramidy. (Zametki o tvorchestve Evg. Evtushenko i ego poeme "Bratskaia GES")' (hereafter, 'V zashchitu piramidy'), Grani, 63, 1967, pp. 114-39 (p. 116). English translations from 'In Defence of the Pyramid', in Siniavskii, For Freedom of Imagination, pp.167-95 (p. 169).

¹³⁶ Tertz, Mysli vrasplokh, p. 333 /p. 81.

personality and its fate, the biography'.¹³⁷ He comes of a generation 'that has seen in its midst no prophets aside from [...] "this fellow like us" [krome vot etogo "svoiskogo parnia"']'.¹³⁸ Unlike Maiakovskii, Esenin, Blok and Tsvetaeva, there is not the possibility of living out the fate of the 'poet as martyr' in the same way. The demands made on the Thaw generation are not of the same order. Setting Evtushenko alongside Esenin, Siniavskii points out that the questions Evtushenko poses are 'incomparably more timid and easy', his responses to them are often correspondingly shallow and pretentious.¹³⁹

It is with the acknowledgement that the earlier 'spectacular' concept of biography is no longer appropriate or even possible in the conditions of post-Stalinist Russia that Siniavskii turns towards Pasternak.

While Evtushenko and Voznesenskii adopt a 'position of active self-definition and self-affirmation' in their writing, Pasternak retreats: 'Art, as he

¹³⁷ Siniavskii, 'V zashchitu piramidy', p.116 / p. 169.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 117 / p. 170. Later, in emigration, and writing as Tertz, Siniavskii launches a far more savage attack on Evtushenko, without actually naming him. Writing of the true writer/artist as someone who by definition works outside and in contravention of accepted norms and channels, he goes on, '[You] should not be sitting in the Presidium, running after the workers with your tongue hanging out, with your piece on the Bratsk GES, striking up with them, with the heroes and readers, some kind of extraordinarily tactless and familiar relationship'. Tertz, 'Literaturnyi protsess v Rossii', p. 144. Later still (referring to his first article on Evtushenko), Siniavskii admits that 'it was perhaps unreasonable to expect that of Yevtushenko [...] but at the time it seemed to me that he had wanted to partake of that tradition and failed'. Siniavskii, 'My life as a writer, p. 8. One might speculate that this more conciliatory tone comes from a Siniavskii whose own life had by this time (1986) become something of a legend whereas earlier Evtushenko's apparently easier successes may have grated a little.

¹³⁹ Siniavskii contrasts Evtushenko's comparatively tame desire for 'dissolution' in Russian nature with Esenin's heroic projection of himself which, in Siniavskii's interpretation, suggests the archetypal and much more potent images of self-sacrifice: the crucified Christ and Prometheus. Esenin's achievement as a poet is gauged through his ability to translate the abstract into the concrete, to make physical in his verse what is spiritual and emotional: 'Yesenin's very sins are induced by a passionate desire for atonement and appear like grievous wounds on the body of a fallen hero who has not overcome his stormy titanic nature.' Siniavskii, 'V zashchitu piramidy', p.117 / pp. 170-71. In the lectures he gave in emigration at the Sorbonne, Siniavskii again contrasts Evtushenko with Maiakovskii, to the former's disadvantage: the transformation of life into spectacle, into myth is necessarily consonant with a 'bad' ending. HIA, Box 19, folder 12, lecture 13, p. 25.

understood it, is a continuous giving of oneself".¹⁴⁰ The Christian paradigm, never explicitly invoked, permeates Siniavskii's introductory essay on Pasternak's verse.¹⁴¹

In Tertz's Mysli vrasplokh this paradigm is not merely explicit, it is the very essence of the work. The last of Tertz's writing to be sent abroad before his arrest, it would have been conceived and written over the same period as the piece on Pasternak. Both works bear the imprint of Siniavskii's personal experience at this time, his discovery, from the mid-1950s, of a completely different world from the one he knew – far-flung, rural Russia where folk and popular custom were preserved and the Orthodox faith was still alive.¹⁴² This experience, with its profound and liberating effect on Siniavskii, undoubtedly added new dimensions to his appreciation of Pasternak. The same sense of wonder at nature and life itself, so sensitively evoked in his essay on Pasternak, pervades Siniavskii's own writing.¹⁴³ The sense of living not in history but in eternity; a feeling of air, of space and freedom, of being at ease with himself

¹⁴⁰ A. Men'shutin, A. Siniavskii, 'Za poeticheskuiu aktivnost', Novyi mir, 37, 1961, 1, pp. 224-41 (p. 228). Siniavskii, 'Poeziia Pasternaka', p. 14 / p. 159. Siniavskii once again draws attention in this essay to the difference between the "notion of [the poet's] life as a spectacle", exemplified by Blok, Tsvetaeva, Maiakovskii and Esenin, 'for whom the poet's personality is central, his work unfolding like a diary of many years, a tale told "of the times and of oneself" [Maiakovskii,], a sort of saga or dramatic biography acted out before the eyes of the readers and surrounded by the halo of legend'. Ibid., p. 19 / pp. 166-67.

¹⁴¹ Returning to Maiakovskii in the greater freedom of emigration it would be precisely the powerful religious symbolism of Maiakovskii's poetry on which Siniavskii would focus. Though the emphasis is entirely different – the poet remains the focal point of his own verse – Maiakovskii's self-mythologising, particularly in the poem 'Chelovek', transforms him into a Christ-like figure, sacrificing himself for the love of mankind. The centrality of the poet to his own verse is not evidence of overweening individualism, however, but the ultimate proof of his assuming responsibility not simply for his own fate but that of others: his personality does not dominate but is subsumed into his art, becoming its most powerful expression.

¹⁴² Siniavskii made regular trips to the north of Russia each summer from the mid-1950s with his wife, Mariia Vasilievna; an artist and art historian, she introduced him to villages such as Pereslavl-Zalesskii and their rich cultural heritage. According to her, Siniavskii was baptized into the Orthodox faith in 1957 or 1958. Conversation with Mariia Vasilievna, Fontenay-aux-Roses, 26 July, 2005. See, also, Zamoyska, 'Sinyavsky, the Man and the Writer', p. 65.

¹⁴³ See, for example, Tertz, Mysli vrasplokh, pp. 331-32 / pp. 77-78.

marks a significant change from Tertz's earlier stories such as 'Ty i ia', for example, which sets the writer in an artificial, hermetically sealed and threatening universe – both a grotesque caricature of the Soviet literary world and a reflection of his own fevered mind, from which the only escape is his imagination.

Mysli vrasplokh echoes the Pasternakian theme of self-effacement but draws on the influence of Shestov and Rozanov to present it as a series of aphorisms. Not only does its seemingly random form deny any pretension to authoritative discourse, it lends itself to the type of self-deprecating humour with which Siniavskii pre-empts the danger of sounding portentous or self-important, a danger all too real given the subject matter. The writer as tribune or prophet, also rejected by Pasternak (as by Shestov and Rozanov), is replaced by Tertz in the guise of the writer as hermit or Holy Fool: Tertz's *épatage*, ferocious in his first works, is toned down, relying more on Rozanov-like unexpected juxtapositions of the concrete and the spiritual for its effect.¹⁴⁴

There are elements here, too, characteristic not only of the iurodivyi, but of the fool of Russian folk-lore, Ivan-durak, who also affirms a non-rationalist path to truth. Devoid of the iurodivyi's inclination to 'scandalise', Ivan-durak is characterised by what would be expressed in religious terms as an openness to divine revelation. He is characterised by 'that state of receptive passivity [...],

¹⁴⁴ For Shestov's opinion on the writer as prophet see, Apofeoz bespochvennosti, p. 19. The combination of the spiritual and the concrete is something that Siniavskii also draws attention to as a feature of Pasternak's work. See, for example, Siniavskii, 'Boris Pasternak', p. 218.

the expectation of a truth that will come and reveal itself, with no effort and no strain on his part and contrary to man's imperfect reason'.¹⁴⁵

Going further than Pasternak, Siniavskii does not merely make himself inconspicuous but withdraws almost completely, into near silence, his thoughts separated by large expanses of blank paper.¹⁴⁶ The writer here undergoes a process of self-elimination, both an emptying and shedding of the self.¹⁴⁷ Viewed in this way, from the Christian perspective, death does not lose its significance in relation to the writer's fate.

Rejecting the idea of a death that is 'accidental', that of 'the average man-in-the-street' (shades, here, of Evtushenko's "this fellow like us") because 'there is about it the absence of a growing bond with life', death is viewed in modest but no less significant terms as the culmination of an individual's life, as what imparts to it its proper sense: '*Man lives in order to die*'.¹⁴⁸ 'We will ask fate for an honest, seemly death and do our best to go to meet it, so that we may properly fulfil our last and most important task, the task of dying, the task of our whole life'.¹⁴⁹ Not spectacle but 'task'; not a public show but a private assumption of one's fate. Tertz's choice of word conveys with a light touch the underlying

¹⁴⁵ Siniavskii, *Ivan-durak*, p. 42. Siniavskii cites this 'philosophy' of the Russian fool in the context of ancient tradition that goes back in Western civilization to Socrates ("All that I know is that I know nothing") and also to eastern sages.

¹⁴⁶ Silence is an importance principle in certain strands of Russian religious thought that has its roots in Hesychasm. See, for example, George P. Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind*, 2 vols, Cambridge MA, 1965, 2, p. 281. Reference to the importance of silence appears in the writings of both Shestov and Rozanov. See, for example, Shestov, *Apofeoz bespochvennosti*, p. 191.

¹⁴⁷ The 'emptying' of the self has its origins in the Orthodox faith's understanding of kenoticism, the image of the suffering Christ, Christ's self-renunciation. See, Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind*, 1, pp. 94-131. For a discussion of this feature of Siniavskii's work see, Aucouturier, 'Writer and Text', p. 5. Also, Holmgren, 'The Transfiguring of Context in the Work of Abram Tertz', pp. 968-69). Holmgren discusses this with particular reference to *Golos iz khora*.

¹⁴⁸ Tertz, *Mysli vrasplokh*, p. 332 /p. 80.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 333-34 /pp. 81-82.

connotations of duty and responsibility incumbent on a writer, his role not to pronounce, but to lead by example. Death is both the culmination and the prerequisite for life, life lived anew.

The writer as thief and conjuror

The self-effacement epitomised by Pasternak in his writing and explored by Siniavskii in relation to himself in Mysli vrasplokh is translated into the basis for a new relationship with both reader and text, one that comes through the willing self-suppression of the author. Tertz's 'Fantastic Stories' trace this progression towards self-effacement and renewal, suggesting different though related solutions. While Mysli vrasplokh presents the spiritual and mystical as a path to self-effacement expressed in artistic terms, the stories shift the perspective so that art itself becomes the means by which the artist is able to transcend himself.

In Siniavskii's writing the mystical is never far from the magical as his later work Ivan-durak illustrates.¹⁵⁰ The figure of the magician or conjuror proposes a more active path to transformation and renewal through art. As such it offers a means of reconciling the paradox of the writer's biography as spectacle with the Christian paradigm of self-effacement.

The earliest of the fantastic stories, written just after Sud idet, 'V tsirke', is an extended metaphor for writing as performance and the transformation of life into art.¹⁵¹ The story reflects Siniavskii's interest in the artistic movements of the

¹⁵⁰ Siniavskii, Ivan-durak, pp. 62-63.

¹⁵¹ According to Siniavskii, Sud idet was finished in '1955, 1956'. Nepomnyashchy, 'Interview', p. 7.

early twentieth century, including the Futurists. The circus was a theme found in the work of many at that time, among them Maiakovskii; it was also a recurrent motif in Olesha's work.¹⁵² In more general terms the circus represents a means of escape, of breaking free of convention as well as a thirsting after risk and the desire to perform some extraordinary feat.

Taking up and incorporating these various influences, Tertz's story is in essence a daring and idiosyncratic take on the biblical themes of the Passion, Crucifixion and Transfiguration of Christ conveyed through the imagery and symbolism of the circus. In this it has much in common with 'Ty i ia', which 'courts blasphemy [...] precisely in order to make us see anew'.¹⁵³ Unlike 'Ty i ia', the tone of 'V tsirke' is less aggressive and more humorous; the ending, though violent, is less bleak.

The biblical subtext is presented almost in spite of itself, in a deliberately irreverent way. Seen largely through the eyes of the protagonist Kostia, a semi-literate electrician, Siniavskii's depiction of the Resurrection is a form of estrangement with a decidedly comical edge, in which circus and Bible become interchangeable: 'He'd had occasion to peep into churches. And he loved all those miracles depicted on ceilings and walls in acrobatic postures. He was especially pleased by one joker who got himself up as a dead man and then jumped out of his grave and astonished everyone'.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Olesha produced a short sketch in 1929, entitled 'V tsirke'. Neil Cornwell has suggested that Siniavskii's choice of the exact same title is no mere coincidence. In an analysis of the 'pivotal similarities' of the two pieces, he shows how 'Siniavskii appears to have used Olesha's sketch as a literary (if not quite literal) and certainly metaphorical springboard'. Cornwell, 'At the Circus', p. 5.

¹⁵³ Nepomnyashchy, 'Andrei Sinyavsky's "You and I"', p. 225.

¹⁵⁴ Tertz, 'V tsirke', in Tertz, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 1, pp. 114-26 (p. 119). English translations from 'At the Circus', trans. Ronald Hingley, in Tertz, *Fantastic Stories*, pp. 145-68 (p. 157).

Language is both agent and expression of transformation as Siniavskii himself gives a virtuoso performance of the creative possibilities inherent in the free, imaginative use of the word. Restoring to the word its biblical sense of ‘act’, here conveniently assimilated into the language of the big top, he sets in motion trapezes of metaphor and analogy that bridge the void, swinging between magic and miracle so that one is convinced that ‘the church originated in the circus’ [tserkov’ proiskhodit ot tsirka].¹⁵⁵

The metamorphosis of Kostia, the protagonist of ‘V tsirke’, into artist is also effected linguistically. As he becomes entangled in a revolving door with the man whose wallet he steals, ‘with a single sweep of the hand, I perform a miracle – a fat wad of money flies through the air like a bird and settles under my shirt’. “Your money’s fine and now it’s mine” [Den’gi vashi – stali nashi]. Stealing is transformed into an act of divine prestidigitation that turns on analogy and assonance, underlining Siniavskii’s idea of the related images of the writer as thief and conjuror.¹⁵⁶

However, it is Kostia’s conscious transformation of his life into spectacle that is the central theme of the work, enacted as a parody of Christ’s Passion. A

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p.120 /p. 157. In Sud idet the writer distinguishes between the word in its biblical, cosmogonic sense, and the word distorted and depleted by Soviet usage: ‘ In the beginning was the Word. If this is true, the first word was as beautiful as the words written by these women. When the first word was uttered the world came to life; it was like a catalogue; each thing had a label on it: “fir tree”, “mountain”, “infusorium”. Stars and planets hatched out of the wordless chaos. And each thing was called forth by its special word, and the word was act. “Action”, the Master corrects me. “Court action [...] a word can only be an accusation. An act can only be a Court action.’ Tertz, Sud idet, p. 278 /p. 57.

¹⁵⁶ Tertz, ‘V tsirke’, p.116 / p.151. See Tertz, ‘Otechestvo. Blatnaia pesnia...’, p. 77: ‘In his resourcefulness, his wit, and supple flexibility the thief outdoes the median norm allotted to us by nature. A Russian thief (as a Russian and as a thief) is even more inclined to conjuring and juggling tricks – both in everyday practices and all the more so, of course, in poetry. The image of the thief-as-artist, the thief-as-entertainer (and wizard) that is so well, so firmly fixed in popular folk tales, finds a new continuation in song, where he sings about himself, in the first person, appearing to us as an artist, a maestro, who knows what he is talking about when it comes to skill with his hands and his words’.

succession of scenes, each one in a different 'theatre', from the circus ring, to a restaurant, a courtroom and finally the enclosed space of the prison yard, takes him from humble electrician to miracle worker, to his denunciation and finally his execution as a common criminal.

The same scenes, viewed from a different angle, trace his path from spectator, to involuntary participant, to active performer. His final step, his leap to freedom, takes place in 'an expanse suffused with electric light [...] beneath the vault of a world-wide circus'.¹⁵⁷ It is a 'salto mortale', a death-defying leap. Though it kills him outright, it is proof of his commitment as an artist, the acknowledgement of his fate and of the liberating power of art through which the man must die in order to be re-born as the artist.¹⁵⁸

In confirmation of this one can look to the other example given by Siniavskii in the same story, which works as a negative image to the positive one of Kostia. The Manipulator, the showman on whom Kostia models himself, whom he admires for his extraordinary 'magical agility', is revealed as a sham, from his natty hairdo that had mesmerised Kostia but which turns out to be a toupee hanging forlornly on the back of a chair, to his death as a senseless accident.¹⁵⁹ Parodying the notion of death as spectacle, the miraculous transformation of life into art, Siniavskii describes the scene through Kostia's disbelieving eyes:

But clearly this was an *artiste* giving a performance fit for outside

¹⁵⁷ Tertz, 'V tsirke', p. 125 /p. 167.

¹⁵⁸ See, Siniavskii, 'My life as a writer', p. 8: 'The person has to die in order to become a writer – at any rate, that's how it was for me'.

¹⁵⁹ Like Bulgakov's Woland, the Manipulator is a foreigner. Described as a 'devilish prestidigitator' he, too, has satanic connections. This would be taken up again by Siniavskii in *Koshkin dom*, where one of the alter egos of the Sorcerer /writer protagonist of the tale, is called 'Inozemtsev'.

consumption, who, inspired by Kostia's shot, was playing his star role, transforming himself miraculously into a dead man conscious of his superiority over those who had remained alive [...] he died unobtrusively without so much as a farewell wink, and left Kostia in bewilderment at the trick which had been performed, and which belonged to them both in equal measure.¹⁶⁰

In 'V tsirke', Kostia lives his life as spectacle, with death as the inevitable end. Yet death, enacted as a willing gesture of self-sacrifice is also an act of artistic inspiration: 'He was gripped by a feeling akin to inspiration, which made every vein leap and cavort, and, in its cavorting, await the onflow of that extraneous and magnanimous supernatural power that hurls one into the air in a mighty leap, the highest and easiest in your lightweight life.'¹⁶¹ Death takes place on the level of language and the text. As such it suggests a new paradigm for the biography of the writer, whose feat lies in his self-suppression in favour of his art.

As Siniavskii put it, later, in the context of a blatnaia pesnia in which a young criminal sings about his own death:

The fact that all is lost, all has perished, is compensated for by the realisation that on the other hand, everything has gone head-over-heels, like some kind of carousel, fireworks, a farce... And even at moments of despair, which alternate with bouts of laughter, such an "estranged"

¹⁶⁰ Tertz, 'V tsirke', p. 124 /p. 165. One is reminded of Mysli vrasplokh, where the death of the 'average man-in-the-street' whose death, which can be 'almost comic', with 'its air of being accidental, intrusive', is compared to a 'hero's death [that is] justified, won in battle, earned by his life'. Tertz, Mysli vrasplokh, pp. 333-34 /pp. 81-82.

¹⁶¹ Tertz, 'V tsirke', p. 126 /p. 168.

approach to one's own person is perceived as some kind of artistic attraction or as the crowning conjuring trick, worthy of a delayed exposure which will necessarily form part of an entertaining story, demonstrating to the world that self-same 'head-over-heels' flight [...] In dying he reveals himself.¹⁶²

The Writer as medium.

'You may live like a fool and yet have excellent ideas from time to time'.¹⁶³

The Christian impulse is no less present in other of the Fantasticheskie povesti and nowhere more so than in 'Ty i ia'.¹⁶⁴ This, the most unforgiving and bleak of the stories, depicts a writer-centred universe emphasised through the 'doubling' of the narrator/writer and his alter ego, the 'I's' rivalling each other for dominance throughout the tale. On one level it can be read as an allegory of the Fall, the writer's extreme arrogance leading to paranoiac self-obsession and his ultimate death. It is not knowledge that leads to his perdition, however, but his egoism as an artist, vying with God as the omnipotent creator. Taking liberties with biblical archetypes, Tertz re-aligns the Old and New Testaments so

¹⁶² Tertz, 'Otechestvo. Blatnaia pesnia...', pp. 86-87.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 314 / p. 7.

¹⁶⁴ For an analysis of the biblical motif of 'Ty i ia', see, Catherine Theimer Nepomnyashchy, 'Andrei Sinyavsky's "You and I": A Modern Day Fantastic Tale' (hereafter, 'Andrei Sinyavsky's "You and I"'), Ulbandus Review, 2, 1982, 2, pp. 209-30. Nepomnyashchy has also drawn attention to 'the biblical references that underlie the narrative' of 'Pkhentz'. Nepomnyashchy, Abram Tertz and the Poetics of Crime, p. 74.

that salvation comes in the form of a woman's selfless love.¹⁶⁵ Though the protagonist Nikolai Vasilevich (the name is Gogol's while his red hair suggests Siniavskii's reddish beard) enters into a relationship with Lida, a librarian, with an ulterior motive, the physical consummation of their relationship gives him his one moment of self-forgetfulness.¹⁶⁶

'Golleditsa' also takes love as the basis for self-transcendence, the love of the protagonist/author Vasili for Natasha, for whom he is writing. In this lies Siniavskii's understanding of the morality of art – morality not in the form of sermonising and preaching, as some obligation imposed on the writer, but as something that must come as an inner necessity: 'as a writer you do fulfil a kind of moral function but that happens not because you embark from some moral aim, but because it's impossible to write without love [...] in art all this must happen organically, without sermons'.¹⁶⁷

Viewed from this perspective, literature is a form of intimate communication, not a pronouncement from on high but a tentative reaching out, a tapping at the window, a kind of morse code. Fragmentary, more of a question than an answer, its form, whether the graffiti on the wall of a public lavatory (Sud idet) or the letter in a bottle, or, indeed aphorisms (in a sense, a more literary form of

¹⁶⁵ Nepomnyashchy reveals how Siniavskii, merging 'two apparently uncongenial traditions, the Biblical and the fantastic', 'redefines the essence of the forbidden [...] the writer courts blasphemy in his story precisely in order to make us see anew'. Nepomnyashchy, 'Andrei Sinyavsky's "You and I"', p. 225.

¹⁶⁶ Quoting Boris Filippov on Siniavskii, Nepomnyashchy writes, "'The sexual act, is, perhaps, the only path – besides the mystical – which manifestly allows us to palpably experience the world of the not-I and to merge with that world, if only for a moment overcoming our reticence, our selfness.'" She goes on, 'This "openness" towards others, this experiencing of "the world of the not-I" is the way to God, and this way is shut off to Nikolai Vasilevich because of his extreme egoism.' Ibid., p. 221. Rozanov's writing is not based on a system of ethics or expressed in terms of morality but, rather, in terms of values, among which love is given a privileged position.

¹⁶⁷ Siniavskii, 'My life as a writer', p. 9.

graffiti) is open-ended: ‘words not written to be read, but cast at random into space, to the four corners of the world, and only God or some chance eccentric will ever gather up these prayers and incantations’.¹⁶⁸

The writer himself is but a medium for the words cast out more in hope than certainty. The text is not the property of the author but comes to him, almost in spite of himself, as a revelation when he is in a receptive state, whether mystical or alcohol-induced as in his story ‘Kvartiranty’ – though for Siniavskii the two are related, as they are in Venedikt Erofeev’s Moskva-Petushki (Moscow to the End of the Line, 1977) a work much admired by Siniavskii.¹⁶⁹

In ‘Gololeditsa’ however, love acquires an added, active dimension through the agency of memory. Love in the sense of memory is presented as a way of overcoming death that is directly linked to writing and to literature.¹⁷⁰ Casually introducing literary references that in themselves prove his point – ‘I don’t know who it was who said, “The dead shall rise again!” Well, that’s true enough. They’ll rise again, all right’ – he writes, ‘You see what is happening all around us? A man lives on and on, but suddenly – bang! – and he’s dead [...] What’s to be done? How can we fight back? This is where literature comes in. I am convinced that most books are letters to the future with a reminder of what

¹⁶⁸ Tertz, Sud idet, p. 278 /pp. 56-57.

¹⁶⁹ ‘A simple Russian doesn’t drink from wretchedness or to drown his cares, but because of his everlasting need for the miraculous, the extraordinary – he drinks mystically, if you like, in order to upset the earthly balance of his soul and restore it to its blissfully incorporeal state.’ Tertz, Mysli vrasplokh, pp. 321-22 /p. 37. In ‘Kvartiranty’ the writer never surfaces from an alcohol-related stupor. His writing is done by his ‘co-author’. A fantastical being who takes refuge in his body in order to be able to write, he represents the writer’s irrational and creative other self. Kostia, the protagonist of ‘V tsirke’ ‘performs’ in an alcoholic haze. A later analogy of Siniavskii’s emphasises the spiritual nature of the relationship of writer and text. In a reversal of the scenario of ‘Ty i ia’, the writer does not vie with God as creator but, like an icon painter is merely an instrument of the Divine will, ‘a brush in God’s hand’. Siniavskii, ‘Stil’ – eto sud’ba’, p. 128.

¹⁷⁰ See, also, Tertz, Mysli vrasplokh, p. 326 /pp. 53-54.

happened [...] retrospective attempts to re-establish links with oneself and one's former relatives and friends who go on living and don't realize that they are missing persons'.

In these ideas is clearly discernible the influence of another turn of the century thinker, Nikolai Fedorov.¹⁷¹ In a highly idiosyncratic blend of Christian faith and scientific reasoning, Fedorov had posited the idea that the task of humanity was the overcoming of death through the literal resurrection of the fathers by their sons. Graveyards would become places not of burial but of re-birth. Siniavskii's re-invigoration of Russian literature is undertaken in precisely this spirit and in this form, a turn backwards to the past in order not simply to disinter the dead bodies of his literary forefathers but to give them new life through his works.

Literature as a form of personal communication with the reader, the writer as medium and writing as a form of resurrection through love and memory acquire new significance in his writing of the camp years as life coincides with art.

Liubimov

Tertz's longest story and the last to be written before his arrest, Liubimov represents a synthesis and culmination of Siniavskii's work up to this point, one in which the convergence of Siniavskii's life and his art begin to achieve a more organic cohesion. Like Mysli vrasplokh, it reflects a greater sense of assurance

¹⁷¹ Nikolai Fedorov, 1828-1903. His major work, Filosofiiia obshchego dela, which contains these ideas, was published posthumously, in 1906.

that is anchored in a discovery of Russia's living past, its culture and religion, and a growing sense of his own place within it. This gives rise to the central metaphor on which the story turns, the representation of culture as archaeological strata which is built, layer upon layer each feeding into the next to give it new depths of meaning. This had been demonstrated in the Fantasticheskie povesti, all of which to a greater or lesser degree, contain multiple layers of allusions for the reader to discover.

However, it is in Liubimov that the significance of the reader as an active participant in the creative process is made more apparent. As the authorial voice constantly switches, dividing itself between different identities but also moving constantly within the spatial expanse of the text, the reader is given the room and the opportunity to become involved. Indeed, he is positively enticed. The story presents itself as a playful but intricate interweaving of literary genres and allusions, a puzzle of literary ideas that demands the reader's active participation in deciphering it.

A fairy tale, among much else, Liubimov is the ideal vehicle for Siniavskii, charting his way as a writer in the modern world. Not only does the fairy tale provide a link to miracles and the miraculous transformation of life, already seen in 'V tsirke' ('Father Ignatius, a remarkable priest [...] had only to hold a service for the sun or the rain to be turned on according to need'), it is a genre that represents for Siniavskii the perfect form of pure art and as such is the best of all antidotes to Socialist Realism.¹⁷² Purposeless, often absurd, the fairy tale,

¹⁷² Abram Tertz, Liubimov, in Tertz, Sobranie sochinenii, 1, pp 13-112 (p. 90). English translations from Abram Tertz, The Makepeace Experiment, trans. Manya Harari, Evanston, IL, 1989 (p. 155). The origins of

much like the anecdote, does not take itself seriously. It is built around word play and buffoonery, verbal tours de force that are as important as the story itself.

This is noticeable in the enjoyment exuded by the writing, unlike some of Tertz's earlier stories, which may be viewed as literary pastiche, the conscientious application of a theory. No less heretical than before, Siniavskii takes on the status quo without the bitter irony and the sometimes forced, grotesque effects of Tertz's earlier pieces, replacing it with a gentler humour and a sense of sheer exhilaration in the act of writing. He is able to indulge and demonstrate the freedom of art in feats that recall his trip to the circus. The text becomes a space which he inhabits like an acrobat, now writing from the footnotes, now from above the line and even, where the sorcerer is concerned, from the 'ceiling', communicating between them through leaps of the imagination.

This opens the way to a different view of history, one that discards the linear impetus of Soviet thought, in favour of a spatial approach through the analogy of writing and archaeology, to the text as layers, a living palimpsest in which past present and future are organically interrelated.¹⁷³ 'If you want to explain the intricacies of Russian history, you have to write in layers [...] Well, it's the same with writing. You obviously can't keep on always excavating at the same

magic and miracle converge in the mists of ages past, they belong to 'that time long ago, where the fairy tale begins and which it defines in the formula, "Once upon a time". The fairy tale does not know when this was and says, for example, that it was when Christ walked upon Earth. That is to say, when miracles were happening everywhere in the world'. 'The fairy tale is a kind of remnant of former miracles'. Andrei Siniavskii, *Ivan-durak*, pp. 82 and 83.

¹⁷³ This was an analogy that Siniavskii would take up in *V teni Gogolia* and again in *Spokoinoi nochi*, where books in the library represent the steady accretion and evolution of history over time).

level'.¹⁷⁴ First given prominence in Liubimov, this is an idea that would become the thematic pivot and organisational cornerstone of his further evolution as writer-critic, finding its fullest expression in 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku' and Koshkin dom.

Liubimov is a celebration of the past, a past denied and destroyed by the Soviet system, and a testament to its powers of endurance and self-renewal. The archaeological motif also recalls Pil'niak's Golyi god (The Naked Year, 1922), while the old women of the village, who by rights should be dead but continue to grow like wizened 'forest mushrooms' are close relations of Zamiatin's crone from My. The past lives on in their beliefs, superstitions and traditions that represent a continuing Russian identity and culture. It lives on, too, in the church at the 'edge of the world' and the stones of the ancient monastery which the protagonist, Lenia Tikhomirov, tries to have pulled down but without success.¹⁷⁵ Stones, monuments and buildings, as Mandel'stam had suggested in poems such as 'Aghia Sofia' (1912) and 'Notre Dame' (1912), are living repositories of human history and culture which withstand political and social storms as stoically as they face the elements.

The past is also the gateway to the fantastic: the pterodactyl, long extinct in real terms, bobs up in the text as an irrepressible reminder of times so ancient as to be almost mythical in fantastical scenes that recall some of Gogol's exuberant

¹⁷⁴ Tertz, Liubimov, pp. 37-38 /p. 58.

¹⁷⁵ One might see in this church 'on the edge of the world' an allusion to Shestov. The opposition of faith and reason, of doubt and certainty is presented by him as a metaphor: those who choose to wander on the 'periphery' are those who are not given the certainty of those who live at the 'centre'. They are seekers, whose understanding of things comes from hesitant groping, from trial and error, illuminated by sparks of light that they themselves ignite. Shestov, Apofeoz bespochvennosti, p.189.

early work. Unlike Soviet time, contained within fixed parameters, fantastic time is fluid and elastic, its different layers interacting with each other in a constantly changing kaleidoscope of cultural patterns. The text itself lives through this rich, open-ended approach. Fuelled by its own energy, which represents the exact opposite of the entropy of Soviet writing that Siniavskii was commenting upon at the time, the text reacts and breathes in its commerce with the past.¹⁷⁶

Transcending barriers of time and space, the text offers access to other dimensions, to other realities and other truths, not imposed but suggested through different perspectives. In the camps this idea would be reinforced by Siniavskii's reading of the work of Father Pavel Florenskii, another early twentieth century thinker.¹⁷⁷ Here, it is the writer in his guise of sorcerer who makes these pathways available. Having made his first appearance in 'Kvartiranty', he was to go on to occupy an increasingly important place in Siniavskii's work. However, whereas in 'Kvartiranty' the sorcerer is merely a kind of house sprite who 'co-exists' with the writer as his intuitive and imaginative alter ego, nourished on liberal doses of alcohol, in Liubimov Samson Samsonovich Proferansov is altogether a more complex and ambiguous figure.

¹⁷⁶ In Zamiatin's My, the House of Antiquity serves much the same purpose. The repository of mysteries and secrets, it contains colour and clutter, mirrors and dark corners; it is redolent of sin and seduction. It is central to the conversion of D-503 from conformist engineer into creative writer.

¹⁷⁷ Florenskii was a thinker, Orthodox priest and polymath whose work influenced other writers, most notably Bulgakov, in Master i Margarita. See, Milne, Mikhail Bulgakov, pp. 251-57. While the spatial approach to art and the crossing of boundaries was inherent in Modernism, Florenskii added the idea of parallel dimensions, spatial, temporal and metaphysical. See, Siniavskii, Pis'ma, 2, pp. 27, 74, 136, 170 and 495. Florenskii's work had exerted a strong influence on Bulgakov in Master i Margarita. See, Milne, Mikhail Bulgakov, pp. 251-57.

On one level Samson Samsonovich is an emanation of Siniavskii's father, a whimsical reminder of his landowner origins, just as Lenia's mother, with her offerings of cottage cheese and her peasant common sense are a tribute to Siniavskii's mother.¹⁷⁸ Donat Evgenevich Siniavskii, a member of the minor nobility, with strong liberal inclinations, had spent his life conducting various experiments (scientific and literary) all of which were doomed to failure.

As a sorcerer Proferansov has the power to do good and certain facets of his being are positive. An embodiment of the past, he has feeling and respect for his native soil, a sense of his roots. His magic, however harmful at times, endures, unlike that of Tikhomirov, because he is a writer not only of spells but of 'outmoded metaphors', the only weapon left against technology and brute force.¹⁷⁹ It is he who speaks of the importance of 'writing in layers' and makes the analogy between writing and archaeology that brings full circle the association of writing as alchemy and the organic, creative power lodged in the earth.

Despite all this, however, more disturbing aspects predominate, heralding the doubts about the writer expressed in Siniavskii's works to come and in particular V teni Gogolia and Koshkin dom. The very abilities that could be positive are open to abuse. In Liubimov Proferansov's influence is seen as largely nefarious: as a member of the liberal Russian aristocracy his past flirtations with fashionable ideologies and foreign ideas had led him to experiments that went

¹⁷⁸ See, Tertz, Spokoinoi nochi, p. 460 /p.166: 'My father would set himself the most improbable tasks. There was a bit of the failed inventor about him [...] After reading a few books on modern power engineering, he worked out a scheme in which nothing was lost but everything went into outer space as a cloud of will power [...] Everything he did fell through...'.
¹⁷⁹ Tertz, Liubimov p. 87 / p. 150

disastrously wrong, with heavy costs in human terms. Now, relegated to the margins, he has not learnt his lesson but continues to meddle. It is his book that falls on the head of his descendant, Lenia Tikhomirov, who takes up its ideas with disastrous consequences for his town. It is his metaphors, now realised by the inept and opportunist Lenia, that run amok. One does not have to look far to see the connection between Lenia and Stalin as sorcerer's apprentice to Lenin: Lenin's metaphors were realised by Stalin 'to the point of their full, graphic embodiment in the flesh'.¹⁸⁰

Nor is Proferansov's power to metamorphose an entirely positive attribute. Far from being metamorphosis in the Ovidian sense, and in tune with the idea of a regenerative circle of life, death and rebirth, his transformations have more of the vampiric about them as he 'devours' the souls of those he inhabits and they are then cast off, like Lenia, a theme taken up again in Koshkin dom. The writer as medium, as the vessel for divine revelation or imaginative inspiration is viewed from an entirely different angle, from the angle of a controlling and occupying presence. Savelii Kuzmich's efforts to write are constantly contested and re-directed by the interfering and autocratic Samson Samsonovich.

Proferansov's creative power endows him with an arrogance that is fatal. Siniavskii's portrayal of him marks the beginning of his concern with the sin of writing, the sin of pride. Proferansov arrogates to himself not merely the powers

¹⁸⁰ Tertz, 'Literaturnyi protsess v Rossii', p. 161. Siniavskii wrote these lines later in emigration, by which time he had read Master i Margarita. Although the idea of Stalin as Woland appealed to him, he had himself long since dreamed up the idea of the writer as sorcerer with the power to turn art into life. A further link between Proferansov as the 'evil' sorcerer and Stalin is suggested by Proferansov's trip to India and his consorting with Indian 'atamans': Tertz reminds the reader that 'among theosophists, subjected to persecution and generally not best loved by the regime, there was none the less current a parable, according to which Stalin knew something that no one else could even suspect and that he was the incarnation of the Great Indian Teacher, Manu'. Ibid., p. 160.

of a sorcerer but sets himself up as God, rivalling the divine power as creator of men's lives and arbiter of their fate. Although this is a more humorous take on the theme of 'Ty i ia', it is conveyed no less insistently.¹⁸¹

Liubimov is customarily interpreted as a political satire. It can, I suggest, be viewed equally profitably as a biblical allegory, heavily spiced with Russian folklore. In this allegory, Proferansov plays God the Father who gives his only begotten son to save the world: 'I give you a leader endowed with the intangible power you have been raving about for three centuries!'¹⁸² The coming of the Messiah has been foretold: a mighty and benevolent tsar is an age-old Russian dream. Moreover, his second coming is eagerly awaited: 'give us back our Lenny Makepeace, our Tsar'.¹⁸³ For humble carpenter read humble bicycle mechanic who rises to assume mythical status, is attributed miraculous powers (he supposedly turns water into vodka and Kozlova, his wife, is convinced that he can resurrect the dead) and who created the kingdom of God on earth, a land of milk and honey.¹⁸⁴ God the Son is no less arrogant than his father, however, and instead of being resurrected to a heavenly throne is punished for his pride and banished to the confines of his own pocket while Proferansov slips off into the ether.

Interwoven with this is an allegory of the Fall which associates Proferansov the sorcerer with Proferansov the writer. What causes Lenia Tikhomirov's downfall is the 'knowledge' from on high in the form of Proferansov's book.

¹⁸¹ It would find its ultimate solution in Siniavskii's book on Rozanov, where the links between God the Father, God Creator and the writer as sorcerer are reconciled.

¹⁸² Tertz, Liubimov, p. 40 /pp. 84-85.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 111 / p. 192

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 53 / p. 85.

Here Proferansov plays the role of Satan, tempting Tikhomirov with the prize of knowledge and earthly dominion. The analogy is clearly important to Siniavskii as he underscores it with a further parody. Kozlova, tiring of Tikhomirov, later tempts Kochetov, his second-in-command, in exactly the same way.¹⁸⁵ She is a more obvious and seductive Eve who offers to help Kochetov ‘steal’ knowledge in the form of Lenia’s plans, so that they can then conquer the world. Wisely, Kochetov refuses. These plans, the book, are symbols of the evil that could be unleashed: ‘But what future did her promises hold out for Russia? Chaos, sheer chaos. Anarchy and civil war’. Knowledge – words – in the wrong hands are negative forces, black magic. The writer as much as his alter ego the sorcerer can be tempted to play God and must be held responsible for the harm he might cause. The fact that it is a question of writing and words that can run out of control is evident from the passage immediately following the above quotation: the paragraph becomes a meaningless rush of words, gathering momentum and threatening to derail the text.

The identity of the writer is examined, leaving a disturbing uncertainty about who he is. In Liubimov it is not a question of a simple ‘split’; there are multiple variants of the writer. All are facets of the same persona. Both Samson Samsonovich and Lenia are ‘magicians’, though Lenia is more of a sorcerer’s apprentice. Both write, as does Savelii Kuzmich Proferansov, and all three are related to each other. On top of this, S.S. Proferansov ‘inhabits’ the other two so what they write can also be attributed to him. The authorial ‘I’ is constantly in doubt and it is often unclear whose voice is heard. Every genre and style of

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 97-98 / pp. 167-68.

writing is explored, from the diary, to the chronicle, scribbled notes, the fairy tale, science fiction and the bible. This further confuses the question of authorial identity as it is impossible to attribute a particular style to any one voice.

The text itself, to which all the protagonists contribute, becomes an arena for competing voices. In what could be seen as a perversion of the Bakhtinian idea of the polyphonic novel, Siniavskii shows the dangers of lack of communication when voices compete in a destructive way. Each tries to do the other down in order to emerge as the dominant voice; each author wants absolute control. What ensues is not creative dialogue but incoherent Babel.

One could say that there is no story in its own right, merely a series of allegories and parodies. This is not to be confused with Siniavskii's earlier stories, where he is engaged in something of a literary exercise. Here, the intention is more ludic. The reader, presented with more of a game than a text, is invited to become engaged with the writer, to decipher his clever sleights of hand, only to find that writer and text have slipped through his fingers. As such it represents a supreme example of art for its own sake, as against the purposeful texts of Socialist Realism. The idea of the text as puzzle or entertainment and the writer as sorcerer would find their ultimate expression in Koshkin dom.

Written on the threshold of his arrest, Liubimov marks an important stage in Siniavskii's evolution as a writer, though it leaves as many questions as answers. On the one hand there is a greater assurance in Siniavskii's writing; a sense of his roots in the broadest cultural sense allows him to play fast and loose with

them to creative effect. On the other hand, there are still doubts about the position and role of the writer in the modern world.

Although the metaphor for self-denial is present, in the form of the writer as medium, its realisation is flawed. The humour and inventiveness of the storytelling cannot hide the fact that Proferansov is an interloper and a writer who lives off other writers rather than infuses them with new life – fears all too obviously related to Siniavskii himself. Moreover the text is still his property and his writing is a self-conscious display of literary pyrotechnics rather than an attempt at self-transcendence. Proferansov as nothing more than a literary composite, the voices of other writers not heard but merely represented in the clever allusiveness of the text.: his outlandish name redolent of Gogol, his household peopled by figures with literary associations such as Arina Rodionovna, Pushkin's Nanny. Proferansov does not relinquish control willingly so that the reader, while drawn into the game, is not yet the equal partner that he will become in the works Siniavskii writes in the camps.

Yet the springboard for Siniavskii's next, decisive leap is irrevocably positioned in Liubimov: all (or much) of Russian literature is there and the author moves freely and easily in it, as in his true element as his life begins to take shape in his art.

Chapter II

‘It may seem improbable that rather than describe the reality of the hard labor camp that surrounded me, I concerned myself with art [...] Nevertheless, in my prison experience, art and literature were matters of life and death’.¹⁸⁶

Siniavskii’s writing from the camps was to prove, if anything, even more controversial than his earlier writing as Tertz. While his unorthodox treatment of Russia’s sacrosanct classics, Progulki s Pushkinym and V teni Gogolia, would provoke the greater outrage, he would also be criticised for not bearing witness to the atrocities of the Soviet penal system. Why did Siniavskii, as a keen ‘observer’ of his times, one who recognised that the age in which he lived was somehow defined by the prison experience that he, too, had shared, not dedicate a more prominent place to it in his work?¹⁸⁷ Leaving aside the easily overlooked fact that Siniavskii’s writing of these years was not composed at some later date but while he was actually serving out his sentence, a circumstance that precluded any attempt at producing a work of ‘camp literature’, in the freedom of emigration he had every opportunity to make good this omission yet failed to do so.

¹⁸⁶ Siniavskii, ‘On the History of This Book’, trans. Catherine Theimer Nepomnyashchy, in Tertz, A Voice from the Chorus, New Haven CT and London, 1976, pp. v-ix (pp. v-vi).

¹⁸⁷ In a serialised reading of Spokoinoi nochi broadcast on Radio Liberty between October 1985 and March 1986, Mariia Vasilievna makes this point. See Mariia Rozanova, ‘Spokoinoi nochi –roman s kommentariem/roman s posledstviem’ (hereafter, ‘Radio Liberty transcript’), HIA, box 47, folder 17, transmission 16, p. 2.

It has been suggested, with some justification, that Siniavskii could ‘*afford* not to give concrete testimony’ since the prison conditions he experienced were not as severe as they had been under Stalin and also because many others had already done so. This reasoning further suggests that his ‘ability to claim exemption’ from bearing witness, in other words his unconventional approach to camp literature, may therefore be viewed as ‘a matter of propitious timing rather than of artistic courage’.¹⁸⁸ This cannot be dismissed completely: always averse to treading a well-beaten path (‘How much can one write about the same old thing?’), Siniavskii took the opportunity to veer away from accepted norms of camp literature, not only in writing about Pushkin and Gogol but also in his serene musings about art and life in Golos iz khora as well as in the later, fantastic Spokoinoi nochi, where chapter two is set in the labour camp.¹⁸⁹

Such appraisals of Siniavskii’s prison writing, however justifiable and cogently argued, suffer from the overwhelming need to measure Siniavskii by the particular yardsticks of his day, trying to fit him willy-nilly on the Procrustean bed of prison literature. They fail to take into account his personal history and what he was actually trying to do as a writer.

In terms of Siniavskii’s reactions to the camps, it was as if the revelations about Stalin and the damage already inflicted on him in his personal life with the arbitrary and unjust treatment of his father, together with the devastations visited on Russian culture, had already shocked him in a more profound way than the raw brutality of prison could. To counter this with the argument that conditions

¹⁸⁸ Toker, Return from the Archipelago, p. 240.

