

The Lords of In-Between: The Trickster and Liminal Figure in the Fiction of Sigizmund

Krzhizhanovsky, 1925-1928

by

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Notes on Manual of Style, Transliteration System, and Translations

In this thesis I utilize the Chicago Manual of Style author-date system. I have used “ibid.” only where page numbers were absent.

The transliteration system I use adheres to the Library of Congress transliteration guide, excepting in cases where an alternative spelling has become common in standard English (e.g., Dostoevsky, not Dostoevskii) or where an author has chosen to spell her/his name a certain way in English (e.g., Perelmuter, not Perel'muter). I have chosen to use Krzhizhanovsky instead of Krzhizhanovskii, since the former is becoming the common form in English as indicated by the translations of his works currently available.

The translations I use are my own but are based on published English translations where necessary. These translations are Joanne Turnbull's *The Return of Munchausen*, Turnbull's and Nikolai Formozov's “Autobiography of a Corpse” and “Seams” in the collection *Autobiography of a Corpse*, and Muireann Maguire's “The Phantom” from her collection *Red Spectres: Russian Gothic Tales from the Twentieth Century*.

INTRODUCTION

Critics who have written on Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky (1887-1950) frequently mention his tart observation that he was “known for being unknown”¹ (Krzhizhanovsky 1994, 128). This phrase’s continued inclusion in critical literature speaks to its ongoing truth in the present day, even among readers and critics of twentieth-century Slavic literature. Indeed, this theme is likewise reflected in his prose. Krzhizhanovsky was preoccupied by ideas of being and non-being, perhaps as a result not only of his interest in philosophies of existence, but of how he viewed his own life and work as well: “I was a literary nonexistence, honestly working for existence”² (Krzhizhanovsky 2013, 197). It seems, if one is to judge by his limited publishing success during his life, that the publishing world agreed.

Krzhizhanovsky might have remained a literary nonexistence, had not a literary historian named Vadim Perelmuter discovered the author’s work in the keeping of the latter’s long-time partner, Anna Bovshek, in 1976. He published one of Krzhizhanovsky’s short stories in 1989, and in 1990 the first collection of the author’s work under the title *Vozvrashchenie Miunkhgauzena. Povesti. Novelly* [The Return of Munchausen: Tales and Novellas]. During the following two decades he published six volumes of, and on, Krzhizhanovsky’s work. In 2006 the first translation, *Seven Stories*, appeared. This translation is Joanna Turnbull’s first of a number of translations of Krzhizhanovsky. The contents of *Seven Stories* all appear in her subsequent translations, some co-translated with Nikolai Formozov, published through the New York Review of Books. These now include *Memories of the Future* (2006), *The Letter Killers Club* (2012), *Autobiography of a Corpse* (2013), and *The Return of Munchausen* (2016). In August

¹ “ia izvesten svoī neizvestonost’iu”

² “ia byl’ literaturnym nebytiem, chestno rabotaiushchim na bytie”

2018, Caryl Emerson and Alisa Ballard Lin published *That Third Guy*, a translation of a selection of Krzhizhanovsky's theatre writings.

Krzhizhanovsky's sudden appearance on the literary scene nearly forty years after his death in 1950 makes him of especial interest. A talented writer with a dense and complex style, which even his devoted readers admit is somewhat inaccessible, his work is still open to critical exploration. His whimsical, philosophical fiction probes the intersection of Kantian conceptions of "I" and "not-I" as well as the nature and role of fact and fiction, truth and falsity, and reality and fantasy. Many critics observe that, at times, he seems ahead of his time: a reader may find, for example, themes that are reminiscent of ideas explored by contemporary authors such as Viktor Pelevin and Vladimir Sorokin.

With this thesis I hope to add to the growing body of critical literature on Krzhizhanovsky by exploring four of his works. The narratives addressed are the short stories "Avtobiografiia trupa" [Autobiography of a Corpse] (1925), "Fantom" [The Phantom] (1926), "Shvy" [Seams] (1927-1928), and the novella *Vozvrashchenie Miunkhgauzina* [The Return of Munchausen] (1928). Like several other critics, I am primarily concerned with analyzing the narrators of these stories. I argue that their characterization and role indicate Krzhizhanovsky's growing interest in the marginalized author-narrator-trickster, and that the novella-length *The Return of Munchausen* is a refined result of this exploration. I am suggesting that Krzhizhanovsky develops narrators that come to utilize motifs of the mythical trickster-figure to a great extent, and that the first three works (chapter two) are Krzhizhanovsky's early renditions of this character, indicating the beginnings of his creative interest in this thematic character that eventually become a 'complete' trickster in the personality of Baron Munchausen (chapter three).³

³ In Krzhizhanovsky's philosophical world, these figures draw upon the figure and theme of Gulliver.

The emerging role of the trickster in Soviet society is discussed at length by Mark Lipovetsky in his excellent 2011 book *Charms of the Cynical Reason: The Trickster's Transformations in Soviet and Post-Soviet Literature*. He argues that the protagonist of Venedikt Erofeev's 1969-70 samizdat novella *Moskva-Petushki* [Moscow to the End of the Line] "gave a new *philosophical* meaning to the image of the trickster, accentuating his liminality and a certain, expenditure-driven sacrality" (Lipovetsky 2011, 153, emphasis in the original). Lipovetsky convincingly argues that Erofeev's protagonist Venichka can be read as an influential, Soviet (perhaps even postmodern) trickster-figure. However, I argue that the position of the first philosophically-inclined trickster figure in Soviet-era literature is one that is better claimed by the many philosophical and liminal protagonists in Krzhizhanovsky's works, the larger part of which were written in the 1920s.

The Trickster: A Working Definition

The trickster figure is one that is popular across cultures. That is, providing one accepts that the trickster is a comparable cross-cultural phenomenon (see Beidelman 1980, in which he argues that comparative analysis of tricksters across cultures is impossible), and providing that it is possible to isolate a series of characteristics that are cohesive as a definition. Mark Carroll, in a partial response to Beidelman, argues that a definition of the trickster must be broad enough to include the clever hero, who is distinguishable by the *success* of his tricks, as well as the selfish-buffoon, whose tricks often backfire. The latter often doubles as a cultural hero (Carroll 1984).

Carroll's definition is a slightly refined version of Mac Linscott Ricketts's 1966 definition, which, like Carroll's subcategory of the clever hero, requires the trickster to be successful at his tricks:

We see the trickster as man fighting alone against a universe of hostile, spiritual powers – *and winning* – by virtue of his cleverness. The trickster is man, according to an archaic

institution, struggling by himself to become what he feels he must become – master of his universe. (Ricketts 1966, 336, emphasis added)

Ricketts and Carroll both approach an interesting variable of the trickster. This is the relative success or failure of his trickery, and whether the tricks need be successful to qualify their doer as a trickster. The traditional trickster is not bound by one or the other. Odysseus is always successful in his trickery, while the Norse god Loki is ultimately successful only when playing tricks on Asgard's enemies. The tricks of the South American selfish-buffoon trickster Fox/Tawk'wax, meanwhile, nearly always fail (Carroll 1984, 117). It will be seen that Krzhizhanovsky's tricksters have this in common with Fox/Tawk'wax. Their attempts to fulfill their role as tricksters are crippled by the Soviet Union and its creativity-crushing ideologies, and in the end, the trickster in question is left suspended in stasis between life and death.

The definition of the trickster that I use in this thesis is reliant upon Lipovetsky's definition in *Charms*. He considers the archetypical Soviet trickster to be in possession of four key characteristics: ambivalence and mediation, liminality and transgressive vitality, the transformation of tricks into an art form, and a relation to the sacred (Lipovetsky 2011, 24-37). In addition to this I would include in the definition of the trickster his appearance as a solitary figure (Carroll 1984, 12). This solitary figure is also a "vent for social frustrations" who provides, beyond his or her traditional laughter-inducing antics, a "deeper type of insight, irony, and transformation" (Hynes 1993a, 206, 205). Neither of these additions are disputed in *Charms*. I have also given close attention to Krzhizhanovsky's trickster as a highly liminal critic of society who accentuates his own liminality by his association with women and their societal position of "structural liminars" (Balduk 2008, 37).

I am concerned with these trickster traits, and especially liminality, in what I propose are three early versions – that is, the narrators of the three short stories – of Krzhizhanovsky's

author-narrator as trickster. Although initially introduced by German-French folklorist Arnold van Gennep, liminality as a conceptual approach to narrative was developed primarily by anthropologist Victor Turner (1920-1983). Turner credited van Gennep's 1909 study *Les Rites de Passage* for piquing his interest (Turner 1974, 56). Liminality, particularly when it is situated in the broader discussion of the trickster figure in popular culture, has since then proved an increasingly popular approach in literary criticism.⁴ This is despite occasional critiques of its tendency towards overgeneralizing and potential lack of specificity (Turner 1966, vi; Hynes & Doty 1993, 2; Achilles and Bergman 2014, 3).

In *Charms*, Lipovetsky describes liminality as one of the key characteristics of tricksters. He defines tricksters as figures associated with disorder and ambivalence, commentators on the society of which they live on the periphery. "All tricksters," he writes, "function as cultural mediators that fuse otherwise incompatible features (natural and artificial, foreign and domestic, animal and human, marginal and mainstream, ideological and non-ideological)...This exact cultural function is responsible for the elusiveness and ambivalence immanent to any trickster" (Lipovetsky 2011, 29). It is the liminal aspects of the trickster that allow him to *be* a trickster.

In the three short stories I analyze, this liminality often appears as a kind of unboundedness that allows for the fusion of incompatible components. It appears most strikingly in the unification of reality and unreality, being and non-being, and the liminal spaces the protagonists inhabit. This last category includes twilight, back alleys, and the space between theoretically-irreconcilable oppositions such as life and death.

Hynes defines the trickster-figure as even more closely identified with liminality than does Lipovetsky:

⁴ See Mark Lipovetsky's *Charms of the Cynical Reason: The Trickster's Transformations in Soviet and Post-Soviet Culture* (2011), and William J. Hynes' *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms* (1993) for two examples of works discussing these themes.

the trickster appears on the edge or just beyond existing borders, classifications and categories...the trickster is cast as an 'out' person, and his activities are often outlawish, outlandish, outrageous, out-of-bounds, and out-of-order. No borders are sacrosanct, be they religious, cultural, linguistic, epistemological, or metaphysical. Breaking down division lines, the trickster characteristically moves swiftly and impulsively back and forth across all borders with virtual impunity. A visitor everywhere, especially to those places that are off limits, the trickster seems to dwell in no single place but to be in continual transit through all realms marginal and liminal. (Hynes 1993b, 34-35)

The trickster's liminality, notes Lipovetsky, is partially why the trickster's character is often "a gentleman of the road" – sometimes exaggerated to levels on par with French philosopher Albert Camus's term of "cosmic homelessness" (Lipovetsky 2011, 30). Lewis Hyde similarly remarks that

They are the lords of in-between. A trickster does not live near the hearth; he does not live in the halls of justice, the soldier's tent, the shaman's hut, the monastery. He passes through each of these when there is a moment of silence, and he enlivens each with mischief, but he is not their guiding spirit. He is the spirit of the doorway leading out, and of the crossroad at the edge of town (the one where a little market springs up). He is the spirit of the road at dusk, the one that runs from one town to another and belongs to neither. (Hyde 1998)

These are the general, transferable traits of the trickster. He (Lipovetsky notes that it is usually a male figure, at least in Soviet literature; Hyde has observed this trend of masculinity as well) is deeply concerned with the liminal experience. His task is to fuse incompatible oppositions. He commentates upon the sacred through his taboo-breaking. And lastly, his tricks

are purposeful and artistically expressive, separating his actions from the activities of the common criminal (Lipovetsky 2011, 33).

However, as William J. Hynes comments in his own discussion of the definition of the trickster, ultimately “no narrative, category, or construct is ever fully watertight. Each one leaks, some more than others” (Hynes 1993a, 212). Neither Krzhizhanovsky nor his protagonists have thus far been categorized into a watertight structure. This is partially why the trickster as an approach works well, for the trickster (and, to a degree, Krzhizhanovsky himself as the frequently-implied author) is “absolutely against any authority and without any allegiance” (Mezan 1972, 94-95, as quoted in Hynes 1998, 209). The following chapters are my analysis of what I propose is Krzhizhanovsky’s ongoing interest and exploration of what would eventually become the characteristics that Lipovetsky attaches to the archetypal Soviet trickster-figure. This is a figure that is inherently resistant to categorization. Consequently, as Paul Radin – the first critic to write a comprehensive overview of the trickster (Hynes & Doty 1993, 2) – remarks, “each generation occupies itself with interpreting the trickster anew” (Radin 1956, 168).

Chapter 1 Overview: Biography and Review of Literature

I have divided this thesis into three chapters. In the first chapter I provide a biographical sketch of Krzhizhanovsky. A definitive and in-depth biography is still lacking, although Rosenflanz’s book provides an excellent addition to the limited resources available. Even her work is, as she readily admits, a “somewhat sketchy... ‘portrait of a ghost’” (Rosenflanz 2005, 2). She includes information found in Krzhizhanovsky’s two short autobiographies, “Autobiography” [Avtobiografiia] (1938) and “A Short Autobiography” [Kratkaia avtobiografiia] (1942). Both are now housed in the Russian State Archive of Literature and Arts (RGALI) alongside Krzhizhanovsky’s correspondence with Bovshek and certain

acquaintances (ibid.). To date, it appears that Rosenflanz has been the only critic to attempt a cohesive biography of Krzhizhanovsky based on then-unpublished archival materials.

Another source of information on Krzhizhanovsky's creative life is his notebooks. These were published by Perelmuter in 1994 in Moscow in the volume titled *Countries That Do Not Exist* [Strany, kotorykh net]. Several years after their publication, however, Perelmuter discovered that the typewritten versions that Bovshek had given him were vastly different, to the point of becoming two distinct texts, from the original notes written in Krzhizhanovsky's hand (kept in TsGALI).

Bovshek's choice to edit Krzhizhanovsky's notebooks so invasively is puzzling. Perelmuter proposes that she was attempting to create "and we must admit, not without success"⁵ a publishable author's notebook in line with those of Chekhov and Il'fovskii, which were also highly edited in their published forms (ibid.). Alternatively, Perelmuter noted that Krzhizhanovsky's writing was extremely difficult to read, calling it "textual torture"⁶ (ibid.). It may be that Bovshek was simply unable to read his handwriting (ibid.).

The original notebooks have since been published by the *Toronto Slavic Quarterly* in an undated online publication. However, Bovshek's editing could to some extent call into question previous assumptions about Krzhizhanovsky that are based on his originally published notes, as well as the integrity of his texts more broadly, since they were all kept by Bovshek in her home in Odessa for some period of time before she turned them over to archives. One would of course hope that his prose, and more polished writing generally, remained untouched. However, as Perelmuter remarks, it was Bovshek who "defined the 'corpus of texts', which, in her opinion,

⁵ "i nado priznat' – ne bez uspekha"

⁶ "pytkoiu tekstologa"

should give the most clear idea of this writer if/when times change – and there [would] be a likelihood of its publication”⁷ (Perelmuter n.d.).

There are thus significant limitations to providing a biography of Krzhizhanovsky. Material that Vadim Perelmuter published based on typewritten copies from Bovshek are clearly less reliable than the handwritten versions in Russian archives. The memoirs Perelmuter gathered and published were written long after Krzhizhanovsky’s death. Travel to archives poses an additional hurdle, and one not undertaken for this thesis. With these complications and limitations in mind, I offer a biographical sketch in the first chapter.

In addition to providing biographical information, in the first chapter I include a review of recent (1990-present) critical literature in Russian and English. I have included material that was relevant to my research as well as mentioning other significant critical works. As I will discuss further in my review of literature, literary criticism on Krzhizhanovsky began appearing only after Perelmuter began publishing Krzhizhanovsky’s work in 1989-90. Much like his limited success with friendships during his lifetime, Krzhizhanovsky tends to attract few scholars. Those scholars, however, tend to be remarkably dedicated, publishing criticism on and translations of his works over a number of years.

Chapter 2 Overview: Krzhizhanovsky’s Early Tricksters

In the second and third chapters, I address Krzhizhanovsky’s prose itself with a focus on the author-narrator-trickster figure. Krzhizhanovsky’s narrators have thus far been approached from a variety of angles, each of which has hinted at the possibility of analyzing them as possible trickster figures. These approaches have included an analysis of the Gogolesque, ambiguous fool figure living on the peripheries of civilization (see Iablokov 2016) and an analysis of certain

⁷ “mozhno skazat’, opredelila “korpor tekstov”, kakie, po eio mneniuu, dolzhny byli dat’ naibolee vniatnoe predstavlenie ob ètom pisatele, esli/kogda vremena peremeniatsia – i vzniknet veroiatnost’ ego izdaniia”

Gothic monster-tropes these characters often possess (see Maguire 2012). There have also been general observations on the strong similarities shared between Krzhizhanovsky's narrators, particularly relating to their liminal spaces in, and experiences of, Soviet society.⁸ However, these different approaches to Krzhizhanovsky's narrators can be brought together in an analysis of their characteristics as those belonging to the inherent ambiguity of the trickster figure.

In the second chapter I explore Krzhizhanovsky's trickster as it is attached to author-narrator trickster figures in three short stories written in the 1920s. These stories are the aforementioned "Autobiography of a Corpse" (1925), "The Phantom" (1926), and "Seams" (1927-1928).

Chapter 3 Overview: Krzhizhanovsky's Baron Munchausen as a Trickster

In chapter three, I address Krzhizhanovsky's 1928 rendition of Baron Munchausen from his novella *The Return of Munchausen*. Continuing my argument from the second chapter, here I argue that the Baron is Krzhizhanovsky's most well-developed trickster from this period. I analyze the Baron using Lipovetsky's four-part definition of the trickster, highlighting the aspects of his behaviour and philosophy that fit the trickster figure well. In continuation of concepts discussed in chapter two, I propose that Krzhizhanovsky's interest in portraying liminal, intellectual/philosophical trickster characters can be traced in part to his experience as an author sidelined by the Soviet Union. This allows for a partially autobiographical approach. Krzhizhanovsky can, as I have suggested earlier, be read as a kind of trickster-figure himself.

⁸ See Vasiuchenko 1990 for an example of this. Vasiuchenko remarks therein that she, at least, cannot see Krzhizhanovsky's protagonists as anything other than reincarnations of the same hero.

Conclusion

In the conclusion, I provide a brief overview of findings based on the above research. I suggest that a connection can be made between Krzhizhanovsky's portrayals of tricksters and his own experience as a marginalized, dissident author in the Soviet Union.

CHAPTER 1

BIOGRAPHY AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

“I was a literary nonexistence, honestly working for existence” (Krzhizhanovsky 2013, 197).⁹

In this chapter I provide a biographical sketch of this self-proclaimed “literary nonexistence.” For this I have drawn from memoirs and the archival research of critics. One key researcher is Karen Link Rosenflanz and her archival work published in her 2005 book *Hunter of Themes: The Interplay of Word and Thing in the Words of Sigizmund Križžanovskij*. I have also used the memoirs of Krzhizhanovsky’s long-time partner Anna Gavrilovna Bovshek¹⁰ and three other recollections written by several others who knew Krzhizhanovsky personally. Vadim Perelmutter gathered – and in one case solicited – these memoirs under the title of “Vospominaniia o Krzhizhanovskom” [Memories of Krzhizhanovsky].

The Kyiv Years (1887-1922)

Sigizmund Dominikovich Krzhizhanovsky (1887-1950) was born in Kyiv, Ukraine. His parents were well-to-do Catholics of Polish descent. According to biographies written by his acquaintances, Krzhizhanovsky was a taciturn individual, uncompromising and emotionally reserved, demanding of himself and others (Krzhizhanovsky 2013, 243). There are four published memoirs: Bovshek’s as well as those published alongside hers by Abram Argo, Ia. Moleva, and Natal’ia Semper. All four writers remark on Krzhizhanovsky’s abrupt and somewhat rigid manner. Semper, for her part, called him “completely inaccessible to outsiders”¹¹

⁹ “ia byl literaturnym nabytiem, chestno rabotaiushchim na bytie”

¹⁰ Bovshek was a talented and involved member of the theatre-art world, working as both an actress and director. Her mentors were K. Stanislavsky, L. Sulerzhitsky, and E. Vahtangov, and among her pupils were the well-known actors Avangard Leontiev, Alla Meshcheriakova, Sergeĭ Nikonenko, Gennadiĭ Pechnikov, director Georgiĭ Ansimov, and art critic Nina Moleva (whose memoirs of Krzhizhanovsky appear in Perelmutter’s collection). A collection of memoirs by these individuals, edited by A. Leontiev, was published in 2009 under the title *Velikoe kul’turnoe protivostoianie: kniga ob Anna Gavrilovne Bovshek* [The Great Cultural Confrontation: A Book on Anna Bovshek].

¹¹ “sovsem nedostupen dlia postoronnikh”

(295). Bovshek recounts that she learned of his early life not from Krzhizhanovsky himself, but from one of his few close friends, the composer Anatoly Konstantinovich Butsko. This second-hand account is the only one that provides information on Krzhizhanovsky's early life.