¹⁸⁹ Tertz, ‘Literaturnyi protsess v Rossii’, p. 148.

in the labour camps were less harsh than under Stalin is valid only up to a point: though indisputably less severe they took an enormous toll on the individuals held there, Siniavskii included. This is eloquently demonstrated by the ‘before’ and ‘after’ photographs on the covers of volumes one and three respectively of his letters, while his old friend, Igor Golomstock has spoken of the damaging effects of prison on Siniavskii.¹⁹⁰ Moreover, before the trial, Siniavskii had already reached a kind of peace with himself, evident in Mysli vrasplokh, that allowed him to face the camps if not with equanimity, then with less anger and bitterness than, say, Solzhenitsyn. Secure in his new found faith, Siniavskii was able to look beyond the everyday horrors to consider more profound questions of life and death, questions which for him were indissolubly bound up with art.

In terms of his depiction of camp life, what is held against him is a lack of ‘concrete testimony’, which may be interpreted as a true to life or realistic rendering of prevailing conditions.¹⁹¹ Leona Toker’s Return from the Archipelago is a remarkable scholarly achievement, her analysis of gulag testimonies both wide-ranging and balanced. Her conclusions about Siniavskii should therefore not be taken lightly. However, Siniavskii did not shy away from truth as such but refrained from laying claim to absolute truth as a writer, let alone one equated with any kind of ‘realism’.

Truthfulness rather than ‘the truth’ is what concerned Siniavskii, the truthfulness that could be found with ‘the aid of the absurd and the fantastic’.¹⁹²

This was the guiding principle of his phantasmagoric art, art that defined him as

¹⁹⁰ Private conversation, London, 2005.

¹⁹¹ Toker, Return from the Archipelago, p. 248.

¹⁹² Tertz, Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm, p. 446 / p. 219.

a writer, as Tertz. In the camps this different apprehension of reality was if anything even more appropriate, except that the situation was reversed: ‘to my amazement, reality itself turned out to be fantastic’.¹⁹³

Siniavskii’s phantasmagoric art provides a link back to Dostoevskii whose fantastic realism had been one of the inspirations for Tertz’s writing. This connection takes on new significance at this time through their common experience of imprisonment and Dostoevskii’s semi-fictional, semi-autobiographical *Zapiski iz mertvogo doma* (Notes from the House of the Dead, 1861-2). Though Dostoevskii does not figure directly in Siniavskii’s prose of these years, his influence is unmistakable when viewed through the prism of a later article, ‘Dostoevskii i katorga’.¹⁹⁴ When Siniavskii describes Dostoevskii’s reactions to prison and the effect it had on him as a writer, one might be reading about Siniavskii himself: forced for the first time into daily, close contact with the ordinary people, with murderers and common criminals, Dostoevskii looks at them with fascination, trying to penetrate their inmost beings, their psychological and spiritual depths.¹⁹⁵ Providing an opening onto another world, these contacts were a revelation, prompting him to look beyond the everyday to what is fundamental and eternal. Like Siniavskii (and unlike many of Siniavskii’s contemporaries) Dostoevskii came to prison as an established author but his experience transformed his writing, laying the ground for the great novels of his maturity.

¹⁹³ Siniavskii, ‘On the History of This Book’, p. vii.

¹⁹⁴ A. Siniavskii, ‘Dostoevskii i katorga’, *Sintaksis*, 9, 1981, pp. 108-11. He confirmed this later in an interview with Catherine Nepomnyashchy. Nepomnyashchy, ‘Interview’, p. 17.

¹⁹⁵ Though fascinated by the ordinary prisoners Dostoevskii, unlike Siniavskii, did not get on well with them— an aspect of his incarceration shared by Solzhenitsyn. See, Nepomnyashchy, ‘Interview’, pp. 17-18.

Prison had an equally profound effect on Siniavskii in terms of his path as a writer but in his case there was not so much transformation as significant evolution in a direction already embarked upon. Siniavskii's 'time out' allowed him to view literature and art in general from a new perspective. His trial had highlighted the interpretation of art in the Russian context, art 'that operates so fixedly in the glare of the immediate political present and future and [whose] limited, agitational view of truth is so concerned with the contemporary and concrete, that there is no opportunity for the artist to concern himself with the timeless'.¹⁹⁶

The theme of death and re-birth around which both Golos iz khora and V teni Gogolia are orchestrated carries an implicit acknowledgement of Dostoevskii's 'House of the Dead' and its part in making possible Dostoevskii's new life as a writer. The connection acquires added dimensions when the theme, as well as the particular link with Prestuplenie i nakazanie (Crime and Punishment, 1866), are carried through to Siniavskii's autobiographical novel Spokoinoi nochi in which he charts his birth as the writer Tertz, the subject of my next chapter.

'The dead are resurrected. Forward – to the sources!'¹⁹⁷

'[A]n old man heard somewhere [...] and was curious to know, when chatting to me, if it was true that Gogol had been buried alive'.¹⁹⁸ 'When

¹⁹⁶ Mathewson, The Positive Hero, p. 94. Although Mathewson is writing here about nineteenth century 'radical art', the same idea could be applied to Soviet art of the twentieth century.

¹⁹⁷ Abram Tertz, V teni Gogolia, London, 1975, p. 479.

someone lands in prison – especially in its Total, most annihilating form – he or she experiences something like dying dragged out for years. Prison puts an end to the captive’s entire preceding life and future [...]. It is the death of human dignity, purpose, vocation – of your higher calling in life. For me writing was that calling, and it was also the crime for which I was indicted’.¹⁹⁹ Just as Siniavskii was coming into his own as a writer, albeit unofficially and with no hope of being published in his own country, this creative pathway seemed to have been summarily and conclusively shut off.

Interweaving the theme of the writer’s death and his fear of losing himself as a writer, Siniavskii’ uses Gogol’s fate as a metaphor for his prison experience, his death-defying attempts to transcend his own entombment. The refrain of ‘I can’t breathe’ [dushno], of suffocation at the beginning of V teni Gogolia, is echoed in Siniavskii’s requests in his correspondence for books, for letters, for literary stimulus that is as necessary to him as a writer as the air he breathes.²⁰⁰ The theme of death overlaps with the idea of exile as Siniavskii’s circumstances recall Pushkin’s and his ‘fears of a solitude that could diminish his will to write’.²⁰¹

This chapter will explore how the condition of imprisonment, while prompting Siniavskii’s fear of a loss of self that was intimately bound up with writing, paradoxically stimulated his further evolution as a writer. Speaking of

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p.7.

¹⁹⁹ Siniavskii, ‘On the History of This Book’, p. vi.

²⁰⁰ Siniavskii likens his inability to write, his frustrated attempts at communication, to a nightmare where you shout out but nothing is heard. Siniavskii, Pis’ma, 1, p. 115.

²⁰¹ Stephanie Sandler, Distant Pleasures. Alexander Pushkin and the Writing of Exile, Stanford CA, 1989 (hereafter, Distant Pleasures), p. 74.

the camps, Siniavskii said, 'There I found myself, my style, my manner in the surrounding world'.²⁰² The theme of potential loss is offset by a sense of belonging that takes shape in the convergence of life and literature, Siniavskii and Tertz. Concurrently, continuing on the path he had already discovered in Mysli vrasplokh, Siniavskii counterbalances his fear of disappearing as a writer in the camps by the active and willing suppression of himself as author, as the reader acquires new significance in the conditions of exile.

While anxious to keep abreast of current developments in the literary world, Siniavskii withdraws into the past, immersing himself in fairy tales and the classics, in particular Pushkin and Gogol, in order to explore fundamental questions about art and life.²⁰³ At the same time, the particular circumstances of the trial and the contemporary situation of the writer continue to reverberate in his writing. Pasternak, though he cedes the foreground to Pushkin and Gogol, remains an unnamed but tangible presence, providing a bridge between past and present, the general and the personal.

The writer

Although Siniavskii's writing from the camps did not carry the idea of social or political protest implicit in the concept of prison literature, it was none the less polemical. With the trial Tertz had become a realised metaphor, the embodiment of pure art and Siniavskii's creative identity; it was his survival that

²⁰² Siniavskii, 'On the History of This Book'. p. vii.

²⁰³ On his desire to keep up to date, see Siniavskii, Pis'ma, 1, p. 133. On the classics, *ibid.*, p. 52: 'when I have some spare time I would gladly immerse myself more deeply in the study of literature (I mean the classics, which are drawing me like a magnet)'.

became Siniavskii's all-absorbing preoccupation. Far from putting an end to Tertz as a necessary but temporary subterfuge, a vehicle for Siniavskii's imaginative prose, the trial was to imbue him with new life. Although Siniavskii said that Progulki s Pushkinym was a continuation of his closing speech at the trial, the same could be said of all his works of this period, all of which embody in different forms his continuing struggle to promote art's necessary freedom from political and social constraints. The natural symbiosis of Siniavskii and Tertz, already in evidence in the pre-trial phase, in the camps becomes a collaborative synthesis as the sparring voices at work in Liubimov now make common cause: although Siniavskii writes the letters it is Tertz's work that is smuggled out through sleights of hand worthy of a conjuror.²⁰⁴

What emerge from the camps are the immediate, day-to-day thoughts of the writer. Siniavskii's writing of these years takes the form of letters to his wife, Mariia Vasilievna. Though the books that are the products of his time in the camps (Progulki s Pushkinym, Golos iz khora and V teni Gogolia) may be viewed as complete in themselves, they form part of a complex meditation about art, its function and the role of the writer, that can only be appreciated fully in the context of the letters as a whole.²⁰⁵ The continuation of Siniavskii's literary work by other means, the letters formed the very stuff of his existence, the

²⁰⁴ See, Nepomnyashchy, 'Interview', p. 11.

²⁰⁵ Progulki s Pushkinym was the only work completed in the camps. V teni Gogolia was conceived there but only the first chapter was completed before Siniavskii was released. As for Golos iz khora, it consists entirely of extracts lifted directly from the letters with few alterations and adjustments, sometimes none at all.

assurance of his survival as a writer.²⁰⁶ His fear of drying up was all too real, so that writing became an obsession, an obsession that fed into V teni Gogolia and was no doubt fuelled by news from Iulii Daniel', his friend and co-defendant, who feared that after his release he had lost his 'creative potential'.²⁰⁷ While the book about Pushkin is all lightness and air, and the letters, for the most part, proclaim the joys of art, V teni Gogolia is a more 'fundamental' work in which the writer's struggle with himself is laid bare before the reader.

Written day by day and in every spare moment over a period of nearly six years, the letters form both the substance and background of these conflicting impulses. Only by reading them can one gain a feeling of what Siniavskii lived through, as time served becomes the reality of each page written, each page a testimony to a fate that, echoing Pasternak in one of the many references secreted in the prose, 'must be lived out, slowly and deliberately, step by step, through every single day, one after the other...'.²⁰⁸

Letters thus serve as a starting point for Siniavskii's work both in real terms and as a metaphor for art, reminding one this time of Rozanov, in whose writing

²⁰⁶ See, John Glad, 'Andrei Siniavsky and Maria Rozanova' in Glad (ed.), Conversations in Exile. Russian Writers Abroad, interviews trans. by Richard and Joanna Robin, Durham NC and London, 1993, pp. 141-73 (pp. 150 and 156). Also, Nepomnyashchy, 'Interview', pp. 11-13.

²⁰⁷ Started in what would be Siniavskii's final year of imprisonment, V teni Gogolia reflects the uncertainties he realized that he would face as a writer in the outside world, which only added to the concerns he had been experiencing throughout his prison term. Daniel's letter (he had received a shorter sentence than Siniavskii and was therefore released earlier), dated 26 December, 1970, coincides with the period when Siniavskii was writing his first and bleakest chapter on Gogol which he had started in March, 1970. For reference to Daniel's letter, see Siniavskii, Pis'ma, 3, pp. 319 and 324. For the start of V teni Gogolia, *ibid.*, p. 49.

²⁰⁸ The letters represent the distillation of hours of note-taking, drafts and corrections. Siniavskii's requests, when writing to Mariia Vasilievna, apart from coffee or the odd essential such as an item of clothing, are consistently for writing materials.

‘there is no insurmountable barrier between [his] prose and his letters’.²⁰⁹ Siniavskii’s writing from camp, however, harks back most strikingly to Tertz’s story, ‘Gololeditsa’ and the idea of literature as a letter to the future, cast out to sea in the hope of finding a single, sympathetic reader.²¹⁰ Chance and freedom rather than purpose and usefulness, and the idea of art as intimate communication coincide in the image of the letter in a bottle and are leitmotifs around which his work of this period is orchestrated. Marooned in Dubrovlag, art and life begin to merge as Siniavskii experiences the fate of a latter-day Crusoe and themes of shipwrecks, castaways and a sheet of paper as a ‘tiny raft’ on which he as a writer must keep afloat, weave their way through his writing.²¹¹

It was Pushkin who would provide the inspiration as well as much of the material for the making of this raft. Imprisoned for his art, Siniavskii found in Pushkin not only an ideal model of pure art, art devoid of preaching or moralising, but also the expression of art’s essential freedom. A victim like Siniavskii of the pernicious relationship between literature and politics in

²⁰⁹ Though Rozanov (like Dostoevskii) is hardly mentioned or even hinted at in Siniavskii’s writing of this time, unlike Pasternak, his influence nonetheless makes itself felt. See A. Siniavskii, ‘Opavshie list’ia’ V.V. Rozanova, Paris, 1982, (hereafter, ‘Opavshie list’ia’) p. 138. According to Siniavskii, Rozanov believed that letters were ‘the highest form of literature’. Ibid., p. 141. In this passage, Siniavskii writes of the mutual admiration of Rozanov and Father Pavel Florenskii and quotes an extract of a letter from Florenskii to Rozanov: “‘The only form of literature that I have come to recognize is LETTERS. Even in a “diary” the author assumes a pose. A letter, on the other hand, is written so quickly and with such fatigue, that there can be no question of posing in it. This is the only sincere form of writing”’. Florenskii’s opinion notwithstanding, Rozanov’s ‘letter’ writing was highly self-conscious; so, too, is Siniavskii’s. Not only was it carefully composed to avoid the suspicions of the censors, it presents a sustained and wonderfully orchestrated meditation about art. In her ‘Introduction’ to the letters, Mariia Vasilievna said that she had not thought of publishing them as everything interesting had already been extracted and published, However, returning to them to corroborate certain facts for her own writing, she was struck by the fact that the letters were not simply giving a string of information – they were prose: “‘I am reading Plutarch. The moon is big. Leaves are falling. I’ll go and have a smoke.”’ Mariia Rozanova, ‘Neskol’ko slov ot adresata etikh pisem’, in Siniavskii, Pis’ma, 1, pp. 13-18 (p. 16). Ibid., p. 384 where the passage she quotes may be found.

²¹⁰ An idea also found in a Mandel’stam essay of 1927. Osip Mandel’stam, ‘O sobesednike’, in Mandel’stam, Sobranie sochinenii v chetyrekh tomakh, Moscow, 1993,1, pp. 182-88 (p. 184).

²¹¹ Tertz, Golos iz khora, p. 584 / p. 206.

Russia, Pushkin was to provide him with a covert means of channelling his thoughts about art and the artist in a way that distanced him from the heated controversies of the present without in any way diminishing their centrality in his thinking.

The Reader

‘[R]ead her Pushkin, and love her as I loved her’, the castaway author of ‘Gololeditsa’ encourages the future recipient of his letter, introducing through Pushkin the idea of literature as a gesture of communication based on love. This brief (and, once again, uncannily prophetic) intimation in an earlier story of his later circumstances would evolve into the guiding spirit of Siniavskii’s work in the camps and would be the essence of his major achievements of those years, his ‘fantastic literary criticism’.²¹²

The reader, who already occupied a significant place in Siniavskii’s thinking as a writer, now assumes paramount importance. Just as the reader had played an important role in the development of Pushkin’s creative voice during his periods of banishment, so Siniavskii’s relationship with his reader evolves naturally from the circumstances of his life at this time.²¹³ Siniavskii’s work, as he often said, was never intended for a mass readership, an attitude that set him at odds with the ideals of Soviet literature; in the camps he further refines this idea, designating his wife Mariia Vasilievna as his sole correspondent.²¹⁴ It was

²¹² Tertz, ‘Gololeditsa’, p. 181 / p. 38.

²¹³ See, Sandler, *Distant Pleasures*, in particular pp. 212-15.

²¹⁴ See, Glad, ‘Andrei Siniavsky and Maria Rozanova’, pp. 166-67. Once again, the similarity with Rozanov is striking: ‘The book, marked by its sign of manuscriptness, becomes something in the nature of

she who suggested that he (re-)read Pushkin while he was in prison awaiting trial, and there he had come upon the correspondence of Pushkin and his wife.²¹⁵ Exile and imprisonment, letters between husband and wife, Pushkin and Natal'ia Nikolaevna, Siniavskii and Mariia Vasilievna, their lives and circumstances become intertwined in this chance encounter.²¹⁶ Siniavskii would take this up and transform it into an intricate creative association, into which he draws other archetypal couples from myth and legend such as Odysseus and Penelope, Peter and Fevronia (with happier experiences of marriage than Pushkin and his wife) but with a passing reference also to a real couple, nearer to him in time and with powerful literary credentials, Anna Akhmatova and Nikolai Gumilev.²¹⁷ In emigration he would deepen this relationship through a still more complex creative integration with Pushkin, in 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku', a fleeting intimation of which is given through the Akhmatova-Gumilev association.²¹⁸

a private letter, intended for a single person. "Opavshie list'ia" is in no way a form of mass reading and even, in a certain sense, not reading at all. It is an intimate correspondence with someone else, with a single person'. Siniavskii, 'Opavshie list'ia', p. 119. Though Siniavskii still received what were clearly welcome letters from old friends such as Igor Golomstock and the Men'shutins, he channeled his writing almost exclusively through Mariia Vasilievna. A move that equates to the 'self-centredness' he discerned as a means of survival in Robinson Crusoe, this enabled him to economise his efforts and concentrate on his writing free of distractions.

²¹⁵ Siniavskii, *Pis'ma*, 1, p. 137.

²¹⁶ For the idea of art as a meeting place, see below, p. 117, n. 232. Siniavskii had drawn attention to the importance of 'artistic encounters' in the formation of Pasternak's 'cast of mind'. See, Siniavskii, 'Poeziia Pasternaka', p. 11 / p. 156. Though Siniavskii was speaking here of real-life meetings, the intermingling of the literary, historical and the contemporary that occurs here between Pushkin and himself were no less significant in his own evolution as a writer in the camps.

²¹⁷ As Siniavskii remarks, 'Only, Pushkin was not happy in his marriage. In this regard you are clearly more fortunate in comparison with him'. *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ Tertz, *Golos iz khora*, p.658 / pp. 310-11.

Central to this process is Siniavskii's new creative rapprochement with Mariia Vasilievna.²¹⁹ Through their correspondence, what had been an abstract notion is translated naturally and organically into practice as art becomes a shared experience, a paradigmatic act of collaboration between writer and reader born of mutual sympathy and understanding. It was in response to Mariia Vasilievna's request that Siniavskii write something light and joyous for her about Pushkin that Progulki s Pushkinym was conceived and completed in Dubrovlag. Thanks to her, too, he even managed to be a published author in the Soviet Union while still under lock and key as a zek. A near miraculous repetition of the events that had first launched his career as Tertz ('confined in Moscow, I am published in Paris; confined in the camps, I am published in Moscow. Hooray!'), the wonderful irony of the situation was not lost on Siniavskii.²²⁰

²¹⁹ Up until then, as Mariia Vasilievna explains in a note, 'In spite of our common interests, before Siniavskii's arrest we always assiduously divided our work into "my text" and "your text". Only when A.S. went to the camps did we start to work together'. Siniavskii, Pis'ma, 1, p. 137. The question of co-authorship acquires other levels of meaning at this time, in that work Siniavskii had completed with others on, for example, Babel, 'over a month before his arrest', had been ascribed solely to the other author, I.A. Smirin. (Ibid., p. 218). See, I. A. Smirin, 'Na puti k "Konarmii" (Literaturnye iskaniiia Babelia)' under the heading of 'I. Babel'. Novye materialy, in Literaturnoe nasledstvo, 74, Moscow, 1965, pp. 468-82. More complicated and more relevant to the question of 'co-authorship' as an act of love was the fact that an article Siniavskii had agreed to write on Kafka with a female co-author enmeshed him in an attempt to discredit him further as malicious rumours were spread about his personal relationship with this woman. Siniavskii, Pis'ma, 1, pp. 130 and 137.

²²⁰ Siniavskii, Pis'ma, 1, pp. 297 and 303. Mariia Vasilievna, in her note on p. 303, enlarges on Siniavskii's delighted reaction ('I am still in a state of amazement and great joy from the article'): 'I sent A.S. my article "Fantasticheskii realizm" in the journal Dekorativnoe iskusstvo, no. 3, 1967' (pp. 3-6). The title of this article, published in a censored Soviet journal, struck Siniavskii because it was a paraphrase of his favourite theory from his essay Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm, contrasting Socialist Realism with his fantastic realism. Moreover, in this article extracts from Siniavskii's letter from the camp were published for the first time and he saw that, shut up in the camp, it was still possible to write and be published'. The extent to which Siniavskii worked on these articles, with the keen eye and attention to detail of the literary critic, as well as in a broader imaginative sense, can be gauged, for example, from a letter entry dated 1-2 July, 1966. Ibid., pp. 84-87.

This approach to writing implicitly refutes the didactic imperative inherent in the Russian literary tradition, a tendency which, in Siniavskii's opinion, fatally distanced writer and reader, artist and public from one another. Here, Siniavskii returns to his quarrel with realist art. Using the past, once again, as a convenient mask for what can be construed as an attack on 'Realism' of whatever ilk, he contrasts nineteenth century portraits with the Fayum paintings of ancient Egypt. The Fayum faces, the life-like representations of departed souls, look out to their beholder in invitation, drawing him in as through an open window, unlike 'the portraits of the realist school, where the living face is trained on you like a gun, forcing you into an unwanted acquaintance with itself'.²²¹

This relationship between the artist and society, seen in terms of a hostile confrontation rather than an attempt to find a common language, tells of the enormous gap that separated them from each other. Siniavskii's trial had been a striking illustration of this dialogue of the deaf, what he later termed the gap between 'I' and 'they', and which he felt was particularly acute in his time: 'in our epoch [...] the artist remains sharply isolated and guarded in relation to society, in a situation, so to speak of extreme loneliness and equally extreme need of understanding and contact'.²²²

²²¹ Tertz, *Golos iz khora*, p. 464 / p. 37.

²²² A. Siniavskii, "'Ia" i "oni"', *Vremia i my*, 13 January, 1977, pp. 169-82 (p. 175). It is tempting to think that the idea for the article, entitled "'Ia" i "oni"', and the ideas contained within it were in part intended as a contrast to the form of prose used by Rozanov, the sort of intimate epistolary style that Siniavskii would refer to as "'ty i ia'", writing that was 'for personal use, from hand to hand' and which his own work exemplified. Siniavskii, *Opavshie list'ia*, p. 145. This companionable and creative understanding of 'ty i ia' marks a huge leap from Tertz's early story of that name in which a hostile relationship exists not simply between two different individuals but between rival sides of the author's own persona. Siniavskii's frustration at the wall of non-comprehension that divides writer and society from one another carries echoes of Pasternak and the problem of non-comprehension between writers themselves. In his words: 'we speak a different language'. Pasternak, *O skromnosti i smelosti*, p. 233 / p. 176.

Prison, with its conditions of heightened alienation, served in this later article, written in emigration, as both illustration and metaphor for the situation of non-communication as Siniavskii interprets the grotesque and seemingly insane acts of violence and self-mutilation of some prisoners as last ditch attempts to make their voices heard. Using a similar analogy in the camps, but necessarily speaking covertly, he uses Gogol to show how, in his desperate endeavours to communicate with his readers, Gogol in his last years had thrust himself at them as some kind of ultimatum, like ‘some quick-tempered general in ancient times who, bleeding profusely, had given the order for his dead body to be fired from a catapult at the enemy’.²²³ Gogol’s efforts were doomed to failure, since they were devoid of human concern for his reader, the loss of his creative gift going hand-in-hand with a loss of love for his fellow man.²²⁴

Siniavskii contrasts Gogol’s later writing with Pushkin’s: ‘[Pushkin’s] entire corpus of works lies before us like a private letter that accidentally ended up among the official papers of our national literature. (What a contrast to Gogol, who managed to conduct a private correspondence with his friends and publish it as government legislation!)’.²²⁵

Taking his cue from Pushkin, Siniavskii writes his letters conversationally, his prose a form of ‘idle chatter’ to Mariia Vasilievna.²²⁶ Open-ended, his writing is offered as a series of speculations that he shares with his reader,

²²³ Tertz, *V teni Gogolia*, p. 21. Siniavskii’s use of physical imagery to convey his own sense of desperation at his inability to write is nowhere more striking than when he says it leaves him feeling ‘disemboweled’ [*vypotroshennyi*]. Siniavskii, *Pis’ma*, 2, p. 267.

²²⁴ Tertz, *V teni Gogolia*, p. 310.

²²⁵ Tertz, *Progulki s Pushkinym*, p. 11/ p. 111.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, *Golos iz khora*, p. 643 / p. 290. Tertz, *Golos iz khora*, p.643 / p. 290.

reflecting the way that Pushkin's prose is animated by the sort of entertaining and trifling chit-chat that might well have taken shape in one of his notes to a friend. Yet in so doing Siniavskii is responding not only to the poet but also to his reader, Mariia Vasilievna. It is her style that reminds him of Pushkin's and her writing that is clearly an inspiration for his own Progulki s Pushkinym: 'Your gift is to make even the most trivial things sound interesting [...] and to fill your letters with air in which one wants to live and stroll [guliat']. You possess that rare capacity for natural chatter that I have found in Pushkin!'.²²⁷ The subtle shift that makes Mariia Vasilievna's voice synonymous with Pushkin's brings Siniavskii closer to both, erasing the boundaries that separate writer and reader, writer and subject in a creative interchange.²²⁸

This process forms the creative cornerstone of Tertz's fantastic literary criticism, as life moves into art. Self-effacement, so influential an aspect of Pasternak's work for Siniavskii, and something to which he himself had given expression in Mysli vrasplokh, is now lived out in practice, thereby gaining new dimensions.²²⁹ As his reader assumes increasing importance, the writer, withdrawing as the voice of authority, not only merges with his reader but at the same time cedes to her the creative role. As in Tatiana's letter to Onegin, 'The reader is given the right to think what he wants, filling in the empty spaces that

²²⁷ Siniavskii, Pis'ma, 1. p. 137. This entry was written just a few days before he intimates that he has started to write about Pushkin. *Ibid.*, p. 141.

²²⁸ In a further blurring of the boundaries between them, while Siniavskii is in prison Mariia Vasilievna takes on the combative role of the street-wise Tertz, sailing as close to the wind as she dared in her encounters with the KGB as she tried to secure Siniavskii's early release. See, Glad, 'Andrei Siniavsky and Maria Rozanova', pp. 160-61.

²²⁹ Withdrawal of the author as the dominant voice, was also a striking feature of Dostoevskii's Zapiski iz mertvogo doma, as Ronald Hingley notes. Unlike Siniavskii, who had already started along this path, it marked a significant change for Dostoevskii. Ronald Hingley, 'Introduction' to Fyodor Dostoevsky, Memoirs from the House of the Dead, trans. Jesse Coulson, Oxford, 1983, pp. vii-xviii (pp. xi-xii).

have been formed with surmises and groping his way among the incongruities'. Yet, though he takes a back seat, the writer's responsiveness increases commensurately with his withdrawal, transforming itself into a state of active receptivity. In this way, his 'chatter'

is in large measure not so much self-expression on my part as a form of listening, of listening to you [...] It is important for me, when I write, to hear you. Language thus becomes a scanning or listening device, a means of silent communion – absolutely empty, a snare or net: a net of language cast into the sea of silence in the hope of pulling up some little golden fish caught in the pauses, in the momentary interstices of silence.²³⁰

Self-effacement, as the active and unconditional receptivity to another's thoughts, an act of communion based on love and humility that imparts an ethical significance to his art, finds its natural confirmation in Siniavskii's real-life circumstances.

This stance is extended also to the text. Siniavskii had already broached the idea in Tertz's 'Grafomany', as the author renounces any claim to authority or ownership of what is written, acting as medium for the self-sufficient prose. Now, while he expresses very similar ideas, the accent is put more on the active decision to relinquish control.

Writing is an act not only of surrender but also of daring and trust, reminding one once again of Pasternak and his definition of courage in facing a blank sheet of paper, 'Artistic creation is a desperate posing of the question: to live or not to

²³⁰ Tertz, *Golos iz khora*, p. 643 / pp. 290-91. Siniavskii, *Pis'ma*, 2, p. 490.

live?’²³¹ Siniavskii traces this through the extended metaphor of plunging into a fast flowing river, which closes over the writer and bears him along: you must not struggle or resist but just keep swimming, sinking to the very bottom before ‘You come out of the sentence a little abashed – and dazed by what you have succeeded in saying’.²³²

Trust and humility are brought together as a basis for writing in the notion, once again, of chance, the importance of which Siniavskii emphasises as he starts to write about Gogol: ‘I decided to re-read him, since he came to hand and in such matters chance is also very important – blind chance and not plans; Gogol himself came to grief through his plans’.²³³ Pushkin, on the contrary, making no attempt to order his own life or those of his readers, like the hero of Russian fairy tales Ivan-durak, entrusted himself to fate.²³⁴ Starting from Pushkin’s writing as ‘idle chatter’, Siniavskii proceeds, via the idea of his laziness, to play on the interrelated notions of chance and fate, risk and luck, an association through which he would return to Pasternak at the end of Progulki s Pushkinym and also, through him, to Maiakovskii, showing how a belief in the benevolent influence of chance and his (lazy) surrender to providence liberated

²³¹ Gladkov, Meetings with Pasternak, p. 59. Tertz, Golos iz khora, p. 620 / p. 258.

²³² *Ibid.*, p. 558 / p. 170.

²³³ Siniavskii, Pis'ma, 3, p. 49. Siniavskii puts this differently but equally simply and eloquently when he describes art as a ‘meeting place’, in which notions of love, coincidence and luck represent the creative coordinates: ‘Art is a meeting place – a meeting place of the author with the object of his love, of spirit and matter, of truth and fantasy, line and contour and so on. These are meetings that are rare and unexpected. In joy and surprise – “Is it you? Is it you?” – each side clasps the other’s hands in a frenzy of emotion. These embraces are perceived by us as manifestations of artistry’. *Ibid.*, 2, p. 227.

²³⁴ Siniavskii, Ivan-durak, p. 43.

Pushkin and taught him humility. Rhyming volia and dolia, Siniavskii shows how ‘Humility and freedom are one when fate becomes our home’.²³⁵

Gogol’s final years had been overshadowed by his pride, his self-appointed writer’s mission to dictate to his readers and society at large. A tendency inherent in the Russian literary tradition, it was one that Siniavskii had touched on, albeit humorously, in Liubimov in the form of the autocratic Samson Samsonovich Proferansov. Alive and well in Soviet Russia it would also be evident in the work of dissident writers such as Solzhenitsyn.²³⁶ Even Gogol’s prayer for the good of society, re-calling the coercive image of realist art trained like a gun on the hapless reader, sounded like ‘an order for general mobilisation [...] the cacophony of all-out war’.²³⁷ Siniavskii, writing about Gogol might have been mindful of the way he himself had let fly salvos against readers, authors and critics alike (as Tertz and Siniavskii) in an effort not to reform society but to stir up the stagnant Russian literary scene.

Through his correspondence with Mariia Vasilievna was brought home to Siniavskii the realisation that art, in order to overcome the barrier of non-communication between writer and reader, did not have to resort to extreme (stylistic) effects such as he had used in his first works as Tertz – though he

²³⁵ Tertz, Progulki s Pushkinym, p. 49 / p. 73.

²³⁶ According to Siniavskii, Solzhenitsyn’s creativity, like Gogol’s, suffered from his desire to preach. See, Nepomnyashchy, ‘Interview’, p. 11: ‘the tradition [...] that art must serve society has reigned over much of the history of Russian art. The artist is obligated to serve society. He must either castigate vice or extol virtue. This tradition goes back a long way and is very strong in Russian literature. It has yielded a great many good fruits, but a great many ills as well. The path of Tolstoy, of Gogol, of Dostoevsky, of Mayakovsky etc. demonstrate this. And Solzhenitsyn is no exception’. Also, *ibid.*, p. 16: ‘because Solzhenitsyn [...] sets himself up as a preacher, his writing suffers. His ideology devours his artistry. But in the Russian tradition the writer must educate, teach the reader. It’s Russia’s great misfortune’.

²³⁷ Tertz, V teni Gogolia, p. 92.

retains and, indeed, rejoices in his ability to shock and surprise his reader – but it could be ‘outwardly peaceful, simple, restrained and even pleasing’.²³⁸

Pushkin’s prayer, unlike Gogol’s, was ‘for the good of the world – as it is’ and Siniavskii, while in prison, is able to detach himself and achieve a measure of serenity impossible in the outside world.²³⁹ Plunged into the mass of motley humanity that was the camps, he never judges or comments on its darker side but constantly marvels at ‘the unheard of spiritual and artistic resources of the common people’.²⁴⁰ His trips to the North with Mariia Vasilievna had introduced him to one small part of Russia outside the urban life into which he had been born and bred. Now the whole of Russia, so it seemed, opened up before him in all its richness and diversity, much as it had for Dostoevskii:

The very geography of Russia stretched out before me in greater breadth in the camps than I could have imagined it in freedom [...] The whole Soviet Union surrounded me in a miniature, condensed form. Isn’t that rare luck for a writer? I finally met my people – in such scope and at such close quarters as had never happened to me and could never have happened in normal conditions. It was this people I wanted to reproduce in the chorus of voices in *A Voice from the Chorus*: let them speak for themselves, objectively, and I wouldn’t interfere.²⁴¹

²³⁸ A. Siniavskii, “‘Ia” i “oni””, p. 175. Later, in more militant mood in emigration, he would return to the idea that the writer, in order to break through the barrier of non-communication, needed to resort to extreme measures. See, Tertz, ‘Literaturnyi protsess v Rossii’ , p.152-3.

²³⁹ Tertz, *Golos iz khora*, p. 466/ p. 40 and Tertz, *Progulki s Pushkinym*, pp. 54-55 / pp. 76-77.

²⁴⁰ Siniavskii, ‘On the History of This Book’, p. ix.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

Art

‘Since it so happened that I was imprisoned for literature, I thought the whole time about literature and about what art is’.²⁴²

The same sense of wonder informs Siniavskii’s approach to literature and art and it is this that he passes on to his reader, paving the way by example rather than by precept or, to borrow a phrase from Helen Gardner, using ‘the torch rather than the sceptre’.²⁴³ If the reader was to be an active collaborator in the production of a literary work, then the way he apprehended literature and art in general was of vital importance.

Illumination, then, not instruction: ‘knowledge begins in wonder and wonder will find and develop its own proper discipline’.²⁴⁴ Once again, it is the circumstances of Siniavskii’s life at the time that provide a powerful stimulus towards this approach. Arising naturally from his correspondence where his writing is a gesture of anticipation and invitation, it also springs directly from his reading itself. In order to write, Siniavskii had to read and his letters reveal a staggering catalogue of what he consumed. Chance discoveries reveal astonishing possibilities as the haphazard supply of books from the prison library, supplemented by loans from fellow inmates as well as by his own purchases and subscriptions, all push him in new directions. Already unusually widely read, he devours everything that comes to hand, from art to history,

²⁴² Andrei Siniavskii, ‘Siniavskii o sebe’, in Olga Matich and Michael Heim (eds), The Third Wave. Russian Literature in Emigration, Ann Arbor MI, 1984 (hereafter, The Third Wave), pp. 107-09 (p. 108).

²⁴³ Helen Gardner, The Business of Criticism, Oxford, 1959, p. 14.

²⁴⁴ Gardner, The Business of Criticism, p. 14.

anthropology to religion, fairy tales to philosophy.²⁴⁵ His consumption is not indiscriminate; rather, like a magpie drawn to colourful objects, he lights on attractive snippets and ideas, pictures and passages, gathering them up with the enthusiasm of an avid collector.

Seen from a different perspective and in another context, everything acquires the newness of the unfamiliar. An estrangement that Siniavskii believed to be indispensable to creativity, it was a quality that he had remarked upon in Pasternak's poetry, the ability of the artist to look 'at the world anew and [understand] it as if for the first time', the ability to see 'the extraordinary and fantastic quality in everyday things'.²⁴⁶ Rather than looking to theoretical justification for this, although he was well acquainted with the work of the Russian Formalists, Siniavskii prefers here the imaginative examples of Swift and Defoe. This is not simply a question of by-passing the censors but reflects his natural inclination to avoid dry theorising in literary matters in favour of entertaining demonstration. 'Swift's discovery, fundamental for art, is that there are no uninteresting objects in the world so long as there exists an artist to stare at everything with the incomprehension of a nincompoop [...] an artist cannot and must not understand anything'.²⁴⁷ This is the principle Siniavskii would apply to his reading of the classics in his fantastic literary criticism.

Humour also comes into play in dislodging the accustomed perception of things but in a gentler form than in the early stories. In the letters and Golos iz

²⁴⁵ He had, for example, asked for a subscription to 'Voprosy literatury' but by mistake received 'Voprosy istorii' instead. However, this proved a source of unexpected and interesting pieces of information. Siniavskii, Pis'ma, 3, p. 37.

²⁴⁶ Siniavskii, 'Poeziia Pasternaka' ,p. 24 /p.173.

²⁴⁷ Tertz, Golos iz khora, p. 452 / p. 21.

khora it is found mostly in the guise, once again, of the ordinary prisoners: their ungrammatical speech full of malapropisms and colourful expressions, their unexpected and spontaneous remarks that mix high and low, the sublime and the ridiculous. This should in no way be construed as a condescending attitude on Siniavskii's part towards his fellow inmates. On the contrary, it is an appreciative and sympathetic shorthand that conveys the breadth of human experience that Siniavskii encountered in the camps. Furthermore, in Golos iz khora the reader becomes aware of the importance of the prisoners' views as their observations are carefully selected, grouped and introduced in passages that serve as a counterpoint to the main theme, reinforcing serious ideas but in a way that diverts and stimulates the imagination. In V teni Gogolia, the point is made more forcefully. Laughter here is a central motif, as Siniavskii identifies it as the driving force of Gogol's genius, with the capacity to tear off the mask of reality that had hardened into an impenetrable crust, a subversive force capable of turning things upside down and revealing their true nature.²⁴⁸

At the same time, in Siniavskii's writing there is a feeling of delighted recognition of things as yet consciously unknown but whose discovery, stumbled upon, comes as confirmation of something realised intuitively.²⁴⁹ His belief in art as an irrational force, as a kind of alchemy, re-unites him with Rozanov, as Siniavskii comes close to experiencing the creative state that he

²⁴⁸ This is close to the idea of carnival which is so prominent in the work of Bakhtin and the aspects of laughter explored in his book on Rabelais. See, Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, trans. Hélène Iswolsky, Bloomington IN, 1984. As mentioned above, however, Siniavskii denied any influence.

²⁴⁹ See, for example, Tertz, Golos iz khora, p. 576 / p. 196 : '...At last I have grasped why Lorelei combs her hair: because hair is identified with waves. Women – yarn – water: these form an entity of which the unifying element [...] is hair. As witness the Armenian spell to make a girl's hair grow: it is pronounced by a stout woman who parts the hair and says: "May this hair be as broad as I am, and as long as flowing water"'.

would describe in Rozanov as a kind of enchantment [zacharovennost' or zavorozhennost']. Under its spell Rozanov would withdraw from surrounding reality and start to live 'wholly within himself'. The outside world, though excluded, lives a new life within him as he is transformed into a 'microcosm, a model of the world'.²⁵⁰ For Siniavskii the ability to dream, to be wholly absorbed in the world of his imagination, becomes an escape from the reality of the camps but also, as for Rozanov, a creative move.

To this 'enchantment' Siniavskii also brings the freshness of a child's vision. Childhood is a strong underlying motif of his writing at this period as, thrown back on his own inner resources, he often draws on childhood memories, re-reading books such as Treasure Island and A.K.Tolstoi's Kniaz' serebrianyi; but he also reads vicariously, anticipating the pleasure of his young son, Egor, whose progress he can follow only at a distance.²⁵¹ In such books all the senses are engaged, the words have weight, sound and even fragrance, but it is above all their visual impact that draws him, as he remembers the large letters and the colourful scenes that pop up, as if by magic, from between their drab grey covers.²⁵²

Playing on the proximity of illustration and illumination, children's books and the work of mediaeval scribes, Siniavskii reminds the reader that art's primary function is to delight and entertain – this is what distinguished the

²⁵⁰ Siniavskii, 'Opavshie list'ia', pp.202-05.

²⁵¹ Egor's view of things and his manner of expressing himself (he was under a year old when Siniavskii was arrested) is a source of amusement and delight; it has the same unexpectedness that Siniavskii finds in the opinions and observations of the prisoners, jolting him out of a familiar way of thinking. See, for example, Tertz, Golos iz khora, p. 649 / p. 298. Siniavskii, Pis'ma, 2, pp.72 and 459.

²⁵² See, Tertz, Golos iz khora, p. 447 / p. 15.

earlier, inspired Gogol, full of laughter and magic, from Gogol the ‘civil servant’ and preacher. Lessons, if there are any, come through suggestion and demonstration, by diverting and stimulating the reader. Letters spring to life on the page, transforming themselves into exotic creatures and foliage so that the reader is not forced into communion with the text but is beguiled, his ‘heart misses a beat at the very sight of them’, as they entice him to ‘delve deeper [...] launching him on an expedition into a wonderland of letters’, an idea that is central to Koshkin dom.²⁵³

This last, posthumously published work by Tertz owes much to fairy tales, as does the scholarly Ivan-durak, penned under the name of Siniavskii at more or less the same time. Although these are works that, properly speaking, belong to the next phase of his life, their genesis, particularly that of Ivan-durak, may be traced to Siniavskii’s time in the camps.²⁵⁴ He also read there instalments of Master i Margarita (The Master and Margarita, 1966-67) sent to him by the Men’shutins when it first appeared in print in Russia.²⁵⁵ He is guarded in his comments about it at first but its influence as a modern-day fairy tale and multi-

²⁵³ Tertz, Golos iz khora, p. 449 / p. 17. In every case, where Egor is concerned, it is instructive – and amusing – to read Siniavskii’s opinions about his upbringing which say as much about Siniavskii’s views about art as anything else, favouring above all whatever is fun and stimulates the imagination. For example, he rejects chess out of hand as ‘that most boring of games’ (too rational, too intellectual ?) suggesting instead tiddly-winks because it is more entertaining and colourful. Or, again ‘something like lotto – but with an entertaining route, like a fly who suddenly falls into the jam and leaves a whole lot of footprints [...]. But chess – it’s too dry...’. Siniavskii, Pis’ma, 3, pp. 335 and 345.

²⁵⁴ While he was in the camps, as well as the books on Pushkin and Gogol, Siniavskii was collecting material for an article entitled Zemlia i nebo v iskusstve Drevnei Rusi, which had been started before his imprisonment and was largely inspired by the trips to the North. The article was never finished but material from it would be included in Ivan-durak. See, Siniavskii, Pis’ma 1, pp. 131 and 138.

²⁵⁵ Siniavskii, Pis’ma, 1, p. 243 and 264. Bulgakov’s novel first appeared in 1966-67 in the November and January issues of the journal Moskva. Siniavskii’s first reference to it is in a letter dated 3 February, 1967. The Men’shutins were evidently anxious to have his reactions but he says he wants to ‘wait until the novel appears in its entirety’. Just a little while later, however (letter of 19 March, 1967) and he is becoming more enthusiastic: ‘for all its surprises, is very much in the spirit of its time and has a parallel in Eisenstein’s “Ivan Grozny”’.

layered allegory of [Stalin's] Russia would be felt both in Koshkin dom and Spokoinoi nochi.

Siniavskii's interest in fairy tales dates from much earlier (as is evident from Tertz's 'Kvartiranty', the most light-hearted and amusing of his Fantasticheskie povesti), but in the camps they develop into a veritable passion as he reads fairy tales from all over the world, from Ireland to Oceania, South America and India as well as Russia.²⁵⁶ Like the anecdote, the fairy tale represents for Siniavskii an ideal form of pure art.²⁵⁷ It is similarly modest in its terms of reference, being 'unacquainted with scholarly terminology' and its natural setting is domestic and intimate, focussed on hearth and home and the oral transmission of stories that is likened to spinning and weaving – an idea similar to the 'reeling out' of anecdotes.²⁵⁸

The significance of the fairy tale is deeper and more extensive, however. Through it Siniavskii returns to what he sees as the birth of art, to ancient times when 'the world was [...] sufficiently metamorphic to keep turning on its side, changing one thing into another and prodding language to bring forth allegorical riddles'.²⁵⁹ This is art that not only distracts and diverts but induces wonder in a very real sense, as it has the magic power to transform and create like some kind of primordial energy lodged in earth, which then acquired overtones of the miraculous in the overlap of paganism and Christianity.

²⁵⁶ Tertz, Golos iz khora, p. 576 / p. 195. See, Glad, 'Andrei Siniavsky and Maria Rozanova', p. 156.

²⁵⁷ Siniavskii views the fairy tale as 'perhaps the very first instance of art detaching itself from real life'.

Tertz, Golos iz khora, p. 487/ p.68.

²⁵⁸ Siniavskii, Pis'ma, 3, p. 176.

²⁵⁹ Tertz, Golos iz khora, p. 580 / p. 200.