Butsko informed Bovshek that Krzhizhanovsky's father served in the military for a time and then worked as an accountant in the Riabushinskiĭ sugar factory (Burovtseva 1998) on the outskirts of Kyiv until his retirement thirty-five years later. Krzhizhanovsky was the youngest of five children and the only son. His four sisters were Stanislava, Elena, Iuliia, and Sof'ia. According to Bovshek, Krzhizhanovsky maintained a close connection only with Elena (211). His mother was an accomplished musician, fond of Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, and Chopin. Krzhizhanovsky himself was well-educated in music by a leading music teacher in Kyiv, Kruzhilin, who taught him for free. In fact, Krzhizhanovsky briefly considered a career in opera, although after completing high school at the Fourth Kyiv Gymnasium he enrolled in law and philology at the University of Kyiv (Krzhizhanovsky 2013, 210; Rosenflanz 2005, 2). According to Bovshek's account, Krzhizhanovsky's upbringing was traditional and calm, if perhaps somewhat old-fashioned.

In 1911 and 1912 Krzhizhanovsky traveled throughout western Europe, touring Germany, Italy, France, and Switzerland, while still studying at university and learning a number of languages at the same time (Krzhizhanovsky 2013, 210). Traveling and completing a portion of one's education in western Europe was a common enough practice among the Ukrainian avant-garde community of the time (Shkandrij 2009). By the end of his life, with varying degrees of fluency Krzhizhanovsky spoke Polish, Russian, English, French, Latin, Italian, Uzbek, and presumably Ukrainian as well. In addition to increasing Krzhizhanovsky's language fluency, Rosenflanz suggests this period of travel further developed his already considerable knowledge of various western philosophical trends. This interest began at an early age. In a short piece

written in 1937, “Fragmenty o Shekspire” [Fragments on Shakespeare], he remarked that he first encountered Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* in the fifth grade. He took away from his reading of it the unsettling perception that the lines between “I” and “not-I” were nebulous. This was an idea that he later explored extensively, perhaps even obsessively in his fiction. He credited his reading of Shakespeare shortly after he finished Kant’s *Critique* with protecting him from what he termed the “metaphysical delusion”¹² that he saw in Kant’s philosophy (Krzhizhanovsky 2006, 384).

According to both Rosenflanz and Semper, among his many other literary and philosophical influences were René Descartes, G.W. Leibniz, Edgar Allan Poe, Jonathan Swift, Joseph Conrad, Franz Kafka, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Jean-Paul Sartre (Rosenflanz 2005, 2; Krzhizhanovsky 2013). Drawing on western thinkers was characteristic of Krzhizhanovsky. “He was not engaged with the east,” remarks Semper; “he was a true European, a townsman, split in binary oppositions, marred by existentialism, skepticism, and substitutions of the external order”¹³ (Krzhizhanovsky 2013, 304). It is likely, however, that Krzhizhanovsky’s creative style was informed by the Kyiv artistic environment as well, where he spent his formative years; the Kyiv creative scene at the time was a hub for avant-garde experimentation.

How the works of western philosophers came into Krzhizhanovsky’s possession is not clear. It is possible that he purchased them while abroad in Western Europe, or while in Uzbekistan where censorship may have been enforced to a lesser extent. Surprisingly, in Moscow Krzhizhanovsky never had more than two shelves of books and was not often observed reading (Perelmuter 1990). Perelmuter suggests that Krzhizhanovsky’s linguistic abilities indicate he had “a tremendous *intellectual capital*”¹⁴ to which he could easily add (ibid., italics in

¹² “Metafizicheskogo navazhdeniia”

¹³ “vostokom on ne zanimalisia...éto byl podlennyi evropeets, gorozhanin, raskolotyi benarnymi oppozitsiiami, omrachennyi ékzistentsializmom, skepsisom i podmenami vneshnego poriadka”

¹⁴ “kolossal’nyi *intellektualnyi kapital*”

the original). He was able to quickly process information from conversations with thinkers like Vernadsky, Severtsov, Fersman, Oldenburg, and Filatov. He did not, in any case, keep books after reading them (ibid.). That he did not is somewhat curious, since his fiction is often concerned with individuals preoccupied with the physicality of books, words, and even individual letters. In fact, in his fiction letters have a mind of their own. In his 1939 story “Bumaga teriaet terpenie” [The Paper Loses Patience], for example, letters tire of “the lies and filth, misprints and sloppy conscience, the bad style, and the cheap pathos”¹⁵ being written – and leave their pages (Krzhizhanovsky 2003, 148).

Although Krzhizhanovsky took a job as an assistant to a barrister in Kyiv in 1914, his primary interest at the time was reading literature and writing his own pieces (Rosenflanz 2005, 2). A series of poetry and travel sketches were published in Kyiv journals, but he considered “Iakobi i *iakoby*” [Jacob and *As If*] his first major publication. This story was published in 1919 in *Zori* (2), when Krzhizhanovsky was thirty-two years old. Despite a brief period serving in the Red Army, Krzhizhanovsky seems to have remained largely distant from, or uninterested in, the major political upheavals occurring around him. Even while at his military post he would recite Virgil in Latin (Turnbull 2009, viii). He actively avoided collaborating with the White Army and chose to work as a watchman at “cooperative storehouses” for about eighteen months (Rosenflanz 2005, 2). According to author Ken Kalfus, Krzhizhanovsky was not “directly dissident” but was not interested or drawn to the socialist society developing around him either (Kalfus 2013). This is, however, an oversimplification. Krzhizhanovsky’s narrators are often torn between opposing the oppressive cultural climate and conforming to it, or at least accepting their marginalized place in it. They are as loquacious as Erofeev’s Venichka, if not as cheerful. They obsessively comment on society in a way that is half-resentful and half-wishful. The behaviour

¹⁵ “i lozh’, i gnus’, i opechatki, i griaznuiu sovest’, i skvernyī stil’, i deshëvyī pafos”

of these narrators suggests that Krzhizhanovsky himself perhaps wanted to be able to consider himself a contributing member of society but could not bring himself to compromise his creative ethics to the degree required. In conversation with Jacob Emery, the critic Alexander Spektor has astutely remarked that “I think what we have here is...someone who is trying to straddle two realms” (Emery & Spektor 2017). Although Spektor is referring to Krzhizhanovsky’s desire to write both “philosophic fiction and fictional philosophy” (ibid.), Spektor’s comment sums up the author’s longtime, agonized indecision regarding the position of his philosophical and ethical allegiance.

Krzhizhanovsky’s work as a storehouse watchman appears to be the height of his social activity resembling active cooperation with the Bolshevik revolution. Bovshek, a native of Moscow, appeared to be the more outspokenly pro-Soviet of the two. She comments with apparent admiration on what she terms “the heroism of our times, the humanity of the issuing decrees, the scope of construction plans”¹⁶ and even claims, echoing the popular enthusiasm of the time, that “no one doubted the Bolsheviks were the future for the whole country”¹⁷ (Krzhizhanovsky 2013, 230, 221).

By 1920, when Bovshek first met him in Kyiv, Krzhizhanovsky was well-known in literary circles as an engaging and original lecturer capable of reciting pages of material from memory (208). In addition to lecturing, he taught at the Lysenko State Institute of Music and Drama and at what Bovshek refers to as the Jewish Studio¹⁸ (213). In a letter discussed by Rosenflanz, S.D. Mstislavskii, a long-time friend of Krzhizhanovsky and the chairman of the All-Ukrainian Literature Committee, called him “a highly cultured man”¹⁹ and “possessing of

¹⁶ “geroikoī sovremennosti, gumannost’iu vykhodivshikh dekretov, razmakhom planov stroitel’stva”

¹⁷ “nikto ne somnevalsia v tom, chto postaiannye khoziava goroda – bols’sheviki I chto za nimi budushchee vseī strany”

¹⁸ Throughout her memoirs, Bovshek calls this studio simply “the Jewish Studio” [evreiskaia studiia], and always in lower-case letters. It is not clear to which artistic group in Kyiv she is referring.

¹⁹ “vysoko kul’turnogo cheloveka”

outstanding literary gifts”²⁰ (Rosenflanz 2005, 3). At some point, Krzhizhanovsky also struck up an acquaintanceship with Mikhail Bulgakov (Maguire 2016).

Krzhizhanovsky had at this time a promising literary career ahead of him. He worked closely with the theatre, the setting in which he met Bovshek. The two eventually became romantically involved. Bovshek’s memoir recalls this period in avid detail. She discusses the difficulties involved in staging plays and the periodic political complications thereof, and comments on the widespread issues of poverty and hunger they both experienced (Krzhizhanovsky 2013, 205). Despite these struggles, it was these last years in Kyiv that Bovshek considers “the beginning of literary life”²¹ for Krzhizhanovsky (217). It was where the “little philosophical novels”²² that were to become part of his first collection, *Skazki dlia vunderkindov* [Tales for Wunderkinds], “were born and ripened”²³ (217). The collection, like much of Krzhizhanovsky’s work, went unpublished during Krzhizhanovsky’s lifetime. In early 1922, stronger political ties with Bolshevik-ruled Russia resulted in not only increased food availability in Kyiv, but in occasional visitors from Moscow as well.²⁴ These visitors brought word that theatre was thriving in the capital. There, there was reportedly increased artistic freedom as theatres were bound only to create as-yet fairly unrestricted “Soviet art.” this was supposedly a city where “Ukrainians, Jews, Poles, and Russians, among others, all performed on stage and sat in the audience” (Fowler 2015, 286). This was surely an alluring prospect Krzhizhanovsky, whose name betrayed him as being of Polish descent, and for the Jewish Studio, whose name similarly declared its non-Russianness. Belief in the better life

²⁰ “obladaiushego krupnymi literaturnymi sposobnostiami”

²¹ “eti poslednie gody ego v Kieve byli nachalon literaturnoi zhizni”

²² “malen’kie filosofskie novelly”

²³ “rozhdealis’ i sozrevali”

²⁴ The food shortages were due to the recent famine of 1921, caused by a drought and disruptions to farming during fighting between pro- and anti- Bolshevik forces. Many cultural figures from Russia escaped the chaos in Moscow by relocating to Kyiv.

awaiting them in Moscow awoke in Bovshek the desire to return to the city from which she had been absent five years. In March she and Butsko left for Moscow via Leningrad with the entire Jewish Studio's staff. This included both teachers and students (222). They were shortly thereafter joined by Krzhizhanovsky.

The Moscow Years (1922-1950)

Once in Moscow, Krzhizhanovsky's artistic output increased immediately and substantially. Although he experienced trouble finding steady work and the cramped quarters of his apartment in Arbat 44 were not ideal, he told Bovshek that the Moscow cityscape inspired his writing. He spent hours every day walking from one end of the city to the other (227). He states in his 1938 autobiography that he found work as a lecturer at the Pedagogical Theatre beginning in 1922, and at Tairov's Kamernyi Theatre in 1923 (350). He regularly contributed scholarly articles to a number of academic journals as well (Rosenflanz 2005, 3). Many of these are available in Perelmuter's collections and in some cases can be found in online databases. He also served as an editor for an encyclopedia and a journal (3).

For a time Krzhizhanovsky became a "fashionable"²⁵ accessory of the literary scene and was invited to read his fiction at literary gatherings (Krzhizhanovsky 2013, 229). Many of the gatherings were hosted by the well-connected and influential Evdoksia Fedorovna Nikitina. She became a valuable advocate for Krzhizhanovsky in the following years, assisting him with everything from offering to use her influence to get his work published to securing an internal passport for him (245; Rosenflanz 2005, 9, 10).

Nikitina was not the only admirer of Krzhizhanovsky. The poet Mark Tarlovskii spoke of Krzhizhanovsky in glowing terms, calling him an "outstanding phenomenon of our time"²⁶

²⁵ "modno"

²⁶ "vydaiushchimsia iavleniem nasheĭ sovremennosti"

(Krzhizhanovsky 2013, 283). At Bovshek's request, the director L.L. Lukianov read Krzhizhanovsky's collection *Tales for Wunderkinds* and was so impressed he gave the collection to the well-known Jewish theatre director, Aleksandr Tairov, who was perhaps drawn to the Jewish studio due to his own cultural background. Tairov was, like Krzhizhanovsky, originally from Ukraine. If Bovshek's assessment of Krzhizhanovsky's popularity is accurate, it is likely that Tairov, having maintained connections with Kyiv's theatre and avant-garde community, was already aware of Krzhizhanovsky's work. Tairov was impressed by Krzhizhanovsky's writing and requested to meet the author, and a casual working relationship was formed between the two that lasted until 1938 (Rosenflanz 2005, 3). The novelist Aleksandr Grin (1880-1932) read Krzhizhanovsky's *Shtempel' – Moskva* [Postmark: Moscow] and remarked favourably upon it (Krzhizhanovsky 2013, 242). During a brief period of relative affluence ten years after he and Bovshek moved to Moscow, the couple took a vacation to Odessa. There they became acquainted with other members of the artistic and literary scene. Among them were Ivan Bunin, Aleksandr Kuprin, Yuriĭ Olesha and his wife Ol'ga Forsh, Vasilĭ Grossman, and Tatiana Shchepkina-Kupernik (270). As had been the case in Kyiv, Krzhizhanovsky attracted few friends, although those he did were usually lifelong and oddly protective of him. Evgeniĭ Lann, a good friend of Krzhizhanovsky's, even went so far as to contact Maksim Gorkiĭ, requesting that Gorkiĭ read Krzhizhanovsky's prose and approve it for publication. Gorkiĭ did not, it seems, approve of Krzhizhanovsky's style (Rosenflanz 2005, 9). This, however, was not unusual, as Krzhizhanovsky's contemporaneous critical acclaim was, as Rosenflanz notes, "rarely echoed at crucial moments by editors who could actually publish his work" (14).

This Moscow-based period of artistic output, from 1922 until his death in 1950, can be broadly divided into two creative categories: his involvement with theatre and film, and his writing, both fiction and non-fiction. His literary output can be divided between fiction (1920s),

literary criticism (1930s), and translation (1940s). Although he wrote fiction sporadically throughout his life, the 1920s was certainly the decade of his greatest creativity (Rosenflanz 2005, 7).

Theatre & Film

In 1923, Tairov began working on a stage performance of G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who was Thursday*, for which Krzhizhanovsky wrote the screenplay. The play was performed in December, garnering a measure of success in part due to its stage designer Aleksandr Vesnin's elaborate and innovative Constructivist set (4).²⁷ In addition to adapting Chesterton's book, Krzhizhanovsky reworked Pushkin's unfinished "Egipetskie nochi" [Egyptian Nights] into a piece called *Tot tretii* [That Third One] (Krzhizhanovsky 2013, 286). A version combining Pushkin's work, Shaw, and Shakespeare was staged by the Karmenyi Theatre. Rosenflanz notes that it is likely that Krzhizhanovsky was involved with this production, given his interest in Shaw²⁸ and Shakespeare (Rosenflanz 2005, 4).

In 1929-30, Krzhizhanovsky wrote *Pisanaia torba* [The Decorated Bag], a play satirizing the Soviet Union. Tairov advised him to hide it (4). In 1934, this was followed by a comedy entitled *Pop i porochik* [The Priest and the Lieutenant] (4). Although the latter was well-received at a reading and reworked into an operetta, interest in it from individual theatres lagged suddenly in 1937, and it was never performed (5). A similar fate befell Krzhizhanovsky's adaptation of Pushkin's *Evgenii Onegin*. Despite having found a decorations designer, Aleksandr Osmerkin, and having convinced Sergei Prokofiev to write the musical score, repeated delays and required changes to its content eventually brought its production to a standstill (Krzhizhanovsky 2013,

²⁷ A book written in 1996 by critic Selim Khan-Magomedov on the architecture of the Soviet avant-garde (*Arkhitektura sovetskogo avangarda: kniga 1: problemy formoobrazovaniia. Mastera i techeniia*) contains a chapter on Constructivism and the theatre staging of Chesterton's *The Man Who was Thursday*. Despite his extensive involvement, it does not mention Krzhizhanovsky.

²⁸ It is interesting to note that Shaw and Chesterton were in fact opponents of sorts and frequently publicly debated one another (Faulkner 1994, iii).

235-236; Rosenflanz 2005, 6). This was brought about in part by Molotov's unexpected visit to the theatre's performance of Borodin's opera *Bogatyri* [Heroes]. Having enjoyed a measure of creative freedom until then, partly due to the absence of political attention the theatre as a whole attracted (238), Tairov had chosen to portray Prince Ivan humorously. Previously a safe subject of criticism, attitudes towards Russian rulers had shifted once again and faultfinding was no longer acceptable. Molotov's disapproval of the play resulted in rumours that the theatre was closing, and the theatre promptly cancelled upcoming performances and staged Gorkiĭ's *Deti solntse* [Children of the Sun] instead in a desperate bid to avoid forced closure (Krzhizhanovsky 2013, 239). Krzhizhanovsky's work was, unsurprisingly, among these cancelled plays.

Krzhizhanovsky wrote several other plays and libretti between 1932 and 1942, including a historical trilogy – *Korabel'naia slobodka* [Naval Settlement], *Fregat "Pobeda"* [The Frigate "Victory"], and *Suvorov* [Suvorov] – that enjoyed some wartime success. Bovshek portrays this period as the time when Krzhizhanovsky came into his own as a "genuine citizen of the fatherland"²⁹ who "generously gave of his middle-aged forces"³⁰ to the cause (276). The war-years, claims Bovshek, were "a time of increased creative forces"³¹ for Krzhizhanovsky (276). Rosenflanz paints a different picture, commenting that these last plays are "only the fading embers of Krzhižanovskij's earlier talent" (Rosenflanz 2005, 6). It seems that Krzhizhanovsky was at last able – for a while – to conform his creative interests to Soviet demands, albeit at the cost of creative quality.

Although theatre played the more extensive role in Krzhizhanovsky's career, he also briefly dabbled in film production. As far as can be traced now, it appears he was involved in two films. The first was *Prazdnik sviatogo Īorgena* [The Holiday of St Jorgen] adapted from a

²⁹ "on chuvstvoval sebia podlinnym grazhdaninom rodiny"

³⁰ "so vseĭ shchedrost'iu otdaval svoi uzhe nemolodyie sily tam, gde oni okazyvalis' nuzhnyimi"

³¹ "gody voiny byli vremenem pod'ema tvorcheskikh cil Krzhizhanovskogo"

1919 novel by Danish author Harald Bergstedt (1877-1965), *Factory of the Saints*. It was released in 1930, and in the final cut the producer Iakov Protozanov credited neither Krzhizhanovsky nor Bergstedt. The film follows the adventures of an enterprising thief who exposes the hypocrisy of the church. Although it ostensibly focuses on the negative traits of organized religion, its commentary on authoritarianism and the questionable behaviour of leaders, as well as the common thief's ability to hoodwink them, could also be viewed as a veiled critique of the Soviet system.

The second film, *Novyĭ Gulliver* [The New Gulliver], was released in 1935. It combined live-action actors and an astonishing number of individually-designed puppets. It is a Sovietized retelling of Swift's work, portraying Gulliver as the Bolshevik saviour of a Lilliput oppressed by its bourgeois aristocracy. To his annoyance, Krzhizhanovsky was forced to rework the story several times and in a letter to Bovshek remarked acidly that "Lilliputians shouldn't tackle the theme of Gulliver"³² (Rosenflanz 2005, 13). This remark gives insight into how Krzhizhanovsky viewed Soviet society generally: J.R.R. Tolkien has noted that "Lilliputians are merely men peered down at, sardonically, from just about the house-tops" (Tolkien 1983). Krzhizhanovsky was certainly given to "a certain disdain for the common crowd" and its lack of interest in his work (Rosenflanz 2005, 134). However, Krzhizhanovsky's dislike of "Lilliputians" is also partly attributable to his desire to keep classic literature out of the way of politically-motivated interpretations.

This cynicism, bordering on arrogance, must surely have played a part in Krzhizhanovsky's lack of close friends. However, this same cynicism helps explain why throughout his life Krzhizhanovsky maintained a remarkable level of obstinacy about the integrity of his own work. It was, as he remarked in a letter, "either *how* I want it, or nohow" (8).

³² "za temu o "Gulliver" ne sledovalo brat'sia...lilliputam"

An echo of this is found in one of his short stories, “Bokovaia vetka” [The Branch Line] in which a character expresses marked horror at those who give up their ethics and goals, “kicking [them] with your foot as if it were a sack of sand”³³ (Krzhizhanovsky 2001a, 505).

Non-Fiction

Krzhizhanovsky’s non-fiction served largely as a means of income and became his main area of interest in the last two decades of his life. These works included encyclopedic entries, introductions and commentaries for a two-volume set of Shakespeare, and editing a volume on Shaw, in addition to various jobs of translation (Rosenflanz 2005, 11-12). Several articles, also on Shaw and Shakespeare, were published in the 1930s by the journal *Literaturnaia ucheba* [Literary Study] (Krzhizhanovsky 2013, 291). As was so often the case, the set of translated Shakespeare that was accompanied by Krzhizhanovsky’s supplementary writing, for which he was uncredited anyways, was never published (Rosenflanz 2005, 11).