This was the source of Gogol's art before he was overtaken by his messianic zeal to reform society and his ability to laugh dried up. 'Gogol's laughter [...] is close to sorcery – it both transforms reality and bewitches the beholder'.²⁶⁰ Gogol the clown and 'comic' is synonymous for Siniavskii with Gogol the sorcerer and it is on this axis that V teni Gogolia turns with 'Revizor' at its centre, as the high point of Gogol's art. Created out of nothing, out of an anecdote, out of deception, 'Revizor' is built on laughter; laughter that upsets the equilibrium of the everyday, breaks rules and strays into the realms of the forbidden, but laughter that is also an expression of love for the characters he creates and which therefore come alive under his spell.²⁶¹

Siniavskii uses the fairy tale to take on the age-old Russian debate about art and usefulness, art and morality. Beauty as an end in itself, the essence of the fairy tale, becomes a metaphor for pure art but art, as Siniavskii shows, that is not devoid of morality and whose morality lies precisely in its aesthetic charge. In the fairy tale beauty represents 'power, goodness and nobility' so that 'justice, religion, morality and economics are brought together and transformed by aesthetics'.²⁶² More than that, the nature of the fairy tale, 'close to the enchantment of creation', shows how the bewitching effect of beauty on the beholder, causing him literally to 'lose reason and memory' is similar to religious ecstasy, in other words to the dissolution of the self in the contemplation of the beautiful object.

²⁶⁰ Tertz, V teni Gogolia, p. 129.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 128-29.

²⁶² Siniavskii, Pis'ma, 3, pp. 175-76.

This is akin to the effect of laughter described in V teni Gogolia, laughter that is synonymous with love, drawing the individual out of himself into a state of self-transcendence. Transported onto a higher plane, the individual loses himself in a state that Siniavskii associates with an act of self-sacrifice, drawing a parallel with ancient cults in which the willing victim, ‘laughs as he parts with life, in his laughter soaring upward and identifying with his god’. This has come down to modern times in a metaphorical sense in art, ‘art in its most elevated and ethical sense’.²⁶³

Translating the act of creation into the world of the fairy tale and laughter so that the bounds between magic and miracle become blurred, serves the same purpose as Siniavskii’s aphoristic expression of his faith in Mysli vrasplokh, guarding against the risk of falling into portentousness but also into too narrow and doctrinaire a correspondence between art and religious belief.²⁶⁴ It enables him to go beyond self-effacement as the artistic interpretation of a purely Christian notion of self-sacrifice, to a more universal conception of it: ‘Any religion, on this point, will hold out its hand to the fairy tale and mysticism will speak in the language of love and poetry: “There is no I – you are I”’.²⁶⁵

²⁶³ Tertz, V teni Gogolia, pp. 167-68. As he goes on to say, happily the artist can now sit comfortably in his study and relinquish his life metaphorically so that ‘offering himself up as a sacrifice he does not lose the hope that he will live and enjoy life a good while longer and only his grateful descendants will understand and value his creative sufferings as the greatest act of holy self-sacrifice’.

²⁶⁴ When asked in emigration by John Glad why his ‘religious views play such a modest role’ in his writing, Siniavskii replied: ‘Well, I don’t consider myself a religious writer [...] I think that one’s religious views are mostly a private, personal matter.’ Glad, ‘Andrei Siniavsky and Maria Rozanova’, p. 158. Siniavskii is speaking here in the context of émigré literary politics and, to a large extent, the difference of opinion between himself and Solzhenitsyn lies behind his comment. Nevertheless it does hold good as a general statement about his writing and the way his religious views are suggested rather than presented explicitly to the reader.

²⁶⁵ Siniavskii, Pis'ma, 3, p. 177.

He thus comes back full circle to the idea of the creative process as an act of love, of willing self-surrender, whether to the reader, his subject or the text, and the 'little golden fish' pulled up out the sea of silence.

Transfiguration and Resurrection

'Art is not the representation but the transfiguration of life'.²⁶⁶ Creation as both divine and enchanted re-endows the word with its magical power, lost to Soviet usage and lost, too, to Gogol in his final years. All that is left as a faint afterglow of this power, in the words of Liubimov's Proferansov, are 'outmoded metaphors'. Metaphors betray their origin in metamorphosis through their magical and playful ability to transform one thing into another, to demonstrate the reversibility of all things, once again revealing their kinship with miracles and laughter.²⁶⁷ They are outmoded in a State that accepts realism as the highest (and only) art form, and which is able to recognise only a one-dimensional, literal meaning of words. The inability (or unwillingness) of the Soviet system to accept anything other than the literal meaning of words lay at the root of its quarrel with Siniavskii and this fundamental problem of communication would characterise the dealings between Siniavskii and his prosecutors during his trial. He was to fall foul of this same failure of communication in the outraged reaction of certain readers to Progulki s Pushkinym. In the fairy tale, however, metaphors are essential as the threads that bind it together and propel it along.

²⁶⁶ Tertz, Golos iz khora, p. 587 / p. 210.

²⁶⁷ Tertz, V teni Gogolia, pp.127-29.

They are also the mainstay of Siniavskii's writing, the word-image that not only suggests rather than dictates but affirms the interconnectedness of all things, as he had noted in Pasternak's poetry.²⁶⁸

Siniavskii's renewed capacity to marvel at the world heightens his awareness of this interconnectedness and of the universal and lasting function of art in making these connections manifest. In his reading, each new subject, while fascinating in itself, is never viewed in isolation but in relation to everything else. Enthralled by the possibilities, Siniavskii's imagination blossoms, transforming the random objects of his reading into a coherent pattern that speaks of culture not as something fragmented and compartmentalised either temporally or geographically, as in the Soviet system, with its selective memory about its cultural heritage, but as an organic and miraculous whole.²⁶⁹

This is the essence of Siniavskii's art of these years, its free spirit, the structure of his works that is not a structure and has no obvious goal, but is a constantly self-renewing web of associations. Comparing the letters with the books, and in particular Progulki s Pushkinym, it is astounding to see how it was already complete in the letters, requiring nothing more than Mariia Vasilievna's

²⁶⁸ Siniavskii, 'Poeziia Pasternaka', p. 17 / p. 164.

²⁶⁹ Here, too, Siniavskii shows a kinship with Rozanov whose view of culture, though highly eccentric not to say extreme at times, was universal, and who lived, according to Siniavskii, not in the present, but in 'millennia'. Siniavskii, 'Opavshie list'ia', p. 98. He makes similar observations about Mandel'stam in Golos iz khora, p. 174-5/ p. 561 and p. 647/ p. 295-6. Vladimir Nabokov, writing about his experience grounded in a pre-Soviet Russian childhood, spells out the difference: 'The Russian reader in old cultured Russia was certainly proud of Pushkin and of Gogol, but he was just as proud of Shakespeare or Dante, of Baudelaire or of Edgar Allan Poe, of Flaubert or of Homer, and this was the Russian reader's strength. I have a certain personal interest in the question, for if my fathers had not been good readers, I would hardly be here today, speaking of these matters and in this tongue'. Vladimir Nabokov, Lectures on Russian Literature, London, 1982, p. 11.

sensitive eye to piece it together.²⁷⁰ To sustain a narrative with not only assurance but with such verve and conviction, to hold in the memory the intricate parts of this narrative so that they could be fitted seamlessly together, was made possible by Siniavskii's ability to make these connections, to throw bridges constructed of themes and metaphors, echoes and associations, from idea to idea.

This principle is present at its most fundamental level in language. As against the Soviet exploitation of language, emptying it of meaning and turning it into a weapon so that words are reduced to an ugly 'clash of sounds', words are not uttered so much as knitted together, weaving themselves into a piece of tapestry or embroidery in an ageless ritual that brooks no interruption and into which the writer is drawn willy-nilly.²⁷¹ In this Siniavskii owes a debt to Gogol and his 'baroque' style as well as to Mariia Vasilievna who, as an artist and art historian, greatly influenced his knowledge and love of the visual arts.²⁷²

A notable illustration of this process is found in a passage on Irish mythology, describing the hand-to-hand combat of two legendary heroes, Cuchulainn and Fer Diad. Siniavskii is struck by the remarkable texture of the writing and, as he starts to comment on it, his own prose acquires a similar density and richness as he marvels at the detail that grows naturally from the intertwined limbs and bodies of the two warriors, their interlocking shapes

²⁷⁰ Another reason for her decision to publish the letters may have been just that: to refute later attacks on Siniavskii in which his detractors claimed he could never have written the book in prison or, if he did do so, then it had been by arrangement with the KGB who supplied him with all the necessary materials.

²⁷¹ Siniavskii, *Ivan-durak*, p. 99: 'in it [the fairy-tale – E.M.] lives the very idea of a canvas, of linking, of a spun yarn, even at the expense of loss of sense. That is why it is able swiftly to regenerate the fabric, even if this sometimes leads to the appearance of monstrous excrescences in the text. But one remains struck by the impeccable correctness of the overall design, which seems to be programmed into its genes'.

²⁷² See, Glad, 'Andrei Siniavsky and Maria Rozanova', pp. 159-60.

transformed into an extraordinary ornamental feat. From verbal to visual, the pattern is then made more concrete and domestic with his observation that ‘the compactness is such that the overall image could easily be stamped on a buckle or a ginger biscuit and brings to mind the interlacing patterns of Viking ornaments’, before returning it to its literary origins as ‘a type of design in which the letters of the Russian alphabet were later to become enmeshed’.²⁷³

The wider cultural implications of what he is describing flow organically from these seemingly whimsical observations. Writing of the ‘miraculous distortion of the hero in his frenzy, [...] transfigured at the peak of battle’, making the grotesque ‘entirely compatible with the beautiful’, he comes to what he sees as the pagan origins of Romantic art.²⁷⁴ Using this idea as a springboard, he makes an imaginative leap to the gargoyles of Notre Dame and the art of the Middle Ages, which in turn, ‘passed naturally from depicting the frenzy of battle to the recreation of spiritual rapture and divine transfiguration’.²⁷⁵

Nothing is lost, as Siniavskii reiterates in V teni Gogolia, where the archaeological strata first used in Liubimov replace weaving and sewing as metaphors for the continuity of the past, its legacy alive in the present.²⁷⁶ If art is the subject of his writing at this time, then its theme is the affirmation of life in the face of death: art may be ‘a kind of luxury, ornament, plaything or keepsake,

²⁷³ Tertz, Golos iz khora, p. 581 / p. 203.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 580-84 / pp. 201-06.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 582-84 / pp. 203-06.

²⁷⁶ Tertz, V teni Gogolia, p. 395.

a mere bauble. But it is only this “surplus” that gives any permanency to our existence’.²⁷⁷

Golos iz khora distils the idea of culture as a whole, of art as the intimation of life in the face of death, into an intricate but lightly executed composition, celebrating it as a series of constantly inventive variations on a theme that rises to a muted but none the less powerful crescendo in the penultimate chapter. Nature provides its backdrop and anchor, the seasons following one another from winter through to spring and early summer, the real time of Siniavskii’s last year in the camps that is at once the time-honoured metaphor for the cycle of death and re-birth. Into this picture, he introduces passages about literature and painting, Easter and the Resurrection. The seemingly disparate subjects (a Chechen saint, a fourteenth century Japanese poet and essayist, a twentieth century Russian artist, but also Shakespeare, and through him Pasternak) are intertwined to demonstrate subtly but unmistakably the universality of the theme and its lasting significance.

From the obvious parallel between the rhythmical changing of the seasons and the human lot, Siniavskii proceeds to an analogy with art, via the link of religious Feast Days, that are not tied to historical time but ordered by this same organic cycle. Referring to the essays of Yoshida Kenko, more akin to painting in their ability to conjure up timeless pictures, he notes that ‘the true art of painting [lies] in these infinitely perpetuated gestures that last for all eternity,’ returning through Feast Days to St George and echoes of Pasternak’s ‘Skazka’

²⁷⁷ Tertz, Golos iz khora, p. 461 / p.34. For a longer explanation of the equation of beauty and reality, see Siniavskii, Pis'ma, 2, pp. 72-73.

from the Zhivago poems as, 'Each time anew St George slays the dragon. Each time anew.'²⁷⁸

Siniavskii's emphasis in these passages is not only on images rather than words but on sketches rather than the finished work. While affirming art's ability to transcend mundane reality, to deal with what is timeless, he shows that it can never have – and should never attempt to have – the final word. The work of the Russian painter Chekrygin serves as example.²⁷⁹ His early death means that his paintings of the Resurrection remain only in the form of sketches:

Chekrygin's death was not so much timely as providential: it preserved his work for ever in the form of preliminary sketches, before he had overstepped their limits, thus allowing him to show that this beginning, so abruptly brought to an end, was in fact the truest and closest possible approach to his subject. It was as though he understood that painting itself is nothing but a study in Resurrection and this is precisely what he left us: a study.²⁸⁰

Whether a sketch, silence or the blank canvas, the space for the reader or beholder is left open as the author retreats from what is beyond words.

If art offers hope in the face of death in its promise of renewal, it also provides a refuge, not only preserving the past as a dynamic part of the present,

²⁷⁸ Tertz, *Golos iz khora.*, pp. 657-58 / 309-11.

²⁷⁹ Vasilii Nikolaevich Chekrygin, 1897-1922. Chekrygin was a painter and draughtsman who first studied icon painting in Kiev. He then went on to Moscow, to the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. Influenced first by Isaak Levitan, a member of the Peredvizhniki group, he became a friend of Maiakovskii and some of his paintings show the influence of the Futurists.

²⁸⁰ Tertz, *Golos iz khora.*, p. 660 / pp. 313-14.

but also helping to make sense of a chaotic and alien world. This idea is present in the letters; evidence of the extent to which Siniavskii was absorbed in art, they show how it provided distraction, stimulation but also consolation. Art thus acquires a dimension and significance that, for all his love of it, had necessarily been absent in his work when he was a free man. His correspondence with Mariia Vasilievna becomes a shared haven, as he writes, ‘I live beneath the wing of your recent letters [...] It feels very cosy and that is rare’.²⁸¹

Isolated in the camps Siniavskii’s thoughts turn naturally to family and home. Playing on the application of the Russian word dom to home and museum, Siniavskii brings together notions of safety and belonging that are vested in the home and shows how, for him, they are equally valid when applied to art.²⁸² The blurring of bounds between the two is illustrated by the very real proximity of the Siniavskii apartment and the Museum of Decorative Arts, ‘that was thus part of my childhood’ and to which he would slip off, away from the bustle of busy Moscow streets, as if entering a different, enchanted world.²⁸³

The idea of art as habitable space is widened out through a series of interrelated images and analogies.²⁸⁴ The tantalising effect of the lighted

²⁸¹ Siniavskii, Pis'ma, 3, p. 306.

²⁸² Given that Golos iz khora carries an echo of Blok’s poem of the same name, it is likely that Siniavskii’s ideas of art as home and refuge were influenced by Blok’s poem, ‘Pushkinskomu domu’.

²⁸³ Tertz, Golos iz khora, p.596 / p. 225. Though not blind to the deadening effects of museums on culture – he says so directly and through his presentation of Pushkin – Siniavskii’s use of the word dom centres on entirely positive images. An obvious comparison would be with Bitov’s Pushkinskii dom (Pushkin House, 1978). As Stephanie Sandler has pointed out, though, Bitov’s attitude to the overlap of home and museum is ambivalent. Bitov, ‘never idealizes home or hearth’ and ‘Home in Bitov’s fiction is a complex and divided space, only a partial refuge from the outside world’. Stephanie Sandler, Commemorating Pushkin. Russia’s myth of a National Poet (hereafter, Commemorating Pushkin), Stanford CA, 2004, pp. 295-97.

²⁸⁴ Siniavskii’s ideas about books as habitable space found an echo in the work of Vladimir Andreevich Favorskii (1886-1964). An engraver, draughtsman and theorist his commitment to technical skill and precision was matched by a lack of dogmatism and a tolerance of experimentation of all kinds. In many respects, therefore, he was a kindred spirit for Siniavskii. See, Siniavskii, Pis'ma, 2, pp. 505-08 and 518-20.

windows of Moscow apartments, viewed from the street by Siniavskii as a child on cold winters' evenings, is transferred to books, so that 'they resemble windows when the lights come on in the evening and begin to glow in the surrounding darkness, forming golden pictures [...], and creating the impression of a cosy existence known only to those who dwell within, a secret life invisible to the outside world'.²⁸⁵ Books in which you can live and roam freely provide a natural link to architecture, as Siniavskii ponders on the difference between Russian and Western religious architecture, observing that the Russian preoccupation with outer form rather than inner space might well be because of the 'special place accorded in our national religious outlook to the Virgin's Cloak of Protection' [pokrov]. 'Inside it we find not infinity of space, not the Cosmos, not the harmony of the spheres, but above all – warmth, protection, cosiness'.²⁸⁶ The longing for cosiness thus becomes not merely a personal but a national feature, a need that has somehow been lost in the nightmare world of socialism which, in its attempts to impose communal living, represents a grotesque travesty of the Russian ideal of sobornost', embodied in the Holy Family and the Church as refuge.

If the national (religious) need for protection was embodied in the Virgin's cloak, the national sense of identity is expressed in cultural terms. The Soviet era, repudiating much of Russia's cultural heritage, had left it with a sense of 'homelessness' [bespriutnost'].²⁸⁷ Returning to the idea of cosiness, refuge and

²⁸⁵ Tertz, Golos iz khora, pp. 448-49 / p. 17.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.606 / p. 238.

²⁸⁷ Tertz, 'Otechestvo. Blatnaia pesnia...', p. 73.

books as living space the Virgin's cloak is transmuted naturally into Gogol's overcoat as Siniavskii makes clear in the camps that literature is his home.

Fantastic Literary Criticism

'In general the fate of the writer is my main theme, whether I am writing about myself or Pushkin or Gogol. It's all the same'.²⁸⁸

Art as a metaphor for resurrection, literature as home: both are combined in Siniavskii's major creative achievement of his time in the camps, fantastic literary criticism. Developing ideas first expressed in 'Gololeditsa' and which reflect the thinking of Nikolai Fedorov, Siniavskii makes literary criticism an act of love and memory in which he brings back to life those who are dead, neglected or otherwise distanced from the reader. As he would write to Mariia Vasilievna from the camps: 'What I mostly feel in me is not myself but my father and mother, you, Egor, Pushkin and Gogol. A whole crowd. They colour our perception of reality, share our destiny and go with us wherever we are taken and we remember them [...] constantly'.²⁸⁹

Consoling though this notion is, it is none the less polemical. Condemned as a writer, Siniavskii resurrects himself, returning to his roots as a literary critic; but a literary critic transformed through the fantastic pen of the writer Tertz, continuing to voice his belief in the freedom of art and the artist. Progulki s

²⁸⁸ Nepomnyashchy, 'Interview', p. 10.

²⁸⁹ Siniavskii, Pis'ma, 3, p. 163.

Pushkinym and V teni Gogolia both turn on the writer's liberation from the fatal constraints of duty, social or political, and his reinstatement as an artist and sorcerer of the modern age.

Siniavskii's works on Pushkin and Gogol, while breathing new life into the two authors, are also the gateway to a more complex exploration of the role and identity of the writer. Siniavskii weaves an intricate web in which the voices of the classics are intermingled with their modern heirs and a bridge established between Russian literature past and present. Siniavskii's own identity and life as a writer is skilfully incorporated into the text in such a way that it does not dominate or detract from his appreciation of his subject but, on the contrary, enriches it through adding a further dimension.

'A novel about nothing', a novel that barely holds together, 'which leads to absolutely nothing and by a nonentity elevated to the status of hero [...] the author loses the threads of his narration, wanders off, marks time, beats around the bush and sits it out in the underbrush, in the background of his own story'.²⁹⁰ Siniavskii about Pushkin or Siniavskii about himself? This is Tertz on Evgenii Onegin but it could equally be about himself and his own methods of literary criticism or, rather, anti-literary criticism. An extraordinary feat of creative evaluation it constantly negates itself, negating accepted notions of what criticism, the critic and, indeed, the writer, should be. Siniavskii might attain a measure of serenity in prison but Tertz's writing loses none of its edginess.

²⁹⁰ Tertz, Progulki s Pushkinym, p. 81 /p. 92.

Progulki s Pushkinym is a deceptively unassuming book. The title sets a nonchalant, carefree tone, yet not only did it perform the extraordinary feat of escaping the clutches of the Soviet authorities, concealed within its covers is a set of ideas explosive enough to rock the Russian literary world – in emigration where the book was first published in 1975 and later in the Soviet Union.²⁹¹ Written in defence of pure art, it carries its own agenda as aimlessness becomes its own end. Siniavskii himself is the other agenda. Siniavskii the literary critic, condemned for his imaginative writing as Tertz, vindicates himself by providing a dazzling interpretation of Pushkin which itself is a virtuoso realisation of his own artistic credo. Therein lay a danger: such a work might be more revealing about its author than about Pushkin himself. As T.S. Eliot put it: ‘The real corrupters are those who supply opinion or fancy [...] – for what is Coleridge’s *Hamlet*: is it an honest inquiry as far as the data permit, or is it an attempt to present Coleridge in an attractive costume?’ – a pertinent question, given Siniavskii’s propensity for disguise and camouflage.²⁹²

Siniavskii avoids this pitfall as the agenda that is Siniavskii-Tertz is contained within his art, becoming the very fabric of his style, a style that neither pronounces on Pushkin, nor mimics him, but evokes him and enters into dialogue with him. The key to this approach is found in the title; not only in the idea of strolling, but in the superficially trivial preposition ‘with’. Siniavskii uses

²⁹¹ An extract from Progulki s Pushkinym first appeared in 1989, in the April issue of Oktiabr.

²⁹² T.S. Eliot, ‘The Function of Criticism’ in Eliot, Selected Essays, London, 1999, pp. 23-34 (p.33). This was a point raised in a much blunter and antagonistic way by Solzhenitsyn, when differences between him and Siniavskii led to a war of words in the émigré press: ‘Pushkin for him is not so much a subject as a means of self-promotion [samopokaz]’. A. Solzhenitsyn, ‘...Koleblet tvoi trenochnik’ (hereafter, ‘...Koleblet’), Vestnik russkogo khristianskogo dvizheniia (hereafter, VRKhD), 3, 1984, 142 pp. 133-52 (p. 140).

neither the looser, more neutral ‘and’, nor the proprietorial ‘my’, nor the more obvious, authoritative ‘on’, which defines the writer as critic.²⁹³ Siniavskii’s ‘with’ proposes a companionable intimacy, harking back to the stylistic principle of associative links and the genesis of the book as both intimate communication and creative collaboration between husband and wife, writer and reader, critic and writer.

Similarly, V teni Gogolia indicates a relationship where the critic does not stand over his subject and pontificate but where one writer acknowledges his debt to the work of the other, his literary lineage at the same time introducing the idea of literature as a gift passed on from one generation to the next – it was Pushkin who had given Gogol the idea for Revizor, the connection highlighted in the epigraph to Progulki s Pushkinym. This approach is extended to Pushkin, too, in the form of the cover illustration for the first Russian edition of Progulki s Pushkinym. Engrossed in conversation, Siniavskii and Pushkin stroll together, their two shadows merging into one.

The illustration does more than suggest a congenial companionship between critic and subject, it shows a positively unceremonious, not to say humorously disrespectful attitude both of the writer-critic towards himself and towards his interlocutor that recalls the tone of the epigraph. A caricatural sketch, it portrays

²⁹³ Pushkin, as the ‘sun’ of Russian literature, had attracted many such attempts to appropriate him. Siniavskii was later to accuse Solzhenitsyn of this (after the latter’s attack on Progulki s Pushkinym): ‘Who gave you the power to appropriate Pushkin, to usurp Russia? [And] religion, morality, art? Exclusively for yourself and those who think like you’. A Siniavskii, ‘Chtenie v serdtsakh’, Sintaksis, 17, 1987, pp. 191-205 (p. 205). Translation from Catherine Theimer Nepomnyashchy, ‘Notes on the Context of Siniavskii’s Reception in Gorbachev’s Russia’ (hereafter, ‘Siniavskii’s Reception in Gorbachev’s Russia’), Russian Studies in Literature, 28, 1991-92, 1, pp. 3-11 (p. 6). On the relationship of writer to critic see Robin Aizlewood and Faith Wigzell, ‘Writers on Writers’: Introductory Essay (hereafter ‘Writers on Writers’) in Wigzell (ed.), Russian Writers on Russian Writers, Oxford and Providence RI, 1994, pp. ix-xvii.

an aged Siniavskii, pointedly dressed in his prison garb, alongside Pushkin as a sprightly dandy. This was to take unheard of liberties with received notions of the role and identity of critic and writer, author and subject.

An attitude of deliberate provocation, it was what Siniavskii termed his 'zanizhennaia pozitsia'. This is different to the self-effacement of Pasternak with its overtones of Christian self-sacrifice and closer to the shock tactics of Rozanov that had more in common with the self-debasing comportment of a holy fool. In Siniavskii's interpretation, the holy fool shares characteristics not only with the more passive Ivan-durak of fairy tales who entrusts himself to fate, but also with the clown and buffoon; he is therefore close to the side of Tertz that courts controversy to a creative end.²⁹⁴ Rozanov had used his self-deflating style as a polemic against the canons of good taste, channelling it, like Siniavskii, through an alter ego (V.V. Rozanov). As in Siniavskii's writing, the author's intention was masked by a studied nonchalance and inconsequentiality while he also subverted the whole notion of literature as a finite and formal enterprise with his loosely constructed text, his thoughts rambling from subject to subject.

Siniavskii's self-deflation and deliberate undermining of his authorial image would incense his detractors who, as he said, clung to the belief that a writer's position was 'somewhere up there, close to God'. Siniavskii's attitude would be

²⁹⁴ '[R]eligious buffoons and clowns, a variation of Ivan-durak of fairy tales on Christian soil', holy fools guarded against the very real temptation of ordinary priests to puff themselves up with pride at their own saintliness or piety, deliberately contravening 'external, generally accepted norms of behaviour'. They 'debased themselves and mocked themselves, acting like people who had lost all shame and reason. In reality, these were individuals liberated from the power of their sinful "I" and totally devoted to their faith which they hid beneath a mask of foolishness or unruly conduct. Holy Foolishness, one could say, is saintliness or righteousness in a deliberately abased form'. Siniavskii, Ivan-durak, p. 304. He also writes of the Holy Fool and his link to the 'comic' in V teni Gogolia (p. 106).

taken by them, by extension, as a threat to this coveted position. Worse still, he applied this irreverent view of the writer to Pushkin himself, preferring to approach him ‘not through the front hall, which is crammed with wreaths and busts [...] but rather with the help of anecdotal caricatures of Pushkin that were sent back to the poet by the street’. This provocative debasement of the poetic image was as creative as his own reincarnation as Tertz; intended to free Pushkin from the accretions of dusty, petrifying scholarship that had killed off any sense of the individual genius, it also liberated Siniavskii.

The battle to free the poet is waged on every front, his official image assaulted from every angle. The assaults range from the controversial metaphor: ‘Pushkin ran into great poetry on thin, erotic legs’, to the idea that emptiness was Pushkin’s content and the notorious image of the vampire. It is a question of perspective: Pushkin is removed from his pedestal, viewed unceremoniously, horizontal and in bed. He is seen not in the public arena but in the margins of his life, at a tangent, taken apart and put together again, a blurred outline from the window of a fast-moving carriage – echoes of both Modernist and Formalist techniques – reintegrated and renewed in Siniavskii’s ‘whole’ view of Russian literature. Pushkin becomes an acrobat, ‘our Charlie Chaplin’, who jumps hurdles and does the splits, takes liberties with verse and violates literary taboos.

All this, however, originates in Pushkin himself. The new relationship proposed by fantastic literary criticism translates into the ability not to comment on or analyse Pushkin but, rather, to inhabit him, his style and his spirit, in a way that is entirely at odds with vampiric occupation as it is born of love, giving back

as much as it takes. Siniavskii is not a ‘prophet or a teacher’ but a medium through whom the spirit of Pushkin lives, while he speaks with and through Pushkin. With Pushkin, he not only strolls, he dances, he flies, and loops the loop, carrying the story along through parody and anecdote, analogies and associations, setting out wilfully to transgress the bounds of the permissible: ‘He would never have written *Evgenii Onegin* if he hadn’t known that you weren’t supposed to write like that. His prosaisms, his descriptions of everyday life, his trivialities and colloquialisms were to a large extent conceived as deliberately unacceptable devices calculated to shock the public’.²⁹⁵ Tertz about Pushkin or Siniavskii about Tertz?

Pushkin’s nonchalant disregard for the official calling of the poet – ‘Pushkin having washed his hands of the civil rights and duties of the times, went off as a poet as other people go off as tramps’ – is set against the agonised final years of Gogol, striving to do his duty as a ‘worthy civil servant’.²⁹⁶ Writing about Gogol was apparently harder for Siniavskii as he knew him better and felt closer to him. The questions associated with Gogol were also harder. Siniavskii embarked on V teni Gogolia, in the final phase of his imprisonment when the question of his own survival as a writer in the world outside was beginning to impinge with increasing insistence.

Unlike Pushkin, cast as a vampire, Gogol devoured himself or, rather, allowed his creations (Siniavskii has in mind the characters of Mertvye dushi) to feed off of him, sucking him dry. Who feeds on whom? The position of both

²⁹⁵ Tertz, Progulki s Pushkinym, p. 88 / p. 96.

²⁹⁶ Siniavskii, Pis'ma, 2, p.427. Tertz, V teni Gogolia, p. 28. Siniavskii is quoting from ‘Revizor’.

writer and critic is evoked graphically in the image of the vampire that haunts Siniavskii even as he provides the solution through his fantastic literary criticism.

While Progulki s Pushkinym is all lightness and air, Pushkin's own restless mobility setting the pace of the work, V teni Gogolia is more a matter of geological exploration, mirroring Siniavskii's view of books as habitable space and culture as archaeological strata but also reflecting the essence of Gogol's prose. It is a journey into the depths, into the hidden recesses of Gogol's inward-looking creative being at its most labyrinthine. Picking up the theme of Golos iz khora, it is above all about the triumph of life over death so that Siniavskii treads a path redolent of literary, Christian and mythological associations, including the descent of Dante into hell and Orpheus into the underworld, to the primordial origins of Gogol's art before its energy was sapped by his sense of his writer's mission.

Resurrecting him through his prose, Siniavskii retraces Gogol's path backwards, to the sources of his art in magic and the elemental force of language. Working on the same principle as in Progulki s Pushkinym, he responds to rather than comments on Gogol's writing, led by association and analogy, this time not describing circles and loops in whimsical flourishes but conjuring up a dense, lush linguistic landscape. From the idea of Gogol's interest in architecture and his 'overabundant' prose, via the stylistic link of the Baroque, Siniavskii loses himself in a verbal tour de force of his own, while

entering into the spirit of Gogol's writing in an unstoppable torrent that embraces art and literature, geography and architecture:

Such is one of Gogol's architectural plans, one of the expressions of his constructive principle which is always felt in the disproportion and over-abundance of his style. But in principle is his sentence not also like a wild, tropical forest, like Derzhavin's 'Waterfall', like the volcanic eruption of style (that so took his fancy in Briullov's 'Last Days of Pompei'), his sentence studded with balconies and banisters of subordinate and parenthetical shoots, that continually digress from the main stem, splitting up, looking at us through a grille of impenetrable brooklets, flourishes, pendants, grace-notes, his style at once unwieldy and inspired, disproportionately spreading, sparkling with sharp twists and turns, holding the whole world in the air, on outstretched hands only for it to collapse there and then in a stupendous avalanche, in a cascade, in a chaos of speech, scattering its ubiquitous tendrils, its innumerable, remarkable buds and bourgeons.²⁹⁷

A feat of imagination in its own right, Siniavskii's prose exposes how the realism attributed to Gogol's art is nothing but deception and illusion, like a bubble that will burst at the prick of a pin: pure art, not just aimless but contentless. Yet in this very illusoriness lies its strength, evoking wonder and amazement as a vista is conjured up out of nothing through the power of words alone.

²⁹⁷ Tertz, *V teni Gogolia*, pp. 346-47. Siniavskii similarly exposes the illusoriness of Pushkin's 'realism'. Tertz, *Progulki s Pushkinym*, pp. 80-85 / pp. 91-94

The 'emptiness that was Pushkin's content' in Gogol's writing becomes a magical force invested with the alchemy of potential, returning by another route to the idea of the unfinished sketch in Golos iz khora, and beyond it to the blank sheet of paper.²⁹⁸ Gogol's prose at the end of volume one of Mertvye dushi, according to Siniavskii, arrives at a 'senseless outpouring of words', bordering on mockery of the reader and the very task of literary story-telling: 'How much is said and how little is said'.²⁹⁹ But only 'by equating the content of his poema to zero', was Gogol able to attain such powerful and pure sounding prose that creates feeling of an epic, of a poema.³⁰⁰

The artist as Impostor

Siniavskii rescues Pushkin from the taint of the vampire and Gogol from the creative dead-end of the 'civil servant' through the figure of the impostor. A character defined by his potential for self-reinvention, the impostor also provides the prototype for the artist-critic whose work is not an act of violation, the forcible occupation by the author of his subject but, going beyond sympathetic identification with him, opens the way to resurrection.

Gogol, through his association with his alter ego the arch-impostor Chichikov, is able to achieve the podvig he so ardently desires. What is denied to him through preaching he achieves through imagination and love, since it is

²⁹⁸ A blank sheet of paper 'wait[s] expectantly, asking to be used – much as a primed canvas yearns for the painter's brush in sweet anticipation; or as a restive steed paws the ground: when shall we go? *Terra incognita* athirst for the traveller...' Tertz, Golos iz khora, p. 644 / p. 291

²⁹⁹ Tertz, V teni Gogolia, pp. 455, 458 and 459.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 468.

at the moment of ‘highest inspiration’, ‘the only place in the poema where the voice of Gogol, merg[es] with the thoughts of Chichikov’, that Gogol achieves his miracle and the dead come to life as they are called by name.³⁰¹

Siniavskii achieves something similar through a series of transformations that spring organically from his art, from the principle of creative association mentioned earlier. Starting with the potential of a blank canvas, from the idea of the artist as no one, from Pushkin as a ‘damned incognito’, Siniavskii proceeds via the liberating principle of illegitimacy with its covert reference to himself and the pre-trial description of him in the Russian press as the heir not of Dostoevskii but of Smerdiakov.³⁰² Illegitimacy opens up the possibilities of self-creation, of an alternative lineage, of Pushkin’s negro blood ‘which took him back to the primordial sources of art, to nature and myth’ and thence, via Hannibal, Pushkin’s grandfather and Peter the Great’s godson, to Peter himself and back, via literature and ‘Mednyi vsadnik’, to Evgenii. From there, the name alone suffices as he sets Pushkin against his creation, Evgenii Onegin, as a link in the chain, only to reject him – ‘No, you can’t throw a bridge to Pushkin over Onegin, with his blurred face and gaping lack of spirituality’.³⁰³ In the matter of emptiness, it is Onegin who is the zero, the true negation, while Pushkin’s emptiness is revealed as its polar opposite: receptivity.

³⁰¹ Ibid., p. 422.

³⁰² Zoia Kedrina, ‘Nasledniki Smerdiakova’, Literaturnaia gazeta, January 22nd, 1966, pp.2, 4.

³⁰³ Tertz, Progulki s Pushkinym, p. 151 / p. 132.

Instead, Siniavskii makes an imaginative sideways pass, producing, like the proverbial rabbit out of the hat ‘– Khlestakov!’.³⁰⁴ Khlestakov is ‘nothing, nobody. But for this very reason Poprishchin’s riddle: “Perhaps I myself don’t know who I am” is applicable to him as to no one else, and for this reason he so freely and easily constructs his own personality, obeying the whims of his imagination’.³⁰⁵ From Khlestakov it is an easy skip to Pugachev, another impostor, and related to Pushkin through literature and his association with Peter. It is Pugachev who provides the link between Pushkin and Siniavskii-Tertz: ‘Pushkin’s impostors are more than just tsars – they are artists as well [...] For impostors also create deception by instinct and inspiration; they bear within themselves and enact their human fate as if it were a work of art’.³⁰⁶

The reader is led with dizzying speed and ever increasing self-assurance along a trail of detection and adventure, of fantastic revelations and breathtaking leaps of the imagination to see how the writer is re-born through an astonishing feat of self re-invention, discovering, as he rounds the final corner, Siniavskii himself. Liberating himself from the official channels that define the calling of the writer, just as he had liberated Pushkin, he creates an alternative lineage for himself, one that depends on the imagination and on the free interrelationship of literary associations.

³⁰⁴ In V teni Gogolia, Siniavskii reinforces the link between Khlestakov and Pushkin: ‘[...]Khlestakov in his disinterested lying/nonsense corresponds parodically with the idea of pure art and limitless imagination, which was close to Gogol during the first phase of his creativity and linked for him with the figure of Pushkin, to whom Khlestakov also is irresistibly drawn’. Tertz, V teni Gogolia, p. 427.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

³⁰⁶ Tertz, Progulki s Pushkinym, p. 157 / p. 136.

With the idea of imposture associated with artistry, with the orchestration of one's own life as a work of art, Siniavskii draws in Pasternak and Maiakovskii.

Pasternak and Maiakovskii

What hero of the modern age casts such a spell over us – a spell based exclusively in the inner music of his image? Why does he exemplify in his person the first intellectual in the highest sense of the word, the true aristocrat of the spirit, and every prince who is born into an unsettled world, not to make himself king but to come out on the stage and, having fulfilled his destiny unprompted, go to his death still a prince?³⁰⁷

An extended, lyrical passage on Hamlet in the pivotal penultimate chapter of Golos iz khora, represents an unmistakable tribute to Pasternak. If the theme of Siniavskii's work as a whole at this time is the triumph of life over death, of art over non-being, then it is Pasternak who stands just out of sight as its inspiration.

There is a difference, however, between Siniavskii's evocation of Pasternak in his writing from the camps and his earlier writing about him, a change that is a direct result of his experience. Previously, his ties to Pasternak though personal and deeply felt, remained necessarily on a more formal level, both because of the prevailing political climate but also because the consequences of his own decision to be a writer had yet to be lived out in practice. With his

³⁰⁷ Tertz, Golos iz khora, pp. 645-46 / pp. 293-94.

persecution and imprisonment, sympathetic and sensitive scholarship about Pasternak is transformed into identification with Pasternak.

Doing what he was unable to do in his pre-trial introduction to Pasternak's poetry, Siniavskii takes up his interpretation of Hamlet in the Zhivago poems in which Pasternak's identity overlaps in the first person with those of Hamlet and Christ, an overlap of identities that is mirrored in Siniavskii's work. While he returns to the idea of Pasternak's self-effacement Siniavskii now emphasises it as an active response to his times. This change of emphasis is enhanced by the freedom afforded by Tertz's signature, giving a greater emotional intensity to his writing. Hamlet, echoing Pasternak's interpretation of him, is seen not as some 'weak-willed neurasthenic' but as an individual isolated in a world where the old order has collapsed and he is left to forge his own destiny, to accomplish 'a mission entrusted to him: namely, to re-discover for himself the path he was to follow and at the same time to give it new meaning by investing moral precepts with the maturity of judgment gained in the course of his lone quest'. The individual is free to choose his destiny, 'a freedom that turns into the duty to choose the best and most subtle course of action'.³⁰⁸

Siniavskii, goes further: Hamlet is not simply free to choose his path but 'learns with an artist's flair, to bend destiny to his will'. He is the impostor in another, more elevated and refined form, the 'true aristocrat of the spirit' the artist who is free of definition, receptive and open to others: 'a prince who is born into an unsettled world, not to make himself king, but to go [...] to his

³⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 644-45 / pp. 292-93.

death still a prince'.³⁰⁹ The passage ends as Hamlet steps into the spotlight in the full knowledge of his fate for which he alone accepts responsibility. It is with this same image that Siniavskii brings to a climax the penultimate section of Progulki s Pushkinym, his own voice sounding distinctly through the many-layered associations that take him via Pushkin and Pugachev to Hamlet and finally to Pasternak: ‘“The noise died down. I stepped out onto the stage...”’.³¹⁰

Yet this image of Hamlet contains echoes, too, of Maiakovskii and the idea of life lived as spectacle, a point underlined by Siniavskii as he observes that ‘Pushkin began where Maiakovskii ended’.³¹¹ The debt to Pasternak increases as it becomes apparent that Siniavskii’s identification with him on ethical and artistic grounds may be extended to the very nature and form of his fantastic

³⁰⁹ Tertz, Golos iz khora, pp. 645-46 / pp. 293-94: ‘His various aspects, alternately coalescing or diverging, weave round the figure of Hamlet in a continual flurry and thus create the impression of a multiple image existing, as it were, in many different projections – a figure enveloped in its own emanations, never assuming a final shape and character, but only hazily sketching out the future contours of an identity that cannot be imposed all at once on a soul still growing and a law yet to be established. Hamlet is so devoid of predetermined qualities, so poor and yet so rich, so changeable and so receptive that we have no idea what he will do a couple of minutes hence, and are thus obliged – as he himself is – to decide for ourselves every time how he must act if he is to perform his allotted task with the artistic grace which can flow only from a unified personality, when reason, will, talent, taste, instinct, duty and destiny are all blended into one harmonious whole.’

³¹⁰ Tertz, Progulki s Pushkinym, p. 163 / p. 140. One may refer by way of contrast, to Siniavskii’s evaluation of Evtushenko in ‘V zashchitu piramidy’. Written a little later, there are clear echoes of Progulki s Pushkinym as Evtushenko is portrayed in terms of a would-be impostor, someone who ‘generally makes no pretension of playing a royal role’ but who ‘in his modest role of “the simple fellow” [...] sometimes behaves immodestly and tactlessly and seems like an upstart who has forgotten his place’. Moreover, Evtushenko’s treatment of and relationship to his cultural heritage, is shown to be superficial. He is not responsive to the voices of others so that they speak through him, but produces a shoddy kind of short-hand reference to them that fails to bring them to life. Referring to Evtushenko’s introduction to his poem, ‘Bratsk GES’, Siniavskii writes, ‘Yevtushenko pronounces a “prayer before the poem”. In it he turns for help simultaneously to seven Russian poets: Pushkin, Lermontov, Nekrasov, Blok, Pasternak, Yesenin, and Mayakovsky, and in passing he gives them each a rapid characterization, paraphrasing in his own fashion their winged utterances – which appears for the most part as cheap cliché or in places as parody’. Siniavskii, ‘V zashchitu piramidy’, p. 118 / p.171 and p. 131/ p. 186.

³¹¹ Tertz, Progulki s Pushkinym, p. 13 / p. 53. This quotation contains no reference to Hamlet; simply, it illustrates the vital interconnectedness of Russian literature that Siniavskii constantly reinforces. For the suggested link between Hamlet and Maiakovskii, see: Gifford, Pasternak, p. 131. In Gifford’s opinion, Maiakovskii as portrayed by Pasternak in Okhrannaia gramota, ‘foreshadows Hamlet in Zhivago’s poem of the same name. But Hamlet is made to fulfil the part that had been written for him, Mayakovsky insisted on writing it himself to his own destruction.’

literary criticism. Looking beyond 'Hamlet', one can find a coincidence between Tertz's literary criticism and Pasternak's 'Okhrannaia gramota' (Safe Conduct, 1931).³¹²

One of the initial premises of this early prose work was to show 'how in life, life moved into art and why'.³¹³ Pasternak's autobiographical sketch thus becomes an aesthetic document through which he defines his identity artistically but in which he, as author, prefers to speak about himself not directly but with and through others and in particular Maiakovskii, to whom the final section is devoted. Pasternak intermingles their respective biographies in the context of his ideas about art, to the extent that the identities of the author and his 'hero' are consistently and deliberately confused, at a crucial moment also bringing in Pushkin.³¹⁴ In turning to Pasternak and Maiakovskii, therefore, it could be argued that Siniavskii is doing no more than continue a dialogue already established between them but this time with himself as intermediary.

Life lived as spectacle versus life lived: the distinction becomes blurred when 'an author who his whole life long has remained out of sight, who has avoided speaking in his own name [...] is in the end forced to take part in a spectacle not even of his own conception'.³¹⁵ Maiakovskii could do no other than live out his life as subject and author of his own verse. Pushkin, according to Siniavskii, had 'tried to avoid spectacle, preferring to put his self-acting characters on display,

³¹² Okhrannaia gramota was first published in separate parts, Part I in the journal Zvezda, 8, 1929; Part II in Krasnaia nov', 4, 1931 and Part III in Krasnaia nov', 5-6, 1931. It also appeared in 1931 in book form.

³¹³ Boris Pasternak, quoted by Lazar Fleishman in Pasternak v dvadtsatye gody, Munich, 1982, p. 176. Fleishman is quoting from a letter from Pasternak to S.D. Spasskii dated 3 January, 1928.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 304-05.

³¹⁵ Tertz, Progulki s Pushkinym, p. 163 / pp. 139-40.

without advertising his authorship' yet in the end 'fate nonetheless caught up with him'.³¹⁶ 'Pushkin did not die in bed but on stage' and that death came as a fitting end to his life as a poet: 'If you want to find out more, read his poems and letters, but the duel is enough to give you the first – most general and truest – impression. The duel, in its overblown and gaudy style, provides a faithful and juicy portrait of him'.³¹⁷

Siniavskii's fate, too, caught up with him when his trial brought his life into the public arena, the writer's life overtaking the man's. The duality of Siniavskii-Tertz, translated through Pushkin into the dichotomy of the man and the poet, is reconciled through the acceptance of his fate in which the two merge and through which he is confirmed as a writer: 'It's crude but accurate. He was the first poet with his own biography – how else would you have had him bite the dust, the first poet who wrote himself into the history of art with blood and gunpowder? See what we can do! Civilians rejoiced. It was the beginning of literature as a serious – not just scribbling verses – spectacle'.³¹⁸

Siniavskii's entry into a different lineage, into the ranks of writers and poets, is accomplished through the acceptance of his fate, a fate which, to a certain extent, like Maiakovskii's, was inevitable but which he had also actively courted in his unofficial writing as Tertz. However, he then had the courage to follow it through, not recanting at his trial, not denying himself as a writer, continuing to write as Tertz. Like Pasternak he did not have to die for this to be accomplished, but his imprisonment, both akin to death in a real sense as well as

³¹⁶ Ibid., p. 163 / p. 139 .

³¹⁷ Ibid., p. 166 / p. 141 and p. 167 / p. 142.

³¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 167-68 / 142.

being its metaphorical enactment, constituted the material proof of his sincerity.³¹⁹

Death/Not Death

Pasternak frames Okhrannaia gramota with the death of the poet, starting with Rilke's and ending with Maiakovskii's, but also at a crucial moment blurring the boundaries between the death of Maiakovskii and that of Pushkin. The death of the poet, intensely and personally felt in the suicide of Maiakovskii, thus acquires universal significance as 'a strangeness that repeats itself from age to age', as an end 'sometimes violent, more often natural but even then, through an unwillingness to protect oneself, very like suicide'.³²⁰

Siniavskii's Progulki s Pushkinym and V teni Gogolia also turn on death – Gogol's long drawn out, unnatural and self-inflicted and Pushkin's sudden and spectacular; both violent in their way, they both resemble suicide. Maiakovskii's death, providing a subtext to the fates of Pushkin and Gogol, highlights the dangers inherent in tying art to some social or political purpose.³²¹ Gogol, sacrificing his art to the greater good of society, increasingly isolated and unable to communicate with his readers, both presages and echoes the tragic fate of Maiakovskii. Maiakovskii's early and most original work went hand in hand with his belief in himself as a poet: 'I am a poet. That is what makes me

³¹⁹ See, Fleishman, Boris Pasternak v dvadtsatyie gody, p. 302.

³²⁰ Boris Pasternak, Okhrannaia gramota, in Pasternak, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v odinnadtsati tomakh, Moscow, 2004, 3, pp. 148-237 (p. 230).

³²¹ Tertz, V teni Gogolia, pp. 27-28: 'Should we mock or lament Gogol if those same needs can be traced in us too? If from our childhood, from those early years before we have any understanding, as the first quit-rent [obrok] paid to fate, there creeps in a thirst to be useful?'

interesting. That is what I write about'.³²² Later he was to deny this name and calling: 'I spit on the fact that I am a poet'. The Maiakovskii to whom Pasternak had listened, spellbound, reading 'Chelovek' (Man, 1916-17), became the Maiakovskii of '150,000,000' (One hundred and fifty million, 1919-20), useful to 'the present, to actual reality and to its bearer – the Soviet government and Party' but to whom Pasternak could no longer find anything to say and whom he 'understood less and less'.³²³

Pasternak's treatment of Maiakovskii, however, though it views him from the perspective of his death, simultaneously denies that death: 'it is like death, but it is not death, not death at all'.³²⁴ Similarly, Siniavskii starts with Gogol's death but treats it as a point of departure, from where he treads a path backwards into Gogol's past, to his period of greatest creativity and originality, so that the end of the book constitutes Gogol's re-birth as a writer. This in turn recalls the structure of Maiakovskii's 'Chelovek'. Siniavskii had discussed this poem in his early article, 'Ob estetike Maiakovskogo', and had pointed out that its first 'chapter', far from being an introduction, represented a summing up: it is the 'lyrical hero's monologue which he pronounces *after* his words in the "Last" chapter [...] The "Last" does not define the final state of the Man'.³²⁵ It is precisely with Maiakovskii's reading of 'Chelovek' that Pasternak leaves the reader a picture of the poet at his most vital. The title of the poem is equally

³²² Vladimir Maiakovskii, 'Ia sam' in Maiakovskii, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v trinadtsati tomakh, Moscow, 1955, 1, pp. 8-29 (p. 9).

³²³ Pasternak had listened to Maiakovskii reading his poem. 'Chelovek'. Quoted by Siniavskii in 'Ob estetike Maiakovskogo', pp. 133-34. Pasternak, Okhrannaia gramota, p. 229.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

³²⁵ Siniavskii, 'Ob estetike Maiakovskogo', p. 132.

significant: Maiakovskii's name is absent, the author-protagonist the anonymous 'chelovek', both individual and universal. Pasternak thus rescues Maiakovskii from the later title of 'poet' and its connotations of official duties and obligations, that was synonymous with a 'second death', just as Siniavskii was to rescue Pushkin, giving back to him a biography instead of a service record.

Death may be the fate of the poet but chance, with the power to overturn fate, liberates him, transforming fate into opportunity as in the case of the impostor. Siniavskii takes the reader from the death of the poet to his re-birth through the idea of chance – chance allied to 'homelessness, orphanhood', now with the positive connotations of freedom, but also to risk, gambling and daring, that instantly suggests connections with Pasternak. In a passage that starts by combining the ideas of magic and freedom, risk and adventure in the notion of chance, Siniavskii conjures up in Progulki s Pushkinym a fast-moving, heady biography that negates death: 'knowing as you fall that you haven't been killed but have been found, singled out by the finger of fate as material proof of the chance occurrence, which is no longer a trifle, but the signal of a meeting, of eternity – "perhaps, a pledge of immortality"'.³²⁶

While framed by references to Pushkin, the central passage is left to gather momentum, unattached to any particular name, addressing its subject as ty, a familiar figure. One can only speculate about the identity but associations with Maiakovskii impose themselves all the more insistently as the work progresses, becoming more plausible as the pieces of the puzzle start to fit together and

³²⁶ Tertz, Progulki s Pushkinym, p. 39 / p. 67.

further connections with Okhrannaia gramota emerge. There, Pasternak makes an equally striking link between fate and chance in connection with Maiakovskii. '[C]hosen' by chance from among a generation of gifted poets, in the lottery that was Futurism, Maiakovskii was the 'Winner and justification of the draw'.³²⁷ Pasternak prolongs the metaphor; portraying Maiakovskii as 'exceptional', playing not one thing at a time, 'he played at everything all at once [...] – he played at life itself', a description remarkably close to Siniavskii's about Pushkin: 'He didn't play but lived, joking and playing'.³²⁸

The artist is reborn as clown, entertainer, magician. Maiakovskii even in his later period, when he put his talents to the service of the State 'knew how to agitate in a jolly way', so that ordinary slogans were given the appearance of an 'entertaining, poetic "bouffonade"', while Pushkin is a clown, 'our Charlie Chaplin'.³²⁹ The two are brought together through the figure of Peter the Great as archetypal creator and myth maker, via the intervening, parodic presence of Evgenii from Mednyi vsadnik. Pasternak had already laid the ground for the conflation of Peter and Pushkin in his poem, 'Podrazhatel'naia' which Siniavskii refers to in Progulki s Pushkinym as 'the theme of the Tsar treated so as to resemble the destiny of the poet'.³³⁰ In an intricate layering of identities Siniavskii then merges the identities of Evgenii, Peter and Pushkin through the miracle-working gesture of a Prospero-like figure: 'the egocentric twitchings of

³²⁷ Pasternak, Okhrannaia gramota, p. 214.

³²⁸ Ibid., p. 215 and Tertz, Progulki s Pushkinym, p. 15 / p. 54.

³²⁹ Siniavskii and Men'shutina, Poeziia pervykh let revoliutsii, p. 325.

³³⁰ Tertz, Progulki s Pushkinym, p. 135 / p. 123. In V teni Gogolia, Siniavskii writes of the influence of Peter's 'genius' on both Pushkin and Gogol: 'both poets created as if in view of this historic idol of Russia, and correlated with him their own inner resources.' Tertz, V teni Gogolia, p. 247. If anything, 'one can observe in Gogol an even closer contact – from hand to hand – between his artistic process and this historical proto-motivator of Russia'.

Evgeny's arms convulsively waving around his frail body echo the hand stretched upward – Pushkin's miracle-working hand, which summons the storm and subdues it, transforming the chaos of nature into the harmonious cosmos of the City'.³³¹ This image describes a circle back to Maiakovskii who, in Okhrannaia gramota, holds the world in his hands, 'now setting it in motion, now bringing it to a halt according to his whim'.³³²

Poet and magician come together in the figure of Orpheus and the musical vibration of his lyre to the sounds of which 'whole cities were built', to introduce the final pages of V teni Gogolia. In the last chapter, Siniavskii discusses Gogol's early and most inspired art as a form of magic that brought the word and the world together in the act of creation. Yet what he emphasises here, as he emphasises throughout the book, is the fact that the later Gogol grew out of the earlier Gogol: 'The religious moralist and housekeeper was the last, legal offspring of the sorcerer, ineradicably ensconced in Gogol the artist'.³³³

Gogol incarnates for Siniavskii the perennial dilemma of the Russian writer:

The "Word" for us has not ceased, it seems, to be in its ideal form a "deed" [delom] and we still expect some kind of "miracle", a "revolution" [perevorot] from art; in the absence of this, we repeat over and over again, "usefulness", "education" [vospitanie]...³³⁴

Gogol's fervent belief in the power of the word was both the source of his gift and his self-destruction. When the long awaited miracle failed to happen in

³³¹ Tertz, Progulki s Pushkinym, p. 137 / p. 124.

³³² Pasternak, Okhrannaia gramota, p. 219.

³³³ Tertz, V teni Gogolia, p. 482.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 550.

Mertvye dushi and the dead did not come to life, Gogol turned away from magic and channelled his energy into the good of society.

The artist wants to be a sorcerer again and he cripples himself and mutilates himself, undertakes “to serve” the State and society, trying to get back to magic. Gogol’s later moralising was just such a return to the past, a striving to restore in the artist the ancient enchanter and sorcerer.³³⁵

What if? The closing pages return to the miraculous possibilities of chance, to the artist not dead but re-born through a moment of inspiration.

If the powers of the artist, the social activist [deiatel’] and the saint were joined together in Gogol in a lost magical synthesis, then it would be as if, in some inspired image, he would be resurrected in front of us’. Art, too, would be liberated, would simply be ‘art’, existing on the level of miracle and without malice, with a light heart bringing freedom to all peoples...³³⁶

The artist must content himself with being just that, an artist and a failed sorcerer whose magic, transmuted into metaphor and allegory, has the power to transform and even to resurrect but not the power to harm. Siniavskii leaves the reader with the picture of Gogol departing in the company of the skomorokhi, the saints Kuz’ma and Dem’ian: ‘Only with them is Gogol saved. Only with them will Russian art be saved’.³³⁷

Through the skomorokhi, the reader can return to the modern-day figure of Vladimir Vysotskii with links to Pasternak and with echoes, too, of

³³⁵ Ibid., p. 551.

³³⁶ Ibid..

³³⁷ Ibid., p. 552.

Maiakovskii. Siniavskii himself is somewhere among them, his identity as a writer preserved in his creative association with them just as they are brought to life through him: it is up to the reader to make the connections.

Chapter III

‘The last phase of my life is to a large extent linked with [...] the attempt once again to comprehend myself’³³⁸

Very little time intervened between Siniavskii’s release on 8 June, 1971 and his departure with Mariia Vasilievna for Paris on 8 August, 1973.³³⁹ That time is recalled by him at the end of Golos iz khora, as a kind of limbo; neither dead nor alive, he feels more ghost than man. The shock of coming back to Moscow, to city life and the reality of everyday existence is graphically put in Spokoinoi nochi: ‘My native city came crashing down on my shorn, defenceless head, and, unaccustomed to it all, I staggered as if slapped in the face’.³⁴⁰ He had been leading what in effect had been a parallel existence, unknown and incomprehensible to those outside, while he found that what had previously been familiar and safe was now alien.³⁴¹

His one point of reference and refuge were his books: ‘What is the most precious, the most exciting smell waiting for you in the house when you return

³³⁸ Siniavskii, ‘Siniavskii o sebe’, p. 108.

³³⁹ At the end of volume three, the final volume of Siniavskii’s letters from the camps, Mariia Vasilievna points out the ‘strange coincidences of the fateful days’ in their life, all linked by the number eight. Mariia Rozanova, ‘Kalendar’ adresata’, in Siniavskii, Pis’ma, 3, pp. 468-73 (p. 468).

³⁴⁰ Tertz, Spokoinoi nochi, p. 355 / p. 22.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 352-54 / pp. 18-21. His sense of estrangement from Moscow on his homecoming is given in both Golos iz khora and Spokoinoi nochi. Golos iz khora, recording his immediate impressions, is grey in tone, detached and tinged with pity for those whose lives seem so empty and trivial. In Spokoinoi nochi, distanced in time from the events, he writes with greater energy and the appreciative eye of the artist/explorer, landing in unknown territory. Tertz, Golos iz khora, p. 665-66 / p. 323, Spokoinoi nochi, p. 360 / p. 28

to it after half-a-dozen years or so? The smell of roses, you think? No, mouldering books'.³⁴² The life that remained to him, the only life that had any significance for him was the life of a writer. This is what he had been tried for, what he had struggled to preserve in prison and it was for this reason that he left Russia: 'why did I emigrate? I had three options: to stop writing and simply live there, or to be sent to camp again – or to emigrate. Well, if I'd emigrated without having anything in mind that I wanted to write, what would have been the point? The point was – to write'.³⁴³

Exile was chosen by him as the only viable situation if he were to survive as a writer.³⁴⁴ Not just survive but continue to be creative: returning once again to the association of creativity and risk, he said, 'and then, you know, every new work is a sort of jump into the unknown – and that's all the more true in emigration. You are forced to ask yourself: can you really do something or can't you?'.³⁴⁵

Siniavskii's distance from Russia would not translate into nostalgia for what had been left behind; he would be pragmatic and even cynical about the state of

³⁴² Tertz, *Golos iz khora*, p. 664 / p. 321. Also, Tertz, *Spokoinoi nochi*, p. 360 / p. 28. 'Back home, I rushed to my bookcase, which I had missed so terribly during the years I was away on business [*komandirovka*]. It was not so much that I felt like reading; no, I just wanted to be back with my books again'.

³⁴³ Siniavskii, 'My life as a writer', p. 8.

³⁴⁴ This was a choice also made by Evgenii Zamiatin, another of Siniavskii's literary heroes. Following the witch hunt against him and Boris Pil'niak in 1929, which presaged the depredations that would be inflicted on writers and literature in the years to come, Zamiatin had written directly to Stalin in 1931 when every avenue of literary work had become closed to him: 'the basic reason for my request for permission to go abroad with my wife is my hopeless position here as a writer, the death sentence pronounced on me as a writer here'. Evgenii Zamiatin, 'Pis'mo Stalinu', reproduced in Zamiatin, *Litsa*, New York, 1967, pp. 277-82 (p. 282).

³⁴⁵ Siniavskii, 'My life as a writer', p. 8.

Russia in the late twentieth century.³⁴⁶ However, his inspiration, his writerly identity, remained indissolubly bound up with Russia.

In this chapter I intend to show how, by-passing any sense of homelessness on a material or geographical plane, Siniavskii's work evolves as a creative reintegration with Russia through literature. His writing in exile does not constitute a break from his previous work, its preoccupation with the fate of the writer and with the meaning of art. The fate of the writer, now reflected through the prism of absence, is explored by Siniavskii in relation to himself with renewed intensity: his own autobiography becomes the vehicle for his ideas, while his passionate commitment to art illuminates the story of his life.

Books as refuge and books as habitable space, a recurrent motif in his writing from the camps, is an idea that is realised in Paris in the form of the Siniavskii house in Fontenay-aux-Roses. Out of the way in a leafy suburb, it was his journey's end, the Ithaca that had been the underlying motif of his letters and Golos iz khora. Albeit in a foreign land, it was, in a sense, an idealised version of home, the stuff of childhood dreams.³⁴⁷ His centre moved to the periphery, his family's shelter, it was also a home to literature in the form of his study but also the printing press set up by Mariia Vasilievna. The creative collaboration that had grown naturally out of their correspondence in prison took on new forms in emigration, as she became Siniavskii's editor and publisher.

³⁴⁶ Glad, 'Andrei Siniavsky and Maria Rozanova', p. 172.

³⁴⁷ Tertz, Golos iz khora, pp. 448-49 / p. 17.

She thus continued to be his bridge to the outside world; all the more so in that, as in prison, he held himself aloof as much as he could from the surrounding world in order to concentrate on his writing and ‘their’ work which he saw ‘in terms of Russian culture’.³⁴⁸

Remove himself as he did from the centre of Paris, however, Siniavskii was unable to distance himself from the rampant disputes of the Russian émigré literary community that managed to invade his private world. Instead of peacefully immersing himself in his writing, he found himself in the midst of warring factions; literature, far from being removed from politics to the realms of pure art, was often the vehicle for heated political debate into which he was drawn willy-nilly. As Donald Fanger put it, writing in 1986 about the third wave of Russian émigrés, ‘nothing is more disconcertingly alien to Russian experience than freedom. The former dissidents have been quick to build themselves a new ghetto in the West, and to subdivide it into zones. Occasionally it shows sign of turning into a Beirut of words’.³⁴⁹

The ‘zones’ to which Donald Fanger refers are the different camps that clustered around the various journals of the émigré press and to which most writers were drawn, Siniavskii included, as the natural outlet for their work. Siniavskii’s wish to publish in a free and unrestricted environment seemed to have been granted, as he became a founding member of the editorial board of a new journal, Kontinent, started in 1974 by another recent émigré in Paris,

³⁴⁸ Glad, ‘Andrei Siniavsky and Maria Rozanova’, p. 148.

³⁴⁹ Donald Fanger, ‘A change of venue: Russian journals of the Emigration’ (hereafter, ‘A change of venue’), TLS, 21 November, 1986, pp. 1321-22 (p. 1321). Joseph Brodskii, writing as an ‘insider’, also refers to ‘the malicious village of [the exile’s] fellow émigrés. Brodskii, ‘The Condition We Call Exile’, The New York Review, 21 January, 1988, pp. 16, 18, 20 (p. 16).

Vladimir Maksimov. The name of the journal viewed in retrospect carries its own ironic commentary on the situation: in the first editorial Maksimov explained that 'Kontinent' was to express the capaciousness of their endeavour, the (ambitious) desire to bring together not just nations but entire continents. The names on the editorial board of the first issue testify to this noble aspiration, including such eminent figures as Dzhilas and Ionesco, as well as Siniavskii and Sakharov, while Solzhenitsyn opens the proceedings with a 'Word to the Journal'. Siniavskii, writing officially for the first time as Tertz, and Solzhenitsyn both contribute articles. This happy state of affairs was not to last long. In the very next issue Solzhenitsyn was at odds with Sakharov over the latter's criticism of Solzhenitsyn's 'Pis'mo vozhdiam'.³⁵⁰ By 1975 Siniavskii had ceased contributing to Kontinent.³⁵¹

An article he wrote that year ('Otkrytoe pis'mo'), in response to Solzhenitsyn's 'first publicistic steps in the West' was refused publication by Maksimov. As one of Kontinent's founding contributors, Siniavskii had

³⁵⁰ See Michael Scammell, Solzhenitsyn. A Biography, New York and London, 1984, (hereafter, Solzhenitsyn), p. 870. Solzhenitsyn's 'Pis'mo vozhdiam', published in 1974 (first in Russian and then in English), was 'in the form of a manifesto, a programme of radical reform and renewal' for Russia, (Scammell, p. 865). Not only was it distinctly anti-Western, it also advocated authoritarian government for Russia and a return to her past, rooted in the Orthodox religion (Scammell, pp. 865-67).

³⁵¹ His article, 'Liudi i zveri', appeared under the signature of Tertz in the fifth issue of Kontinent, 1975 (pp. 367-404). However, his name would re-surface on its pages in 1986 (numbers 49 and 50) where Maksimov refers to him pointedly as 'the literary critic, Mr. Siniavskii', in what was obviously intended as a jibe. Siniavskii had written to Kontinent hoping to forestall publication on its pages of a defamatory article written by Sergei Khmel'nitskii and already published that same year in the June-July issue of the Israeli journal Dvadtsat' dva in response to Siniavskii's less than flattering portrayal of him as the character 'S' in Spokoinoi nochi. Maksimov, justifiably one feels, asks why Siniavskii did not address his letter to Dvadtsat' dva, whose editor, Aleksandr Voronel' was in any case a friend of his (in fact Siniavskii had done so). In this Maksimov was only partly right. Aleksandr and Nina Voronel' had indeed been friends of the Siniavskii's since before the trial, but the Khmel'nitskii affair had soured relations between them and would lead to a distasteful and seemingly gratuitous attack on Siniavskii in Nina Voronel''s memoirs written after Siniavskii's death, in which she not only raises one again the question of complicity with the KGB but questions his abilities as literary critic and writer and even resorts to crude personal innuendoes. Nina Voronel', Bez prikras. Vospominaniia, Moscow, 2003 (hereafter, Bez prikras), pp. 115-244.

naturally sent his article to 'his' [svoi] journal. An excuse was made and the article was refused also by Ruskaia mysl', only appearing in Sintaksis, the Siniavskii's own journal, in 1991.³⁵² Mariia Vasilievna's 'correction' that follows the 1991 publication, makes it clear that the Siniavskii felt that Maksimov's refusal had been dictated by his desire not to offend Solzhenitsyn, who was already exerting a strong influence in the émigré community.³⁵³

The Solzhenitsyn-Siniavskii clash was to become a defining feature of the third-wave Russian emigration. As lines were drawn between émigrés of more conservative persuasion like Solzhenitsyn and those of more liberal outlook such as Siniavskii, what can only be described as a feud swiftly developed between the two.

Though the idea of rivalry is never voiced the suspicion remains that, even if only subconsciously, it must have fed into what was already an uncomfortable relationship.³⁵⁴ As they both emerged to fame and notoriety in the mid-1960s, it was Solzhenitsyn who first established an international reputation with the publication in Moscow of Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha (A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, 1962). However, it was the trial of Siniavskii and Daniel' in 1965 that proved the most sensational event of the decade, effectively launching

³⁵² Siniavskii, 'Otkrytoe pis'mo A. Solzhenitsynu' (hereafter, 'Otkrytoe pis'mo'), Sintaksis, 31, 1991, pp. 159-62.

³⁵³ See, also, Glad, 'Andrei Siniavsky and Maria Rozanova', p. 162.

³⁵⁴ Igor Golomstock, when asked about a possible sense of rivalry between the two men, said that if there was one, it was on Solzhenitsyn's side and not Siniavskii's. Private conversation, December, 2006. In Nina Voronel's account it was Siniavskii who felt envy towards Solzhenitsyn. Given the patently malicious intent of her overall account, however, it is difficult to lend much credence to this view. Nina Voronel', Bez prikras, p. 181. Conversely, it is natural that Igor Golomstock, as an old and loyal friend, should defend Siniavskii.

and giving voice to the dissident movement.³⁵⁵ The first sign of divergence between the two writers is directly connected with this and took the form of the glaring absence of Solzhenitsyn's signature on a letter of protest in support of Siniavskii and Daniel' sent to the Twenty-third Congress of the Communist Party by 'the flower of Soviet literature'. More striking was the reason given by Solzhenitsyn for this omission: his disapproval of "writers who sought fame abroad".³⁵⁶ This was an irony, given that Solzhenitsyn 'had himself sent various works to the West, albeit as a precaution'.³⁵⁷ The same kind of innuendoes are still to be found almost twenty years later, with Solzhenitsyn referring to those

³⁵⁵ Mariia Vasilievna emphasises that at the time of the trial Siniavskii and Daniel' were virtually unknown as writers. The trial not only revealed their names but made them overnight celebrities. Rozanova, 'Radio Liberty Transcript', folder 16, transmission 6, p. 7. See, also, Nepomnyashchy, 'Andrei Sinyavsky's "Return"', p. 38. A survey conducted in 1989, when works previously forbidden in the Soviet Union began to appear there (among them Solzhenitsyn's Arhipelag GULag and Siniavskii's Progulki s Pushkinym) showed how few people had actually read anything of Siniavskii's compared to the number who now professed an interest in him, 'suggesting that interest in [him] was sparked primarily by knowledge of [his] trial and imprisonment'. On the close overlap of cardinal events in the lives of Siniavskii and Solzhenitsyn, see, Scammell, Solzhenitsyn, p. 551. Scammell suggests that, while admiring Siniavskii and Daniel's stance, Solzhenitsyn resented this shift of attention away from him and his own troubles with the regime. The 'troubles' to which Scammell refers was the confiscation by the Soviet authorities of the manuscript of V krughe pervom, that took place on 11 September, 1965, 'in the narrow interval between the arrests of Sinyavsky and Daniel'. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Bodalsia telenok s dubom, Paris, 1975, p. 116. Translations from, Solzhenitsyn, The Oak and the Calf. Sketches of Literary Life in the Soviet Union, trans. Harry Willets, London, 1980 (p. 102); also, *ibid.*, p. 133 / p. 118. Solzhenitsyn's expression of his frustration over the different press coverage accorded the 'arrest' of his novel and the arrest of Siniavskii and Daniel' are to be found on p. 127 / p. 112.

³⁵⁶ This accusation is answered by Siniavskii in, for example, 'Dissidentstvo kak lichnyi opyt', where he emphasises the fact that sending his work abroad was 'the best way of "preserving the text" and not a political act or form of protest'. 'Dissidentstvo', p. 136. In fact, Solzhenitsyn's accusation smacks not a little of hypocrisy. In Bodalsia telenok s dubom he describes how, in 1954, he had microfilmed some manuscripts, fitted them into the cover of a book and sent them off to Alexandra L'vovna Tolstoi in the U.S.A. – for exactly the same reason as Siniavskii namely, in order to preserve them. Solzhenitsyn, Bodalsia telenok s dubom, p. 9 / p. 4. Also, *ibid.*, p. 118 / p. 104. Solzhenitsyn's disapproval of Siniavskii's 'seeking fame abroad' almost exactly echoes the words used by Boris Slutskii about Pasternak at the meeting of Moscow writers during the furore that erupted over the award to Pasternak of the Nobel prize. 'Stenogramma obshchemoskovskogo sobraniia pisatelei 31 oktiabria 1958 goda', HIA, Box 58, folder 3, p. 31.

³⁵⁷ Scammell., Solzhenitsyn, pp. 556-57. Confirmed by Mariia Vasilievna in a private conversation, Fontenay-aux-Roses, January 2007.

who lived the lie for decades, earning their living from and existing in perfect harmony with the State they now rejected.³⁵⁸

A few years later and Solzhenitsyn's ambivalence to the whole question of emigration, influenced by his increasingly conservative and nationalist stance, would lead him to make the nice distinction between his own 'involuntary' departure and Siniavskii's choice to go, when they both left for the West within a year of each other.³⁵⁹ According to Siniavskii, 'As far as [Solzhenitsyn] is concerned, to leave Russia by choice is an act of betrayal'.³⁶⁰ Betrayal and treachery, words first used against Siniavskii by the Soviet State, but also by those of the intelligentsia who felt that Siniavskii and Daniel' had acted too precipitately, damaging hopes of any lasting change to the regime, would continue to circulate in the air of the émigré community in connection with Siniavskii.³⁶¹ His reply to them would constitute a strong motif of his work during this final phase of his life, in particular his fantastic autobiography, Spokoinoi nochi.

It is all too easy to be drawn into 'taking sides', albeit retrospectively, in the Siniavskii-Solzhenitsyn clash and I admit to an obvious bias in favour of Siniavskii. However, it would be wrong to see the clash purely in terms of a mutual antipathy and merely as a series of skirmishes between the two men. The

³⁵⁸ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. 'Nashi pliuralisty', Vestnik russkogo khristianskogo dvizheniia (hereafter, VRKhD), 139, 1983, pp. 133-60 (p. 152).

³⁵⁹ See, Nepomnyashchy, 'Interview', p. 21, where Siniavskii spells it out: 'everyone who left was a coward or a runaway except for him, who was the only one who was involuntarily exiled. This immediately soured our relationship'. Also, Scammell, Solzhenitsyn, p. 879.

³⁶⁰ Olga Carlisle, 'Solzhenitsyn and Russian Nationalism: An Interview with Andrei Sinyavsky' (hereafter, 'Solzhenitsyn and Russian Nationalism'), New York Review of Books, 26, 1979, 18, 22 November, 1979, pp. 3-6 (p. 4).

³⁶¹ See, Nudel'man, 'Dvadsat' let spustia', p. 150.

crux of their differences was more fundamental and stemmed from their diametrically opposed views of the role of the writer and the function of art. In this sense, Siniavskii's exchanges with Solzhenitsyn were more about what he stood for than who he was. Siniavskii defended the idea of pure art, writing for its own sake, while as a writer he had moved towards self-transcendence in favour of his art. Solzhenitsyn, on the other hand, was endowed with a keen sense of the writer's historical mission and of the social obligations of art and the artist. This translated into what seemed, to Siniavskii at least, increasingly arrogant pronouncements in his publicistic articles and speeches in emigration, which he addressed to the government back home but also to Western leaders.³⁶²

It was this assumption of the mantle of prophet and teacher, so much at odds with his own view of the writer's role, that irked Siniavskii. His quarrel was not with Solzhenitsyn's literary work as such; though stylistically it was not to his taste – he confessed that at times he found 'all this realism boring' – he singled out for particular praise Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha but also Rakovyi korpus (Cancer Ward, 1968) and Arhipelag GULag (The Gulag Archipelago, 1973).³⁶³ Rather, he objected to Solzhenitsyn's tone, his refusal to brook any dissent.

The pressure for unanimity seemed to Siniavskii to be a feature of the émigré community as a whole. Played out between Siniavskii and Solzhenitsyn in the

³⁶² In 'Dissentstvo kak lichnyi opyt', Siniavskii names no names but, speaking of 'many contemporary Russophiles', decries their tendency to criticize the West, setting their Russian 'Christian "love" and mercy"' above the idea of 'law'. Siniavskii is 'against mixing spiritual and earthly values, the religious and the political'. (pp. 142-43).

³⁶³ Glad, 'Andrei Siniavsky and Maria Rozanova', p. 147. When talking to John Glad, Siniavskii makes the distinction between Solzhenitsyn as nationalist and publicist and Solzhenitsyn as writer. Ibid., pp. 145-48. See, also, Andrei Siniavskii, ' "Pushkin – nash smeishchiiisii genii"', interview with T. Putrenko, Literaturnaia gazeta, 32, 8 August, 1990, p. 7; also, Carlisle, 'Solzhenitsyn and Russian Nationalism', pp. 4-5.

émigré press, the question of unanimity versus pluralism would be distilled into an exchange of articles, Solzhenitsyn's 'Nashi pliuralisty' answered by Siniavskii's 'Solzhenitsyn kak ustroitel' novogo edinomysliia'.³⁶⁴ However, for Siniavskii, the desire for unanimity prevalent in the émigré community held wider and more disturbing implications, reminding him as it did of the conformist Soviet mentality he thought to have left behind.³⁶⁵ He draws a parallel between émigré dissidents and the idealistic Revolutionaries, many of whom under Soviet rule became cowardly, conformist NEP-men.³⁶⁶ Even the vocabulary deployed carried echoes of Sovietese, with 'pluralism' equated with 'relativism'. Those who, like Siniavskii, held dissenting views were side-lined or even silenced.³⁶⁷ The idea of authority whether vested in a single individual or group spoke of a monolithic approach to life, an exclusive and narrow world view that went against all that Siniavskii believed in and which, in his view, held very real threats for art and the artist. Non-conformism, viewed in this context,

³⁶⁴ A. Siniavskii, 'Solzhenitsyn kak ustroitel' novogo edinomysliia', *Sintaksis*, 14, 1985, pp. 16-32. Though Solzhenitsyn's article is not ostensibly aimed at Siniavskii, his name appears frequently enough to make it clear that he is one of, if not the main, target. See Fanger, 'A change of venue', p. 1321. As Fanger put it, 'In matters of commentary and opinion, virtually any point of view may find publication in the "appropriate" journal. But dissenting views are likely to be published, if at all, in the correspondingly "appropriate" journals. Pluralism (a highly charged and imperfectly understood concept) seems to be approved and practised almost exclusively in this form'.

³⁶⁵ Siniavskii, 'Dissidentstvo', pp. 140-41.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 141. See also, p. 139: 'the very meaning of "dissident" somehow becomes colourless here and loses its heroic, its romantic halo'. Siniavskii paints a picture of emasculated warriors who 'are essentially opposing nothing, risking nothing; it is as if we were waving our fists in the air, believing we are conducting a struggle for human rights' but all this is 'not a fight, not a sacrifice and not a heroic feat [podvig] but, rather, charity or philanthropy'.

³⁶⁷ See, A. Siniavskii, 'Otkrytoe pis'mo'. Mariia Vasilievna supplies the context in her 'correction' at the end of the article, ending with the remark, 'This was our first bitter taste of emigration – the taste of censorship and that familiar Soviet word "probit".' (p.162). A similar situation occurred roughly a decade later when Siniavskii was denied the right of reply in *VRKhD* in response to Solzhenitsyn's attacks on him in that journal. Written in 1985, his article, 'Chtenie v serdtsakh', was only published in *Sintaksis* in 1987.

was not simply the perversity of an inveterate ‘non-joiner’, but was seen by Siniavskii as the gauge of his integrity as both man and artist.

Sintaksis

It was in this confrontational atmosphere, that the Siniavskii’s journal, Sintaksis, was founded in 1978.³⁶⁸ The name itself, deliberately low-key and indicating a linguistic and literary orientation, was designed if not as a provocative gesture, then certainly as a direct stylistic response to Maksimov’s Kontinent, as well as to grandiose-sounding Soviet journals.³⁶⁹

While the Siniavskii’s firmly planted their flag in the field of literature, it was literature with a militant subtext. The journal was both *profession de foi* and call to arms: matters literary were intermingled with articles of clear polemical intent.³⁷⁰ The circumstances of Sintaksis’s founding and the fact that it was Mariia Vasilievna who was the driving force behind it played no small part in determining its ethos as well as demonstrating her central and ever more active part in Siniavskii’s life, not only as his wife but as his co-creator and his most ardent champion, carrying on the role that she had developed while he was in prison. The explanation that she had had the idea of starting a journal after

³⁶⁸ See, Carlisle, ‘Solzhenitsyn and Russian Nationalism’, pp. 5-6.

³⁶⁹ Andrei Siniavskii and Mariia Rozanova, ‘Vstrecha A.D. Siniavskogo i M.V. Rozanova so studentami i prepodavateliami literaturnogo instituta imeni Gor’kogo’ (hereafter, ‘Vstrecha’), 4 March, 1992, HIA, box 47, folder 3, pp. 13-15. Mariia Vasilievna, in explaining the genesis of Sintaksis, starts, as she says, ‘from the end’, with the stylistic implications of the name, stressing her ‘stylistic’ unity with Siniavskii, who loves to “‘work on abasement”” (rabotat’ na snizhenie). Apart from her dislike of pompous journal titles, with their Soviet connotations, she adds another side to her argument by referring to her dislike of all the talk about a spiritual renaissance in Russia, which she sees as hollow. She is speaking in 1992, in the context of El’tsin’s Russia, but it is not hard to make the connection with Solzhenitsyn and his ideas.

³⁷⁰ Indeed, even what, to all intents and purposes, were purely literary contributions, by their very nature represented a response to the purposeful articles of other writers. Tertz’s ‘Anekdot v anekdote’ (1978) and ‘Otechestvo. Blatnaia pesnia...’ (1979) both spring to mind.

Siniavskii's split from Kontinent simply in order to give him an outlet for his writing, can therefore only be regarded as part of the story; the spirit in which she conceived it and the determination with which she saw it through belie this modest claim.

It was both symbolic and polemical in another sense, taking up the baton passed on by Alexander Ginzburg. Ginzburg had brought out the first journal entitled Sintaksis, 'the first unfettered word, the first free and uncensored word to appear in Soviet times', only to be arrested for this in 1960. In 1967 he was re-arrested and sentenced to five years hard labour for putting together Belaia kniga po delu A. Siniavskogo i Iu. Danielia (The White Book, 1967), a record of the Siniavskii-Daniel' trial. By the time of the launch of the Siniavskii's journal, Ginzburg had been arrested for a third time for his human rights' work. Not only was the journal named after his, each of its first numbers was designed to further his cause.

Above all, however, Sintaksis strove to encourage genuinely critical writing, writing that did not judge a work of art according to whether it was pro or anti the Soviet regime or pro or anti any particular émigré camp but purely on its own literary merits. It is a viewpoint that, for all its polemical passion, is imbued with a spirit of tolerance and the belief in individual freedom: 'the paths of art are inscrutable. And each person decides himself how best to write'.³⁷¹ Through this stance Sintaksis endeavoured to nurture a critical readership. The absence of

³⁷¹ Siniavskii, 'O kritike', p. 150. He goes on to say, 'As for demanding of a writer living in the Soviet Union that he become involved in politics and openly oppose the government, apart from anything else that is immoral. It is the same as forcing a man to go to prison or emigrate. One should neither forbid emigration nor demand that all true, honorable writers quit Russia'. See, also, Carlisle, 'Solzhenitsyn and Russian Nationalism', p. 5.

a 'broad and qualified' literary criticism in émigré Russian literary circles, Siniavskii puts down to the absence of a genuine, lively literary debate but also to a lack of readers. Neither 'boded well for Russian literature'. The same stagnation of the literary scene that he had struggled against in Russia, seemed to him to prevail in emigration, if for quite other reasons. In freedom and with nothing to fight for, readers slip into a kind of "indifferent weariness", so that the writer in turn becomes a conformist and reading is kept within safe and undemanding bounds.³⁷² In the words of Andrei Arkhangel'skii, "Sintaksis" sought out and educated a different, atypical reader, one that was rare in Russia: not some anti-Soviet out to destroy the tanks of Empire, or some hysterical lover of literary fisticuffs and not an indifferent sceptic, but a sober-minded and active co-author'.³⁷³

The Writer as Enemy.

The publication in London in 1975 of Progulki s Pushkinym sets the Siniavskii-Solzhenitsyn antagonism within the broader context of Russian literary politics that seemed to cross so effortlessly back and forth between Russia and her émigré outposts – an irony, given that literature itself found the passage more difficult. Once again, Siniavskii's non-conformism was the principal if unspoken issue, channelled through questions of culture and national identity.

³⁷² Ibid., pp. 152-53.

³⁷³ Andrei Arkhangel'skii, 'Progulki v svobodu i obratno', Toronto Slavic Quarterly, 15, Winter 2006, <http://www.utoronto.ca/tsq/15/index15.shtml> [accessed 18 November 2009] (para. 7 of 20).

The first salvo came from the old guard of the émigré community in the form of an article by Roman Gul', 'Progulki khama s Pushkinym'.³⁷⁴ Such was the ferocity of the attack from the émigré press that it was later dubbed by Michel Aucouturier Siniavskii's 'second' trial.³⁷⁵ The irony was redoubled in that Gul', equating Bolshevism with the 'boorification [okhamlenie] of Russian culture, identified Siniavskii as both product and proponent of this process.

Gul''s attack, though ostensibly literary in nature, had a nationalistic subtext: Siniavskii was branded 'anti-Russian', any apparent denigration of Pushkin being directly equated with an affront to Russia itself, a reaction that betrays the heightened sensitivity to questions of national identity that may be seen as a feature of emigration.³⁷⁶ This label harmonised well with Solzhenitsyn's view of Siniavskii, showing how there was a degree of continuity between 'first wave' and 'third wave' perceptions of culture.³⁷⁷

The furore over Progulki s Pushkinym unleashed what seems to have been pent-up resentment against Siniavskii that went well beyond his literary transgressions. The fact that he had been freed from prison early naturally provoked, at the very least, questions, and in the highly charged atmosphere of the émigré (dissident) community was bound to give rise to damaging

³⁷⁴ Roman Gul', 'Progulki khama s Pushkinym' (hereafter, 'Progulki khama'), Novyi zhurnal, 124, 1976, pp. 117-129.

³⁷⁵ See, Mariia Rozanova 'K istorii i geografii etoi knigi', Voprosy literatury, 10, 1990, pp. 154-161 (p. 157).

³⁷⁶ Catherine Nepomnyashchy points out the analogy between the crisis of identity experienced by Russian émigrés and by Russians at home during glasnost', which goes some way to explaining the similarity of reactions to Siniavskii's work from both sides when an extract from the book was first published in Russia in the April 1989 issue of Oktiabr'. See, Nepomnyashchy, 'Andrei Sinyavsky's "Return"', p. 35.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

insinuations, suggesting that he had done a deal with the KGB.³⁷⁸ Articles attacking him for his book on Pushkin and his Russophobia, therefore, also contained allegations of a more vicious personal nature. The fact that he had managed to compose nearly three books while doing hard labour and had even smuggled one out to his wife only added fuel to the fire, suggesting to some that he had been given special treatment and even the absurd idea that he had not done time at all.³⁷⁹ These accusations were also fed, perhaps, by resentment at what was seen as Siniavskii's 'lack of solidarity with the cause', his failure to bear testimony to the horrors and suffering of the camps.³⁸⁰ Also, unlike Iulii Daniel' and his wife, Larissa Bogoraz, neither he nor Mariia Vasilievna had caused any trouble or engaged in 'anti-Soviet' activities while he was in prison.³⁸¹

These accusations must have overlapped with other rumours circulating about the younger Siniavskii and his earlier so-called collaboration with the KGB which, in the late 1940s, had attempted to use him in order to entrap the daughter of the naval attaché in Moscow, Hélène Peltier. Although nothing referring to this appeared in print until after the publication of *Spokoinoi nochi* in 1984, Zinovii Zinik writes of a list compiled by Solzhenitsyn just after his

³⁷⁸ Such insinuations could surface at any gathering with émigrés in attendance when Siniavskii's name was mentioned, even after his death. Jane Grayson cites the example of the 'Nauchnaia konferentsiia Tallin-Tartu' on Nabokov, 14-17 January, 1999. Mariia Vasilievna retaliated at every available opportunity, notably in 1994 when, defending Siniavskii's honour for the umpteenth time, she explains why the Siniavskiis were allowed to leave on favourable terms. She had indeed had 'dealings' with the KGB, but on her terms. She had let it be known to the KGB that a book Siniavskii had written in prison was about to be published abroad (*Progulki s Pushkinym*). They were afraid that this would be a book about the camps, exposing their full horrors to the West, so the deal was done and the Siniavskiis were allowed to take everything, as if they were traveling diplomats – a service also rendered to Solzhenitsyn and his family, as she points out. M. Rozanova, 'Abram da Mar'ia', p. 138.

³⁷⁹ See, for example, Gul', 'Progulki khama', p. 121.

³⁸⁰ See, Michael Scammell, 'Speculations of a captive monk', *TLS*, 20 May, 1977, pp. 626-27 (p.627).

³⁸¹ See, M. Rozanova, 'Abram da Mar'ia' pp. 144-45.

arrival in the West in 1974, of ‘those dissident figures who in his opinion could, in one way or another, be suspected of collaboration with the KGB’. Although Siniavskii’s name apparently did not figure on that list, Zinik draws attention directly afterwards, to what he terms Solzhenitsyn’s unsuccessful attempt to ‘tarnish’ Siniavskii’s reputation.³⁸² The fact that the list was never published can have done little to allay the rumours.

History seemed to be repeating itself and life once again seemed to imitate art during these first years of freedom, years which provide the backdrop to Siniavskii’s autobiographical novel, *Spokoinoi nochi*. Far from being considered a hero as a result of his courageous behaviour at his trial, it was as if he were seen as the villain of the piece. The idea that difference could be considered suspect and threatening, an idea signalled in his articles for *Novyi mir* and demonstrated by Tertz’s ‘Pkhentz’, once again comes into play as Siniavskii finds himself in the position of an outsider, an object of vilification. From being ‘an enemy of the people’ in Soviet parlance, he had become not merely an enemy of Russia, a ‘Russophobe’ but, as he said himself, ‘an enemy in general’.³⁸³

This time however, it is not as an alien creature from another planet that he expresses this sense of otherness, but as a Jew. In a life strewn with coincidences here was another striking example: though he was not himself a Jew, Siniavskii

³⁸² Zinovii Zinik, ‘The old days’, *TLS*, 9 March, 2007, pp. 5-6 (p. 6).

³⁸³ Siniavskii, ‘Dissidentstvo’, p. 146. Zamiatin, writing half a century earlier, had made a similar point about himself. Describing the campaign against him first started in 1920 and which ‘has continued, on different pretexts, to this day’, he says, ‘Just as the Christians created the devil as a convenient personification of evil, so the critics have made me the devil of Soviet literature’. Zamiatin, ‘Pis’mo Stalinu’, p. 278.

had chosen all those years ago a Jewish pseudonym, Tertz. Now a member of the third wave of emigration, the majority of whom were Jews, he found himself almost literally in their shoes. Moreover, the article he had produced for the first issue of Kontinent was written as Tertz and put forward the idea that Jews were the universal Russian scapegoat because they represented ‘Russia’s objectified, original sin, of which it tries constantly and unsuccessfully to cleanse itself’.³⁸⁴

The idea of the writer as Jew and as scapegoat was to have its fantastic literary expression in the novella Kroshka Tsores where the eponymous protagonist is given the family name of Siniavskii. Kroshka Tsores had been conceived originally as part of Spokoinoi nochi but Siniavskii decided to publish separately and in advance of the latter, maybe because the increasing intensity of the attacks against him prompted an earlier response.³⁸⁵

Siniavskii and Tertz. The writer and the reader

The question arose as to the survival of Tertz and Siniavskii’s continuing need to divide himself into different personae: what were to be their respective roles in this situation? They were both implicated in the fray so, as Mariia Vasilievna put it, ‘Naturally, the liberal Abram and the democrat Andrei

³⁸⁴ Tertz, ‘Literaturnyi protsess v Rossii’, p. 185. For his treatment of the question of the Jews’ position in Russia, see pp. 182-89. Also, Siniavskii, Osnovy, pp 358-75 and in particular p.369.