Shakespeare and Shaw were the primary focus of Krzhizhanovsky’s later writings, appearing in both his non-fiction and his fiction work. In the end, Bovshek writes, Krzhizhanovsky sided philosophically with Shakespeare rather than Kant (Krzhizhanovsky 2013, 264), and at that point shifted away from his fiction writing towards literary criticism and Shakespeare studies.

In addition to these academic works, Krzhizhanovsky wrote a travel log, *Salyr-Giu’l*. It is an account of his experience traveling to and around Uzbekistan in 1933. It recounts his impressions of the areas through which he travelled, and also the philosophical considerations brought about by this experience: “there is an undeniable resemblance between thinking and traveling. Thinking is the movement of images in the head, while travel is the movement of the

³³ “a vy tychete nogoī, kak v meshok s peskom”

head past the changing images. By rearranging terms, we can say that wandering is thinking with objects, while thinking is wandering in yourself³⁴ (Krzhizhanovsky 2003, 367).

Fiction

Following his relocation to Moscow, Krzhizhanovsky wrote a series of short stories and novellas in rapid succession. These were met with typically limited publishing success. Attempts to publish *Vozvrashchenie Miungauzina* [The Return of Munchausen] were eventually rejected despite an initial conditional acceptance, and his collection *Sobiratel' shcheleī* [The Collector of Cracks] met a similar fate in 1928 (Rosenflanz 2005, 8). In 1939 the journal *30 Dneī* published “Neukushennyī lokot” [The Unbitten Elbow], written almost a decade earlier (9). Another collection, *Rasskazy o zapade* [Tales of the West], was edited and accepted for publication in 1939 but was laid aside when the war began (9). A minor success was the publishing of a slim volume on the philosophy of titles, *Poëtika zaglaviī* [Poetics of Titles]. It was published in 1931 by Krzhizhanovsky’s proponent Evdoksia Nikitina through her own publishing house, Nikitnie Subbotniki [Nikitina Saturdays].³⁵

Krzhizhanovsky's fiction might loosely be categorized as surrealist fantasy, perhaps above all else preoccupied with the nature of reality (Thirlwell 2013, xi). His stories are, in the words of reviewer Colin Fleming, “mad – albeit magisterially controlled” (Fleming 2009). Similarly, according to one of the first Russian reviewers, Irina Vasiuchenko, they are “refined and whimsical, reflecting the complex work of thought”³⁶ (Vasiuchenko 1990). This type of writing was “the most useful vehicle available for the most intricate philosophy” (Thirlwell 2013, x).

³⁴ “mezhdū myshleniem i puteshestviem est’ nesomnennoe skhodstvo. Myshlenie – èto peredbizhenie obrazov v golove. Puteshestvie – peredvizhenie golovy mimo smeniaiushchikhsia obrazov. Perestaviv terminy, možno skazat’: stranstvovat’ – znachit myslit’ ob”ektami; dumat’ – stranstvovat’ v sebe samom”

³⁵ Nikitnie Subbotniki was the name that had originally been used to refer to Nikitina’s literary gatherings.

³⁶ “izyskannaia i prikhotlivaia, otrazhaiushchaia slozhnuiu rabotu mysli”

One notable downside to this complex writing style is its inaccessibility (Vasiuchenko 1990; Rosenflanz 2005, x). Krzhizhanovsky's choice of style and genre could also be read as a criticism of the variety of literature favoured by the Soviet state. As Thirlwell remarks, the Soviet Union "liked to play with the nature of the real" and Krzhizhanovsky's similar interest might perhaps be read as a critique of that (Thirlwell 2013, xi). Author Italo Calvino (whose definition of the fantastic Thirlwell suggests is applicable to Krzhizhanovsky), in his introduction to an anthology of European stories of the fantastic, notes of fantastic literature that

it is the genre that tells us the most about the inner life of the individual...its theme is the relationship between the reality of the world we live in and know through perception and the reality of the world of thought that lives within us and directs us. The problem with the reality of what we see - extraordinary things that are perhaps hallucinations projected by our minds, or common things that perhaps hide a second, disturbing nature, mysterious and terrible, beneath the most banal appearances - is the essence of fantastic literature, whose best effects reside in an oscillation between irreconcilable levels of reality. (Calvino 1997, vii)

Calvino's observations are particularly applicable to Krzhizhanovsky's stylistic approach to narrative. Krzhizhanovsky's writing, intrinsically concerned with the individual and frequently addressing "common things that...hide a second, disturbing nature" (vii), can be read as a creative way of critiquing formal Soviet dogma.

Heightened censorship presented a significant obstacle to publishing this kind of fiction, and occasionally became a threat to not only Krzhizhanovsky's publishing but also to his life. In one case, his niece Moleva recalled an agitated Krzhizhanovsky arriving at her family's home with a number of his manuscripts and the news that several of his friends were "in difficult

situations”³⁷ (Moleva 2009). He requested that Moleva’s family hide the manuscripts he had brought with him. Moleva’s grandmother hid some in clay rye flour pots and returned them to Krzhizhanovsky after the war (ibid.). A second, less fortunate cache was buried beneath a cottage terrace in Malakhovka. The cottage burned and a new house was built in the same location, and the manuscripts were never recovered. Moleva even includes the address of the house in her memoirs, recalling Krzhizhanovsky’s words about the lost manuscripts: “as long as I live, I hope”³⁸ (ibid.).

Despite the number of stories written (over forty), and numerous attempts at getting his work published, Krzhizhanovsky remained virtually unknown in the publishing world. During the 1930s, a telling conversation took place at a meeting of the selection committee for the Writer’s Union in the Soviet Union. The committee had met to discuss whether to grant Krzhizhanovsky entrance to the Union. A.A. Fedeev led the meeting and “with some bewilderment”³⁹ inquired

what kind of phenomenon is this? ...it’s not that there’s bad talk about the man, it’s just that we simply know nothing about him; we didn’t suspect his existence. Where did he come from, who is he, and what has he done? Nobody knows. Some – a minority – extol him, calling him a European writer who could make the honour and glory of the Soviet Union.⁴⁰ (Krzhizhanovsky 2013, 287)

Krzhizhanovsky was ultimately accepted into the Union, thanks in a large part to Mikhail Levidov, Evgeniĭ Lann, and other acquaintances (288). It seems it did not assist him with

³⁷ “v tiazheleĭshem polozenii”

³⁸ “poka zhivu, nadeius”

³⁹ “v nekotorem nedoumenii”

⁴⁰ “chto za iavlenie? ...odna – bol’shaia – chast’ ne to, chto plokho govor’iat o cheloveke, no prosto ne znaiut ego, ne podozrevaiut o ego sushchvovanii. Otkuda on, kto on takoĭ, chto on sdelal? Neizvestno. Zato drugie – v men’shenstve – prevoznosiat ego, pochetaiut evropeĭskim pisatelem, kotoryi mozhet sostavit’ chest’ i slavu sovetskoĭ literatury.”

publishing, however. “Krzhizhanovsky was not lucky with his opponents,”⁴¹ remarks Argo (291). Even Krzhizhanovsky’s name worked against him. Moleva, less cautious than Bovshek in her criticism of the Soviet Union, observes that “everyone knew that the ‘leader and teacher’ systematically exterminated everything that was connected with Poland and even with its Communist Party”⁴² (Moleva 2009).

By the late 1940s, Krzhizhanovsky had for the most part given up trying to publish his work. His absence of publishing success had in all likelihood saved him from the purges, but by the time Semper met him, “the ideological oppression and veto of the all-powerful censorship had already broken him as a writer, erased hope, and plunged him into a deep, incurable pessimism”⁴³ (Krzhizhanovsky 2013, 304). Long-time friends were arrested (Levidov) or had fallen fatally ill (Mstislavskiĭ) (277). He became increasingly dependent on alcohol. In May 1949 he suffered a stroke that rendered him unable to read, although he could still write (280). He died in his home on December 28, 1950 at the age of 64. It was a remarkable age for a Soviet author, especially one so unwilling to compromise, and one hailed as “the missing link between Kafka and Borges”⁴⁴ (Thibaudat 2010).

Review of Literature

In this section, I give an overview of recent critical literature (1990-present) in Russian and English pertaining to Krzhizhanovsky. Works in both English and Russian deal with a wide range of themes, although themes of Western (Kantian) philosophy, temporality, and spatiality do figure consistently. The wide range of critical approaches employed in dealing with Krzhizhanovsky is a testament to the narrative complexity of his work. The research mentioned

⁴¹ “Krzhizhanovskomu ne vezlo na opponentov”

⁴² “vse znali: “vozhd’ i uchitel” sistematically istrebial vse, chto bylo sviazano s Pol’sheĭ i dazhe eĭ kommunisticheskoi partiei”

⁴³ ideologicheskii gnet i veto vsemogushcheĭ tsenzury uzhe slomili ego kak pisatelja, vytravili nadezhdu, pogruzili v glubokii, neislechimyĭ pessimism

⁴⁴ “Le chaînon manquant entre Kafka et Borges”

in this literature review have been selected to highlight the diversity and quality of approach, as well as critical trends. I hope to bring attention to the variety of theories that have been applied to Krzhizhanovsky's work thus far. The following critical sources were selected based upon resource availability and relevance to the topics this thesis addresses. Much of the criticism to date has an experimental tone, as critics explore the viability of theoretical approaches to Krzhizhanovsky's texts. I have attempted to take into account the exploratory nature of current criticism by providing examples of the most prominent critics who have applied different theoretical approaches to the literature in question.

Likely due to the absence of English translations until 2005, criticism on Krzhizhanovsky in Russian has an earlier starting point than its English counterpart. Critical literature began to appear in published form in 1990 (see Vasiuchenko's 1990 article "Arlekin protiv koshcheia"). Although there seems to have been only three major works in Russian on Krzhizhanovsky published during the 1990s (1990, 1995, and 1998), publication numbers have been steadily increasing, with most occurring between 2007 and 2010. V.N. Toporov's book-length essay appeared in 1995, and to date a number of articles, as well as PhD dissertations, have been written on Krzhizhanovsky. Those considered most relevant to this study are discussed in more detail in the literature review that follows.

An invaluable resource for any scholar of Krzhizhanovsky is an astonishingly comprehensive guide to published works and translations of Krzhizhanovsky in Russian and numerous other languages (including but not limited to Polish, French, and German) that can be found on the website zygmuntkrzyzanowski.edu.pl. This is an academic domain webpage maintained by Warsaw-based researchers Bogdan Navrotsky, Valentina Mikolaichik-Trzhinskaya, and Veslava Ol'brykh-Navrotska.

Critical Literature in English

Although scholarly interest in Krzhizhanovsky has been increasingly steadily in recent years, as of yet relatively little has been written on the topic in English. Only a handful of researchers and authors have published more than one article on his works, and the vast majority of these works have been written in the last decade. Some of the prominent scholars among English language commentators are N.L. Leiderman (whose pen name is Mark Lipovetsky), Princeton scholar Caryl Emerson, Ohio State University professor Alisa Ballard Lin, and Jacob Emery of Indiana University at Bloomington.

Introductions to the English translations of Krzhizhanovsky's stories offer excellent, though short, analytical overviews of the author's stories. Adam Thirlwell (a British novelist), Caryl Emerson, and Joanne Turnbull (the translator of Krzhizhanovsky's recent English publications) have written the introductions to *Autobiography of a Corpse* (2013), *The Letter Killers Club* (2012), and *Memories of the Future* (2009) respectively.

N.L. Leiderman's informative article entitled "The Intellectual Worlds of Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky" discusses the intellectual sources with which Krzhizhanovsky was familiar and argues that these have significantly influenced his work. It seeks to address Krzhizhanovsky's writings based upon the author's extensive philosophical readings. Emerson's approach similarly relies upon Krzhizhanovsky's extensive knowledge of literary texts as a method of exploring the author's work. It is a valuable source on the topic, though his comment that Joost Van Baak was among the first to insist that Krzhizhanovsky belonged to the tradition of Swift and Poe is not strictly correct. This idea was in fact first noted by Krzhizhanovsky's acquaintances, including a contributor to the 1990 collection of memoirs, *Memories of Krzhizhanovsky*.

Continuing the interest in Western influences on Krzhizhanovsky, in "Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky at the Edges of the Stalinist Shakespeare Industry, 1933-1938" Emerson

discusses Krzhizhanovsky's prose in relation to Soviet theatre. Emerson also provides a valuable biographical introduction to Krzhizhanovsky in Joanne Turnbull's 2012 translation of the author's *The Letter Killers Club*. Jacob Emery, in his 2012 article "Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky's Poetics of Passivity" addresses how Krzhizhanovsky explores the intersection of literary influence and individual artistic effort. Emery proposes that Krzhizhanovsky writes of poetic inspiration as "the alienated spirit of the divine animating the...passive clay of human material" (Emery 2012, 95). This, Emery proposes, accounts for the passive tone that appears so frequently in Krzhizhanovsky's writing.

Kleiner is one of the growing number of scholars to write a master's or doctoral thesis on Krzhizhanovsky. In 2014 she wrote a Master's thesis under the supervision of Leiderman/Lipovetsky, arguing that Krzhizhanovsky draws close connections between Kantian philosophy and the violence of the Soviet regime. Kleiner posits that Krzhizhanovsky uses allegory to trace "the decay of reason and Kantian subjectivity" and considered the "Enlightenment impulse" to have transformed humanity "into a society of zombies" (Kleiner 2014, iii). At McGill University in 2016 Lisa Stuntz also wrote a master's thesis on Krzhizhanovsky, exploring the fractured and ultimately unknowable reality presented in his prose in relation to the social isolation experienced by the philosophically-inclined thinker-narrator who recognizes this.

In 2012, Alisa Ballard published "БЫТЬ encounters БЫ: Krzhizhanovsky's Theatre of Fiction." Ballard discusses Krzhizhanovsky's view of theatre as a created world and his interest in Kantian philosophy. She analyzes a series of Krzhizhanovsky's stories through this lens, including the Krzhizhanovsky's dialogue between a philosopher and a fictional being in his short story "Jacoby and *As If*."

Karen Link Rosenflanz, in addition to writing “Overturned Verticals and Extinguished Suns: Facets of Krzhizhanovsky’s Fourth Dimension” in 2012 - in which she connects popular scientific thought at the time of Krzhizhanovsky’s writing to his work - is the only author that has written a full-length book on his prose in either Russian or English. She takes a formalist approach in her book *Hunter of Themes: The Interplay of Word and Things in the Works of Sigizmund Križžanovskij*. It was published in 2005 as part of the series *Studies on Themes and Motifs in Literature*. She makes the bold claim that “it is the elements of Formalism that ultimately provide the key to enter the endlessly expanding room of Križžanovskij’s themes” (Rosenflanz 2005, x).

Another notable book is by the Oxford graduate Muireann Maguire, who also maintains the literature blog *The Russian Dinosaur* on which reviews or criticism on Krzhizhanovsky appears periodically. In 2012 she published *Stalin’s Ghosts: Gothic Themes in Early Soviet Literature*. This excellent work, which includes other authors alongside Krzhizhanovsky, connects Gothic themes to dissident and Socialist Realist literature and thereby to postmodern authors such as Viktor Pelevin. She argues that Russian literature has always been “creatively dependent” on its 19th-century Gothic background, and that Soviet-era Gothic dissident literature such as Krzhizhanovsky’s presents a counter-narrative to the optimism of official Soviet dogma (Maguire 2012, 7).

In addition to these written critical works, Rosenflanz, Ballard, Kleiner, and Emery presented a round-table discussion on Krzhizhanovsky at the 2017 ASEES conference in Chicago. In 2016, the first conference exclusively on Krzhizhanovsky was held at Indiana University. There are several doctoral theses on Krzhizhanovsky in progress. These include Virginia University student Reed Johnson’s work on the metaphysics of time and space in Krzhizhanovsky, which compares his philosophical perspective on time and the future to early

Soviet thought on similar topics. In private correspondence Jacob Emery indicated that Stephen Alexander Tullock is also completing a doctoral thesis on Krzhizhanovsky at Harvard University.

Interestingly, broader and less academic searches online reveal a number of small English-language blogs and articles from authors and academic researchers interested in situating Krzhizhanovsky in international contemporary literary contexts. These included *The New York Times Review of Books* (an article written by American author Ken Kalfus), *The Paris Review* (an article by Adam Thirlwell), and blogs such as *On Art and Aesthetics* and *The Russian Dinosaur*, which are maintained by academics Tulika Bahadur and Muireann Maguire, respectively.

Critical Literature in Russian

Works on the Russian literary scene of the 1920s frequently disregard Krzhizhanovsky. For example, a book written in 1996 by critic Selim Khan-Magomedov on the architecture of the Soviet avant-garde (*Arkhitektura sovetskogo avangarda: kniga 1: problemy formoobrazovaniia. Mastera i techeniia*) contains a chapter on Constructivism and the innovative theatre staging of Chesterton's *The Man Who was Thursday*, but does not mention Krzhizhanovsky. This is despite the latter's remarkably extensive involvement in writing and producing the play.

Russian critical literature specializing in Krzhizhanovsky tends, like its English counterpart, to address a wide variety of topics. The first major Russian critic to analyze Krzhizhanovsky was the renowned scholar V.N. Toporov in his 1995 book *Mif. Ritual. Simvol. Obraz. Issledovaniia v oblasti mifopoeticheskogo*. Nearly a hundred pages of the volume are devoted to Krzhizhanovsky's use of minus-space, especially in the short story "Seams." He

explores “interrelatedness”⁴⁵ and “interdependence and reciprocity”⁴⁶ between a human and the city-space he inhabits (Toporov 1995, 477). Toporov situates his discussion of Krzhizhanovsky in the wider context of his own study of the city-myths of St Petersburg and Moscow. Most later critics take Krzhizhanovsky’s work on space and time to be reflective of the author’s ongoing interest in philosophy and metaphysics; Toporov is somewhat dismissive. He suggests instead that Krzhizhanovsky experienced a form of spatial phobia, and it is this phobia that consequently appears in stories such as “Kvadraturin.”

The second major work and the first doctoral dissertation written on Krzhizhanovsky was written in 1998 by Nataliia Burovsteva at the Moscow Pedagogical State University. Her work “Proza S.D. Krzhizhanovskogo: problemy poetiki” addresses the metaliterary component of the writer in what she terms the author-narrator-hero relationship, the interaction of space and the time, and certain linguistic aspects of the texts as well. Her work brings attention to several critical directions which later critics have explored, and she has further discussed these themes in a series of articles as well. Among them are “‘Mir, vynutyi iz glaza’ (lingvostilisticheskiĭ aspekt prozy S.D. Krzhizhanovskogo),” “Intertekstual’nost’ i smysl: novella S.D. Krzhizhanovskogo ‘Kunts i Shiller,’” and “Kategoriia siuzheta v proze Krzhizhanovskogo: siuzheta struktura kak smysloporozhdaniushchiĭ mekhanizm teksta,” and “‘Byt’ ili ne byt’ S.D. Krzhizhanovskogo god 1926-ĭ (Metaliteraturnaia problematik povesti ‘Klub ubiĭts bukva’).” These articles are largely expansions of ideas that appear in her earlier dissertation.

In addition to Burovsteva’s dissertation, nearly a dozen others have since been written in Russian. These include I.B. Delektorskaia’s “Ėsteticheskie vozzreniia Sigizmunda Krzhizhanovskogo: ot Shekspirovedeniia k filosofii iskusstva” (2000), in which she discusses

⁴⁵ “vzaimozavisimost’ i vzaimoprindlezhnost”

⁴⁶ “vzaimozavisimost’ i vzaimootdacha”

spatiality as “the eternal tragedy of Krzhizhanovsky and his characters”⁴⁷ (Delektorskaia 2000), L.V. Podina’s “Mnogofunktional’nost’ vremeni i prostranstva v dukhovnoĭ kul’ture pisatel’ia S. Krzhizhanovskogo” (2012) likewise discusses spatial-temporal themes in Krzhizhanovsky’s work. On a similar theme, Irina Lunina in 2009 wrote “Khudozhestvennyĭ mir novell S.D. Krzhizhanovskogo: chelovek, prostranstvo, kommunikatsiia,” in which she analyzes Krzhizhanovsky’s work using an anthropocentric approach. She addresses the role of male and female individuals in his work, exploring the “basic parameters of the character’s space”⁴⁸ (Lunina 2009). She also discusses the communication style used by characters in the texts, ultimately aiming to “reconstruct the author’s conception of man”⁴⁹ (ibid.). Other notable PhD theses are those by E.V. Moiseeva, E.N. Vorob’eva, V.V. Goroshnikov, and A.A. Manskov.