³⁸⁵ In an interview in 1991, Siniavskii links the novella expressly to his experiences in emigration: ‘In my novella, *Little Jinx*, strictly speaking there are two ideas. The first (and perhaps in this sense *Little Jinx* is an autobiographical work) has something of my situation in emigration. You try to do good and everyone says: “How horrible!”. *Strolls with Pushkin* is a good example of that. I write a well-meant phrase, and people say it’s Russophobia. By the same token, in *Little Jinx*, in the eyes of society the writer has killed his five brothers. But in fact he hasn’t killed anyone. His five brothers killed him’. Nepomnyashchy, ‘Interview’, p. 16.

Siniavskii could not fail to reply'.³⁸⁶ What was at stake was Siniavskii's integrity as an individual and his status as a writer; this latter point was all-important and could well be overlooked, lost in the welter of the more tendentious political and ideological accusations aimed at him.³⁸⁷ His response, therefore, had to be as much an affirmation of Tertz the writer as it was a vindication of Siniavskii the man: "Continuing my own defence, I said to myself: "You're a writer, and nothing else matters!"³⁸⁸

A single, obvious opponent in the shape of the Soviet government had necessitated the original split, with Siniavskii as the 'legitimate' academic and literary critic and Tertz as his iconoclastic, unofficial alter ego. Now, however, both could speak freely but the enemy had morphed into a hydra whose different heads each represented a different, hostile camp and had to be fought on various fronts simultaneously. Moreover, the hostilities had become more personal and were directed at him by fellow intellectuals.³⁸⁹ They could not be met with a simple denial of guilt, as at his trial, but had to be answered in full and in more complex ways.

Kroshka Tsores' difficulty was not simply his otherness; it was also his inability to communicate with those around him. Not only did his well-intentioned actions achieve the reverse of what he meant, whatever he said was

³⁸⁶ Rozanova, 'K istorii i geografii etoi knigi', p. 158.

³⁸⁷ The importance to Siniavskii of being – and being known as – a writer can be gauged from the fact it was precisely on this point that Maksimov chose to denigrate him. At the height of their clash, and with reference to a letter from Siniavskii concerning Spokoinoi nochi, it was as 'the literary critic, Mr. Siniavskii' that he alluded to him in Kontinent. V Maksimov, 'O "RUKE KGB" I PROCHEM' (hereafter, 'O "RUKE KGB"'), Kontinent, 49, 1986, pp. 337-42 (p. 337).

³⁸⁸ Tertz, Spokoinoi nochi, p. 370 /p. 42.

³⁸⁹ A reminder that it had been fellow writers who had ensured the severity of Siniavskii and Daniel's sentences in 1966. See, John and Carol Garrard, Inside the Soviet Writers' Union, p. 139.

misinterpreted or misconstrued. A similar failure of communication alienated Siniavskii from his fellow Russians, a failure that bridged the divide between first and third wave émigrés and would also be a feature of reactions in Russia when works such as Progulki s Pushkinym first appeared in print there in the late 1980s. It was not what Siniavskii said about Pushkin, so much as how he said it that so incensed the old guard émigrés such as Roman Gul'.³⁹⁰ Gul' could no more see past the 'vulgarity' of Siniavskii's language than Solzhenitsyn could understand and accept the playfulness of his treatment of so hallowed a figure of Russian literature as Pushkin.³⁹¹

In this, the outraged reaction of Siniavskii's conservative contemporaries in the Russian intelligentsia unable to cope with a radical new departure in the literary field, may be seen an echo of the reception of Lermontov's Geroi nashego vremeni, the major work of a poet venturing into the field of what was, by the standards of the time, experimental prose. Denouncing Lermontov's work for its harmfulness, contemporary criticism saw in its negative features a 'foreignness', the pernicious influence of Western culture, so that 'Pechorin [...] stepped straight into the dominant philosophical argument of the age in Russia between Slavophiles and Westernisers and from the Slavophile point of view, fell short, because he did not exhibit the requisite features of Russian nationality'.³⁹² The same overlap of politics, philosophy questions of national identity and literature was and would continue to be a feature of the debate that

³⁹⁰ John Glad, 'Roman Goul', in Glad, Conversations in Exile, pp. 50-65 (p. 59).

³⁹¹ Solzhenitsyn, '...Koleblet tvoi trenochnik'.

³⁹² Robert Reid, Lermontov's A Hero of Our Time, Bristol, 1997, p.3.

defined attitudes to Siniavskii and found him wanting from the point of view of nationalists (or neo-Slavophiles) such as Shafarevich and Solzhenitsyn.

Lermontov's answer to his critics that took the form of a Preface to the second edition of 1841, now considered an integral part of the text, focuses on the failings of his reader and presages, in strikingly similar terms, Siniavskii's reaction to the reception of Progulki s Pushkinym. In his Preface Lermontov attacks with biting sarcasm the ineptitude and illiteracy of his reader, who, if one could fast forward a hundred and fifty years or so, would meet his counterpart in Siniavskii's time: 'badly educated', with no sense of irony, he succumbs to the 'misfortune of believing in the literal meaning of the words of this book'.³⁹³ Mariia Vasilievna, writing in the wake of the Progulki s Pushkinym scandal, was to remark that the Russian people had 'unlearned how to read', that metaphors, for example, passed them by, read as literal depictions.³⁹⁴ In this she was merely repeating in a different way what Siniavskii had said in his final plea at his trial in 1966.

The role of the reader, developed in Siniavskii's writing of the camp years in his fantastic literary criticism, acquires a further dimension in his work of this period. The collaborative partnership of Tertz and Siniavskii, evident from the first phase of his career and deepened by the experience of the camps, now takes on renewed meaning. While Tertz takes up the challenge obliquely and metaphorically, Siniavskii uses the more direct path. However, the subject matter and also, on occasion, the style of the writing can be seen increasingly to

³⁹³ Lermontov, Geroi nashego vremeni, p. 212.

³⁹⁴ Rozanova, 'K istorii i geografii etoi knigi', p.159.

overlap and the distinctions between the two become blurred. This is evident in the articles signed by Siniavskii but still more so in his academic work, his lectures at the Sorbonne on Russian literature and culture and the books that grew out of some of them: ‘Opavshie list’ia’ V.V. Rozanova and Osnovy sovetskoi tsivilizatsii.³⁹⁵ Although it is Siniavskii who delivers the lectures what he says is often more akin to the many-layered writing of Tertz.

More than at any other time, the full significance of Siniavskii’s work now emerges only if it is considered as a single entity, as a finely tuned dialogue conducted between Siniavskii and Tertz, as an act of synthesis in which man and writer, writer and literary critic come together. This dialogue would find its most complete expression in Spokoinoi nochi.³⁹⁶

Spokoinoi nochi constitutes Siniavskii’s most complex and effective reply to his critics in the matter of his personal and artistic integrity. His writing in the camps had been carried out in the expectation of a receptive reading, in the knowledge of a reader as sympathetic to his writing as he was sympathetic to them and to his subject. Now, not only is he himself the subject of scrutiny just as much as his art, he is faced with an uncomprehending, not to say hostile

³⁹⁵ The date of publication given for Osnovy sovetskoi tsivilizatsii is that of the first, French edition (La civilisation soviétique) which is based on lectures given by Siniavskii at the Sorbonne in 1979, 1982 and 1984. It does not contain part two, ‘Intelligentsiia i vlast’ which is based on the Harriman lectures, delivered by Siniavskii at Columbia University in New York in 1997 as The Russian Intelligentsia. A Russian edition containing both parts, did not appear until 2002. In a postscript to this edition, Mariia Vasilievna explains that for a long time, up to and including Gorbachev’s perestroika, when there was still some hope of ‘turning the pyramid of Soviet power into a Parthenon of democracy’, Siniavskii did not consider that there was anything to be gained from publishing it for a Russian audience: they had, after all, lived through it all themselves. With El’tsin’s firing on the Belyi dom in 1993, however, those hopes were dashed. Siniavskii started gathering material for another book and it was then that the idea of a Russian edition took shape. M. Rozanova, “‘Osnovy sovetskoi tsivilizatsii’”. Mal’enskaia spravka’, in Siniavskii, Osnovy, pp.456-57.

³⁹⁶ H el ene Zamoyska points out the importance of this dialogue from the very beginning of the Siniavskii-Tertz relationship, emphasising the role of Tertz as a ‘moral stimulant who ‘committed [Siniavskii] to be worthy of his freedom’. Zamoyska, ‘Sinyavsky, the Man and the Writer’, pp. 63-64.

readership (in certain instances, people who had not even read the book were against it) who accuse him of hating not only Pushkin but all Russian culture.³⁹⁷ He therefore tests and tries his reader, as Lermontov had done, not only challenging his perceptions of the author but at the same time drawing him in, involving him in literature as an active participant. This takes a variety of forms, from the most basic game-playing such as ‘spot the deliberate mistake’, to his fantastic literary criticism, the most sophisticated exercise in writer-reader communication, both of which he had already used in his writing from the camps.³⁹⁸ Now, his fantastic autobiography takes it a stage further. Only if he were prepared to engage with him on this level would the reader learn who Siniavskii was and what literature, in Siniavskii’s view at least, was all about.

Fantastic Autobiography

‘Professor, snimite ochki-velosiped!

ia sam rasskazhu o vremeni i o sebe’³⁹⁹

³⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 157. Rozanova refers to the ‘venerable professor Gleb Struve’ who declared that ‘although he had not read “Progulki”, the quotations from it in various works were so monstrous that he, too, was unable to remain silent’.

³⁹⁸ An example of a deliberate mistake is the attribution to Lomonosov of the lines ‘You might not be a poet, but you must be a citizen’ in Progulki s Pushkinym. As Siniavskii tells John Glad, ‘Well, my God, every schoolboy knows that Nekrasov said that, not Lomonosov. I wrote that in jest. So they decided to expose me. “Just imagine”, they said. “He’s a professor, and he doesn’t know that!” They’re out of touch and they can’t see it.’ Siniavskii, here, is referring to ‘the current émigrés’. Glad, ‘Andrei Siniavsky and Maria Rozanova’, p. 165. Siniavskii plants a similar howler in Koshkin dom, where Tolstoy is given as the author of Brat’ia Karamazovy. In the later uproar when Progulki s Pushkinym was published in Russia, the point was picked up by Valentin Nepomniashchii, who none the less misinterpreted it, seeing it as a supercilious game on Siniavskii’s part and as such an insult to the reader. See, ‘Obsuzhdenie knigi Abrama Tertza “Progulki s Pushkinym”’, Voprosy literatury, 10, 1990, pp. 77-153 (pp. 144-45)

³⁹⁹ Vladimir Maiakovskii, ‘Vo ves’ golos’ (1930), in Maiakovskii, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v trinadtsati tomakh, Moscow, 1955, 10, pp. 279-85 (p. 279).

To accept Siniavskii's statement that Spokoinoi nochi was 'not exactly an autobiography' but 'an artistic work' would be to ignore what Donald Fanger has called its 'patent intentionality'.⁴⁰⁰ Indeed, it is shot through with intention, not least because it is presented as an artistic work. A rebuttal of the official Soviet 'heroic biography' and also the Socialist Realist novel which, in the cross-fertilisation between official discourse and literature typical of Socialist Realism, had become a 'ritualized biography', it also went against the canons and expectations of his own dissident milieu: 'The Soviet dissident liberates himself from the necessity of recording his life, of becoming only another witness of his era, instead of remaining the artist that he is'.⁴⁰¹

Siniavskii's eschewing of the more predictable forms of dissident literature, dominated by the 'factography' of memoirs, diaries and the chronicling of the times as a form of testimony, was not, however, a crude gesture of non-alignment. Rather, it was a complex creative step in its re-connection with older strands of Russian literature. Implicit in his writing from the camps, Siniavskii's debt to Dostoevskii and the idea of truth that cannot be conveyed through a factual and objective account of reality is now openly articulated as a leitmotif of his fantastic autobiography.

Prison had revealed to Dostoevskii that man was neither good nor bad but irrational, limitless and in this very irrationality he was free. Based on this revelation, according to Siniavskii, Dostoevskii had turned away from the traditional, 'novel of character' (for which one may read 'realist novel') which

⁴⁰⁰ Siniavskii, 'My life as a writer', p. 8. Fanger, 'A change of venue', p. 1322.

⁴⁰¹ Andrew J. Nussbaum, 'Literary Selves: The Tertz-Sinyavsky Dialogue', in Jane Gary Harris (ed.) Twentieth Century Statements in Russian Literature, Princeton NJ, 1990 pp. 238-59, (p.257).

‘embodies a materialistic understanding of the nature of man’ and begun to write ‘novels of state’.⁴⁰² Psychological analysis, the linear development of character, is no longer applicable as the individual reacts, ‘falls into states’ and ‘jumps out of himself’, like Raskolnikov. Siniavskii invites the reader to consider him as the protagonist of his own life and story as a complex figure, perhaps not completely blameless but certainly not irredeemably evil.

The link to Dostoevskii goes further and deeper, however, to the thematic heart of Spokoinoi nochi and the idea not simply of Siniavskii’s birth as the writer Tertz but of his redemption and his spiritual and creative resurrection through literature. Spokoinoi nochi presents itself as not merely a defence of Siniavskii’s writing as Tertz but its defiant continuation, as the third part of what may be seen as the trilogy started with Progulki s Pushkinym and V teni Gogolia.

While Dostoevskii provides the thematic core of Siniavskii’s novel, in the matter of his antecedents in the autobiographical field it is once again to Pasternak and Pushkin, Rozanov and Maiakovskii that one should look – not for any exact equivalent as much as for the spirit in which the accounts are framed – while the reverse trajectory of the account re-iterates his orchestration of V teni Gogolia.

Whereas Progulki s Pushkinym shows the unmistakable influence of Pasternak’s Okhrannaia gramota, there are points of contact between Spokoinoi nochi and Doktor Zhivago as the spiritual and artistic biography of the writer cast as fiction. This is more surprising as Siniavskii, a passionate admirer of

⁴⁰² Nepomnyashchy, ‘Interview’, p. 17.

Pasternak's poetry, was less enthusiastic about his last, great prose work. The one aspect of it about which he was complimentary was precisely the one where the poetic element was at its strongest, reminding him of *Sestra moia zhizn'* (My Sister Life, 1922).⁴⁰³ The energy and promise of the renewal of Pasternak's early poetry is re-lived in Zhivago's re-birth as a poet and writer as a process of creative and spiritual transformation. The poet's death is transcended by the poems that live on as a testament to his life and his art and it is echoes of these poems that are woven into Siniavskii's text in the 'icons' that figure towards the end of *Spokoinoi nochi*.

Arguably, however, it was Maiakovskii and Rozanov who proved the strongest influences on Siniavskii's presentation of his own biography and this is reinforced by a reading of Siniavskii's lectures on them at the Sorbonne that date from this time. More than Pasternak, they consciously made themselves the 'lyrical heroes' of their own work.

Most importantly, here were Siniavskii's models for self-representation as a mode of polemics. Self-projection in the case of both Rozanov and Maiakovskii was in no small measure a response to individual detractors who at the same time represented principles inimical to their way of thinking. Personal accusations were linked to fundamental reactions to their times, to the complex issues of their identity and to their artistic credos.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰³ See, Glad, 'Andrei Siniavsky and Mariia Rozanova', p. 145. Also, Nepomnyashchy, 'Interview', p. 8.

⁴⁰⁴ See, Siniavskii, *'Opavshie list'ia'*, pp. 267-69. Siniavskii cites the example of Rozanov's disagreement with the eminent thinker and author, Piotr Struve. 'For Rozanov, Struve was an example of the "correct" and "respectable" man, that is to say of what was for him the most unpleasant kind of person. Putting it in more concrete terms, he was typical of the scholar, the professor who strives to think about everything in a strictly scientific and objective way'. Struve was moderate in all things and 'this moderation drove Rozanov wild, inasmuch as Rozanov was in all respects an immoderate and indecent writer' (p. 268). The

It is in their challenging of received ideas of authorial self-representation, however, that the influence of Rozanov and Maiakovskii on Siniavskii becomes still more pronounced. In the case of Maiakovskii it is Pushkin who, as in Okhrannaia gramota, provides a crucial link, now pointing the way from Siniavskii's fantastic literary criticism to his fantastic autobiography as he answers his critics who had attacked him for Progulki s Pushkinym.

The basis of Siniavskii's fantastic literary criticism, his sympathetic identification with his subject, reflects directly what Siniavskii highlights about Maiakovskii's approach to Pushkin. Maiakovskii, in his poem, 'Iubileinoe' (Anniversary, 1924), had rescued Pushkin from the dry scholars and Pushkinists who had turned the living poet into a 'mummy', by treating him as a living person, engaging him in conversation. The idea of a conversation, of the poet brought to life and immortalised through his own voice, is then carried over into Maiakovskii's 'Vo ves' golos', now in reference to himself. 'Iubileinoe' had taken the form of a conversation with the statue of Pushkin on Moscow's Tverskoi Boulevard, on which were inscribed Pushkin's lines from his poem, 'Pamiatnik' [Ia pamiatnik sebe vozdvig nerukotvornyi], (The Monument, 1836).

particular clash between the two men took place in the context of the Beilis affair, when there was talk in 1914 of excluding Rozanov from the religious-philosophical society because of his extreme anti-Semitism. Rozanov's reply to Struve took the form of a letter to Merezhkovskii in Opavshie list'ia, (p. 269). See, also, Anna Lisa Crone, 'Rozanov and Autobiography: the Case of Vasily Vasilievich' (hereafter, 'Rozanov and Autobiography'), in Jane Gary Harris (ed.), Autobiographical Statements in Twentieth-Century Russian Literature, Princeton NJ, 1990, pp. 36-51 (p. 40). Maiakovskii had undertaken a similarly pointed attack in 'Vo ves' golos' against Georgii Shengeli, for similar reasons: Shengeli was the same kind of 'professor' type so disliked by Rozanov. A poet of the neo-classical school and author of a series of literary-critical works on how to write verses (answered by Maiakovskii in 'Kak delat' stikhi') he had published in 1927 a 'voluminous' book against Maiakovskii, looking at the whole of Maiakovskii's work from an academic point of view: Maiakovskii vo ves' rost. Maiakovskii initiated a direct polemic with this book in his poem, 'Vo ves' golos': 'That is why Maiakovskii decided to take upon himself the foundation of his own poetry in its relation to the era and the future. "Professor, remove your pince-nez! I will tell you about my times and about myself"'. HIA, box 20, folder 5, pp. 16-17.

The idea of a memorial set in stone is then translated into its literary counterpart as Maiakovskii, in ‘Vo ves’ golos’, plays with the whole notion of monuments and statues, dead tradition versus living art. Siniavskii shows how, taking up the literary tradition of the pamiatnik – a genre established by Horace’s ‘Exegi monumentum’ and adopted by Russian poets from Derzhavin to Briusov, with lines from it inscribed as an epigraph to Pushkin’s poem – Maiakovskii now applies it to himself, continuing the conversation with Pushkin begun in ‘Iubileinoe’. Siniavskii, echoing this, applies to his own biography the approach he had used in Progulki s Pushkinym, asserting his right to define himself.

Siniavskii highlights the fact that the conversation in ‘Vo ves’ golos’ is now with the text of ‘Pamiatnik’, with the very idea of erecting a monument to oneself, as well as with an established literary genre. ‘Vo ves’ golos’, therefore, is both ‘monument’ and ‘anti-monument’, just as Spokoinoi nochi is both autobiography and anti-autobiography.

The point that Siniavskii makes, and which is carried over into Spokoinoi nochi, is that this approach is not intended to deny either the tradition or the genre but to infuse them with new life, to rescue at one and the same time both the individual and his representation from a form imposed by others. Dumb stone in Maiakovskii’s poem is transformed into the poet speaking ‘at the top of [his] voice’, as he becomes his own, living monument.⁴⁰⁵ Similarly, in Progulki s

⁴⁰⁵ HIA, box 20, folder 5, Lecture on ‘Vo ves’ golos’, pp. 10-11: “Monument” was, for Maiakovskii, a synonym for stagnation, old things, for dead authority which hides the living face of the artist. Therefore, in ‘Vo ves’ golos’ he speaks against a monument to himself and suggests for himself a particular kind of “anti-monument”, which is a stimulus for this poem. Instead of a monument, Maiakovskii proposes himself as a living person and addresses the future and generations to come “as a living person speaking to living people” [kak zhivoi s zhivymi govoria]. Thus we have a variation of the “monument” tradition and a rejection of this tradition, We have both a “monument” and an “anti-monument”. As a result,

Pushkinym, contrasting images of stone and water vie with each other as the busts and monuments to Pushkin are discarded, dissolved in Siniavskii's fluid and dynamic evocation of the living poet; the same imagery and allusions would be carried through to Spokoinoi nochi .

Rozanov's 'Opavshie list'ia' V.V. Rozanova offers a different challenge to accepted notions of autobiography in that it is self-depiction that sets out deliberately to confound the reader and defy definition; myth-making that simultaneously undermines its own myths. Self-representation as myth-making might seem more obvious in Maiakovskii than Rozanov, with works such as 'Chelovek' and its powerful echoes of Gospel motifs and cosmogony.⁴⁰⁶ However, Rozanov's very 'ordinariness' is no less of a literary mask or device, ordinariness taken to extremes and which constitutes its own legend. The same is true of Siniavskii: the quiet, self-effacing scholar was no less of a mask than the brash and disreputable Tertz. The eponymous hero of 'Opavshie list'ia' V.V. Rozanova is both Rozanov and yet not Rozanov. The writer is not so much revealed as glimpsed, not as a finished product but as someone in the constant process of evolution who, in spite of the very concreteness of his imagery and the specificity of his allusions remains determinedly elusive.

This brings us back to Lermontov and his Geroi nashego vremeni, a title saturated with ambiguity and irony. The eponymous 'hero' is effectively held out as bait, as a quarry for the reader to pursue through the multiple shifts of

Maiakovskii's very prose and image acquire the truly monumental character of a "monument" erected to himself. At the same time we have before us not a bronze statue but a living man and poet, Maiakovskii, life size and speaking at the top of his voice.'

⁴⁰⁶ See, for example, HIA, box 19, folder 12, lecture 13, p. 23.

perspective, the twists and turns of the narrative. The novel, divided into discrete but interrelated sections, is structured not chronologically but artistically to lead to the heart of the matter with Pechorin's diary. Yet, ultimately, Pechorin remains elusive and the novel open-ended as Pechorin's supposed baring of his soul before the reader is as contrived as Rozanov's 'undressing'. It is left for the reader to make up his own mind as to the qualities and character of the hero. Spokoinoi nochi sets just such a puzzle for the reader.

Spokoinoi nochi

'The past cannot be grasped in sequence. It slips through our fingers the minute we begin building monuments to it'.⁴⁰⁷

Though polemical in intent, Siniavskii does not make Spokoinoi nochi an outright rejection of his era and the culture that shaped him. It is, rather, a story of integration with his times and himself, 'an effort of memory to bring hero and author into a significant unity'.⁴⁰⁸

This is reflected in the text that is not a linear account but might be seen as a kind of surreal palimpsest in which past and present are glimpsed through superimposed layers, harking back to the metaphors of archaeological strata in Liubimov and V teni Gogolia. A more apt analogy, however, one which is equally implicit in Siniavskii's view of art and culture and reinforced by his experience in the camps, would be to see the text as a densely woven fabric of

⁴⁰⁷ Tertz, Spokoinoi nochi, p. 351 / p.18.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 351 / p. 17.

history and art, of literature and Siniavskii's life. The reader is made aware of the infinite number of strands that go to make up the story but will only truly understand it in all its complexity and richness if he is able to connect these strands and see them as an integrated whole.

Taking up the rite of passage motif of traditional culture, appropriated as a template by Socialist Realist novels, Siniavskii re-invents it in the story of his life as a writer. The text shifts constantly, not only chronologically but stylistically and even visually with its alternating black and red print – a reminder of Siniavskii's modernist leanings – mimicking the uneven path by which he came to his conversion. Alongside this he sets his own parables of epiphany and resurrection, his metaphorical emergence from the belly of the whale and his real and symbolic ascent from the prehistoric caves in France.⁴⁰⁹

Invoking pagan myths of cyclical renewal and in particular the story of Orpheus, with its promise of the survival of art, Siniavskii's path involves a descent into darkness. Echoing the motif of burial in V teni Gogolia as well as the experience of the archpriest Avvakum, Siniavskii's story picks up the threads of Progulki s Pushkinym and V teni Gogolia, the circular strolls of the former echoed in the closing pages of the latter with the re-emergence of the writer as itinerant minstrel into the blessed light of life and creativity.

⁴⁰⁹ The same idea is found in one of Siniavskii's lectures on Maiakovskii. He describes Maiakovskii in the prologue to 'Chelovek' as 'the new Adam', 'or, as he calls himself, the New Noah, sitting in Noah's ark or in the belly of his mother earth, from which the sun's rays draw him out'. HIA, box 19, folder 12, lecture 13, p. 17.

Chapter I 'Perevertysh'.

Spokoinoi nochi is a book about the writing of that book, about the life of the artist as a literary fact. In Siniavskii's words: 'what I did was to choose from my own biography what were, for me, the most decisive moments, the ones that determined my journey as a writer'. To the question 'Is this reality or fantasy?', his answer is, 'it's reality – but out of that reality I picked the most sharply fantastic situations. That's why it's a novel'.⁴¹⁰

From the outset, Siniavskii's is deliberately ambivalent, unwilling to fix the genre and nature of his work. Even as he appears to clarify the situation for the reader he is intent on challenging him. Signalling the parallel versions of his arrest, one an apparently factual account, the other "The Mirror", a fairy-tale play in five scenes', he appeals to the reader: 'please do not confuse that with the actual story of my arrest, which I shall be telling at the same time'.⁴¹¹ Yet it is a fairy-tale that Siniavskii or, rather, Tertz, weaves about himself in the form of a book that is also a play in five acts, and his warning to the reader is precisely to alert him to this fact, all the while leaving open the possibility that fact and fairy-tale can be diametrically opposed and coterminous at one and the same time. Through the prism of the fairy tale the Soviet experience, particularly the Stalin era, can be faced and transmuted into art, its horrors dissipated like a nightmare at daybreak.

Conflating time, past and present become interchangeable as Siniavskii's 'first' and 'second' trials merge into one. The 'concrete political sabotage' of

⁴¹⁰ Siniavskii, 'My life as a writer', p. 8.

⁴¹¹ Tertz, Spokoinoi nochi, p. 341 / p. 4.

which he had stood accused at his trial is revealed as his later treatment of Pushkin, while his indictment at the hands of his fellow émigrés is made part and parcel of his earlier prosecution by the State. Spokoinoi nochi shows Tertz unbowed and unrepentant, wielding language in a pyrotechnical display of exuberant provocation. His attitude to Pushkin is outrageously defiant as, going further than ever he did in Progulki s Pushkinym, he deliberately confuses his name with that of a well-known laxative (Purgine).

The continuity with his works on Pushkin (and Gogol) is further enhanced as it becomes apparent that Spokoinoi nochi represents the writer's attempt to wrest back the right to fashion his own identity. The passive voice, with which the novel opens as he is seized by the organs of State security, is transformed into an active one as Tertz, his writerly self, takes control, not dictating events but dominating them stylistically on the level of the text. Following the 'plot', his biography parts company with any official account to enter the realms of the literary and the fantastic.

Language that was the root of his disagreement with the Soviet State as with his detractors in emigration, language that formed him as Tertz, is now central to his vindication, his polemics and his integration. Metaphors are shown to be not merely something for which one 'pays with one's head' but re-assume their proper function as agents of transformation. Picking up the name perevertysh applied to him (and Daniel') in the weeks leading up to their trial, he flings it back in the face of his accusers, adopting it as the title of his first chapter. A term of revilement in the mouths of his detractors, it is closely related to

pluralism, with its suggestion of multiple and fluid identities. Siniavskii now adopts it as a badge of honour as Tertz assumes as his defining characteristic the perevertysh and oboroten's magical gift of metamorphosis but now cleansed of all the negative political and ideological connotations acquired in Soviet parlance.

To the gift of self-transformation are added the advantages of illegitimacy as once again Siniavskii exploits creatively the accusations against him. He had been proclaimed the heir not of Dostoevskii but of Smerdiakov.⁴¹² However, as Siniavskii had demonstrated in Progulki s Pushkinym, illegitimacy is an exhilarating condition that liberates the writer, enabling him to create himself. Taking his cue from Kedrina's article, he uses his 'illegitimacy' to reintegrate himself into the family of Russian literature by the back door.

As if in confirmation of this, his non-official status, he wins the recognition of his fellow prisoners en route to the camps. The tribe of thieves and criminals embraces him as one of its own, 'due solely to my notoriety as a writer who disagreed with you [...] The sea has accepted me! The sea has accepted me, Pakhomov!...' ⁴¹³

⁴¹² Kedrina, 'Nasledniki Smerdiakova', p. 2 / pp. 100-01.

⁴¹³ Tertz, Spokinoi nochi, p. 401 / pp. 81-82. Lieutenant Colonel V.A. Pakhomov, 'Investigator on Cases of Special Importance' was one of Siniavskii's interrogators.

Chapter II 'Dom svidanii'

'It turns out that we are born for prison. And yet all we think of is freedom, escape...'⁴¹⁴

The one chapter of Siniavskii's autobiographical novel nominally situated in the camps, 'Dom svidanii', touches on it only tangentially; literally, in that it is situated not in the camp proper but at its edge, in a 'barracks-like hotel' where prisoners are allowed a brief meeting with their wives and loved ones once a year; but also because the everyday life of the camp impinges hardly at all.

Containing a multi-layered narrative where crimes of passion and literary misdeeds become synonymous, the fairy tale assumes the form of a blatnaia pesnia. As adventure and love story come together, the chapter proclaims a poetics not of imprisonment but of escape and self-fulfilment. Played out over a single night, the text expands in a multiplicity of ideas and images to refute alike the barred windows, the relentless passing of the hours and the limits of the printed page.

The fairy tale is the thread that draws all together, from the 'banquet' that appears as if by magic in front of the famished prisoner at the beginning: 'there's everything your heart could desire on the table. Every last delicacy', to the chicken that appears miraculously outside the door of the Siniavskii apartment in Moscow.⁴¹⁵ It has its ogres (the repulsive prison guard, Kishka), its witches (both real and fictional) and its fairy godmother/godfather (the anonymous, brave individual who left the chicken and then 'disappeared without trace'). But

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., p. 426 / p. 118.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 402 / p. 84 and pp. 446-48 / pp. 145-48.

it is prison itself that turns out to be the true fairy tale – ‘A horrible fairy tale, of course, but a beneficial one for a writer’.⁴¹⁶

Prison becomes something not merely pre-ordained, inevitable in view of Siniavskii’s underground activities, but something subconsciously courted in order to give shape and substance to the idea that was Tertz, the necessary coincidence of the writer and his times:

I’m at ease in my skin here. Not just as a person who has grown used to the life around him, but as a writer who has at last found himself in his work. There’s a voluptuous pleasure in slipping into this torture garden full of marvellous creations that, in some strange way, are a continuation of my own capricious ideas, my own long, slippery snake mask.⁴¹⁷

The language, persuasively sensuous and metaphorically suggestive, forms a bridge between his physical and stylistic identities, allowing him to pass effortlessly from one to the other.

Prison is both symbol and agent of transformation, while the ability to metamorphose becomes the chief attribute of the writer-hero of the tale, in the manner of the Russian byliny. Siniavskii indulges the multiple possibilities of his alter egos, revelling in the creation of his own myths and legends. On this playful level, prevalent at the start of Spokoinoi nochi, Siniavskii casts himself as the lead in his own adventure story, the stuff of childhood fantasies, as the retiring professor becomes, by turn, a gladiator, Spartacus, the Count of Monte

⁴¹⁶ Siniavskii, ‘On the History of This Book’, p. vii.

⁴¹⁷ Tertz, Spokoinoi nochi, p. 440 / p. 138. See, also, Siniavskii, ‘On the History of This Book’, pp. vi-vii. Also, Rozanova, ‘Radio Liberty transcript’, folder 18, transmission 26, p. 5.

Cristo. Overcoming obstacles, fighting himself out of corners, he outwits his various opponents and rights the wrongs committed against him.⁴¹⁸

Romance and adventure merge with detective story and science fiction, as the prison interlude doubles back on itself to the events leading up to Siniavskii's arrest and the Count of Monte Cristo gives way to the Invisible Man. The theme of the hunter and the hunted is introduced as the darker side of reality begins to intrude. However, as with the other major leitmotifs of the work, the path to the serious heart of the matter starts with a light step. Questions of life and death, of honour and betrayal are translated into the world of literature and fantasy: 'Just as if this were the denouement of a detective story, a model for a board game of cops-and-robbers'. Porfirii Petrovich is hot on the heels of Raskolnikov.⁴¹⁹

Using as starting point the real events of his arrest, Siniavskii once again turns to his advantage a condition imposed on him by the State. From the moment of his capture, he had been reduced to the status of a non-person,

⁴¹⁸ In a sense, Siniavskii was living out his childhood dreams, as his parents' disapproval of the authors whose work he yearned to read was what made him into a writer: 'I always have the feeling that I let all that was most important and most beautiful in life slip by me, that I had lost it somewhere back in my childhood, and the unread *Headless Horseman* was galloping on ahead without me. And perhaps that's why in the end I became a writer, out of a sense that something was missing: to make up for lost reading!...' Tertz, *Spokoinoi nochi*, p.485 / p. 200. Here, Siniavskii chooses as his alter egos characters who are not simply romantic heroes but those whose stories strike a chord with his own: the rebellious slave and the wronged individual whose self re-invention represents both an essential part of his escape from unjust incarceration and an act of revenge on his enemies. *The Count of Monte Cristo* has further aspects that make it appealing for Siniavskii. Dumas grew up at a period when 'the two rival ideologies, of Classicism and Romanticism, were engaged in a mock-heroic combat for the soul of French literature [...] Romanticism meant energy, modern subject matter, mixing genres and openness to foreign influences'. His epic tale intermingles fiction and reality, adventure story and detective story, while incorporating in its protagonist features of two Romantic stereotypes, the Byronic hero and the vampire. Written around the motifs of imprisonment and escape, this is also an allegory of 'burial and resurrection'. See, Robin Buss, Introduction to Alexandre Dumas (père), *The Count of Monte Cristo*, trans. Robin Buss, London, 1996, pp. xi-xxi.

⁴¹⁹ Tertz, *Spokoinoi nochi*, p. 103 and p.419/ p. 108.

virtually invisible to those around him, thus presenting him with a blank canvas on which to inscribe his life anew.⁴²⁰

The Invisible Man, as both alter ego and metaphor for the elusive author, becomes the mediator between Tertz as hero and Tertz as writer. The tale shifts back and forth between fantasy and reality, between text and Moscow, Tertz and Siniavskii, using the polysemantic leitmotif of snow to link the disparate levels of the story together. Snow becomes the quintessential symbol of the transformative character of both writer and his prose.

But this is also a thieves' tale, a blatnaia pesnia, and it has an edge to it. The white snow is stained with red: a knife inserted into the whirlwind comes out covered in blood, 'And blood is proof. Proof that there's something alive inside that whirling snow...'. Death is a real possibility if the hero is caught and, as the snow melts, it is blood that comes to dominate the story. Death arrives in grotesque and graphic terms to jolt the reader into the real world as the whimsicality of the Invisible Man is juxtaposed with the brutal reality of the killing of an escapee from the camps, as Siniavskii dwells on the sight of a human being reduced to lifeless meat, 'a side of beef'.

However, the violent end of the prisoner is not simply a matter of hunter and hunted, of innocent victim and ruthless pursuers, but one of a failure of communication and the prisoner, a harmless madman who hears voices and lives in the world of his imagination, is but another alias for the writer.⁴²¹ His

⁴²⁰ Ibid., p. 340 / p.2 and p. 357 / p. 25.

⁴²¹ The image of the 'madman', indicating the Soviet State's use of psychiatric hospitals as a convenient, alternative way to rid themselves of troublesome intellectuals, was a particularly topical one in the 1960s but had been used earlier by Bulgakov in Master i Margarita.

unnecessary and viciously executed death results from the failure of the guards to understand and interpret his actions: ‘nothing could have been easier than to lead him by the hand like a child, back from the plowed-earth zone, but they had opened fire on him’.⁴²²

This second chapter of Spokoinoi nochi, is above all a story of communication and literature’s role in ensuring this. The abject failure of communication, as in the case of the madman Klaus, and the fatal consequences that ensue, is offset by paradigmatic acts of communion that relate directly to Siniavskii’s writing of the camp years. The various tales and anecdotes, both fictional and real, that go to make up the chapter are set within a love story that is at once a story about literature, literature which, by its very nature is criminal and fraught with danger, but which, in its ideal form, is an act of communication and love.

Siniavskii pays tribute to Mariia Vasilievna in his version of a blatnaia pesnia as he sketches in a few lines the story of a ‘bandit’ and his young lover. Caught up in a drunken brawl, the bandit falls to the ground with a knife in his hand and his lover is blamed for giving it to him, for involving him in some potentially fatal crime. Infuriated, she lashes back, “‘Yes, good people, I slipped him the knife – me, I did it. Yes, that’s how much I love him!’” [...] “‘Yes, I love him, the bandit!’”⁴²³ As Siniavskii is careful to let drop elsewhere in Spokoinoi nochi, in thieves’ cant a pen means a knife and Mariia Vasilievna, like the gangster’s moll, had always backed Siniavskii in his most daring and ‘criminal’ ventures as

⁴²² Tertz, Spokoinoi nochi, p. 425 / p. 121.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, p. 408 / p. 92.

a writer, and in prison had given him not only the idea for the book on Pushkin but supplied him with an endless supply of pens.

Language is often inadequate to the tasks it sets itself. Setting in motion an extended, complex allegory of forests and trees, words uttered or half-spoken, the literal and the metaphorical, Siniavskii leads the reader from the witches of Macbeth (via a witch-like old academic 'with a mustache and an international reputation' who was 'Shakespeare incarnate') and Birnam wood (linking their prophecies to the story of Oleg the Wise) and thence to the forested slopes of a Swiss mountainside. The trees, like language, like 'feeble literature', in their desperate attempts to conquer the summit, merge with 'the paths of our innumerable accomplices and comrades', dragging themselves 'to the top of their tombs'. They are doomed to failure but 'What an impulse for the impossible, that same readiness to risk everything for flight and ascent.' 'Language is about what's beyond its own grasp...'⁴²⁴

True communication can dispense even with words if the spirit in which it is undertaken is one of sympathy and understanding. Just as, despairing of being able to write on the unyielding walls of the Potma transit camp, Siniavskii had touched it and had felt the tremors left on them by the thousands who had already passed through, so in the small cell-like room of the Public House, as he paces up and down he finds that it is like 'tuning in to a call signal', reminding him of caged animals:

Captured, all hope lost, they do not seek a way out but, to keep from dying, they use pacing as a way to begin resonating with the other levels

⁴²⁴ Ibid., pp. 423-25 / pp. 114-17.

of consciousness that are always pulsating everywhere, and then they begin to live by the laws of literary existence, which does not butt up against the wall but quite simply bypasses it, and when we speak about ourselves, we also listen intently to the beat of universal life, which carries like a recitative and to which our lives and thoughts are synchronized without our even knowing it.⁴²⁵

At times deprived of paper and the wherewithal to write, Siniavskii learned to communicate not through words, but with every fibre of his being. This is how he ‘tuned in’ to the walls of the prison cell. This is how he communicates with Mariia Vasilievna when she comes to visit him, drinking her in, absorbing her through her face: ‘I begin with the face because it’s the most important. I don’t know if we do this with men too, but we love a woman for her face, choose her by her face. It’s cruel. “Choose” is not the word, however – we fall under the spell of a face, we go over the waterfall, we fly through the air and are smashed on the rocks and we barely notice.’⁴²⁶

Few words are uttered at their meetings. It is more a matter of gestures, of words sketched in the air, of sentences scribbled on sheets from a notebook and then torn up like so much paper spaghetti into a pan of water that is then flushed away. Each sentence, half started, is already understood.

Communication is the act of love itself, a way of completing ‘what words could not fully say’ and an act of self-preservation. Sin is transmuted into

⁴²⁵ Ibid., p. 451 / p. 152.

⁴²⁶ Ibid., p. 405 / p. 88.

salvation and death into life as they repeat what so many others had done before them, as 'an age-old tremor comes from the walls' .

Chapter III 'Otets'

Eschewing the more obvious 'Otsy i deti' in favour of 'Otets', Siniavskii concedes to his father the pivotal role in his story and his decision to become a writer. Underlying this central chapter is the clash between generations, between nobleman turned revolutionary and loyal Soviet citizen and his son, reared under the Soviet system but whose idealism and aesthetic leanings link him with the era of Revolutionary romanticism. Between them yawns the chasm of the Stalin years. The bridging of this chasm and Siniavskii's re-integration with his father, the thematic core of this chapter, picks up the threads of Prestuplenie i nakazanie as the motif of hunter and hunted shades into the theme of atonement and resurrection.

Donat Evgenevich Siniavskii's central role in his son's autobiographical novel not only constitutes a tribute to him but represents an intrinsic part of Siniavskii's own self-justification and rehabilitation in the face of trials past and present. At the same time the theme of betrayal that runs as an undercurrent through the chapter encompasses not only the charges levelled at Siniavskii over the years but also the Soviet State's betrayal of the ideals of the Revolution, personified in its treatment of Donat Evgenevich. This, in turn, is interwoven with Siniavskii's own sense of guilt towards his father. In all cases Siniavskii's culpability is associated with his writing.

Siniavskii was haunted by the feeling that he and not his father should have been arrested in 1951.⁴²⁷ While the father had remained unwavering in his loyalty to the Soviet regime, it was the son's 'underground' writing that would be branded 'anti-Soviet'. Siniavskii's sense of guilt was further compounded by the feeling that his decision to write represented a betrayal of his father's legacy: 'he did not follow his father's example and, in choosing art, pure art, had spurned ideology, politics, social work and usefulness'.⁴²⁸

If Siniavskii's decision to become a writer engendered a sense of guilt, however, it also offered up the path to expiation. 'His gentry mother fell at his feet: Don't go, you're my only son. She lay down in his way. He stepped over her. Petersburg. Exile'.⁴²⁹ Father and son are drawn together by a common response to Dostoevskii, by the association of reading and their individual acts of rebellion as Tertz's writing becomes the metaphorical realization of his father's Revolutionary work: 'psychologically, in Andrei Siniavskii's mind, his writing was a Revolutionary act, in the daring of its realization, its style and its language – a challenge to conformist society with its literary norms'.⁴³⁰

Through his writing Siniavskii healed the rift that he felt separated him from his father (at the same time confirming, for the benefit of his dissident critics, that writing was a valid act of protest and revolt). As though integral parts of the same biography, the fates of father and son are woven together, converging in their common experience of prison. Siniavskii, as in his fantastic literary

⁴²⁷ Ibid., p. 482 / p. 197. Also, Rozanova, 'Radio Liberty transcript', folder 17, transmission 16, p. 2.

⁴²⁸ Ibid., transmission 18, p. 6.

⁴²⁹ Tertz, *Spokoinoi nochi*, p. 470 / p. 180.

⁴³⁰ Rozanova, 'Radio Liberty transcript', folder 17, transmission 13, p. 6.

criticism, re-establishes his links to family not conventionally but through an unofficial and alternative line as the ‘prison baton [...] passed as a legacy from grandfather to father and from father to son’.⁴³¹

Even more than a gesture of atonement and integration, Siniavskii’s identification with his father is an act of resurrection. Taking the form of their literal physical convergence, it reflects once again the ideas of Nikolai Fedorov whose influence, as already noted, is clearly present in Siniavskii’s fantastic literary criticism.⁴³² An implicit parallel is thereby presented between Siniavskii’s resurrection in his writing of Donat Evgenevich and the bringing to life of his literary ‘fathers’, the feat of resurrection accomplished through art.⁴³³ Memory, through the agency of art, promises the continued existence of each generation in the next, an idea, viewed from a different perspective, with which Siniavskii had ended the preceding chapter where ‘death and conception intersect as the dual purpose of existence’.⁴³⁴

Recalled to life by Siniavskii, his father is lovingly portrayed as a romantic idealist, the ‘last Mohican’ of the Revolution. This aspect of Siniavskii’s treatment of his father in Spokoinoi nochi gains from a reading of Osnovy sovetskoi tsivilizatsii and in particular chapter five, ‘Novyi chelovek’. Prestuplenie i nakazanie forms a tacit link between the two as communist morality, encapsulated in the dictum that the ends justify the means, opens the way to a world in which ‘all is permitted’. In Osnovy sovetskoi tsivilizatsii,

⁴³¹ Ibid., transmission 16, pp. 5-6.

⁴³² Ibid., transmission 13, p. 2. Also, Tertz, Spokoinoi nochi, p. 457 / p. 162.

⁴³³ Rozanova, ‘Radio Liberty transcript’, folder 17, transmission 13, p. 2. Also, Tertz, Spokoinoi nochi, p. 479 / pp. 191-92.

⁴³⁴ Tertz, Spokoinoi nochi, p 456 / p. 159.

Siniavskii contrasts the ‘new’ Soviet man with those he calls ‘Russian Revolutionaries of the old type’ for whom ‘bloody violence, although necessary, was an extreme measure, a sin (“sin” in the old, Christian-religious sense)’. (Siniavskii’s father, nowhere named, is clearly the inspiration for this passage.⁴³⁵ For the latter the transgression of individual conscience was seen as a personal sacrifice, a necessary evil expiated only by their death; for the former this sacrifice amounted to nothing more than ‘banal conformism’.