Interestingly, beginning in 2009 some Russian critics began to discuss religious themes in connection with Krzhizhanovsky (see articles by Livskaia, Vorob’eva, and Manskov). Old Testament themes of exile and sacrifice began to appear. Along similar lines Livskaia, in her 2009 article “Filosofsko-ěsteticheskaia kontseptsiiia bytiia v tvorchestve S. Krzhizhanovskogo,” proposes that Krzhizhanovsky argues for the triumph of the common and universal over personal, individual destiny as the true fulfillment of the artist. This is a remarkable similarity to the tone of early Soviet rhetoric on authorship and artistic thought. These critical themes appeared as a new wave of nationalism and calls for a return to perceived traditional and religious values swept through the political scene in Russia. However, despite Krzhizhanovsky’s Catholic upbringing, these religious analyses fit his work more poorly than other critical approaches. Bovshek was personally critical of rigid religiosity (Krzhizhanovsky 2013, 242), and

⁴⁷ “izvechnaia tragediia Krzhizhanovskogo i ego personazheĭ”

⁴⁸ “issledovat’ osnovnye parametry prostranstva personazha”

⁴⁹ “rekonstruirovat’ avtorskuiu kontseptsiiu chelovek”

throughout his stories Krzhizhanovsky, with characteristic severity, critiques blind adherence to any creed selling itself as purveyor of absolute truth.

However, it should be noted that in 2014, in a departure from her earlier work Livskaia proposed instead a possible reading revolving around the lonely liminality of the hero-author, whose uncommonness is rejected by the rest of society (see her article “Khudozhnik kak novyĭ tip geroia v russkoi literature 1920-1930-kh godov: na materialie proezvedenyĭ S. Krzhizhanovskogo”). This is much more in keeping with other criticism on Krzhizhanovsky.

CHAPTER 2

No Border Sacrosanct:

Krzhizhanovsky's Early Tricksters, 1925-1928

Yet I am fully and firmly aware: I have been banished forever and irrevocably from all things, from all joys, from all truths. Though I walk, look, and listen beside others settled in this city, I know: they are in Moscow and I am in minus-Moscow. I am permitted only the shadow of things; things are beyond my reach...I may only watch (Krzhizhanovsky 2013, 69-70).

Introduction

In this chapter I trace the developments of the trickster-figure in Krzhizhanovsky's work from 1925 until 1927-8. This is arguably the period of Krzhizhanovsky's richest and most well-developed literary style. It is certainly his most prolific. The stories I address from this period are "Autobiography of a Corpse" (1925), "The Phantom" (1926), and "Seams" (1927-1928).

In each of these narratives, one or more characteristics of the trickster figures comes through particularly strongly. In this chapter I assess the types of liminality, mediation and ambivalence, and relation to the sacred that Krzhizhanovsky explores and develops in these short stories. I will focus upon establishing Krzhizhanovsky's unnamed protagonists as his early explorations of themes that eventually became key characteristics of the Soviet-era liminal trickster-figure, and how this may be read as partially autobiographical. I attempt to show the parallels between Krzhizhanovsky's protagonists and his own, similarly liminal place at the outskirts of "conventional" Soviet society. I have, where deemed helpful for establishing Krzhizhanovsky's protagonists as prototypical tricksters, drawn parallels between them and those Lipovetsky establishes as tricksters. These are Erofeev's drunken philosopher Venichka and Bulgakov's trickster-devil Woland.

It should be reiterated that I am proposing that the short story characters in this chapter are *early versions*, or explorations, of the trickster-figure and theme, which Krzhizhanovsky fully

develops in the character of Baron Munchausen. In this chapter I am concerned with analyzing these characters in relation to distinctive trickster traits they exhibit. It would be difficult to argue that the characters from these three short stories are fully-developed tricksters, particularly as they rarely play overt tricks.

The Trickster-Author: “Avtobiografiia trupa” [Autobiography of a Corpse] (1925)

“Autobiography of a Corpse” was among those stories briefly considered for publishing during the author’s lifetime. “Autobiography” relates the experiences of a young journalist recently arrived in Moscow. He finds an apartment for rent, discovering then that the apartment’s previous tenant has committed suicide and has left a notebook of letters for the next tenant. In it the dead man relates the reasons he has killed himself and informs Shtamm that through the act of reading his letters, Shtamm’s psyche has been overtaken by the dead man’s own.

The editor of the journal *Rossiiia*, Isa Lezhnev, was fond of Krzhizhanovsky’s writing style and had previously published his story *Postmark: Moscow* in 1925. Lezhnev’s sudden immigration brought the publishing process to a halt, as his replacement quickly realized the “impracticability” of publishing the story (Maguire 2012, 166). It then remained unpublished until 1990 when it appeared as part of Perelmuter’s collection. “Autobiography” is a cyclical tale, in some ways reminiscent of Tolstoy’s *Smert’ Ivana Ilycha* [The Death of Ivan Ilych]. There is both a Tolstoyan “passion for depicting death” (Bakhtin 1989, 284) and a similarly symmetrical “rare structural integrity” (Halperin 1961, 334). It is likewise a narrative of a life that is, like Ivan Ilych’s, “most simple and most ordinary and therefore most terrible” (Tolstoy 1967, 255).

The narrative has been approached from a variety of critical angles. It has been most simply assessed as “a depressing tale about human isolation culminating in suicide” (Stuntz 2016, 119). According to Toporov, it is one of Krzhizhanovsky’s most characteristic works of minus-space and a discussion of human loneliness and emptiness (Toporov 1995, 543).

Perelmuter has called it an exploration of the disembodiment of the individual⁵⁰ (Perelmuter 1990). Maguire, thematically, has assessed it as a tale indebted to the Gothic-fantastic tradition that explores the social tension between the dead and the living, where death becomes “a strategy for survival” (Maguire 2012, 165, 170).

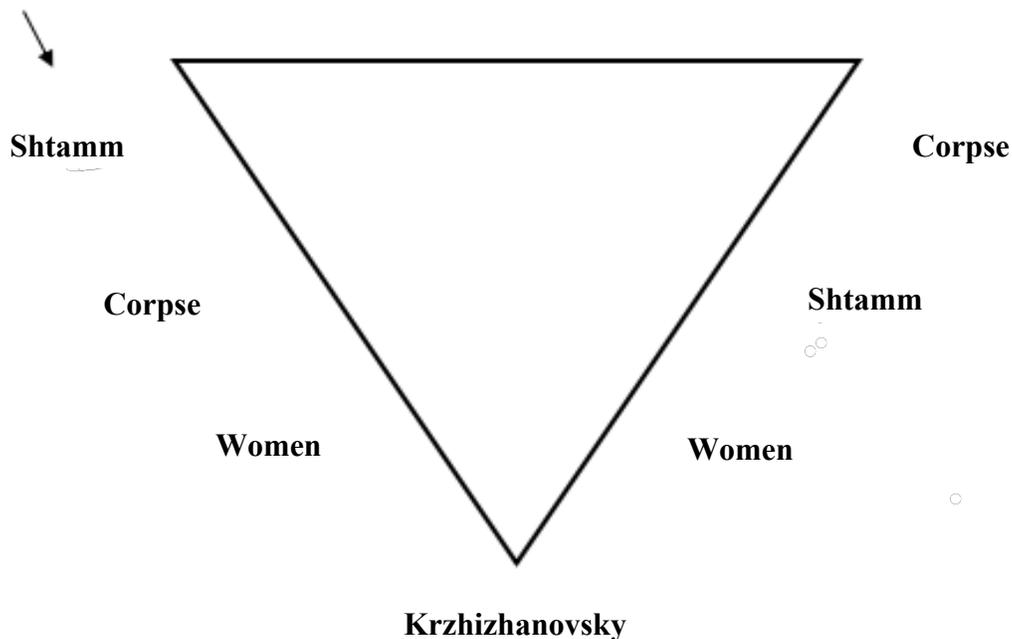
Many of Krzhizhanovsky’s tales are composed of elaborate multi-level narratives, a style well-suited to the trickster. One critic referred to Krzhizhanovsky’s stories as being “built on the principle of a kind of ‘matryoshka’”⁵¹ wherein one narrative rests inside a second (Golubkov 2000). Lipovetsky has remarked upon what he terms the “multi-leveled doublings” of the trickster, which serve to “fill out the space between the distinct opposition of *one’s own* and *the other*” (Lipovesky 2011, 138, emphasis in the original). “Autobiography of a Corpse” follows this pattern. It is made up of a series of character-doubles of its one constant protagonist, the corpse himself. Each of the discourses surrounding the corpse and his doubles provides a pairing to the corpse’s perspective. The corpse himself, though the one constant figure throughout the story, in trickster-fashion plays an ambivalent role, reinventing himself and his perspective for each of these doubles. This is an example of both the trickster’s mediation and his “cunning in regard to doubling back or reversing himself” (Hyde 1998). Because of this trait, the corpse’s character can be analyzed only through his interactions with other individuals.

The order of appearance of each character, the “matryoshka layers,” unfolds as follows: Shtamm, the corpse, women, and Krzhizhanovsky himself revealed at the centre, closely associated with dead and wounded soldiers. It then “refolds” back in nearly the same way. The ending’s significant difference is that the reader is unsure whether Shtamm or the corpse (that is, Krzhizhanovsky himself) is at the end the outermost layer of the narrative. That is, it is unclear

⁵⁰ “istoriiu razvoploshcheniia lichnosti”

⁵¹ “postroen po printsipu svoëobraznoï matrëshki”

whose psyche is the dominant psychological force now directing Shtamm’s actions. Critics disagree on this point: Maguire argues that Shtamm is unaffected by the letters, his unimaginative mind unfazed by the oppressive, creativity-squashing nature of the Moscow environment (Maguire 2012, 166), while Rosenflanz posits that Shtamm is “forced to accept the influence” of the corpse (Rosenflanz 2005, 133). Shtamm’s response to the letters at the end of the narrative is certainly vague enough to be read either way, although the text suggests that Rosenflanz’s approach may be the more accurate of the two. This indefiniteness is also much in keeping with a trickster’s narrative.



The First Double: Shtamm

Shtamm provides both the first and semi-final, or final, depending on how the tale is read, layer of the matryoshka narrative. He is a young and relatively successful though “nervous”⁵²

⁵² “nerven”

journalist from the provinces. He is also possessor of a firm belief in his ability to “exchange ink droplets for rubles”⁵³ (Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 508). He arrives in Moscow during the housing shortage in search of an apartment to rent, and through a strange streetside encounter he finds one hundred square feet to call his own on only his second day in the city.

Shtamm’s seemingly logical assumption that his writing skills are marketable are cut short by the “arrival” of the corpse in the form of the dead man’s notebook. The letter-like entries are addressed to the future tenant from the dead man. This previous tenant, suffocated by the world in which he lives, describes in his letters the state of affairs that led him to commit suicide. The traumas he experienced during his life – including an unsuccessful love affair, poor eyesight, and the experience of the civil war – have forced him into a half-life existence. This eventually leads him to decide that he would much rather overtake the consciousness of someone else, someone of whom his only requirement is that they be “completely alive”⁵⁴ (512).