Donat Evgenievich’s fearlessness and fidelity to moral absolutes, not in the communist sense but as eternal values, to life with a ‘higher meaning’, offer a telling contrast to those who sacrificed their beliefs – and the lives of others – in the name of an idea.⁴³⁶ He, too, was a hunter but not of the Stalinist variety. In his case hunting was ‘his tribute to tradition – his youth, his gentry ways, his enthusiasm for the “people” and revolution’.⁴³⁷ He was not the cynical product of the Stalinist era but of an ‘earlier, utopian tradition’. As such he is gently and affectionately portrayed (albeit with a touch of irony) as a quixotic figure, his Rifle and Bicycle doing service for the idealist knight’s lance and horse, the ‘revolutionary nobleman’ whose word is his bond.⁴³⁸

The continuity between father and son is confirmed as more real than apparent in the closing pages of ‘Otets’. In what is the most restrained of the chapters of Spokoinoi nochi is situated the moment of epiphany when Siniavskii’s future as a writer opens up before him. Paradoxically, it is Donat

⁴³⁵ Siniavskii, Osnovy sovetskoi tsivilizatsii, pp. 171-72.

⁴³⁶ Tertz, Spokoinoi nochi, p. 474 / p. 185.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 469 / p. 178.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 460 / p. 166.

Evgenevich, the father who disdained fantasy in favour of the rational and scientific and made the young Siniavskii give up his prized copy of The Headless Horseman, who was instrumental in revealing this to him.

Once again the continuity between them can be traced to their time served, as it was Donat Evgenevich's experience of prison which suggested that the line dividing the fantastic from the real is a small and tenuous one. His months of interrogation convinced him that the authorities had the very real power to tune in to his thoughts and read his mind at the mere flicking of a switch, something that haunted him even after his release when he was exiled to his place of birth at Rameno.

Siniavskii's own understanding of this thin border, of the inconclusive and mysterious line that divides fantasy from reality, is awakened in the walks he takes with his father in the forest. Picking up the metaphor of trees and language from the previous chapter, Siniavskii accustoms himself to the idea of silence rather than speech, of receptivity and tuning in, of electrical waves and unseen powers, as the mysterious impulses seem to transfer themselves from his father's mind to galvanize nature so that the vast ocean of trees sways around them, set in motion by a 'localized whirlwind'. It is not nature, however, that comes alive so much as Siniavskii's newly acquired ability to see the extraordinary reality that 'seethes' all around him in the rustling, dancing leaves of the trees.

Reality itself is fantastic, while what seems fantastic can often turn out to be a poor deception, as Siniavskii discovers when he finally reads The Headless Horseman: 'none of it was the way I had imagined. A dead body, a corpse, its

head already cut off, was tied to a horse that was then let go to gallop through the pampas. Crude, banal, and boring. Totally jerry-rigged'.⁴³⁹

Siniavskii's notion of the fantastic comes from his ability to see reality in a different way and in this his debt to Dostoevskii is at its most evident: 'I have my own view of reality and what in the view of most people verges on the fantastic and exceptional is sometimes the very essence of the real for me'.⁴⁴⁰ The fantastic reality of the forest translates the trees into pages, the forest into text so that 'a writer withdrawing to work and do some real writing retreats to the forest so that no one will see or hear him [...] The text is the sole refuge [...] And we enter the forest. We enter the text'.

Chapter IV 'Opasnye sviazi'

Books provide refuge and salvation in both metaphorical and real terms in the penultimate chapter of Spokoinoi nochi, 'Opasnye sviazi', where Siniavskii deals with Stalin and the Stalinist era that formed him as a writer.

Just as Siniavskii had said that the universe of prison could only be grasped through the images and symbols of the theatre, so the Stalinist epoch can only be appropriately conveyed in terms of nightmare, sorcery and witchcraft, a vision reminiscent of Bulgakov's Master i Margarita.⁴⁴¹ 'Opasnye sviazi' is alive with

⁴³⁹ Ibid., p. 486 / p. 202.

⁴⁴⁰ Dostoevskii, quoted by Malcolm V. Jones in Dostoevsky after Bakhtin. Readings in Dostoevsky's Fantastic Realism, Cambridge, 1990, p. 2.

⁴⁴¹ Siniavskii may or may not have been influenced by Bulgakov. At the very least their visions of the Stalinist era had something in common and in an article published three years later he praises Bulgakov for his unique ability to capture the extraordinary, surreal atmosphere of the Stalinist period. A. Siniavskii,

mediums and sorceresses, ghosts and apparitions, with incantations and flying broomsticks. All is cloaked in the blackness of night – Stalin’s death, the séance and his ghostly apparition at the medium, Alla’s, bedside. Fact and fiction become indistinguishable as this night and the period as a whole are shot through with intimations of a ‘black mass, a witches’ Sabbath, of howlings from beyond the grave’.⁴⁴²

Fear stalks the streets and people themselves become the ‘instruments of witchcraft’. Unlike Siniavskii, the writer as medium for the voices of others who through him gain new life and significance, Stalin had used his people as a channel for his own language, a language of subjugation. People ‘mutter[ed] words that were not their own but someone else’s inspired from above, repeated by rote, and which interpreters translated into the most primitive language, solely for the sake of appearances and for general accessibility...’.⁴⁴³ Siniavskii’s emancipation from the Soviet system and Soviet mentality consisted to a great extent in being able to resist this language that was inculcated into him as into all Soviet citizens, to switch off the voices in his head and tune into his own thoughts and ideas. Fear stays Siniavskii’s hand as he starts to pen the first words about Stalin and he is forced to counteract it with an imaginative sideways leap into the sunlit world of France where he is writing the novel, while he gathers his composure.

‘Stalin – geroi i khudozhnik stalinskoi epokhi’ (hereafter, ‘Stalin – geroi khudozhnik’), *Sintaksis*, 19, 1987, pp. 106-25 (pp.123-25).

⁴⁴² Tertz, *Spokoinoi nochi*, p. 537 / p. 268.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*.

‘Opasnye sviazi’ is not an attempt to conjure up Stalin. Rather, it is an attempt simultaneously to exorcise him and to come to terms with his epoch and its legacy. Magic can only be counteracted by magic and Siniavskii summons the fairy tale to set all to rights, to give access to another reality: ‘Fairy tales help us to see the world as truly worthy of life, great and significant. Seeming to be lost in the ancient past and the impossible, fairy tales remind us what is real, what has already happened, though we were just blind to it, and what is yet to be and will come to pass when we are gone’.⁴⁴⁴ As he had written in his letters from the camps, beauty is the only lasting, true reality and it is the fairy tale, in its colour and luminosity, that embodies this.⁴⁴⁵

‘Evil [...] is characterised only by the absence of a sign, it does not exist and is designated by the colour black’.⁴⁴⁶ For this reason, perhaps, Stalin is never presented as a living figure, appearing instead only in anecdotal form, as a supernatural column of frozen vapour, a ghost, or an upstart Georgian look-alike. In part this may also be that fear itself prevented a face to face confrontation with the master magician and showman. However, Siniavskii pre-empted any questions on the subject, saying that he is less interested in Stalin himself than in his ‘consequences’. Emphasising the elusive mystique of the man, who so carefully cultivated it as the source of his power, managing to perform some kind of mass hypnosis on an entire nation, Siniavskii shows how

⁴⁴⁴ Tertz, *Spokoinoi nochi*, p. 504 / p. 225.

⁴⁴⁵ Siniavskii, *Pis'ma*, 2, pp. 72-75. ‘Beauty is a sign of reality and at its highest level is equivalent to reality; the Romantic antithesis of the “beautiful” and the “real” does not hold true, inasmuch as only the beautiful is completely real, while ugliness is illusory’. (p. 73). The fairy tale, as the incarnation of beauty can be seen as a higher or, possibly, sole reality.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

that power lingered beyond his death to haunt and control his unfortunate people.⁴⁴⁷ Even the hint of a Georgian accent, better still accompanied by a moustache and a pipe, was enough to render people submissive, as he recounts in an anecdote about a Georgian student who capitalised on these features to become a regular lady-killer.⁴⁴⁸

Humour is as good a form of magic for exorcising evil as any solemn oaths and rituals. While Alla the medium confronts Stalin with a cross, Siniavskii does so through his art. Including anecdotal stories such as the above in a series of ‘unmaskings’, Siniavskii demystifies Stalin. The dead body, embalmed for public display and which had caused the death of countless people in their wild stampede to see it – ‘the dead man had not lost his bite. He had cleverly worked his death so that a fat slice of his congregation was sacrificed to him, immolated in honor of his sad departure’ – is revealed a few pages later as a banal corpse, casually laid out on a make-shift autopsy table: ‘The body had been lanced wide open and was now physically beyond repair, an impossible image’.⁴⁴⁹

This image is quickly succeeded by the picture of Stalin as ‘Vaska the Cat’ in the Krylov fable. What appears to be a return to the realm of the fairy tale and the fantastic is undercut by the realisation that the all-powerful leader, much like the Wizard of Oz, is a sham, a man hiding behind some extraordinary legend. Stalin’s power and mystique are dissolved and fear turns to laughter as the omnipotent monster is revealed as ‘A cat with a mustache’.⁴⁵⁰ As in the case of

⁴⁴⁷ Siniavskii, ‘Stalin – geroi i khudozhnik’, p. 122.

⁴⁴⁸ Tertz, *Spokoinoi nochi*, p. 537 / p. 269.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 523 / p/ 251 and p. 532 / p. 263.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 533 / pp. 263-64.

the headless horseman, what appears fantastic, if seen with fresh eyes can be revealed for what it truly is, the spell broken; or, as Siniavskii puts it in 'Dom svidanii', 'It is not deception that deceives us but the truth that has grown up around us and overtakes us precisely because of the precautions we took to avoid it'.⁴⁵¹

Stalin was one thing, but how could one come to terms with the very real blood-letting? Siniavskii's answer is, once again, books. Literally, in the case of the stampede to view the embalmed body, when a briefcase stuffed with volumes from the Lenin library slowed him down, preventing him from joining the crowds who rush headlong and are trampled underfoot. But also metaphorically. When news had come of Stalin's death he had taken himself off to the library and to the five-volume '*Foreign Accounts of the Time of Troubles*'; not, as he explains 'because of my enthusiasm for the work I was professionally obliged to produce, but to contemplate pure and distant historical prospects that had nothing in common either with my field or with the contemporary situation'.⁴⁵²

In a sense, however, it had a great deal to do with the contemporary situation. A violent and confused period, when the death of a ruler had left a power vacuum, contested violently and ruthlessly by different factions, an era that almost imploded in on itself with its Pretenders and usurpers, the Time of Troubles provided a convenient parallel with the period Siniavskii had lived through and whose effects he was still witnessing. Interpolating fantastic and

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., p. 424 / p. 116.

⁴⁵² Ibid., p. 238 / pp. 238-39.

grotesque scenes of murder and torture from that distant historical period into his narrative, Siniavskii is able to mitigate the effects of the present by evoking it through the past.

Books such as these provide Siniavskii with an escape route: ‘a good book can displace life in all its meaninglessness. The book you’re currently reading has an existence parallel to your own, and no sooner do you think of that book, than a load is taken off your mind. You’ve found an emergency exit’. Siniavskii found an exit not only into the past but into his imagination and the world of writing.⁴⁵³

In his nocturnal walk around the Moscow streets, he is accompanied by a mysterious ‘friend’ who first came into his life in 1946.⁴⁵⁴ The date alone (Zhdanov’s assaults on intellectual and cultural life that triggered the start of Siniavskii’s disenchantment with the regime) suggests a connection with Tertz. In what appears a somewhat contrived scenario, conversations with this ‘friend’ allow Siniavskii to project an inner dialogue, in which he conflates his first, inchoate ideas of rebellion that arose in 1946 with his decision to commit himself to his writing, as the Stalinist era draws to a close.⁴⁵⁵ The lesson comes in the form of a Dostoevskian revelation: ‘the solution lies within each of us [...]

⁴⁵³ Ibid., p. 515 / p. 240.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 529 / p. 258.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 530 / p. 260 and p. 536 / p. 267. It is in connection with this alter ego that Siniavskii cites Jack London’s, The Star Rover (without actually giving the name): ‘The story was about a prisoner in a straitjacket who was being tortured. Losing consciousness from the pain, he was freed to seek an inward escape route and travelled from one land to another, on routes he had taken in other lives. Why beat your head against the wall trying to make a revolution no one needs? Isn’t it better just to slip away via meditation? The body stays put, but the soul can roam’.

It's been said that the kingdom of God is within you'.⁴⁵⁶ It was a question of switching off his rational mind, of going where his 'higher mind' told him to go.

Siniavskii's mystery companion and alter ego apparently had the power of clairvoyance, in particular the ability to see the winning lottery number. However, it was Siniavskii himself who admitted to actually landing the first prize. Echoes of Maiakovskii, of Pasternak and Pushkin resurface as he admits that 'historically, I lucked out!'.⁴⁵⁷ The century that he 'had drawn like a winning card' might 'devour' him but 'as a writer connected with a definite period (the end of the forties, the beginning of the fifties), the epoch of mature, late-flowering Stalinism, I cannot help remembering those days with a certain pleasure, a son's sense of gratitude. I am not ashamed to say that I am a child of those grim years'.⁴⁵⁸

There was a danger, however, and one of which Siniavskii was fully aware. To escape via the imagination was one thing, to divorce himself from reality altogether was quite another. To contemplate what lay around him with the self-conscious and appreciative gaze of a 'collector' carried within it the danger of the aestheticisation of reality, of setting a higher value on art than on life, of sitting it out in his ivory tower while others took the streets.⁴⁵⁹ This is the question around which the final chapter of his fantastic autobiography is orchestrated.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 530 / p. 260.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 536 / p. 267.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 535 / p. 266.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 536 / pp. 267-68.

Chapter V 'Vo chreve kitovom'

With Spokoinoi nochi Siniavskii set out to answer those who had equated the writing of Tertz with treachery; whether towards the State, or towards Russia's most sacred literary icon. Betrayal, loaded with Christian symbolism, is the dominant theme of his final chapter. The grotesque nightmare of the Stalin years gives way to an account in which reality is present in equal measure with fantasy and horror recedes as fairy tale is combined with parable. Siniavskii's religious faith, never a matter of dogmatism or preaching but, rather, an unquestioning faith in something 'higher', takes form in his art as icons, the visual metaphor of this faith, form a thematic bridge between this chapter and the preceding one, also reinforcing links between Siniavskii, Pasternak and Maiakovskii.⁴⁶⁰ While Tertz continues as narrator, it is Siniavskii who steps forward as the protagonist, with the clear intention of assuming responsibility in his own name. "The noise died down. I stepped out onto the stage": Siniavskii turns the spotlight on himself.⁴⁶¹

As if to emphasise the return to his sources and the circular path of his work, 'Vo chreve kitovom' may be seen as a re-working in a different key of the first and second chapters. The scenario of 'cops and robbers, first presented as an

⁴⁶⁰ The 'icons' at the end of 'Opasnye sviazi' not only recall Pasternak's Zhivago poems but, in that they represent a triptych, also evoke Maiakovskii's 'Oblako v shtanakh'. In this poem, subtitled 'Tetrptych', the poet presents himself as the thirteenth Apostle in a 'kind of parody of an icon. But an exalted and tragic parody'. HIA, box 19, folder 9, lecture 1, p. 13. Reminding his reader that Maiakovskii trained first as a painter, Siniavskii refers to 'Oblako v shtanakh' as 'his own kind of icon painting through the language of the twentieth century' (p. 12).

⁴⁶¹ Tertz, Progulki s Pushkinym, p. 163 / pp. 139-40. As he said, just before the lines quoted above, 'There may come a time when an author who his whole life long has remained out of sight, who has avoided speaking in his own name (for the sake of the innocent birdies about which he, in wonderful anonymity, has been chirping indistinct somethings in bird language), is in the end forced to take part in a spectacle not even of his own conception'.

exuberant literary game, is now staged as a real-life hunt on the streets of Moscow but in a charged atmosphere akin to Dostoevskii's fantastic realism; echoes of Prestuplenie i nakazanie dominate though there are hints, too, of Besy (The Devils, 1871-71) and Brat'ia Karamazovy (The Brothers Karamazov, 1880). The game is still of the essence but there is no longer any need for flights of fancy as reality itself supplies them. As Siniavskii had noted in 'Otets', the fantastic is present all around: in the ability of the KGB to see through walls, to track the movements of agents and their victims by remote control, as well as in the miracle of his final emancipation from this world. Now, however, the stakes are higher and the references more loaded as Siniavskii bears the responsibility not simply for his own fate but also for those of others. Tertz's earlier play-acting of the romantic hero, his chameleon-like assumption of different guises, is now merely given wry acknowledgement as Siniavskii, transported to Vienna as the bait in a KGB plot, self-consciously dons a pair of cheap sunglasses, the parodic lead in a second-rate spy film.

Was Siniavskii just such a second-rate hero, a literary parody along the lines of an Onegin, or was he the genuine article? The technique of humorous self-abasement learnt from Rozanov and epitomised by self-parodying gestures such as the above, suggests that there is still the element of a game, that Siniavskii, for all that he has stepped into view, is still intent on mystification, still torn between the need to reveal himself and the desire to remain out of reach, to keep his inmost self safe from the prying gaze of the outsider. On the other hand, this self-deprecatory stance, far from being just another diversion, a red herring that

detracts from the deadly seriousness of the underlying issues, serves, rather, to enhance it. It is the hero pre-empting any attempt by a third party to downgrade him, all the while deliberately drawing attention to his role in a knowing aside to the reader. More intensely than at any other moment in the novel, Siniavskii's appeal to the reader permeates the writing of his final chapter.

Heroes and villains are the stuff of which his fantastic autobiography is made and the hero needs a villain as his counterpart. Siniavskii offers himself up for scrutiny alongside his childhood friend, Sergei Khmel'nitskii, or 'S'. Casting Khmel'nitskii as the out-and-out villain of the piece, however, presented its own problems, throwing into doubt the truthfulness of Siniavskii's account. Khmel'nitskii was to publish a heated rejoinder to Siniavskii's portrayal of him, in which he said that Siniavskii's depiction of him as 'evil incarnate' was designed as the dark background against which 'his own irreproachable person could shine out all the brighter'.⁴⁶²

An obvious reply to this would be that Khmel'nitskii read his depiction too literally; perhaps he suffered from the same malady which, according to Mariia Vasilievna, afflicted most modern-day Russians. Yet, it could be considered too easy an option for Siniavskii to take refuge behind the plea of fiction, all the while destroying the man's reputation in what resembled an act of cheap revenge. However, not only are the salient points of Siniavskii's portrayal of Khmel'nitskii corroborated facts, his outwardly damning portrait is a masterpiece of carefully crafted allusions, the composite depiction not of an individual but of all those features that constituted for Siniavskii a portrait of his

⁴⁶² Sergei Khmel'nitskii, 'Iz chreva kitova', *Dvadtsat' dva*, 48, June-July 1986, pp. 151-80 (pp. 151-52).

generation; a generation in which suspicion and betrayal were endemic in society at large and even in the closest of relationships; a society in which not only Khmel'nitskii but also Siniavskii and countless others at one time or another had been used as potential informants by the KGB.⁴⁶³ *'A Hero of Our Time*, my gracious sirs, is indeed a portrait, but not of one person; it is a portrait composed of the flaws of our whole generation in their fullest development'.⁴⁶⁴

Supposedly leaving the final judgement to the reader, as Lermontov does, Siniavskii paints a portrait of Khmel'nitskii that is ambiguous and many-layered, playing on the similarities between himself and 'S' as much as on their respective differences. Siniavskii presents them as the twin products of their age and its culture that not only encouraged denunciation but raised it to the status of a romantic, heroic deed. Pavlik Morozov's story, interwoven with Khmel'nitskii's, highlights the disturbing perversion of such fundamental principles as sacrifice and martyrdom when linked to conflicting notions of heroism and betrayal, made all the more disturbing for being located in the deceptively innocent figure of a child.

⁴⁶³ In a follow up to Khmel'nitskii's article in *Dvadtsat' dva*, Siniavskii sent a letter not only to *Dvadtsat' dva* but also to the editorial board of *Kontinent* when it became known to him that the journal was about to publish Khmel'nitskii's article. He briefly lays out the facts of the case, how both he and Khmel'nitskii were approached by what was then the MGU; how he decided to save H  l  ne and how Khmel'nitskii not only tailed her but also Bregel and Kabo. In both cases he appends two letters: one from H  l  ne and one from Iurii Bregel, whom he had met in emigration. Both confirm the account Siniavskii had given regarding Khmel'nitskii. See, Siniavskii, 'V redaktsiiu zhurnala "22"', *Dvadtsat' dva*, 49, Aug.-Sept. 1986, pp. 221-23 and Siniavskii, 'V redaktsiiu zhurnala "Kontinent"', *Kontinent*, 49, 1986, pp. 337-42. See also, Alexeyeva and Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation*, p.136. According to Alexeyeva, declining the overtures of the KGB 'was tantamount to suicide'.

⁴⁶⁴ Lermontov, *Geroi nashogo vremeni*, p. 213 / p. 2.

Siniavskii summons up not the boy hero in person, but in the form of another 'icon', the 'incorporeal youth in Nesterov's visionary painting'.⁴⁶⁵ For the question of treachery is inextricably linked not only with Khmel'nitskii but with the question of art and its relationship to life. Art had brought Khmel'nitskii and Siniavskii together, art and their common repudiation of the 'unbearable boasting and boredom of the official, conservative style. S helped me rid myself of realism, Pisarev, relevance, high-minded ideological content, and didacticism in aesthetics'.⁴⁶⁶ In these matters Siniavskii's debt to Khmel'nitskii was indisputable.

Yet the question, 'what is more important – art or life?' that persists as a refrain throughout Siniavskii's work, returns with increasing insistence in this latter phase of his life. His integrity as man and writer depended on his answer. As he said, 'It isn't art that does us in but art's connection with reality'.⁴⁶⁷ His apparent retreat from reality, his standing apart from the burning social and political issues of his day, laid him open to charges from his fellow intellectuals: "'We're going to end up in the camps [...] and you, you, Andrei, are you going to sit it out in your ivory tower?!'"⁴⁶⁸

Withdrawal into the realms of pure art is essentially bound up with other, more disturbing implications of the subordination of life to art that brought Siniavskii together with Khmel'nitskii: 'We agreed on one essential point – that

⁴⁶⁵ Tertz, *Spokoinoi nochi*, p. 554 / 291.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.548 / p. 284.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 549 /p. 285.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 562 / p. 302. See, also, Rozanova, 'Abram da Mar'ia', p. 144, where the individual who threw the taunt about the 'ivory tower' is named as one Vadim Kozhinov.

form was sufficient unto itself”.⁴⁶⁹ It was here that their paths diverged. The split of Pushkin into man and poet, reflected in Siniavskii’s duality, has its negative variant in Khmel’ nitskii: ‘he [...] contrived to write poems in such a way that his personality seemed to divide in two: he achieved heroic feats with artistic resolve’.⁴⁷⁰ In the siren call of art lay the temptation of the aestheticisation of life, of life lived as spectacle, in which were inherent dangers identified by Pasternak in Okhrannaia gramota and also latent in the Stalinist tendency to translate life into art; namely, the risk of creating an ethical vacuum, a kind of no man’s land where ‘all is permitted’. Such was the pose affected by Khmel’ nitskii. Siniavskii has him proclaiming, Raskolnikov-like, ‘I’m beyond good and evil, my friend [...]. Godlike. Above the barriers’.⁴⁷¹ Siniavskii, in affirming his adherence to pure art, had laid himself open to the same risk. Had he not written, “Poetry is above morality – or at least it is an entirely different matter”?⁴⁷²

Siniavskii uses the Dostoevskian metaphor of the line, the boundary, the threshold, to pursue the question. Khmel’ nitskii’s boast of having gone ‘the limit’, as Siniavskii said, ‘For him meant betrayal’, evincing in him not even a sense of having acted for the greater good, as in the case of Pavlik Morozov, but

⁴⁶⁹ Tertz, Spokoinoi nochi, p. 548 / p. 284.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 549 / p. 285.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid. Siniavskii’s use of the specific expression, ‘Poverkh bar’erov’ would seem to be a deliberate reminder of Pasternak’s early collection of poetry of the same name. Pasternak refers to this collection in Okhrannaia gramota, as a turning point: ‘I renounced the romantic manner. And hence came the non-romantic poetics of *Over the Barriers*’. His renunciation of the romantic manner coincides with his split from Maiakovskii and is synonymous with his rejection of the concept of biography as spectacle: ‘I parted company with it at a stage when it was still a mild option with the Symbolists and before it yet presupposed any heroics or smelt of blood’. Pasternak, Okhrannaia gramota, p. 227/ pp. 96-97.

⁴⁷² Tertz, Progulki s Pushkinym, p. 170 / p. 143. Here Siniavskii is quoting Pushkin, as he indicates immediately after the quotation: ‘(“Notes in the Margins of P.A. Vyazemsky’s Article ‘On the Life and Works of V.A. Ozerov”’). Ibid., p. 170 / pp. 143-44.

the rapture of ‘metaphysical ecstasy’.⁴⁷³ His transgression, in other words, is an aesthetic act, a performance in which he plays the coveted title role. The limits he oversteps are the footlights separating art from reality, performance from life.

In ‘Vo chreve kitovom’, Siniavskii returns to the trope of the theatre with which Spokoinoi nochi begins, as the locus in which his intricate pattern of allusions is woven together, in which the respective influences of Dostoevskii and Pasternak overlap. Khmel’nitskii’s aestheticism is expressed in terms of a theatricalisation of his life. A reminder of Pasternak’s writing about Maiakovskii and the idea of biography as spectacle, it also recalls ideas found in another of Pasternak’s early prose works, ‘Pis’ma iz Tuly’ (Letters from Tula, 1918). Here, the false theatricality of a troupe of young cinema actors, who turn even a meal in a station waiting room into an opportunity for histrionic display, is set against the example of an old stage actor who, in the privacy of his own room, slips into a role from a love story of his past. This is not play acting but the complete absorption of the actor in his role, taking one back to the idea of art based on inspiration and love as a gesture of self-suppression. The ethical dimension of the translation of life into art is dependent on the sincerity of the actor’s performance, the degree of self-oblivion he is able to achieve.

Khmel’nitskii is unmasked through his ‘performances’, scenes which are deliberately set as parallels to events in Siniavskii’s life. The scene most densely suffused with significance is the one in which Khmel’nitskii stages an impromptu and gratuitous assault on a girl at a student party. Carrying distinct overtones of the episode in Besy, where Stavrogin assaults a young girl, for no

⁴⁷³ Tertz, Spokoinoi nochi, pp. 549 and 550 / pp. 285 and 286.

apparent reason, Khmel' nitskii's behaviour starts as an attempt to kiss the girl and ends up with him biting her.⁴⁷⁴

Failing to lose himself in his part, Khmel' nitskii's act is one of cheap sensationalism. Unlike Maiakovskii, whose transformation of his life into art was genuine, and the old actor in 'Pis'ma iz Tuly', who achieves complete self-oblivion in his role, Khmel' nitskii acts out his part superficially and cynically, so that when he blurs the boundaries between art and life the ethical safeguard of sincerity is absent. Moreover, his supercilious disdain for his audience ('you fools') alienates him from them, precluding any kind of communication or collaborative dialogue. The result is rejection and isolation, in a denouement that ties the scene to the end of Progulki s Pushkinym with its echoes of Pasternak's Hamlet, as the protagonist steps out to face his audience.

The difference between the two performances lies not only in the absence or presence of sincerity but also in the notion of sacrifice. Hamlet, in Pasternak's interpretation, carries the weight of a Christ-like assumption of responsibility.⁴⁷⁵ His stepping not over the footlights but onto the stage, in full view of the audience, is an act of humility that conveys the acceptance of his burden, unlike Khmel' nitskii's transgression of the boundary, the sacrificing of two friends, that is an act of self-centred arrogance.

⁴⁷⁴Ibid., p. 567 / pp. 309-10.

⁴⁷⁵This is an idea that Siniavskii also emphasises in Maiakovskii's poetry. In 'Pro eto', one of the Poet's doubles, the God-like Poet ('chelovek iz-za-semi let) appears in order to place the burden of saving mankind on the shoulders of 'little Maiakovskii' (the 'bear'), an ordinary, weak man. HIA, box 20, folder 4, lecture 22, pp. 4-10.

The Christian connotations, central to Pasternak's portrayal of the artist, are carried over into Spokoinoi nochi with the motif of the kiss.⁴⁷⁶ Khmel'nitskii had not only denounced two innocent friends, Bregel' and Kabo, to the KGB. He had also revealed at an informal gathering in 1964, in what may have been an impulsive outburst but which none the less had dire consequences, that Nikolai Arzhak was none other than Iulii Daniel'.⁴⁷⁷ While Siniavskii's rendering of the party scene where the girl is kissed may be put down to 'artistic license', these two acts of betrayal (the one deliberate, the other ambiguous) are documented facts, facts which Khmel'nitskii himself acknowledged as such.⁴⁷⁸

Khmel'nitskii's attempt to kiss the girls fails, and the kiss is transformed into a bite. So Siniavskii reconfigures the kaleidoscope of images that link Spokoinoi nochi to Progulki s Pushkinym. Khmel'nitskii draws blood but he is no vampire, no creative Pushkin or Pugachev. His action is devoid of creativity and falls flat, diminishing rather than raising him up in the eyes of his audience.

Step forward the real hero! Having carefully assembled his picture of Khmel'nitskii, Siniavskii introduces the other key player in the drama: H  l  ne Peltier. Like Khmel'nitskii, her role is both factual and symbolic. The daughter of the French naval attach   in Moscow in the immediate post-war years, she

⁴⁷⁶ The symbolism of the treacherous kiss, staged as a performance, had its counterpart in Stalinist practice: 'when he embraced a friend and whispered to him, "I'll kill you!" Stalin kissed him in the front of everyone, but at the same time was preparing the murder'. Nepomnyashchy, 'Interview', p. 19.

⁴⁷⁷ For an impartial account of the Bregel' and Kabo affair and Khmel'nitskii's part in it, see, Alexeyeva and Goldberg, The Thaw Generation, pp. 114-15. Also, Aleksandr Voronel', 'Pravo byt' uslyshannym', pp. 145-51. For Khmel'nitskii's revelations about Daniel', *ibid.*, and Voronel', in Nudel'man, 'Dvadtsat' let spustia', pp. 140-141. Also, Alexeyeva and Goldberg, The Thaw Generation, pp.133-34.

⁴⁷⁸ Khmel'nitskii writes that there was a class gathering of the type Siniavskii describes. However, Khmel'nitskii says that Siniavskii himself was not present and there was no such scandal as his alleged attack on the girl. Khmel'nitskii, 'Iz chreva kitova', p. 157. On p.168 he talks of the denunciation of Bregel' and Kabo as 'my irredeemable sin'.

became a fellow student of Siniavskii's and a close friend. Later, it was she who smuggled out the first works of Tertz and had them published in the West. Her fate became entwined with Siniavskii's and Khmel'nitskii's when the KGB recruited Siniavskii in a plot to entrap her; Siniavskii was to marry her and thus provide a channel, via her, to the West for the Soviet secret services.⁴⁷⁹

Hélène's symbolic significance in Siniavskii's autobiography, however, is far greater than the sum of its facts. Her entrance into his story signals the start of the fairy tale proper: 'she entered our enchanted forest, fearless as Cinderella', and, as Siniavskii reminds us, in fairy tales, 'things [are] other than they first seem [...]. The last becomes the first. The poor man is rich. In reality the fool is clever and handsome. Cinderella marries her true love, the prince. And the ogre doesn't catch Tom Thumb'.⁴⁸⁰

Siniavskii's story in a nutshell – or almost; just a few adjustments are necessary. There were, in fact, two 'princesses', the first being Mariia Vasilievna who, in her active championing of her husband, was the other heroine of his story. The second necessary adjustment is that, in the case of Hélène, she was just as much the heroine as Siniavskii was the hero. Not only did she provide a window onto another world of Siniavskii's dreams – France – it was to be a genuine escape route for Siniavskii when the time came. She it was, also, who helped him to see the reality of his communist world in the broader context of her Catholic faith, transforming his life with the same miraculous power of the fairy tale.

⁴⁷⁹ Alexeyeva and Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation*, p. 136.

⁴⁸⁰ Tertz, *Spokoinoi noch*, p. 505 / p. 226.

Magic and miracle, as already noted, are never separate in Siniavskii's view of the world, just as they are fundamentally linked in Russian culture. In the case of H  l  ne Peltier and her part in his story, the two go hand in hand, for she is 'the expression of something spatially greater than her own soul – a fairy, a puff of blue smoke, a luminous emanation'.⁴⁸¹ H  l  ne appears not simply as Cinderella or the princess but as the 'girl in a light-blue dress', the Holy Virgin, protector and intercessor, translated from the 'icons' at the end of 'Opasnye sviazi' into the real events of Siniavskii's life in the final chapter. In H  l  ne religion and literature intermingle in the idea of redemption through art: at once Holy Infant and Mother of God, she is also Sonia Marmeladova, in her humility and her power to lead the sinner to redemption through love.⁴⁸² Via this symbolic incarnation of H  l  ne, Siniavskii is re-united with his father through their common bond with Prestuplenie i nakazanie, for it was Sonia Marmeladova who had drawn his idealist father to revolution, just as H  l  ne helped Siniavskii realise his revolutionary act, smuggling out Tertz's writing.

Faced with the choice of tricking H  l  ne or saving her, Siniavskii decides instead to deceive the KGB, enacting a pantomime for their benefit. The fairy tale continues as the hero sets out to rescue the maiden in distress, though the script inclines more towards Prestuplenie i nakazanie. While Khmel'nitskii plays the Nietzschean Raskolnikov who oversteps the threshold of the permissible, Siniavskii, in another variant of the man-poet split, is his penitent, human side, the side open to redemption and transformation. In an atmosphere redolent of

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., p. 576 / p. 321

⁴⁸² Sonia Marmeladova, too, was seen as a Holy Mother figure by the convicts in Siberia. The idea of salvation through love is also central to Maiakovskii's 'Pro eto'. HIA, box 19, folder 12, lecture 13, p. 5.

Dostoevskii's Petersburg, his sense of guilt, the heat, the sleazy environment of the park, have him hallucinating, recalling how he tried to clean his tracks off the floor (in reality nothing but sunlight), left by him 'like a sloppy house-painter!'.⁴⁸³

In fact, the episode is carefully planned, presented as a direct parallel to and refutation of Khmel'nitskii's attack on the girl student. The performances of Siniavskii and H  l  ne are entirely genuine, each living rather than superficially assuming their parts. In their self-effacement, their mutual self-sacrifice, the ethics of art and Christianity come together so that the kiss they exchange is a pledge of their relationship, a relationship founded on trust and motivated by love in which art and life play equal parts.⁴⁸⁴

This kiss, diametrically opposed to the deceit and betrayal implicit in Khmel'nitskii's actions, is Siniavskii's first step on the path to freedom, as he turns his back on the Soviet State and the perverted morality on which it stood. Rejecting the unanimity and conformity that smelled of blood, he makes his own choice, with echoes now of Brat'ia Karamazovy. Free will has a different perspective when viewed in the context of sacrifice and bloodshed: 'What if you were ordered to murder a child in the name of the highest moral ideals. Would you be making a choice there – to murder or not to murder? And afterwards wouldn't those very ideals seem slightly bloodstained, to put it mildly, not with our own blood, not with the proletariat's, but with the blood of others, of innocent children, the more of which you see, Lenka, the longer and closer you

⁴⁸³ Tertz, Spokoinoi nochi, p. 558 /p. 336.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 590 / pp. 338-39.

look at our valiant, bloodstained banner'.⁴⁸⁵ There is no choice when it comes to sacrificing others.

Freedom of another sort is achieved and one that in the first instance resembles Khmel'nitskii's at the close of his 'performance', the painful freedom of isolation, the 'terrible sense of being an outcast'.⁴⁸⁶ Siniavskii returns here to those taunts of betrayal that link this earlier period with his experiences as an émigré. In the eyes of the Soviet State he had acted as a traitor in saving Héléne, while his loyalty to Russia was seen as doubtful by fellow émigrés; he was still, therefore, both an 'enemy of the people' and a 'Russophobe'.

However, Siniavskii's sense of isolation, as he demonstrates persuasively to the reader, is not the alienation of the weak and cowardly Khmel'nitskii, but of Hamlet, the Christ-like Russian Hamlet of Pasternak evoked in Golos iz khora. Siniavskii had not taken refuge in his ivory tower when the choice had to be made about Héléne, he had acted. For Siniavskii, however, it was not enough simply to refute the accusations against him in terms of the actions he took, important as these were. His vindication and liberation lay in his art, pure art as an active, ethical response to his times.

The ivory tower is a case in point. Picking up the taunt hurled at him by a fellow intellectual, he contemplates Lefortovo prison: 'And here it is – the tower, the ivory tower'.⁴⁸⁷ Not just any prison, Lefortovo is rich in associations for Siniavskii personally. Part of his very identity, it was where official and

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 590 / p. 339. The 'blood-stained banner', the banner of the Revolution, is the image with which Siniavskii opens his chapter on the 'new man' in Osnovy sovetskoi tsivilizatsii.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 591 / p. 340.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 562 / 302.

unofficial merged in the revolutionary lineage of his father: 'My father before me had been imprisoned in Lefortovo'.⁴⁸⁸ His own sojourn there was a badge of pride among fellow zeks, while its legendary status lent it an aura suitable for the performing of heroic feats.

Siniavskii's feat was liberation through the alchemy of language. Undermining Lefortovo's walls by means of his 'lateral vision', he opens the door onto a parallel dimension where the 'dead iron forests' of the prison metamorphose into a fairy-tale edifice, all light and air. The transformation is achieved through the imagination and the steady accretion of seemingly random associations that meander deceptively from one to another. Starting with the ubiquitous image of the spider, used negatively in reference to Stalin, and the 'tarantula' Khmel'nitskii, and suggestive of the State's activities in trapping and devouring its defenceless victims, Siniavskii transforms the insect into the modest engineer of this ethereal structure, its gossamer fine threads mimicked in his metaphors and analogies that sling bridges to and fro across the expanse of the printed page: 'From a dead animal to a live lute'.⁴⁸⁹

'Lefortovo castle can be compared to a spider web and to prose'.⁴⁹⁰ Art inspired by the wonder of creation, by the miraculous interconnectedness of things, works its magic through these associations, making whole what was fractured and senseless. The Stalinist night that had given birth to Siniavskii and Tertz both, was a mere episode in Russia's long history, history that had been compartmentalised, reduced by Marxist theory to a straight line that precluded

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 398 / p. 77.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 564 / p. 305.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 565 / p. 306.

any dialogue between past and present, while making of the future a foregone conclusion. Such a view of history had made victims of those caught up in it: ‘Oh, the flood of History like a waterfall sending us over the stones of Mesopotamia!’. The Assyrian frieze with which he begins the chapter is awash with death and the blood of hunter and hunted alike. Yet this very frieze which, in the brutality and hopelessness of its stone speaks of the inevitability of death, is transformed through Siniavskii’s art into something that is life affirming.

Starting with the stone waterfall of history in the bas-relief that suggests a correspondence between stones and water, a link is provided that enables the one to assume the characteristics of the other. In the cave in France, at the end of the chapter, the water imagery insinuates itself further, takes over and challenges the immutability of history and death, as the very stones become fluid, ‘the cave resounded, went into motion, began to flow and expand, made entirely of stone but tumbling freely as water’.⁴⁹¹

History is restored to life as something you can feel, see and live through. From being outside and alien, it is seen to be contained within each individual in the form of memory expressed through art, memory as an organic force like that of water, of landscape and trees: ‘As if the leaves retained the memory of the whole tree and the tree that of the earth’.⁴⁹² History is not so much a question of time as of space, of layers. The image of layering, of an organic process, is then linked to books as the living repository of history: ‘history is not soil. It’s stonier

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 551-52 / p. 288.

⁴⁹² Ibid., p. 475 / p. 187.

than that [...] An accumulation of books is like deep, heavy geological deposits'.⁴⁹³

From history to books and back to the Lenin library, the ivory tower to which Siniavskii had fled the day Stalin's death was announced. It is through books that meaning is restored to life, life that is not unilinear and monosemantic but rich and divers, built of the same associations that go to make up Siniavskii's art:

One thing issues from another. Everything interacts. Not like today. The chronicles may differ in their accounts. So what if one foreigner sees Dmitri the Pretender as a veritable Achilles and another sees quite the opposite. There's a logic here; a Divine Providence can be sensed. This is History, mind you, not some wayside inn. History (as befits it) invested with Eternity. Eternity in the images of legend. History that we so sorely lack today...⁴⁹⁴

History is a richly textured pattern, disparate threads woven into a picture where single elements, meaningless in themselves, come together to form a coherent whole:

what embroidery! What play of mind interwoven with life's changing phases, allowing one to imagine that history might be an artistic tapestry, embroidered with a precious design? ...Who wove it? Who placed the flowers where they are?...⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹³ Ibid., p. 518 / p. 244.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 516 / p. 241.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 514 / p. 239.

History as tapestry, and tapestry as art that promises reconciliation and redemption come together at the end of Siniavskii's autobiography as he contemplates in Vienna the mediaeval wall hanging where the pain and suffering of the Crucifixion are transmuted into a work of everlasting beauty. Only faith in a higher power can help art transform what appears unfathomably senseless into this pattern. In the tapestry of the Passion are united the ideas of self-sacrifice and love the ideas that formed the ethical foundation of Siniavskii's art.

To return to the Assyrian bas-relief: its power lies not in the horror it depicts but in its capacity to reach out across the millennia by arousing compassion in the beholder. The stones and monuments that serve as metaphors for the barriers of death, silence and non-communication are transformed by the writer's perception and his ability to transmit this to his reader. The unyielding walls of the Potma transit camp respond with the tremor of voices, recalling the lives of all those who passed through; the 'dead iron forests' of Lefortovo vibrate with infinitesimal sounds, transmuting death and incarceration into life and freedom.

The spider's web of Siniavskii's prose is made up as much of the 'spaces between the threads' as the threads themselves, as much by the blank spaces as by the words. This brings Siniavskii back full circle to Progulki s Pushkinym and the charges levelled against him for his treatment of Pushkin. Siniavskii's work about Pushkin had been just such an act of self-effacement and love in order to restore him to life. At the same time, he is able, once again, by implicit reference to Pushkin, to answer the question of pure art and its disengagement from reality. While 'the deified creation feeds on itself, suffices unto itself and is

an end in itself” and would therefore ‘inevitably degenerate into the cruellest parody’, it is saved by the fact that it has at its disposal ‘a potential that allows it, even when immersed up to its ears in banality, suddenly, spontaneously to catch fire and soar. Just give it an excuse and although estranged from everything, although having forgotten all about heavenly gifts, it will reveal “divinity, and inspiration, and life, and tears, and love” in the soul’.⁴⁹⁶

In the artist’s ability to see ‘past suffering and death to that which comes after’, his two sides, man and poet, come together, the divine gift of creation combined with the human capacity for love: ‘Art is stronger and more enduring, and, if you will, more alive than destructive life. That is why it is both healing and always moral, but independent of foolish morality...There is no art without love’.⁴⁹⁷ This is the belief that makes sense of Pushkin’s assertion, quoted by Siniavskii in Progulki s Pushkinym: “‘Poetry is above morality – or at least it is an entirely different matter’”.⁴⁹⁸

Siniavskii’s journey back to Russia, having foiled the attempts of the KGB to make him entrap Hélène, thus echoes his ‘strolls’ with Pushkin. It is a journey of synthesis, in which man and writer come together. The emptiness that was Pushkin’s ‘content’, his receptivity, is evoked in Siniavskii’s silence. While his guards keep up a steady stream of empty chatter, he drinks in the night and the possibilities that await him. It is a journey of integration not only with himself

⁴⁹⁶ Tertz, Progulki s Pushkinym, pp. 173-74 / pp. 145-46. See above, p. 215..

⁴⁹⁷ Tertz, Spokoinoi nochi, p. 599 / p. 350.

⁴⁹⁸ Tertz, Progulki s Pushkinym, p. 170 / p/ 143.

but with his times, his country and his family, brought together through the metaphor of the night, now transformed out of all recognition.

The night that was Stalin's Russia, engendering grotesque nightmares and synonymous with death, now becomes a refuge, holding within itself the promise of new life, light and creativity. As in 'Dom svidanii', 'the night does not sleep; the night stands guard over sleep and it creates, drawing light and fire from the gathering dark'.⁴⁹⁹ Night provides, too, the link back to family, to childhood and his roots through memories of sleeping outside at Rameno, the estate of his father's family, whither he is bound to be re-united with his father.

The story concludes, not with an ending nor even a new beginning but with inchoate promise and the dissolution of the writer in the air that surrounds him, elusive as 'the parting hoot of a locomotive in the night'. The journey is itself a metaphor for writing as open-ended, not a finite task, for biography not as the last word on its subject but a process or voyage of discovery. 'The spirit wafts where it will'.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁹ Tertz, *Spokoinoi nochi*, p. 609 / p/ 363.

⁵⁰⁰ Tertz, *Progulki s Pushkinym*, p. 176/ p. 147.

Chapter IV

‘What interest is there without risk? [...] I’m going for broke’⁵⁰¹

‘When I began thinking about the past ten years, I suddenly realized that these had been the bitterest of my life, for nothing is more bitter than unfulfilled hopes and lost illusions’.⁵⁰² This was Siniavskii delivering the Harriman lectures in 1996. The lost illusions to which he refers concern the situation of the intelligentsia and the role the majority of them had played or, rather, had failed to play in the emergent Russian democracy, and which was encapsulated for him in the episode of El’tsin and his firing on the Belyi dom in Moscow in October 1993. With their support of El’tsin’s attack on the Russian parliament, the intelligentsia had, according to Siniavskii, sold out to the authorities in what he saw as a horrifying repetition of the conformism prevalent under Stalin.⁵⁰³

Siniavskii might well feel bitter. The sense of *déjà-vu* is overwhelming as passages of this lecture read like a re-run of Tertz’s first work, Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm, in which he had first inveighed against the leaden classicism of Soviet orthodoxy. Everything had changed and nothing had changed. The notion that difference was of itself a crime, a notion that he had challenged from his early days, both as Siniavskii and as Tertz, had not disappeared. Any attempt at independent thought, so it seemed to him, was seen

⁵⁰¹ Abram Tertz, Koshkin dom. Roman dal’nego sledovaniia (hereafter, Koshkin dom), Znamia, 5, 1998, pp. 41-149 (p. 41).

⁵⁰² Andrei Siniavskii, The Russian Intelligentsia, New York, 1997, p. 10.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-9.

as a threat and as such was interpreted as treachery, just as in Soviet times. 'Soviet literature intimidated its readers – and itself – with the bogeyman of treachery. Show pity towards an enemy, and you're a traitor. Stand aside from the class struggle, and you're a traitor. Start championing the right not to join the party, or the independence of the individual, and you're a traitor'.⁵⁰⁴

'Traitor' and 'treachery' ring in the reader's ears as they were to ring in Siniavskii's over the last decade or so of his life as he defended to the last the right to independent thought, his belief in the spirit of intellectual, moral, and spiritual inquiry, or, to put it another way, the need to take risks as an ethical and creative imperative. The impassioned tone of the passage, the way that Tertz's voice takes over for a moment from Siniavskii's, is indicative of the intense personal significance of these ideas, ideas that would permeate the works of his last years. The notion of the writer as enemy, explored by him first through the extra-terrestrial Sushinskii and then through the Jew Kroshka Tsores, would now be interpreted in more general terms of the traitor and the outsider, coming finally to rest in the image of the sorcerer-writer.

In the first instance, however, accusations of treachery had more to do with lingering rumours of his collaboration with the KGB that spread in émigré circles. In a murky tale that reads more like a dubiously written spy novel, the activities of the organs of State security insinuated themselves into émigré politics and Siniavskii's integrity was consistently undermined. His publication of Spokoinoi nochi in 1984 had brought into the public arena for the first time the question of his involvement with the KGB and its origins in the late 1940s. If

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 3.

he had hoped to quell with this book rumours that had haunted him ever since his arrival in the West, he was to be sadly disappointed. Sergei Khmel'nitskii's response to Siniavskii's less than flattering portrayal of him in the novel, an article entitled 'Iz chreva kitova' in the Israeli journal Dvadtsat' dva in 1986, further fanned the flames, as the brand of traitor was returned to Siniavskii with interest.⁵⁰⁵ Furthermore, to the idea of a deal done with the KGB to shorten Siniavskii's imprisonment and facilitate his passage to the West were added whispers, actively supported by Vladimir Maksimov in Kontinent, suggesting that Siniavskii had been sent as a plant by the Soviet government to undermine the activities of the dissident émigrés and in particular Solzhenitsyn.⁵⁰⁶ These rumours appeared to be substantiated by a document that surfaced in another Israeli journal, Vesti, in 1992 in the form of a letter written by Andropov to the Central Committee in 1973, the year the Siniavskii left for France.⁵⁰⁷

However, it was once again Progulki s Pushkinym that served as a catalyst for the most vitriolic invectives aimed in Siniavskii's direction at this time and which now issued from within Russia itself. The uproar caused by the book in émigré circles in 1975 was nothing compared to the reactions from the Soviet Union when, Gorbachev's reforms now permitting, an extract appeared in the April 1989 issue of the journal Oktiabr', the year that also saw the return to print in Russia of Solzhenitsyn, with his Arhipelag GULag.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁵ See above, chapter 3.

⁵⁰⁶ See, Rozanova, 'Abram da Mar'ia', p. 143.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 150, where the said letter is reproduced.

⁵⁰⁸ For a more detailed account of which of Siniavskii's works appeared in Russia and when, see Nepomnyashchy, 'Andrei Sinyavsky's "Return"', pp. 27-28. The appearance of works by still living, previously banned authors such as Siniavskii and Solzhenitsyn, followed that of 'manuscripts written

There is no question that Arkhipelag GULag was a work of much greater import, of much more lasting significance than Progulki s Pushkinym, yet, even so, this slight book's appearance in the same year did not pass unnoticed. Quite the contrary: it provoked a scandal. Likened by some to an exploding 'bomb', the small excerpt from Progulki s Pushkinym fuelled what Mariia Vasilievna referred to as Abram Tertz's 'third trial', as history seemed to be repeating itself with monotonous regularity.⁵⁰⁹ Unlike the 'second trial', that took place in émigré circles when Progulki s Pushkinym came out in the West, and which she characterised as 'literary', this subsequent 'trial' was more political in nature and had begun, according to her, in 1984 with Solzhenitsyn's article, '...Koleblet tvoi trenochnik'.⁵¹⁰

Solzhenitsyn, with his increasingly nationalist stance, had already divided Russians abroad into 'patriots' and 'Russophobes' in his article 'Nashi pliuralisty'. Now, conservatives inside Russia took up the cry, when the journal Nash sovremennik published 'Russofobiia' (in abbreviated form) in June 1989, an article written by Igor Shafarevich, an émigré of the far right whose name was closely linked with Solzhenitsyn's.⁵¹¹ Divisions between conservatives and

sometimes decades earlier "for the drawer" by official Soviet writers' and that of "safely dead" authors, whether Soviet or émigré'. Ibid., p. 26.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 36.

⁵¹⁰ Rozanova, 'K istorii i geografii etoi knigi', pp. 157-58. A. Solzhenitsyn, '...Koleblet tvoi trenochnik', pp. 133-152.

⁵¹¹ Igor Shafarevich, 'Russofobiia', Nash sovremennik, 1989, 6, pp. 167-92. Shafarevich's article (or, to use Catherine Nepomnyashchy's term, his 'reactionary tract') had originally been published in the December 1988 and March 1989 issues of the émigré journal, Veche. A 'noted mathematician', Shafarevich was firmly associated with the Solzhenitsyn camp; he had been a co-contributor with him to the dissident anthology 'Iz-pod glyb' ('From under the Rubble', Paris, 1974) and had since 'Apparently [...] moved far to the right politically'. Nepomnyashchy, 'Andrei Sinyavsky's "Return"', pp. 28-29. He was to follow this up with an article in September in which Siniavskii is compared to Salman Rushdie and his book on Pushkin to the latter's Satanic Verses. Shafarevich, 'Fenomen emigratsii', p. 5.

liberals at home and abroad intensified as the hue and cry continued throughout the summer and autumn of 1989 on the pages of the Russian press.

In terms that were disquietingly reminiscent of the tactics and rhetoric used against him at his first trial, Siniavskii found himself accused once again of treachery: his treatment of Pushkin was interpreted as a betrayal of Russian culture and Russia as a whole. The problem was not only the style of the book but also its timing: Siniavskii became the scapegoat for feelings of frustration and uncertainty stirred up by the disintegration of the old Soviet Union. In what was perceived as his sacrilegious denigration of Pushkin, Siniavskii was considered to have undermined a symbolic figure – one of the few remaining such figures – in whom feelings of cultural pride and national identity coalesced.⁵¹² The publication of Progulki s Pushkinym thus acquired the dimensions of a ‘socio-political’ and not merely a cultural event. Moreover, what was perceived as his unceremonious attitude to Russian culture and his disregard for the dignity and status of the author, including his own (his ‘zanizhennaia pozitsiia’), made him the natural focus for attacks from conservatives among the intelligentsia who saw their own sacrosanct positions under threat, their ‘monolithic control over the cultural establishment slipping from their hands at an ever accelerating pace.’⁵¹³

⁵¹¹ Part of the problem was the timing of the book’s appearance: ‘At a time when established values are disintegrating and the horrors of Soviet history are being revealed at a sensational pace, people clearly want to cling to those aspects of their culture in which they can indisputably take pride’. Nepomnyashchy, ‘Andrei Sinyavsky’s “Return”’, p. 35.

⁵¹² Nepomnyashchy, ‘Andrei Sinyavsky’s “Return”’, p. 35.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

The full text of Progulki s Pushkinym was reproduced in issues seven, eight and nine of Voprosy literatury, 1990, and was followed in issue ten by the transcription of a debate organised by the editorial board of the journal, to which it had invited eminent members of the Russian academic community.⁵¹⁴ This undoubtedly reflected a desire to give a fairer hearing to Siniavskii and his work, a fact underscored by the inclusion of Mariia Vasilievna's critical commentary in the same issue ('K istorii i geografii etoi knigi'). The fact remained, however, that the overall balance of opinion was not in Siniavskii's favour. The conclusions hit a particularly sensitive nerve as Siniavskii's 'dishonouring' of Russia and Russian literature emerge as the principle accusation against him. Though a confirmed non-conformist, it was above all as a Russian writer that he saw himself and the only recognition that really mattered to him was recognition in Russia by the Russian intelligentsia.

Siniavskii's work of this time has a triple motivation: to affirm his integrity as a man and a writer, to vindicate his work as a literary critic, and to fight for the future of Russian literature in the face of what he sees as a new conservatism. This was no easy task and necessitated a new configuration of the Siniavskii-Tertz persona in which Mariia Vasilievna became ever more actively involved. While Siniavskii took on his detractors through his art, Mariia Vasilievna dealt with the accusations against him on a practical and material level.⁵¹⁵ Already a seasoned fighter – ten years of leading a 'double life'

⁵¹⁴ Although these issues of Voprosy literatury are listed as having been published in 1990, they did not appear until 1991.

⁵¹⁵ This goes some way to explaining the fact that though 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku' was finished in 1991, in other words while the Progulki s Pushkinym controversy was in full swing, it was not published

between the sending abroad of Tertz's first work and Siniavskii's arrest, or as she put it, ten years of 'higher education in banditry', had prepared her well – she had honed her skill while Siniavskii was in prison during her periodic encounters with the KGB.⁵¹⁶ The Siniavskii-Tertz division acquired a new permutation during this period as she had assumed the role of the street-wise, audacious Tertz. She herself saw it in these terms, in terms not simply of a kind of guerrilla warfare but of a 'creative process'.⁵¹⁷ Taking on the KGB she had played them at their own game.

It was, however, during this last phase of his life, when Siniavskii was embattled from all sides, that she truly came into her own. It was she, as she now revealed, who had 'blackmailed' the KGB to secure Siniavskii's early release, by threatening them with the publication abroad of 'a book from the camps', already safely out of their reach. Now, leaving no stone unturned, she set about to disprove conclusively the claims that he had been and still was in the pay of the KGB, finally running to ground Andropov's incriminating letter. Thanks to her persistence, the document published in Vesti was revealed as a forgery, a clumsy collage, sent anonymously to the journal. Moreover, it was proven that not only was Siniavskii innocent, but that the KGB had itself instigated and encouraged the rumours against him in the émigré community. A

until 1994, by which time Mariia Vasilievna had marshaled her evidence. The other reason for the delay is quite simply that Siniavskii was never in a hurry to publish his work. See, M. Rozanova, postscript to Koshkin dom, p. 149.

⁵¹⁶ See, Rozanova, 'Abram da Mar'ia', in particular pp. 126-27.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 128-29. 'For Siniavskii interrogation was hard, unpleasant and dangerous work, when he was expecting to be tripped up on some contradiction or fearful of saying too much (the dispatch of some other authors also depended on him) ... But for me an interrogation was almost a creative process, with its own joys (and a fatal abyss just over the edge...) I rushed to an interrogation as I would, if you will forgive me, to a chess tournament, to a reconnaissance trip'.

series of articles, accompanied by copies of various letters and other papers, including the falsified letter from Andropov, constituted the documentary proof of her husband's innocence and were published together under the heading 'Obratnaia perspektiva' in Sintaksis in 1994. The section is completed by a letter from Vladimir Maksimov in which he retracts his accusations and extends an unconditional apology to Siniavskii and to Mariia Vasilievna.⁵¹⁸

All's fair in love and war but Mariia Vasilievna's championing of her husband cost her dear. In a particular incident, recounting her part in Siniavskii's early release with some relish and not a little panache for a Russian television programme about Pushkin ('Piatogo koleasa') filmed at Chernaia rechka, the scene of Pushkin's fatal duel, she was shocked to hear that some viewers (Maksimov among others) interpreted it as no less a form of collaboration and treachery. Siniavskii's writing of this time may be seen as much as tribute to Mariia Vasilievna as it was a reply to his accusers and a reiteration of his artistic beliefs. It is to Pushkin and Chernaia rechka that he returns in the first instance to bring this all together.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., p.150. Maksimov's apology appears on pp. 161-62, followed on p. 163 by an acceptance of that apology from Mariia Vasilievna on behalf of herself and Siniavskii, 'Konets velikoi epokhi', under which is a drawing of a handshake between a man and a woman.

‘Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rech ku’

‘[...] be on an equal footing. Yes! on an equal footing with that same literature you write about’.⁵¹⁹

If as a man Siniavskii was disillusioned, as a writer he had not lost either his zest for literature or the will to fight, as the epigraph to this chapter shows. Once again, as in Spokoinoi nochi, it was his art that provided not only his refuge but his most obvious and effective means of answering his detractors. Focussing on the essay ‘Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku’ and the novella Koshkin dom, both written under the name of Tertz, I intend to show how his life remains intimately bound up with his art but now feeds it in an increasingly organic way, becoming the stimulus for new creative departures. However, unlike in Spokoinoi nochi where Siniavskii himself is the pivot and focal point of the work, the balance shifts so that Russian literature occupies centre stage.

‘Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku’, an essay on Pushkin’s Kapitanskaia dochka (The Captain’s Daughter, 1836), is a continuation and vindication of what Siniavskii had endeavoured to achieve in Progulki s Pushkinym. As if to underscore this he takes up again themes and images from the earlier work (the vampire, the impostor) centred round the figure of Pugachev, while introducing terms such as oboroten’ which serve as a link between the fantastic world of his

⁵¹⁹ Tertz, ‘Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku’, p. 20.

literary criticism and the fantastic reality of his ‘trials’.⁵²⁰ He returns to Pushkin not only because it was his work on Russia’s most sacred poet that had first unleashed the outcry against him but equally because, in the midst of the ‘socio-political’ storm that the book had become, Pushkin remained for Siniavskii a beacon – the only beacon – of pure art in its broadest and most universal sense, art that did not seek to preach but to lift the human spirit.

Siniavskii begins his essay proper with Pushkin writing to his wife, Natal’ia Nikolaevna. Providing an insight into his thoughts and mood at the time of writing Kapitanskaia dochka, Pushkin’s letters to Natal’ia Nikolaevna form part of the structural and thematic pattern of Siniavskii’s work. They also serve as a departure point for the complex set of ideas that go to make up his essay: how Pushkin’s private life fed into and contributed an essential creative dimension to his work, an idea that provides an unobtrusive hint at a similar connection between Siniavskii’s life and his art. A link to Progulki s Pushkinym through its origins in Siniavskii’s correspondence with Mariia Vasilievna, the letters also represent a tacit signal of her continuing part in his story. Finally, they indicate to the reader his own role in what is to come.

‘Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku’ is a multi-faceted and subtle work but it is first and foremost a work of literary criticism, literary criticism that demands much of its reader. In this, too, it represents a reply to comments made about Siniavskii in the Voprosy literatury debate. According to Valentin Nepomniashchii, not only had Siniavskii dishonoured Pushkin, his attitude to his

⁵²⁰ Jane Grayson points out how Siniavskii’s reading of Pushkin and his treatment of his material, including the ambivalent portrayal of Pugachev is influenced by Veresaev’s Pushkin v zhizni (Pushkin in Life, 1926-27) which Siniavskii read in prison. Grayson, ‘Back to the Future’, pp. 159-60.

reader was equally disrespectful. Engaging in what amounted to a supercilious game with him – will he get it or won't he? Does he belong to the elite group of initiates or is he dim? – Siniavskii had done neither himself nor literature any favours, putting himself beyond the reach of the ordinary reader.⁵²¹

Siniavskii responds by making a special point of allotting to his reader an active and equal role in 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku'. Moreover, he is at pains to avoid the blatant *épatage* of Progulki s Pushkinym that had been so roundly criticised and which might be thought to alienate that reader. However, Siniavskii's work was never intended for the mass readership that Nepomniashchii envisages. It was certainly not for those who stare unmoved and uncomprehending at culture, like the uneducated 'hordes' of his fellow Russians at the Prado from whom he flees, in shame.⁵²² Light-hearted though it may appear, Siniavskii's art requires insight and effort, but then, so too does Pushkin's: 'Anyone who confuses Pushkin's genius with the simplicity and naturalness of his style is deceiving himself thrice over'.⁵²³

Art as much as the artist is the subject of 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku' and the emphasis shifts accordingly. Siniavskii had been accused of irreverence, of dishonouring and devaluing Russia's literary heritage, but literature, as he is at pains to show in 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku', could die a death just like the writer if all that were asked of it was to survive as a mummified object of veneration. It is the reader as much as the writer who is capable of ensuring its

⁵²¹ V. Nepomniashchii in 'Obsuzhdenie knigi Abrama Tertza "Progulki s Pushkinym"', Voprosy literatury, 10, 1990, pp. 77-153. Nepomniashchii's contributions occur on pp. 77-78 and 143-53 (p. 144).

⁵²² Tertz, 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku', pp. 38-39.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

continued existence, as something live and vigorous: ‘The classics sleep, but so long as we read them with genuine interest, their books live, change form and sometimes even gain in influence’.

This is where literary criticism comes in and Siniavskii steps to one side for a moment, roughly mid-way through his essay, to address his critics in impassioned terms: ‘The classical tradition is legitimate but so, too, is the violation of that tradition. Otherwise, who knows, it may go to sleep and never wake up’. Approaching the thorny question of vampirism by another route, he dismisses the pompous-sounding branches of scholarship such as ‘literary history’ and ‘literary criticism’:

they both feed and live off of literature. And they sound so grand.

‘History of literature’, ‘literary criticism’ – just as though they were spliced. Well, if that’s the case, then let us critics and literary historians behave as equals. Yes, let’s be on equal terms with the literature we write about. Bold. Bold as Pushkin.

and he pictures himself walking at night in the vast cemetery, in the Elysian fields to which all the great works of world literature have been consigned, not weeping over them, but whispering to each one, ‘Wake up! Your time has come!...’⁵²⁴

Literature, as Siniavskii alerts the reader at the beginning of ‘Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku’, should be read in layers. So he prompts him to consider the idea of the literary and cultural strata that go to make up Pushkin’s work. The scene at Cherniaia rechka follows the one set in the Prado. In both cases the

⁵²⁴ Ibid., pp. 20-21.

crowd's lack of understanding makes him despair for the future of Russian culture if it views with hostility anything new or 'foreign'.

In Siniavskii's reading of Kapitanskaia dochka the Russian literary tradition is shown to be but one stratum within the broader geological deposits on which Western culture is nourished, from travellers' tales to the fairy story, chivalric romance (Don Quixote) to Shakespeare's Hamlet. Pushkin is familiar with all and with all he allows himself the license of parody and irreverence, the free play of his creative imagination to the benefit of his work and the enrichment of the reader.

All writers necessarily 'feed' on the 'blood' of others' works but in so doing they can bring those works back to life. Turning the notion of vampirism on its head, Siniavskii suggests that books themselves, 'travelling along the channels created by their readers', gather momentum, energised by their contact with the reader (a 'bite-kiss') and in turn infect generations to come. So the 'vampire book' not only perpetuates itself but renews itself and others.⁵²⁵

Pushkin's work, apart from its debt to the European literary tradition, also betrays the influence of Fonvizin's Nedorosl' (The Minor, 1782). Taking up the lines of the protagonist, Prostakov, "I don't want to learn, I want to marry", Siniavskii points out that for Grinev love and marriage are to all intents and purposes synonymous with learning; thus, Fonvizin's antithesis 'under Pushkin's pen is translated into the equation: to marry is to learn'.⁵²⁶ Fonvizin's Prostakov, is resurrected and transformed by Pushkin in the figure of Grinev, via

⁵²⁵ Tertz, 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku'., p. 26.

⁵²⁶ Ibid., pp. 14-16.

a connection with the simpleton of the fairy tale (Ivan-durak) and all the positive connotations attached to him, including an ability to trust in fate that is shared also by Pushkin.

In order to re-invigorate the literary tradition, an author must take risks, daring to write differently, as Pushkin did. Speaking of himself, Siniavskii writes, 'Like Pushkin's Terentii from the village of Goriukhino, I change my handwriting. I write alternately, now with my right hand, now with my left. And even with my foot. On the off-chance that I won't be recognised. I attempt to clear a new barrier of prose'.⁵²⁷

Pushing further techniques of estrangement learnt from the Russian modernists and Formalists, Siniavskii proceeds to give an impressive demonstration of both reading and writing on different levels, starting with a spatial metaphor (the Champs Elysée above, the Paris metro below), and on to the temporal (Pugachev's era, Pushkin's and the present day) and the imaginative in the superimposed stories of Pushkin and Natalia Nikolaevna, Grinev and Masha Mironova, while adding a third, his own and Mariia Vasilievna's. The reader must keep his wits about him as Siniavskii constantly dislocates the narrative, moving back and forth between fact and fiction, present day Leningrad and Pushkin's Russia, while an interlude towards the end brings together a surreal combination of all three on a film set at Chernaia rechka where the story of Pushkin's duel is being re-enacted.

⁵²⁷ This small passage is a reminder of Pasternak. In 'Odin den' s Pasternakom' the same question arises, concerning the need to try something new in order to re-invigorate one's work and is answered with the same metaphor of 'writing with one's foot'. Siniavskii, 'Odin den' s Pasternakom', pp. 134-35. The idea would resurface in Koshkin dom.

Siniavskii's writing itself owes not a little to cinematic technique as he makes use of flashbacks, fast forwards and zooms in and out of focus: 'Nearer! Nearer! Close-up! Click!'.⁵²⁸ In order to write differently the author, like Pushkin, must learn to look differently: 'The author rubbed his eyes. Having carried out his duty as a historian, it was as if he completely forgot about it and, as if anew, for the first time, he took a good look at Pugachev'.⁵²⁹ Pushkin's view of Pugachev changed when, through a chance encounter with an old Cossack woman, he turned from dusty archives to the oral transmission of history in anecdotes and stories handed down within living memory. As a result, what Pushkin saw was not some rough peasant but a werewolf [oboroten'] and so the shift occurs from history to fairy tale, from fact to fiction, from chronicle to art. Pugachev is not all bad and history is greater than the sum of its facts: Pugachev steps out of Kapitanskaia dochka with a vividness and a power to intrigue that would be lacking in a more straightforward, documentary account.

Yet this view of Pugachev is equally valid and can lay claim to equal truthfulness – 'untruth' and 'lies' were other crimes laid at Siniavskii's door by his critics in the matter of his treatment of Pushkin. Pugachev's 'werewolf-like quality' [oborotnichestvo] is 'an objective historical fact': what could be more fantastic than the transformation of an unknown tramp into a tsar who had shaken half of Russia to its very foundations? Simply, "poetry is invention [...] and has nothing in common with the prosaic truth of life".⁵³⁰

⁵²⁸ Tertz, 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku, p. 11.

⁵²⁹ Ibid., p. 31.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., pp. 30 and 31.

Pushkin's story owes as much to chance, coincidence and ambiguity as it does to fact, both in its genesis and in his use of it to structure his novella. 'Realism is realism. A novel is a novel'. Siniavskii suggests how the single circumstance of the unseasonal weather that greeted Pushkin on his departure from St Petersburg in the summer of 1833, prompting an association in his mind with the 'storm' of the Pugachev revolt, set in train a sequence of thoughts that came to fruition in Kapitanskaia dochka, reviving, along the way, themes and characters from his earlier story, 'Metel' (The Snow Storm, 1831). Following the unusual storm in August, Dantes, the harbinger of another cataclysmic event, 'entered the capital on the sly in September'.⁵³¹

Siniavskii's own work grows organically from these observations. An analysis that is at once a narrative, it is based not on strict rules of literary criticism but on intuition and creative association, an idea that had been the essence of Progulki s Pushkinym. The facts, as in the case of Pushkin and Pugachev's story, are there for all to see but they require a fresh eye and a bold pen to give them whole new dimensions. As befits a work entitled 'The Captain's Daughter', Siniavskii suggests that Pushkin's novella is articulated around nautical metaphors, around ships and voyages, rough seas and tricky passages. A frail vessel, it is held together by a complex and symmetrical system of 'rigging'.⁵³²

Demonstrating rather than spelling it out, Siniavskii's text is held together by an equally carefully crafted pattern of themes and associations that, echoing

⁵³¹ Ibid., p. 10.

⁵³² Ibid., p. 44.

those of Pushkin, link the various layers of his work to each other, and his work to Pushkin's. Apart from the storm (Mariia Vasilievna sets out for Leningrad to oversee the publication of Siniavskii's work on a blustery day; his publication of Progulki s Pushkinym created a 'storm') there are the journeys, fictional, metaphorical and real: Pushkin's journey in 1833 to research his History of the Pugachev Rebellion and, underlying this, the path that would lead to his death in a duel at Chernaia rechka. His story of the captain's daughter tells another tale of voyages, Grinev's real travels reflecting his metaphorical voyage of self-discovery and Masha Mironova's journey to petition the Empress, Catherine the Great. Finally his own 'return' to print in Russia, as Mariia Vasilievna travels to Leningrad, is echoed by his physical return ('the vampire never dreamt he would find himself again on his native soil') making sure that his spectacles are safely lodged in his pocket: 'spectacles are for me what a pistol is for other people'.⁵³³

If journeys provide a framework, the thematic pivot of both Pushkin and Siniavskii's work is honour, the question of honour as the unspoken prompt that encouraged Siniavskii's writing of 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku'. Siniavskii's passing reference to his spectacles-cum-pistol, though humorous, through its nod in the direction of duelling, takes the reader to the heart of the matter as he writes of Pushkin: "'Honour! Honour! Honour!'" thundered in his head all these last years, in his letters, his articles and his conversations'.⁵³⁴ The epigraph Pushkin chooses for Kapitanskaia dochka is likewise an old saying about honour: 'Evidently thoughts about honour and the story of his novel came

⁵³³ Ibid., p. 25, p. 34.

⁵³⁴ Ibid., p. 42.

together in his mind'.⁵³⁵ The last years of Pushkin's life were overshadowed by a growing concern at the scandalous rumours circulating about his wife. Siniavskii shows how these concerns influence and are reflected in his interpretation of Pugachev's story so that honour becomes the pivot on which the whole story turns.

In Siniavskii's case the opposite is true, in the sense that it is his wife who stepped out in his defence so that Mariia Vasilievna's part in safeguarding his honour may be read as a vital subtext to his writing on Kapitanskaia dochka. In an analysis of its structure, towards the end of 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku' (and here he does spell it out) Siniavskii picks out three main aspects of the work that seem to hold together the fragile structure built out of next to nothing, out of anecdote and coincidence. First there are the documents, then a system of couples or pairings, which, according to Siniavskii, are evidence of Pushkin's 'fundamental inclination to poetic harmony as the basis of existence'. Thirdly and most importantly comes honour.

Honour is the axis on which Pushkin's story turns and the thematic thread that binds all together, and it is the interplay of honour and documents that are relevant to Siniavskii's own story. Among the documents two stand out: Captain Mironov's 'officer's diploma' that serves as a gauge of honour, handed down to Grinev through the 'close participation and mediation' of Masha Mironova, who sought protection at Court "as the daughter of a man who has suffered for his loyalty".⁵³⁶ Secondly, there is Grinev's genealogy. A letter written in the

⁵³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 40.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

Empress's own hand to Grinev's father, it 'contains the vindication of his son and praise for the mind and heart of captain Mironov's daughter'.⁵³⁷

Before one even comes to Mariia Vasilievna's part in Siniavskii's story, one can discern here echoes of Spokoinoi nochi and the 'baton' handed from Revolutionary father to revolutionary son, the gentry code of honour passed from one quixotic idealist to his immediate descendant: 'I give you my word as a revolutionary'. Not passed on as a matter of course, but 'won': 'Honour doesn't stand still, honour must be learnt, it must be fought for'.⁵³⁸ To Pushkin's symmetrical 'pairings' one can add Siniavskii's buried just below the surface of his text and which come straight from his autobiography.

The most important of these is that of the two 'Masha's' – Masha Mironova and Masha Siniavskii. Siniavskii's battle for his honour was certainly hard fought but he was not alone as Mariia Vasilievna was a constant and active presence at his side. Masha Mironova, an apparently colourless nonentity (something that could never be said of Mariia Vasilievna), while taking no part in the development of events, follows [Grinev] around and accompanies the hero everywhere as a stimulus to his fight and to his life, as the constant subject of his thoughts and anxieties' until 'her turn comes to step forward alone – in the face of universal snares and intrigue'.⁵³⁹

While Grinev starts out as a mediocre Quixote who grows in stature as the novella progresses, it is Masha Mironova who assumes the mantle and role of the knight [rytsar'], taking up the baton ceded to her by Grinev, and it is only her

⁵³⁷ Ibid., p. 50.

⁵³⁸ Ibid., p. 44

⁵³⁹ Ibid., p. 18.

involvement that 'saves' him. The documents that frame Pushkin's story have their counterparts in the documents assembled by Mariia Vasilievna in vindication of her husband's integrity. These documents appear, published in the same issue of Sintaksis that begins with Siniavskii's 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku', so that the two combined, Siniavskii's essay and Mariia Vasilievna's evidence, constitute the two props or pillars 'framing' his own story. In this story, however, it is Mariia Vasilievna, like Masha Mironova, who is attributed, albeit tacitly, the starring role.

This is one side of Siniavskii's reaction to his critics (and those of Mariia Vasilievna). The other side of his vindication concerns the nature and role of art in society: can art survive if the artist is expected always to toe the line of 'duty', to bow down before it as something sacred and inviolable? With this in mind one can discern yet another dimension to his reading of Kapitanskaia dochka. Pushkin, he tells us, could not care less about service and all the while he was standing around in his courtier's uniform, licking an ice-cream, he occupied himself with thoughts of Grinev: 'versifying and service are incompatible'.

Faced with the superhuman task of not only fulfilling his duty and preserving his name as an officer but also of saving Masha Mironova's life and honour, his honour 'in some strange way splits' into two unequal parts. On the one hand there is a sense of duty (to service, country and throne); on the other there is the 'voice of sentiment (also a duty), that draws in its wake not only love but life, honour and the pride of the captain's daughter'.⁵⁴⁰

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 49-50.

Grinev's choice forms part of a leitmotif that runs throughout 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku' in which duty (service) and obligation are juxtaposed with inspiration and love as two contrasting stimuli for art. The most obvious example is that of the illiterate hordes in the Prado who are there only because they are duty-bound to visit it under the terms of a cultural exchange. Needless to say, under such conditions and with such a mind-set, there is no hope whatsoever of any culture being 'exchanged'. Once duty is set to one side, however, the imagination is freed and miracles can happen, as when Pushkin looks anew at Pugachev and is able to bring him to life, because he has put behind him the 'duty' of the historian. Finally, there is Grinev's relationship with Pugachev. As against his father who had set him on the course of service to country and sovereign, Pugachev, acting in the self-appointed role of 'proxy' father, jolts Grinev out of his preordained rut so that he starts to neglect service, becoming free to decide his own path, to become 'self-styled' [samozvannym] in his turn. Grinev's chance, almost magical meeting with Pugachev, sets in motion his self-transformation that takes place over the course of the story and is akin to a creative act, reminding one of Progulki s Pushkinym and the idea that 'Pushkin's impostors are more than just tsars – they are artists as well' and 'bear within themselves and enact their human fate as if it were a work of art'.⁵⁴¹ Pugachev thus serves as a living metaphor for art as the free spirit of creation.

To return to Grinev's choice. If honour is the stimulus, love is the agent of his transformation – taking one back to Pushkin's reversal of Fonvizin's antithesis through which marriage is equated with learning. 'It is love that opens his eyes,

⁵⁴¹ Tertz, Progulki s Pushkinym, p. 157 / p. 136.

feeds and expands his mind. Love is fundamental for creation and for an understanding of the world – such is the tacit message of “Kapitanskaia dochka”. Tacit because, ‘Pushkin does not try to explain anything, prove anything and does not preach’.⁵⁴²

Echoing Pushkin’s Kapitanskaia dochka, Siniavskii’s ‘Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku’ is also a love story, a love story dedicated to his wife but equally to literature. Literature is not something that should dictate or be dictated to. Rather it should come as a gift, individual to individual, writer to reader, from one generation to the next. Siniavskii starts ‘Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku’ with a reminder that Gogol received the ideas for two of his greatest works, Revizor and Mertvye dushi from Pushkin in the form of anecdotes, for which he extended his gratitude not simply in the ‘sweeping, impertinent speeches of Khlestakov who claimed, ‘so he said, to be ‘on friendly terms with Pushkin. The whole of “Revizor” is devoted with grateful thanks to Pushkin’.⁵⁴³

⁵⁴² Tertz, ‘Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku’.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., p. 3.

Koshkin dom

By an arc of sea a green oak stands,
to the oak a chain of gold is tied,
and at the chain's end day and night
a learned cat walks round and round.
Rightward he goes, and sings a song –
leftward, a fairytale he tells.⁵⁴⁴

'Without risk there is no art and a coward doesn't play cards'.⁵⁴⁵ Koshkin dom begins where 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku' left off. Obeying his own injunction to be bold and daring in literary matters, Siniavskii takes up the main themes and ideas of 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku' and re-works them, translating them into a fantastic tale, in which life and art, literary criticism and literature come together in an extraordinary synthesis.

The polemical intent of 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku' is still apparent as the tribulations of Siniavskii's final years and a sense of bleakness about his fate as a writer are woven into the narrative of Koshkin dom. But the feeling is more one of generalised disillusionment and with the idea that there is nothing to lose,

⁵⁴⁴ Pushkin, Ruslan i Ludmilla, in Pushkin, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh, 3rd edn, Moscow, 1963, 4, pp. 10-101(p. 11). Translation from Alexander Pushkin, Ruslan and Lyudmila, trans. Roger Clarke, London, 2005, p.5.

⁵⁴⁵ Tertz, 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku', p. 51.

there is a sense of letting go, of revelling once more, as he did in Liubimov, in fantasy and writing for its own sake. As in Liubimov Siniavskii has no single literary companion: literature is the subject and hero of his tale.

Through his art Siniavskii also achieves a measure of reconciliation with his critics and with Russia. While 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku' moves between Paris and Leningrad / St. Petersburg, Koshkin dom is firmly situated in Moscow, with glimpses of the émigré writer's life intruding every now and then into what, for Siniavskii, is the most Russian of cities and with which he identifies as a Russian writer. He would never go back to live there and his reception there as a writer had been all too painful but this, his last novel, constitutes a symbolic spiritual and creative return.

Not for nothing is the reader advised in 'Puteshestvie Chernuiu na rechku' to read in layers. In Koshkin dom he is given an equally valuable piece of advice: look at the text as you would a story-book puzzle, just 'hold the edge of the drawing up to your nose and glance at the intricate landscape from the corner of the page, and the truth [will] reveal itself'.⁵⁴⁶

Siniavskii does provide his reader with a guide of sorts and a clue. The guide comes in the form of the Prologue which in a few pages identifies the landmarks in his life as writer, key points that the reader may identify in another form in Tertz's story. A companion piece to 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku', Koshkin dom may equally be seen as a continuation of his fantastic autobiography: the train journey started at the end of Spokoinoi nochi is

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 48. The exact way the picture should be held and from what angle it should be looked at is not absolutely clear and Siniavskii's directions have been disputed by Russians who were asked about this – E.M.

continued in this, his 'long-distance novel'. His life is viewed from the perspective of old age as he drifts between dreaming and waking, past and present: here are the childhood origins of his passionate interest in books, in reading, writing and the world of the imagination from which his parents tried vainly to distance him. Here, too, are the painful, lingering accusations aimed at him by fellow writers, still trying to 'prove that I was never in prison' and even the absurd notion that he did not exist at all – 'At all, you understand'. There is also the idea that he is some kind of sorcerer, 'since I have not died yet'. These somnolent interludes allow his active, 'astral body' to separate itself from its mortal shell, leaving his imagination free to roam, as he drinks in the velvety night air of his memories (another echo of the closing pages of Spokoinoi nochi). As if in direct refutation of the accusations against him, it turns out to be the star-laden night of his camp years, its creative potential overcoming the surroundings to evoke images of One Thousand and One Nights.

The clue to the puzzle is the zolotoi shnurok (the golden shoe lace). First mentioned in the Prologue, it is Robinson Crusoe's life-saving 'loop' [petlia] or hook, used to fish up untold treasures from the sunken brig, essential for survival on a desert island. In Koshkin dom the zolotoi shnurok takes the form of passages of seemingly senseless 'abracadabra' that are interspersed throughout the text. A kind of latter-day Ariadne's thread, it leads to the heart of the labyrinth and out again if one can hold fast to it, through the various twists and turns of the story. To reveal all at the beginning, however, would be to give the game away.

True to the idea of the puzzle, Siniavskii does his best to disorientate the reader, with numerous shifts of location, in which fact and fiction are blurred and the authorial voice is never fixed in a single individual. Moreover, the genre itself is fluid, one moment a memoir, another a fairy tale, the next a diary, with a scene from a surreal play thrown in for good measure. The sense of frustration is compounded by the fact that these are often presented as fragments, while the whole is propelled along in the form of a detective story.

This seemingly relentless assault on the reader's critical faculties, not to mention his powers of concentration, serves to convey Siniavskii's sense of alienation from contemporary reality. His visits to Russia from the late 1980s onward, after an absence of nearly twenty years, revealed the country, and Moscow in particular, changed out of all recognition. This is reflected in the novel where the city seems to be falling apart (he had noted the same about Leningrad in 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku); dirty and neglected, the negative effects of perestroika are everywhere evident as the city falls prey to aggressive Western-style consumerism and an influx of foreign culture at its most cheap and tawdry. In addition there is a more disturbing, fundamental sense of chaos, of a moral and spiritual vacuum.⁵⁴⁷ Koshkin dom, with its fantastic evocation of Moscow, reflects a sense of life adrift in the modern world, both formless and surreal. For many of Siniavskii's friends in Russia,

⁵⁴⁷ Once again, he spells this out in The Russian Intelligentsia (p. 17): 'The meaning of life has also been lost [...] We have now fallen from that logical Soviet cosmos into chaos and have no idea we can believe in. The meaning and lives of several generations has been lost. It looks as though they lived and suffered in vain. After all, it is hard to believe in the dawn of capitalism, particularly such a wild and terrible capitalism, which smacks of criminal lawlessness'.

however, these were simply the reactions of ‘an old man abroad who was not keeping abreast of Russian reality’.⁵⁴⁸

Balzanov, the hero of Koshkin dom, is just such an old man, a retired teacher of literature turned detective, whose eye (a glass eye serving for Siniavskii’s pronounced wall eye) and names, Donat Egorovich, proclaim his parenthood with Siniavskii, incorporating the names of his father and his son. Unfit though he may appear, he is a crusader against the evils of the modern world and a quixotic figure – a nod from Siniavskii not only in the direction of his father but also towards Pushkin and his use of the chivalric romance in Kapitanskaia dochka.

Balzanov’s quarry and opponent is the evil Sorcerer, and so begins the detective story with a pursuit through Moscow, both fictional and real as Siniavskii’s tale acquires overtones not only of Prestuplenie i nakazanie but also of modern fantastic prose and Bulgakov’s D’iavoliada (Diavoliada, 1924). As the story unfolds, less cops and robbers, more hide-and-seek, the reader senses that Siniavskii’s game may be played on more than one level and in this instance with literary theory itself; substituting the ‘death of the author’ with the disappearance of the writer, as Proferansov, the sorcerer, vanishes in a dexterous conjuring trick, turning into a little golden ball before Balzanov’s very eyes.

Viewed on this level the dislocation of the narrative described above exploits the detective story to question the workings of narrative prose as such, with the writer showing off his talents as a conjuror under the noses of an amazed audience: one moment he is walking along a Moscow street, the next he has

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., p.12.

jumped into the pages of the text in an act of bluff and double bluff. He has come a long way from simply making use of the footnotes. Though there is undoubtedly, here, an acknowledgement of Western literary critical theory, this is more in the way of a knowing sideways glance at the reader. For Siniavskii, theorising of this kind was somehow too cold-blooded, too abstract and too solemn.⁵⁴⁹ The fantastic approach, the demonstrative and entertaining rather than the instructive, suited him far better.

Siniavskii's intention and method in Koshkin dom, true to his Russian literary roots, seems closer to that of Lermontov and his approach to prose writing. Much as Lermontov had done in Geroi nashego vremeni, but in a more extreme and playful way, Siniavskii exposes the workings of narrative prose in order both to exploit them as a creative feat but also to question them. Shifting narrative perspective, with bewildering changes of authorial voice, Siniavskii lays bare the unreliability of 'realistic' and 'truthful' accounts. His juxtaposition of the fantastic and the detective story serves to emphasise his point; a detective, after all, deals in facts, in logical deduction but that does not always lead him to an answer when it comes to questions of art: As the Sorcerer says:

Alas, I fear the pernicious influence on literature of everyday prose.

Beware, writer, of competing with reality, chasing after every dangerous insect and reptile. They bite! You are not a detective and you are not a court reporter. And if you are entertained by detective intrigues, then look in them for the secret paths of art or universal history and not a police report. Be patient. From time to time a new adventure story will peep into

⁵⁴⁹ See, Siniavskii, Pis'ma, 2, p. 74.

the window above the surface of objective reality and will wag its tail...⁵⁵⁰

Truth and, indeed reality, is more reliably found in the subjective and irrational. Not only the fantastic, but dreams, visions and intuition are a more reliable guide, and it is in this realm that Koshkin dom is set.

There remains the question of the writer. Proferansov's vanishing act reflects the very real sense of crisis about the role and function of the contemporary Russian writer that affected Siniavskii in personal terms but which was, for him, a more generalised concern. Where is the writer to be found? The image of the sorcerer acquires more universal connotations as it reminds the reader of the later Gogol, his transformation from good sorcerer into bad at the end of his life, as he destroyed his art through preaching and moralising.

The quest for the writer acquires some urgency in these last years of the twentieth century as Balzanov sets out on his mission to run the Sorcerer to ground. His opinion of writers in general is not high and he does not spare himself in his criticism of them: 'I know these writers. I've read their works. They're no better than anyone else. Worse, even. Each one of them thinks he's an oracle'.⁵⁵¹ Reminding one of Siniavskii's descriptions of Gogol in later life, their 'satanic pride' and 'unbridled imagination' threaten to destroy Russia, turning it into an 'imaginary country'.⁵⁵² Moreover, the calling of the writer is devalued: everyone, so it seems, is a graphomaniac; they, no less than the reader, are illiterate or misguided, as chapter seven (part two) shows. Balzanov's struggle against the Sorcerer represents, on one level, the struggle of the critic

⁵⁵⁰ Tertz, Koshkin dom, p. 73.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 144.

against this multitude of authors whose unstoppable torrent of preaching and self-expression threatens to engulf one and all. In what amounts to a parody of Gogol's Vybrannye mesta iz perepiski s druž'iami, Siniavskii's experiences of emigration are presented in comic shorthand as the correspondence between these would-be authors and 'Siniavskii', showing him fending off a barrage of admonitions and requests for help. His target becomes a little more pointed as he exposes their extremist views, their desire to become involved with politics and the fate of the Orthodox Church. Clearly Solzhenitsyn is not far from his mind but true to the spirit of the tale, their mutual antagonism is given a humorous twist, encapsulated in the differences between the dogs they each own. Solzhenitsyn is said to have dogs named after camps, while Siniavskii (here represented by his other alter ego, Balzanov) has a poodle sentimentally named Mathilda.⁵⁵³

The plot thickens as it becomes clear that the Balzanov-Sorcerer antagonism is another way of projecting the critic-writer dichotomy, the Siniavskii-Tertz split.⁵⁵⁴ Moreover, the split is apparently a radical one: while Balzanov is given names from Siniavskii's family, the Sorcerer holds the key to his imagination. While Tertz had 'saved' Siniavskii in Spokoinoi nochi, Balzanov and the Sorcerer appear sworn enemies and the synthesis, gaining in creative potential since Progulki s Pushkinym, seems all but undone.

⁵⁵³ Siniavskii did, indeed, have a poodle called Mathilda when he lived in Paris, and a cat called Caspar Hauser.

⁵⁵⁴ Tertz, Koshkin dom, pp. 128-29.

In the depiction of the Sorcerer would seem to be distilled Siniavskii's longstanding sense not simply of otherness but of being 'an enemy in general. An enemy as such'.⁵⁵⁵ From Sushinskii in 'Pkhentz' to Kroshka Tsores he had projected himself in fantastic form as not only misshapen but an outsider. Now, with the hostile reception of Progulki s Pushkinym fresh in his mind, Siniavskii interweaves folklore and reality, Koshkin dom and 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku', so the sorcerer is both vampire and d'Anthès: a creature of the night who sucks out the life blood of others, he is also the 'foreigner' who killed Pushkin, as the accusations against him resolve themselves into the figure of Inozemtsev, the last but one of the sorcerer's incarnations.⁵⁵⁶

Yet are his accusers any better? The transformations of the Sorcerer are sharply offset against the shameless opportunism of other writers, as their desperate bid for survival in the uncertain situation of late twentieth century Russia reveals an extraordinary aptitude for self-reinvention, 'at every opportunity becoming a communist, a fascist, a liberal or a Christian. Whatever you like'.⁵⁵⁷

The question cannot be shrugged off so easily, however, as the accusations continue to haunt him and the detective novel threatens to turn into horror story as Proferansov's vampirism is given a more sinister twist. He, and his later incarnation Inozemtsev, are no mere blood-suckers but out-and-out cannibals

⁵⁵⁵ Siniavskii, 'Dissidentstvo', p. 146. Even among friends, at the start of his career, Siniavskii had seemed to belong to another species: 'at first, Siniavskii seemed to me to have come from some other life'. Aleksandr Voronel', 'Dvadsat' let spustia', p. 138.

⁵⁵⁶ Inozemtsev's first name and patronymic(s) are equally foreign-sounding: Valerian Valerianovich/Gustafovich (and also Gogolian). Siniavskii's own patronymic, Donatovich is neither very common in Russia nor particularly Russian-sounding. The connection of the foreign and demonic is present, too, in Bulgakov's Woland.

⁵⁵⁷ Tertz, Koshkin dom, p. 91.

(back to the Prologue and a clue in the form of a picture from Robinson Crusoe and the grisly remains of a human foot) who do not simply feed, parasitically, off of their victims, but murder them, disposing of their spirit in order to occupy their body in an egoistic attempt at self-preservation.⁵⁵⁸ An evil and sinful act, it strikes at the very heart of Siniavskii's beliefs, going back to his first days as a writer: to steal is acceptable, akin to magic, an artistic sleight of hand.⁵⁵⁹ To kill, however, 'means destroying the soul and the soul is sacred, God-given'.⁵⁶⁰ The artist, divided between the need to write and the need to feed off others in order to survive, is drawn into a vicious circle that seems to allow of no escape.

This precipitates an agonising crisis of self-doubt that goes beyond a mere critic-writer or man-writer split, reflecting the relentless onslaught of criticism directed against Siniavskii. Visual images of fragmentation and dislocation project this sense of disorientation. Mirrors reflect an image of the writer shunned by society who then becomes unrecognisable to himself: 'The legs appeared at first to belong to someone else's body; their elegance was such that they did not correspond to my inner world'.⁵⁶¹ Worse still is the idea of losing oneself, an idea that contains within it a direct attack, too, on the writer looking at himself: 'all the same, a mirror distances us terribly from ourselves...Not without reason, during all my training I never let myself go and allow my

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 42.

⁵⁵⁹ Siniavskii, Ivan-durak, p. 49.

⁵⁶⁰ Aleksandr Voronel', in Nudel'man 'Dvadtsat' let spustia', p. 136. Voronel' here recalls his first meeting with Siniavskii in 1955, when he first began to send his work abroad as Tertz. The discussion began with Siniavskii putting the question to a group of friends: "What is worse – to kill or to steal?" (p. 135).

⁵⁶¹ Tertz, Koshkin dom, p. 72.

dreams to carry me away into the annals of biography'.⁵⁶² The novel thus becomes a warning against self-referential art, the writer obsessed only with himself. An enfilade of mirrors, with its endlessly refracted, identical images, conveys a sense of getting nowhere, a dead end.

Viewed in this light, Balzanov's hunt for the Sorcerer, is the writer's hunt for himself. 'Where am I now? And where is the real Siniavskii?'⁵⁶³ The many-layered prose that slips from third person to first, from memoirs to adventure story, to diary and back again, tells a tale of flight masquerading beneath a cloak of self-revelation that contains echoes Geroi nashego vremeni. Yet the Sorcerer is to be pitied as much as he is damned and the blood that should be splashed around for all to see is absent, as the horror story suddenly degenerates into farce and bodies are occupied and discarded in such rapid succession that the reader has difficulty keeping up, and at one point is even unsure whether he is dealing with a man or a woman.

As the Sorcerer puts it, the problem is: 'How do you leap out of yourself, while still remaining yourself?' How can you be a normal human being, so that 'no one will shout at you in the street: "Out of my sight, you damned sorcerer!"' (for which one may substitute Russophobe or vampire, as the case may be) while at the same time being overwhelmed by the necessity of remaining that Sorcerer, a writer, 'sloughing one's skin before it is too late! [...] Like a lizard, a snake!...'?'⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶² Ibid., p. 71.

⁵⁶³ Ibid., p. 97.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 121.

The answer lies in the re-affirmation of difference as an asset rather than a curse.⁵⁶⁵ In his search for himself Siniavskii looks inward rather than at the image of him reflected by his detractors. Problematic figure though Proferansov is, in him and his alter egos are concentrated the essential traits that distinguished Siniavskii from his fellows. A nineteenth-century nobleman, Proferansov embodies the importance Siniavskii attached to his past. Even among his fellow intellectuals, Siniavskii stood out thanks to the unusual breadth and depth of his culture: 'Siniavskii, unlike many of us, was a person with roots. He never forgot his noble ancestry and always emphasised that he had a heritage'.⁵⁶⁶

Despite his meddling and dilettantism, the Proferansov of Liubimov is the incarnation of Russia's literary past, the repository of folklore and the fantastic, a phantom who, though reduced to living in the margins, manages to cling on in the chaos of the Soviet present. Moreover, through his excursions from the footnotes, he represents the energy and subversiveness that informs all of Tertz's writing. In Koshkin dom, it is precisely during the Sorcerer's 'excursions' to the past, to his estate near Penza, that the style of the tale takes wing in exuberant flights of fancy, the lively and irrepressible prose 'brought to heel' by a splendid

⁵⁶⁵ See, Nudel'man, 'Dvadtsat' let spustia', p. 158. Nina Voronel' says here that Siniavskii had to be different, 'that was his main characteristic. That is why he became Abram Tertz. Everyone was going in one direction, so he upped and went in the opposite one!' Allowing for some prejudice on Nina Voronel's part (she was to paint the most malicious portrait of him after his death in her memoirs, Bez prikras, the idea that Siniavskii would deliberately choose to diverge from the common path rings true, and supports the idea of risk-taking as both a natural propensity and a considered ethical and creative choice. See, also, Sandler, 'Sex, Death and Nation', p. 305, where she discusses Siniavskii's otherness in the context of the uproar caused by Progulki s Pushkinym: 'He suffers little discomfort from difference and instead has a tendency to see a bit of himself in whatever seems different'.

⁵⁶⁶ Aleksandr Voronel', in Nudel'man, 'Dvadtsat' let spustia', pp. 156-57. Voronel' adds, 'It was he who showed me that culture can only be genuine when it is deeply rooted'. Voronel' is speaking as a Jew who learnt from Siniavskii, a philosemite, that he would only have a future 'if I became acutely aware of my roots'. (p. 156).

borzoi; similarly, in Spokoinoi nochi it was on his visit to his father at Rameno, site of the old family estate, that Siniavskii experienced the epiphany that would transform him into Tertz.

The Sorcerer is also a defender of the fairy tale in the face of its modern rival, science fiction.⁵⁶⁷ Dismissed by him as a ‘shameful palliative’, typical of ‘our mediocre age’, he sees science fiction as a sign of ‘ordinary conformism, of bowing to the majority’.⁵⁶⁸ For all his fierce loyalty to the regenerative and creative force of the Revolution, Siniavskii retained a strong measure of elitism, at odds with his environment. It was, however, an emphatically literary elitism, so that Proferansov’s sigh, ‘what a shame that the Bolsheviks destroyed the nobility of Rus’’, is a sigh for the passing of literary, not social distinction’.⁵⁶⁹

If Proferansov as the writer turns out to be ambiguous and not the unregenerate evildoer suggested by Balzanov, then what of Balzanov himself? While portraying a hostile rivalry between the two protagonists, his alter egos, the one writer, the other literary critic, Siniavskii seems to suggest that the two might not, after all, be completely unlike or, indeed, separate entities. Balzanov, as much as the sorcerer, is a misfit in society (and in ways that link

⁵⁶⁷ Proferansov’s opinion about science fiction carries a strong reminder of thoughts expressed by Siniavskii while in Dubrovlag. He remarks, in one of his letters, on the current fashion (and one can all but hear the tone of contempt as he writes the word) for science fiction in popular journals. In spite of his serious interest in and knowledge of science fiction, evident in articles written before his arrest, he objects to the way that they seem to be encroaching on and undermining traditional Russian culture and the fairy tale in particular. Now, according to him, characters of the fairy tale such as baba-iaga are explained away as beings from outer space. For Siniavskii ‘to explain the twists and turns of one’s own culture as the result of external interference is somehow disrespectful to that culture; all its wonderful secrets are re-fashioned in an industrial way and in themselves are worthless’. Siniavskii, Pis’ma, 2, pp. 375-76

⁵⁶⁸ Tertz, Koshkin dom, p. 74.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 77. Siniavskii puts the same idea in a different way: ‘I can well see my beloved Maiakovskii or my not so beloved Solzhenitsyn on the television screen, but I cannot imagine what Mandel’stam would do in a television studio. “Sleeplessness. Homer. Taut sails...” Give this divine line to the crowd so they can tear it to pieces? Give it to the masses? Not for the world!’ . Siniavskii, ‘Stil’ – eto sud’ba’, p. 131.

him specifically to Siniavskii).⁵⁷⁰ Like Siniavskii, Balzanov likes to ‘work on abasement’ [rabotat’ na snizhenii], while at times in his discussions about Koshkin dom, ‘the hand of Inozemtsev can already be felt’. Moreover, specific words used by Siniavskii in chapter seven, ‘poor, poor people’, are echoed by Inozemtsev, suggesting that Siniavskii, too, is yet another of his incarnations, part of an on-going line. This is borne out when, at the end of the novel, and against all expectations, Balzanov’s protégé, Andriusha, divulges the hope that he may one day become a writer, as a shadow (Proferansov’s?) slips over his face. The siren call of art worked its magic in just this way in Siniavskii’s family as his son, Egor, trained as an engineer, is now a writer in his turn.⁵⁷¹

The separation of writer and critic is more apparent than real and their creative synthesis is confirmed in the only sphere that matters, namely literature. For all that he wages a battle against writers and the Sorcerer in particular, Balzanov admits that ‘Literature is my only home’.⁵⁷² Both he and Proferansov seek refuge, albeit on different occasions, in Koshkin dom.

Koshkin dom

The thematic and symbolic heart of Siniavskii’s story, Koshkin dom is the central point where fact and fiction converge, where autobiography is translated

⁵⁷⁰ Tertz, Koshkin dom, p. 129. The affectionate name of ‘Desik’ by which Balzanov was known at home and for which he was teased by other children in the yard of their communal building – all the more so when neighbours acquired a dog called Dezka – was also the name that Siniavskii was called by his mother. Conversation with Mariia Vasilievna, Fontenay-aux-Roses, 2206. Not only do Balzanov’s childhood reminiscences of being teased for being ‘different’ almost exactly replicate Siniavskii’s own, his experiences among the literary fraternity also recall Siniavskii’s as his foreign-sounding name makes them wonder ‘was I not investigating Russian literature with some evil intent, was there not some sort of intrigue?’. Tertz, Koshkin dom, p. 103.

⁵⁷¹ Egor Siniavskii writes in French, under the name of Egor Gran, his wife’s surname.

⁵⁷² Tertz, Koshkin dom, p. 103.

into fable and sorcerer and detective, writer and literary critic, come together. Nominally situated in Moscow, it might have been transported there from the Paris suburb of Fontenay-aux-Roses. Or, perhaps, just as Moscow is said to possess ‘several false bottoms’, this is a house that exists simultaneously in parallel dimensions, acting as a temporal and spatial bridge between Siniavskii’s various existences.

The fantastic building of Tertz’s story is a close facsimile of the Siniavskii house on the rue Boris Vildé, with its air of faded grandeur, its notable literary past (the French writer Huysmans was a one-time occupant) and its romantically overgrown garden, not to mention the Siniavskii cat, Kaspar-Hauser and dog, Mathilda.⁵⁷³ The self-contained world to which Siniavskii retreated in order to escape the vicissitudes of literary politics, it is both fortress and sanctuary devoted to writing and printing, to literature and the arts and also his family home. This side of his life is woven into Koshkin dom in the form of Balzanov’s friends and surrogate family: Nastia (a book-binder), her illegitimate son, Andrei, and brother ‘Super’ whose apartment is wallpapered with illustrations from Russian fairy tales.⁵⁷⁴ They provide a refuge of common sense and practical help for Balzanov when he is most at a loss, and he in turn, acts as a kind of proxy father to Andrei.

⁵⁷³ The French novelist of Dutch descent, Joris-Karl Huysmans (1848-1907), by succession realist, decadent and Symbolist-mystic writer, lived in Fontenay-aux-Roses during 1881 and used the house as a model for the one in his novel, A rebours.

⁵⁷⁴ Tertz, Koshkin dom, pp. 61-62. Sasha Superman or ‘Super’, who is Balzanov’s ever-resourceful helper, played a similar part in real life. Sasha Surikov was also known as ‘Super’ to the Siniavskiis. A young scientist, he had helped Mariia Vasilievna in many practical ways when Siniavskii was in the camps and came to Paris to help nurse him in his final illness.

Koshkin dom is simply a more exotic and mysterious version of the Paris house and takes its title from the children's verse-story of the same name by Samuil Marshak.⁵⁷⁵ A story of forgiveness and magnanimity, it tells the tale of orphaned kittens refused a home by their proud aunt, who nevertheless take her in when her own house is burnt down. Siniavskii's Koshkin dom is also a refuge for the homeless: the last repository of Russia's cultural past, it is neglected and abandoned but it still lives and breathes. Here the supernatural and magical find their true home, with ghosts, a talking telephone and the mysterious lamp, the relic of a bygone age that only communicates in situ. In its quiet, darkness and coolness it represents a complete contrast to the noise, glare and suffocating heat of modern Moscow. Described as a neobytaemyi osobniak, it is the fabled island of Robinson Crusoe, an image that recurs time and again in Siniavskii's work as both quintessential journey's end and magical place of adventure and possibilities. It is home, too, to the fairy tale, with its table on three chicken's legs and the fabulous stucco mouldings that are part of its fabric.

Refuge and escape route, the fairy tale is much more besides. Not only does it make everything 'more significant, more real', as in Stalin's Russia it will restore order and harmony together with a sense of justice and morality.⁵⁷⁶ It

⁵⁷⁵ See, S. Marshak, 'Koshkin dom' in Marshak, Skazki, pesni, zagadki, Moscow, 1962, pp. 677-726.

⁵⁷⁶ See, Tertz, Spokoinoi nochi, pp. 504-05 / p. 226. 'Fairy tales knew and swore to us at the outset that things were other than they first seem [...] At times the miraculous will invest our realm with meaning, our realm where everything is truly devoid of logic, hopeless, repulsive, and beyond all understanding. What yesterday appeared to have no right to exist, today receives the sanction of the fairy tale...' In Koshkin dom, Siniavskii gives the example of the fairy tale literally saving a man's life. It is the story of how Genka Temin (a real prisoner whom Siniavskii knew) was refused entry to the notorious Kolyma camp. Kept waiting in the bitter cold, he would surely have died. As Temin prayed to God to help him, over the camp loudspeakers he heard broadcast Pushkin's fairy tale about the fisherman and the fish. In Temin's mind 'his prayer merged with the voice of the old fisherman: "Have mercy, your majesty, lady fish..."' and he was suddenly let in. There is a direct correlation between the saving of Genka Temin by Pushkin and the fairy

also provides one of the keys to the riddle, a way of looking at the puzzle that will help to make all clear.

Down-at-heel, modern Moscow is itself rescued in classic fairy tale style. Projecting into literary form the picture of suffering under Gaidar's economic reforms, where miserable old women have to resort to rummaging in rubbish heaps in order to survive, Moscow is personified now as an emaciated, untidy tramp of an old woman, now as a young girl who has deceived an older husband but who, in true romantic fashion, is forgiven everything and taken back.⁵⁷⁷ Beneath all the dirt and disappointment her true beauty and magical nature are preserved; one needs only a heightened perception to become aware of it.

This is granted not to the Sorcerer but to Balzanov, one magical night in winter, in an interlude that hovers between dream and fairy tale. Critic and writer draw close together as the ex-teacher and pragmatist is enticed into the world of the imagination. The stage is set: 'picture to yourself...'. The time is all-important: New Year's Eve, a liminal time between one year and the next when the laws of nature are suspended and anything can happen. The atmosphere is built up as snow – always for Siniavskii, a symbol of transformation – 'is falling as if from the other world and before our very eyes the city turns into an enchanted kingdom'.⁵⁷⁸ Moscow is compared to the legendary city of Kitezh, an opera set for Evgenii Onegin, as allusions literary,

and Siniavskii's own salvation in the camps through writing about Pushkin. Tertz, Koshkin dom, p.94. For reference to 'Genka' or Gennadii Mikhailovich Temin, see Siniavskii, Pis'ma, 2, pp. 206-07 and 210.

⁵⁷⁷ This is the picture of Moscow that the Siniavskii's had when they went there in the summer of 1992: 'we were horrified. We had the feeling that we had returned to the wartime years of our youth. Siniavskii, The Russian Intelligentsia, pp. 30-31.

⁵⁷⁸ Tertz, Koshkin dom, p. 130

theatrical and musical are intertwined, providing Balzanov with a moment of epiphany in which he sees the true essence of Moscow and of Russia as a whole contained within its cultural heritage.

This is where the writer finds his home and where he is able to assume a new identity, not through killing anyone – ‘I am a good man’ – but through love and a leap of the imagination. Pasternak blends with fairy tale as the writer, an old man afraid to cross a busy Moscow street, makes a sudden daring attempt and finds himself wafted over, like a butterfly on the wings of fancy and literary allusion (‘To live one’s life, so they say, is not like crossing a field’).⁵⁷⁹ Encountering a beautiful young girl, Iuliia Sergeievna (who is reading Hans Christian Andersen) he falls in love and, unwilling to remain in her eyes a decrepit old timer he makes another daring leap, this time through a change of handwriting.⁵⁸⁰ Suddenly he has written himself into a new identity and a new story, as the whole street metamorphoses into something beautiful, reminiscent of Versailles, while ‘all the nonsense remained there, back on the previous page’.⁵⁸¹ The text becomes his new home as ‘It seemed as if I were not walking along the street but that my eyes were gently sliding along its classical description, only here and there mentally introducing trivial corrections into a text that was a little old-fashioned but everlastingly beautiful. An amazing

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 66.

⁵⁸⁰ Siniavskii re-read Andersen in the camps. Siniavskii, *Pis'ma*, 1, pp. 346-47.

⁵⁸¹ Tertz, *Koshkin dom*, p. 70.

lightness of style!'.⁵⁸² He who dares wins: he is now the handsome young prince and Iuliia Sergeievna his princess in a love story of life-long devotion.⁵⁸³

With a stroke of the pen, Siniavskii re-casts his life. At the same time, he pays tribute once again to Mariia Vasilievna, developing ideas from 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku': Masha Mironova was not only knight but Cinderella, a fairy tale princess, and Kapitanskaia dochka seen in a different light is another of Pushkin's fairy tales, replete with ogres and wolves as well as princes and princesses and interventions of the supernatural. 'Read in layers', the reader is told in 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku'; 'look differently at the picture and the truth will be revealed' he is advised in Koshkin dom. The reader is invited to look at Mariia Vasilievna through her husband's eyes, to see her as Pushkin saw Natal'ia Nikolaevna; not as she appeared through the scandalous rumours and malicious gossip of contemporaries but through the eyes of someone who truly loved her: 'We must remember Natal'ia Nikolaevna not somewhere else, in a fabric shop, but in the mind and perception of Pushkin, who revealed in his letters that he loves her soul more than her face and there is no face on earth to compare with hers'.⁵⁸⁴

Look again and Pushkin's script merges almost imperceptibly with Bulgakov's. Iuliia Sergeievna, once a beautiful young girl, is now an old woman who more nearly resembles a witch.⁵⁸⁵ Like the Sorcerer, her husband, she is a misunderstood and ambiguous figure, one minute using language more suitable

⁵⁸² Ibid., p. 70.

⁵⁸³ Ibid., pp. 67-68.

⁵⁸⁴ Tertz, 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku', p. 19.

⁵⁸⁵ Tertz, Koshkin dom, p. 81.

to a camp inmate, the next singing in the church choir or quoting Gumilev. So too, Mariia Vasilievna, herself a highly cultured and gifted individual, would be seen in a less than flattering light by many who crossed her path. Encouraging and defending Siniavskii at every twist and turn of their life together, and particularly, in this its last and most difficult phase, she could be a formidable opponent who did not shirk confrontation when it was necessary and whose plain speaking did not always endear her to people.

Yet, like Iuliia Sergeievna, whose unalterable love for the Sorcerer had ensured his continued existence, Mariia Vasilievna through her letters to Siniavskii while he was in prison, and in emigration through the journal and the publishing house 'Sintaksis', had safeguarded Siniavskii's survival as a writer. Through all his changes of fortune Mariia Vasilievna stood by Siniavskii just as Elena Sergeevna, Mikhail Bulgakov's third wife, had devoted herself to her husband and preserved his work until it could be safely published. When everyone seemed to turn against Siniavskii, 'My sole comfort was that my wife, Mariia Vasilievna, did not reject me'.⁵⁸⁶ Like the Master and Margarita the Sorcerer and Iuliia Sergeievna die on the same day, if not in each other's arms.

Through this allegory the reader is invited to look again at literature, not with the cold eye of duty (or theory) or within the narrow parameters prescribed by 'realism' but with the warmth of a deeper appreciation that comes from reading in layers.

Zolotoi shnurok

⁵⁸⁶ Siniavskii, 'Stil' – eto sud'ba', p. 128.

The fairy tale provides access to a further layer of Siniavskii's tale, which, like a matreshka, the reader must keep on opening in order to reach its heart. The key is the golden lace, the 'zolotoi shnurok'. A random collection of disconnected sentences, it seems little better than a form of mumbo-jumbo. On a superficial level one might take this as the most basic form of game-playing, as Siniavskii making fun of the literary establishment, staging a deception along the lines of the Emperor's new clothes. Mariia Vasilievna admits as much, saying that it was 'nothing more nor less than a collage, based on an old grammar book'.⁵⁸⁷

To leave the matter there, however, would be to mistake Siniavskii's intentions and do his work an injustice. As he explains in his earlier article, the prose he refers to as the zolotoi shnurok is intended as a leap into the unknown, an experiment, a reaction against the stagnation he saw suffocating Russian literature at the time and, in particular, village prose that had not moved on for the last twenty-five years: '(just think – quarter of a century and nothing has budged!)' and was in essence just another form of realism.⁵⁸⁸ Taking heed of his own warning in 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku' Siniavskii is looking to the future, to ways of invigorating Russian prose while not sacrificing any of its past. Returning to one of his favourite artistic periods, the early twentieth century, he draws a parallel between it and contemporary Russian literature to

⁵⁸⁷ "'A Key to Russian Grammar for French Speakers'". Tertz, 'Zolotoi shnurok', p. 187, n. According to Mariia Vasilievna's footnote, 'Zolotoi shnurok' had been read and received with great enthusiasm at a literary gathering and 'one well-known Slavist and translator proposed to translate it immediately into French'. When Mariia Vasilievna told them of its provenance, however, 'certain prose-writers present took it as a hint'.

⁵⁸⁸ Tertz, 'Zolotoi shnurok', p.182.

the detriment of the latter. Although the Futurists' programme was 'weak and vague', such was the strength of their negation of preceding movements that they cleared the way for such towering figures as Khlebnikov, Maiakovskii and Pasternak.⁵⁸⁹

In a daring innovation that demonstrates his capacity to violate rules and break boundaries that was always the creative and ethical core of Tertz's work, Siniavskii pushes his prose to the limits. With the book under threat from mass communication, as well as literary stagnation, he produces something that corresponds to the 'electronic age', both in its content, reduced to a minimum and also in its surreal, staccato style. Prose without 'subject' or 'object' it not only puts paid to the author as the voice of authority and narrative story telling as such but takes account of up-to-date ideas in literary critical thinking, interpreted, however, in a less solemn way. At the same time, his 'zolotoi shnurok' bears echoes of the past in the form of the pioneering spirit of the writers of the 1920s, heirs of the Futurists such as Kharms who, with his humour and witty sketches, often just a few lines long and deliberately devoid of any predictable structure, combines iconoclastic irreverence with a true love of the Russian literary heritage.⁵⁹⁰

This leads the reader to the next level and closer to the heart of the matter and the secret of the zolotoi shnurok. As Balzanov realises, in a moment of

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 182-83.

⁵⁹⁰ Kharms' translator, Matvei Iankelevich (citing Mikhail Iampolskii), identifies humour, in the form of irony as "the major contribution" of OBERIU (The Union of Real Art, of which Kharms was a member), to the avant garde. "Before them, the avant-garde, despite the joyful antics of the Futurists, was serious to the core. At the same time Kharms, unlike the Futurists, did not throw the classics overboard but used them 'in a way that they hadn't been used before'. Today I Wrote Nothing. The Selected Writing of Daniil Kharms, trans. and ed., Matvei Iankelevich, Woodstock and New York, 2007 (hereafter, Today I Wrote Nothing), pp. 14-15.

inspiration, what he is looking at in this prose, pared down and distilled to a minimum, is both ‘a draft and an abstract, a prototext [pratekst]’ but also an after-text [za-tekst], a post-text’, a fundamental document for all sorcerers. What emerges from it, in short-hand, as it were, is the sum-total of not only Russian but world literature, from Hesiod and Homer (all those coloured metals), to Shakespeare (Desdemona’s handkerchief), Aesop and Lafontaine (all those animals), the German Romantics and more besides and the origins of Russian literature in Pushkin and the fairy tale.⁵⁹¹ Armed with his zolotoi shnurok, Siniavskii prowls about the cemetery of world literature, whispering in the ear of the slumbering classics: ‘Wake up! Your time had come!’⁵⁹²

What Balzanov cannot see but the reader can, is that Siniavskii’s life is also there in coded form: ‘What do you like to do? – I like to read and especially to write’; ‘Can’t you lend me a few francs?’ So, too, are events in the outside world: ‘Fire, it’s your turn’ is not simply the proto-image of all literary duels but a reference also to El’tsin’s firing on the Belyi dom. ‘Pure art does not signify an impassive or heartless relation to life’, it simply means art that is not dictated to, not exploited for political or social purposes, but art that is free to evolve its own, independent, creative relationship to it, while literary criticism, establishing its own creative association between art and life, is an adventure story, ‘Research into the secret pathways of art and not a police report’.⁵⁹³

This is what Koshkin dom is all about. In essence, it is nothing more nor less than an expanded form of the zolotoi shnurok. Children’s story, detective novel,

⁵⁹¹ Tertz, Koshkin dom, pp. 144-46.

⁵⁹² Tertz, ‘Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku’, p. 21.

⁵⁹³ Siniavskii, ‘Stil’ – eto sud’ba’, p. 130. Tertz, ‘Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku’, p. 8.

family novel, memoir, diary, fairy story, all rolled into one; it is literature written in layers, the one feeding into the other in a creative feat that resurrects them all into a new life. Not only the works of others but all of Tertz's writing is there, too, from the circus and Kostia's salto mortale (a magician in the camps 'leaps' into the body of another victim, prolonging his life as artist-sorcerer by escaping under the very noses of the camp authorities in a witty take on Siniavskii's sleight of hand with Progulki s Pushkinym), to the ubiquitous graphomaniacs, the divided self of 'Ty i ia', the alien Pkhentz and the love story of 'Gololeditsa', not to mention the sorcerers of 'Kvartiranty' and Liubimov. All of Siniavskii's literary companions, too, are present from Pushkin (the fairy tale), Gogol (the sorcerer), Rozanov (Balzanov's self-deprecating style) Maiakovskii (life transformed into art) and Pasternak, both with his self-effacement and his creative and ethical principle of risk-taking, of learning to write differently. Siniavskii is not to be found elsewhere but in the literature he wrote and wrote about.⁵⁹⁴

Art not the artist is what matters; art not the artist will remain. The reader may look for Siniavskii at the heart of the labyrinth but he exists only inasmuch as his art exists, and through it the art of so many others. The fundamental idea, expressed by Siniavskii in 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku' but especially in Koshkin dom, is simply that. The writer may change his form over the centuries, but that is immaterial so long as he passes on his art, alive and flourishing for the next generation; he may live on the works of others, as either writer or literary critic, but as long as he gives back of himself then art can only gain.

⁵⁹⁴ The episode of the camp magician is found on p. 97.

Echoing the idea he had expressed in 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku', all of this Russian literature, literature in its entirety, is handed as a gift from Super (as the final incarnation of the Sorcerer) to Balzanov, from the writer to the literary critic, from the Sorcerer to Andriusha and from Siniavskii to the reader. As the prose becomes more fragmented, compressed, distilled into its very essence so the space for the reader to play his part increases. The final, encoded, layer of the zolotoi shnurok is precisely that. If Siniavskii has played his part well, the reader will be enticed along the 'mysterious pathways of art' that he has laid down and it is the reader who will ensure its survival.

'A book about everything in the world and about nothing in particular'.⁵⁹⁵ Turning to the visual arts, Siniavskii draws a parallel between the art of writing and the painting of a camp inmate, Boris Sveshnikov.⁵⁹⁶ It is about what is left unsaid: snow, the expanse of white canvas, the blank page which suggests rather than spells out, which rises above the trivial and the obvious to embrace a broader view. This is akin to the ideas expressed in Spokoinoi nochi about art's power to heal. Here, art is seen once again as something organic, the beginning of life: 'The graphic quality, like a sign of life, like its first manifestation'.⁵⁹⁷ Pure art, like the zolotoi shnurok, saying everything and saying nothing, leaves the reader to fill in the blanks as the writer withdraws into silence.

⁵⁹⁵ Tertz, Koshkin dom, p. 94.

⁵⁹⁶ Boris Sveshnikov, born in 1927, started to study at the Moscow Institute of Decorative and Applied Art in 1946 when he was sent to prison on some trumped up charge, remaining in the camps until 1954. His style of painting has been described as 'fantastic realism'. See, Renee Baigell and Matthew Baigell, Soviet Dissident Artists. Interviews after Perestroika, New Brunswick NJ, 1995, pp. 90-93.

⁵⁹⁷ Tertz, Koshkin dom, p. 93.



Boris Sveshnikov, black ink on paper, untitled, 1988c.

Courtesy of Jane Grayson, London.

Conclusion

‘The personal tragedy of Abram Tertz is that he is known first and foremost as a prisoner [sidel'tsa] and while there are many prisoners in Russian literature, there are very few writers who have marked out the future development of their country's literature with such courage’.⁵⁹⁸

Was Andrei Siniavskii a hero of his time? The epigraph to my conclusion, taken from an article written about him as part of a collection to mark the tenth anniversary of his death, illustrates the difficulty that still exists when trying to fit the man to his times, the tendency to fall back on the easily recognisable image of the dissident martyr. Leaving a question mark over his name I have attempted to approach Siniavskii in a spirit more suited to him, namely not to effect a finalised portrait of him but to let his works speak for him.

I have endeavoured not to put Siniavskii on trial but to remove him from the polarisation for and against that overshadowed much of his life and which distracted attention from the only context that mattered to him and in which he would wish to be remembered, namely Russian literature. Situating him in this context I have drawn attention to what should be considered his greatest achievement, his contribution to the continued life of Russian literature in his emphasis on a re-connection with the reader.

⁵⁹⁸ Dmitrii Bykov, ‘Tertz i synov'ia’, *Toronto Slavic Quarterly*, 15, winter 2006, <http://www.utoronto.ca/tsq/15/index15.shtml> [accessed 18 November 2009] (para. 1 of 9).

I do not mean to suggest that Siniavskii, his life and works, have no significance in the context of the political and social upheavals of his time; on the contrary. Rather, I wish to re-direct attention to the complex way that his life fed into his art, how his evolution as a writer would be unthinkable without this active and creative interchange. His fate as a writer reflects the ebb and flow of the Soviet-Russian political scene and Soviet literary politics as Stalinism gave way to thaw, stagnation and ultimately the break-up of the Soviet Union. These phases, lived by him first as a respected academic within the Soviet system, then as a condemned criminal, an internal émigré in the camps and finally abroad as an émigré proper, are charted in his writing as an inverse progression, as a re-integration with Russia through literature.

I hope that my reading of Siniavskii has shown that, for all his belief in ‘pure art’, art disengaged from politics and the social obligations traditionally incumbent on a Russian writer (and never more so than in the Soviet era), his art was profoundly and essentially polemical in its struggle to promote that belief; indeed, it is possible that it would not have thrived without the various challenges thrown in his path and his spirited reaction to them.

The intention has been to view Siniavskii in relation to his times but to put those times in a wider perspective, the perspective of the role and function of art and the artist in the Russian cultural tradition. This tradition is what Siniavskii himself was concerned with as a writer, seeing his task as the re-connection of Russian literature to its past in order to assure not simply its survival in the

future but its on-going regeneration. As a writer he made himself the channel, the living link between past, present and future.

Siniavskii was not so much a dissident as a heretic, a dissenter whose divergence from the Soviet system and its values was born of disillusionment with its cultural policies and ideology. Believing passionately in the spiritual and ethical freedom of art, he waged an unremitting struggle against the orthodoxy of received ideas and norms imposed on art and the artist in Soviet Russia which, in his opinion, had endangered the continued existence of both. In this his courage and his integrity are indisputable. So, while some of his contemporaries might have questioned his lack of active engagement with causes such as the human rights movement and some critics might term his prison experience 'belated', this in no way detracts from the fact that he was prepared to lay his life on the line as a writer and to refuse to compromise his beliefs.

This was demonstrated not simply at his trial for all the world to see (and either condemn or applaud), but in the privacy of his prose, in every line he wrote and in the spaces in-between. In this sense Tertz was more than merely a temporary subterfuge. As H el ene Zamoyska put it, 'Tertz was, in a way, the projection of what he wished to become [...] Tertz purified Sinyavsky and helped him to free himself from his obsessions and complexes; more than this, Tertz, as a moral stimulant, committed him to be worthy of his freedom'.⁵⁹⁹ Risk and daring are the hallmarks of Tertz's writing, qualities also shared by Siniavskii and demonstrated in his early writing as a Soviet critic but which he could only develop stylistically and creatively as Tertz.

⁵⁹⁹ Zamoyska, 'Sinyavsky, the Man and the Writer', pp. 63-64.

It is often overlooked that Tertz started life as a literary critic: his scathing denunciation of the Soviet system in Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm is presented through a devastating critique of its art. The emphasis on literary criticism as the core of the work of both Siniavskii and Tertz is the focus of my thesis. My belief is that Siniavskii never stopped being a literary critic, that his writerly persona, Tertz, was simply the fantastic extension of his scholarly identity. This identity was not static but progressively acquired new dimensions as his ideas evolved so that criticism became the inspiration for departures into innovative, hybrid literary forms, from his fantastic literary criticism, which perfected the symbiosis of literature and criticism, to fantastic autobiography and the final ‘abracadabra’ of Koshkin dom. Tertz was the critic who, through his excursions into the realms of the grotesque and fantastic, the alternative and imaginative, was able to breathe new life into Russian literature through sparking new terms of engagement with the reader.

But where was this reader? The Soviet system, with its ideologically orientated and didactic approach to literature, had shaped generations of readers who, according to Siniavskii, were ‘uneducated’ and, according to Mariia Vasilievna, had ‘unlearned how to read’. Moreover, writers and critics, speaking with the voice of authority that identified them with the interests of the State, left no middle ground for engagement by the individual reader. The result was a fatal inertia in Russian literature that kept to the same well-worn tracks, safe for the

authorities and that satisfied the rather low expectations of a mass audience. The same was true, if for different reasons, in emigration.⁶⁰⁰

Lines of communication had to be re-opened with readers or, rather, 'the' reader as Siniavskii rejected the idea of a mass readership in favour of a more intimate communion between individual and text. In order to do this he reinvented the identity and function of the writer, jettisoning his role as educator and preacher, a role not only inherent in Soviet ideas of the function of art but also part of the wider Russian literary tradition and which distanced writer from reader and reader from text.

Looking to the past for inspiration, Siniavskii traced the origins of the writer through the incarnations of the fool, the clown and the thief, to the magician and the idea of writing as an ancient form of magic in which pagan sorcery overlaps with Christian belief in the miraculous power of the word. This, thought Siniavskii, had been lost in Soviet times, with language impoverished and abused, exploited as a weapon of coercion and indoctrination.

Entertaining and stimulating the reader, whether through the shock tactics more prevalent in Tertz's early prose or through the more playful approach of his later works, Siniavskii entices the reader rather than coerces him into a relationship with the text. This is the point at which Siniavskii and Tertz merge. Though the critic is there to mediate, he is not there to instruct but to illuminate and stimulate the reader to make his own discoveries, to involve him in a dynamic collaboration, and this is the freedom given to him in his alternative stylistic identity.

⁶⁰⁰ See, Siniavskii, 'O kritike', pp. 152-3.

The reader is jolted or invited into looking and seeing differently. The text is viewed in spatial terms, as archaeological strata. A metaphor applicable to culture as a whole, it contradicts the temporally oriented, linear impetus of Soviet thinking, as does the equally potent metaphor of art as tapestry or intricately woven fabric. Nothing is lost as each layer feeds into the next, not so much stones as rich deposits of alluvial loam. This approach of reading a text in layers is articulated exuberantly in Liubimov (though the earlier, short stories yield equally profitably to multi-layered readings), is refined in the coded texts of his camp years, in particular Progulki s Pushkinym, developed further in Spokoinoi nochi and distilled into its essence in 'Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku' and Koshkin dom. The sensitive reader, encouraged, enchanted and cajoled, learns to read between the lines and through the layers, making connections that reveal new meanings and ensuring the ongoing life of the text.

Reading becomes an act of co-authorship in which the writer yields his dominant position. This was not a new idea: one can look to Mandel'stam's 'O sobesednike', for example. Siniavskii takes it further, however, progressively retreating as author in order to leave blank spaces for the reader to fill. Stepping aside, in an act of trust he passes on literature, Russian literature in its entirety, as a gift for the reader to hand on in his turn.

The 'death of the author' has become a well-worn theme, a central idea of late twentieth century critical writing, as have the 'empty spaces' of reader reception theory. However, Siniavskii came to them by another route entirely,

one that reflects his rootedness in Russian culture.⁶⁰¹ From Russian culture comes the Christian notion of self-sacrifice which finds artistic confirmation for Siniavskii in the work of Pasternak and the idea of art as ‘a continuous giving of the self’.⁶⁰²

So, while Siniavskii is daring and innovative to the end, it is his links to Russia’s cultural past that provide his creative impetus for the leap into the future. This has been recognised by a later generation of Russian émigré critics such as Alexander Genis, who sums up Siniavskii’s aesthetics as ‘archaic postmodernism’.⁶⁰³ From his Russian past, too, comes Siniavskii’s ‘deconstructionist’ approach to literature, as Alexander Zholkovsky noted.⁶⁰⁴ These ideas also originated in his love of the visual arts and their cross-fertilisation with literature inspired by Russian modernism. Here, I would also bring in Western artists, including Picasso.⁶⁰⁵ This example enhances the idea central to Siniavskii’s writing that communication with the reader comes through lateral thinking, through demonstration rather than dry theorising. It also quashes the idea that he was closed to external influences. His depth and breadth of culture were unusual by any standards and extended well beyond the borders of his homeland. It was simply that, as a non-conformist, he did not follow the obvious paths.

⁶⁰¹ A point made by both Catherine Nepomnyashchy and Mikhail Epstein. See, above, p. 35.

⁶⁰² Siniavskii, ‘Poeziia Pasternaka’, p. 14 / p. 159.

⁶⁰³ See, Alexander Genis, ‘Archaic Postmodernism: The Aesthetics of Andrei Sinyavsky’, in Mikhail N. Epstein, Alexander Genis and Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover, Russian Postmodernism. New Perspectives on Post-Soviet Culture, trans. and ed. Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover, New York and Oxford, 1999, pp. 185-96.

⁶⁰⁴ See, above, p. 35.

⁶⁰⁵ See, Jane Grayson, ‘Picture Windows: the art of Andrei Siniavskii’, in Catriona Kelly and Stephen Lovell (eds), Russian Literature, Modernism and the Visual Arts, Cambridge, 2000, pp. 88-118 (p. 96).

What of Siniavskii's 'gift' of literature, to be passed on to future generations? In terms of his direct influence on Russian literature, his works are not widely read and it is in the context of his trial, as mentioned at the beginning of my conclusion, that he tends to be remembered. However, one can detect echoes of his ideas in the writing of subsequent generations. The work of Russian authors who grew up in the 1960s and 1970s, for example writers of 'cruel prose' [zhestkaia proza] such as Vladimir Sorokin (b.1955) seem, if unconsciously, to have been influenced by Siniavskii's work, its stylistic departures and challenging of taboos. The extreme shock tactics of Sorokin's novels such as Serdtshe chetyrekh (Four Stout Hearts, 1994) represented a way of 'moving forward to expand literary space [...] a jolt that expanded reality'.⁶⁰⁶ There is a different but tangible point of personal contact between Sorokin and Siniavskii in that Sorokin's first novel, Ochered' (The Queue, 1985) was published by Sintaksis.

Among younger Russian writers Viktor Pelevin (b. 1962) is one of the most highly thought of and the influence of Siniavskii can be felt in his writing, though, again, he has made no acknowledgement of this.⁶⁰⁷ His satire of contemporary Russia in Omon ra (Omon Ra, 1992) , for example, has a Tertzian edge while at the same time acknowledging a debt to the past in its echoes of Zamiatin's My. Looking beyond that, Pelevin challenges the reader,

⁶⁰⁶ Vladimir Sorokin, 'Interview' with Kristina Rotkirch, in Anna Ljunggren and Kristina Rotkirch (eds), Contemporary Russian Fiction. A Short List. Russian Authors Interviewed by Kristina Rotkirch, trans. Charles Rougle, Moscow 2008, pp. 140-52 (P.144).

⁶⁰⁷ Pelevin admits to a liking for the works of Platonov and Bulgakov ('I was deeply touched by *The Master and Margarita*') as well as foreign authors Huxley, Hesse and Castaneda). Ibid., p. 81 and Viktor Pelevin, Interview with Sally Laird, in Sally Laird. Voices of Russian Literature. Interviews with Ten Contemporary Writers, Oxford and New York , 1999, pp. 178-92 (pp. 184-85).

prompting him into a re-reading of the text. Not through blank spaces so much as through shifting perceptions, in the constant interplay of illusion and reality. The reader, hesitating in the discrepancy between the apparent reality of the protagonist's viewpoint and the more cynical picture that suggests itself through the experiences described, becomes actively involved. Pelevin does not preside as author or direct his reader to a conclusion but lets him come upon it as a discovery. His Chapaev i pustota (The Clay Machine Gun, 1996) is a complex example of temporal and spatial shifts and the disorientation of the reader that forces him into a constant questioning of what he is reading.

Surprisingly, Pelevin and Sorokin have both said that when they write, they do not do so with a reader in mind.⁶⁰⁸ This, however, is not to say that anticipation of reader response is not implicit in their writing. Rather, it reflects the fact that as writers of their time, a time that has seen the break-up of the Soviet Union and an ensuing period of anxiety and uncertainty, their immediate concern has been to arrive at a sense of self in an increasingly fractured society in which mass culture, albeit of a different variety from the Soviet model, threatens to engulf the individual.

I am inclined to think that Siniavskii's legacy, for the time being at least, is in the hands not so much of writers as of informed critics such as Genis and Vail and academics such as Zholkovskii. Love of literature is channelled into new ways of looking at it, ways in which the past, speaking to the present, suggests new possibilities. Works, such as Zholkovskii's Text counter Text. Re-readings

⁶⁰⁸ See, Viktor Pelevin, Interview with Sally Laird, in Sally Laird. Voices of Russian Literature. Interviews with Ten Contemporary Writers, Oxford and New York, 1999, pp. 178-92 (p. 185) and Vladimir Sorokin, in *ibid.*, pp. 143-62 (pp. 158-59)

in Russian Literary History not only re-emphasise the work of the critic in engaging the reader, so fundamental to Siniavskii the writer, but draw attention to the need not only to read but to re-read, thus putting the onus back onto the reader: 'literature thrives on re-reading'.⁶⁰⁹ Moreover, Zholkovskii returns to the fundamental relationship of writer and text ('To put it bluntly, I still believe in literature's primary realities, texts and authors') and a love of literature as a basis for criticism. Finally, as someone who knew Siniavskii personally and who gained much from him, he embodies the principle of the live intercourse that keeps literature going as the dialogue is renewed between texts, classic and modern, but also through individual contact as literature is handed on from one generation to the next.

Was Siniavskii a hero of his time? This was not Siniavskii's question. Was Siniavskii a writer of his time? This *is* Siniavskii's question. He leaves behind him the space of his texts for his readers to fill with their answer.

⁶⁰⁹ Alexander Zholkovsky, Text counter Text. Rereadings in Russian Literary History, Stanford CA, 1994 (hereafter, Text counter Text) p. 4.

Appendix

Note on translation and transliteration.

In my translations from Russian into English I have use a modified version of the Library of Congress (LOC) system in the text I have made the following changes in names:

‘oi ’ in the LOC system becomes ‘oy’ in Zamoyska.

When authors such as Alexander Genis and Alexander Zholkovskii who are published both in Russian and English and whose names therefore appear in books variously as Aleksandr and Alexander, I refer to them in the text as Alexander.

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