The corpse establishes the first of his trickster characteristics (liminality) by first drawing the rationalist Shtamm into his own liminal space. The spaces inhabited by any liminal figure are those of ambiguity, often exemplified by thresholds (the Latin term *limen*, from which van Gennep derived the word liminal, means threshold). This is the corpse’s apparently empty apartment which he agrees to not turn over, but to share with Shtamm (512). Shtamm becomes acquainted with the corpse only after he has entered the apartment building. This building is described in terms that suggest Shtamm’s passage is from the liveliness of the Moscow streets into a different kind of space. To reach his room, he makes his way down the “dark corridor”⁵⁵ of the similarly “dark and quiet”⁵⁶ apartment building (511). In the doorway of the room Shtamm is “welcomed” by the corpse when the notebook of letters falls by the apartment threshold from a

⁵³ “obmenivat’ chernel’nye kapli na rubli”

⁵⁴ “vpolne zhivy”

⁵⁵ “po temnomu koridoru”

⁵⁶ “temno i tikho”

crack in the door. Babcock-Abrahams notes that tricksters “tend to inhabit crossroads... doorways, and thresholds” (Babcock-Abrahams 1975, 159). The threshold can also be read as representative of a protagonist’s life space, in this case emphasizing the corpse’s in-between habitat. It similarly emphasizes Shtamm’s movement into this space. Beyond the familiarity of Moscow is the trickster’s domain, and beyond this threshold is “darkness, the unknown, and danger” (Campbell 1953, 77).

The spaces that the dead man describes himself as occupying are always at the margins. He dawdles at the edges of the safety city life seems to offer. He walks the city streets at night, and during his last vigil before his suicide watches the city only through a window (24). Through these incidents he accentuates his liminal spaces, distinct from mainstream society. Shtamm echoes this latter scene after finishing the letters by standing at the window and looking over the city.

Although the threshold appears in the outset of “Autobiography,” cracks appear more often, first in the descriptions offered by the corpse about the process of loss of individual identity (Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 524) and then as Shtamm begins to see streets as cracks and notices thin lines in the wallpaper (541). These cracks, showing the metaphorical cracks in Shtamm’s psyche as the corpse overtakes him towards the end of the narrative, also serve as indicators of Turner’s “betwixt-and-between.” And while the corpse of “Autobiography” does not appear as the typical “gentleman of the road” as does the archetypal trickster (Lipovetsky 2011, 30) (who appears in Krzhizhanovsky’s later works), he does travel a so-called “spirit road” (Hyde 1998). His ability to reach out to the living emphasize the unexpected abilities and creativity of the liminal individual who can move “between the living and the dead” (ibid.).

Like the spaces the dead man moves in and between, his experience of light further emphasizes his liminality. Due to his poor eyesight he sees only 45% of all light. His glasses,

rather than providing clarity, fog over at the sight of wounded soldiers and he is able to see nothing but a “muddy smear”⁵⁷ (Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 528). Books, rather than providing intellectual clarity, likewise obscure his vision (516). This chronic dusk the corpse experiences mirrors Shtamm’s own blindness (in the form of his optimism) of the social system he lives in. After a while the corpse’s experience begins to reflect itself in Shtamm’s world as well, as he too comes to live in a room lit only by a “bluish half-light”⁵⁸ (542).

At the first level of the matryoshka narrative the corpse serves as a punisher of cool rationality. In this way he is much like Bulgakov’s trickster Woland. He glorifies the ambivalent and the in-between and works as a disprover of logic, in this case Shtamm’s assumption that he can exchange drops of ink for hard cash, and he uses his own writing to subvert Shtamm’s reason. William J. Hynes notes of the trickster that “the logic of order and convergence, that is, logos-centrism, or logocentrism, is challenged by another path, the random and divergent trail taken by that profane metaplayer” (Hynes 1993a, 216). Like Woland, Krzhizhanovsky’s corpse belongs to that variety of trickster that responds to the strict rationality of a Muscovite – or in Shtamm’s case, a Moscow initiate – with irrational, deadly truths, tricks, or in Hynes’ words, a divergent non-logocentric path, of his own. The “wastefulness” of the trickster is made particularly obvious when one considers the corpse’s lack of a truly “pragmatic motive” for overtaking Shtamm’s psyche (Lipovetsky 2011, 54). His actions are instead the typical actions of a trickster, who is drawn to artistic and self-sufficient acts for the act’s own sake, often at the expense of others (54).

⁵⁷ “mutnoe piatno”

⁵⁸ “sizoe predzorie”

The Second Double – Women

The second layer of the matryoshka of “Autobiography” is composed of women. Through interactions with this group the corpse continues to indicate his liminality and establish the trickster’s characteristic ambivalence. There are also, as with Shtamm, frequent references to sight and blindness. The dead man emphasizes how unseen these members of society are by reference to sight. “Vision,” remarks the corpse, has either “a microscopic or telescopic radius: whatever was too far for the microscope and too close for the telescope simply passed out of sight, and in no way was included in the field of vision”⁵⁹ (Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 522). It is the particular in-between, unseen spaces and their inhabitants that are of concern to the corpse, and it is where he spends much of the narrative. The unseen social stratas are a theme to which Krzhizhanovsky repeatedly returns.

At this level of the matryoshka narrative the corpse easily shifts between open criticism and covert mimicry of society. The trickster’s narrative, notes Anne Doueui, “repeats interpretations and responses to interpretations” (Doueui 1993, 200). Thus the corpse, in addition to associating himself with the unseen of society, also mirrors and exaggerates societal norms by fleeing from individuals of the liminal strata. Typically, these liminars are women. In fact, besides Shtamm the corpse permits himself only limited numbers of male acquaintances (Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 539). Although the Soviet-era trickster is most often male (Lipovetsky 2011, 11), women’s traditional position in society is similarly ambivalent (Balduk 2008, 37) and one that is “approached with paranoia” (Norton 1988, as quoted in Balduk 2008, 24). They are “structural liminars” (Balduk 2008, 37), and consequently, according to Norton, “at once at the center and on the periphery, containing and contained within the structures of the state. They are

⁵⁹ “Videnie imelo libo mikroskopicheskiĭ, libo teleskopicheskiĭ, radius: to zhe, chto bylo slishkom dal’nim dlia mikroskopa i slishkom blizkim dlia teleskopa, poprostu vypadalo iz videniia, nikak i nikem ne vkluchalos’ v pole zreniia”

at once the agents and the objects of structure – as mothers instructing children in social forms, and as a group subject to exceptionally stringent behavioural constraints” (25).

The dead man’s mimicry of society’s lack of interest in women as structural liminars is stressed by his unsuccessful love affair with an unnamed girl. This takes place some years before he writes his letters to Shtamm. The girl’s similarity to the dead man is accentuated by the glasses she wears, which become entangled in his own. Unaccountably ashamed after this event, he flees down the stairs, feeling as though he had “stumbled upon a corpse,”⁶⁰ suggesting he has, in encountering the girl, encountered his own eventual suicide (Krzhozhanovsky 2001b, 514).

In the episode that in the matryoshka scheme is parallel to the corpse’s love affair, the corpse visits a graveyard. This is a relatively liminal zone itself, housing the dead but frequented by the living. There he briefly encounters a young girl and her mother and identifies the former as being “life”⁶¹ itself (534). He thereby credits peripheral, liminal figures, especially women, as those ultimately most essential. As author Adam Thirlwell notes of Krzhozhanovsky’s writing more generally, “everything that seemed marginal is in fact revealed as central – the crack, the seam, the dream, the reflection, the shadow” (Thirlwell 2013, xiv).

The corpse catches the child’s attention and notes the size of her pupils, much in the same way that he comments on the glasses worn by his short-term lover. Upon also catching the eye of the child’s mother, the corpse flees. On his way out of the graveyard he knocks down an old woman (534). Having so drawn the attention to the liminality of the entire group (elderly, adult, and child) and their similarity to himself as a peripheral member of society, he then underscores his “changing of sides” – from a liminar to a mimicker or pseudo-member of society – by joining in the gatekeeper’s laughter at the old woman’s anger (534). In this scene, in trickster fashion he

⁶⁰ “kak esli by ia v temnote natknulsia na trup”

⁶¹ “Zhizn”

has both breached and “reaffirm[ed]” the belief system (Hynes 1993a, 207). He is simultaneously “*undermin[ing] and embody[ing] the...symbolic order*” (Lipovetsky 2011, 42, italics in the original).

The Third Double – Krzhizhanovsky

The third of the corpse’s doubles, and the centre of the matryoshka, is Krzhizhanovsky himself, aligned with the question of identity. Krzhizhanovsky implies that he is the corpse by referencing the number of letters in his own first name. “I looked at my name on the envelope,” writes the dead man, “especially carefully. Yes, nine letters, and they name me.”⁶² (Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 514). The appearance of “author-creator” that is designed to be “deliberately indistinguishable” from the actual author is a typical feature of intertextual play,⁶³ and frequently appears in postmodern writing (Lipovetsky 1999, 18). The appearance of this technique suggests that the trick is ultimately played on the reader. It is not only Shtamm, Krzhizhanovsky tells us, that is overtaken by a corpse’s psychology. Jacob Emery has commented on this theme, remarking that “Krzhizhanovsky conceives of his own...work...[as] waiting in manuscript to be let out and lodged in the darkness of someone else’s head, his unknown future reader” (Emery & Spektor 2017).

The limitation of words to explain human identity appears alongside the revelation that the corpse is a deliberate image of the author. Throughout his narrative the corpse draws attention to the “incompleteness” of reality and the limitation of one’s perception of self that is established through language. Anne Doueuhi remarks that “the joke is on us if we do not realize that the trickster gives us an insight into the way language is used to construct an ultimately incomplete kind of reality” (Doueuhi 1993, 200). Society’s attempts to provide the corpse (and

⁶² “osobenno vniatel’no osmotrel ia svoe imia: na konverte. Da, deviat’ bukvy: i zovut.”

⁶³ For a discussion of cultural play applicable to intertextuality, see Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens*.

perhaps Krzhizhanovsky as well) with a concrete identity in the form of identity cards and the written word makes the dead man skeptical. He doubts their ability to pin down the fluidity of his own identity, this fluidity being another component of the trickster (Lipovetsky 2011, 29). “The more often I was certified,” the corpse tells Shtamm, “the more unreliable I became to myself...the more often the unfolding Remington lines assured me with a number, flourishes, that I was thus and such, the more suspicious I became of my “feasibility”...the caverns in my “I” began to expand again”⁶⁴ (Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 524).

The blurred lines – between life and death, Krzhizhanovsky and the corpse, and the corpse’s psyche and the reader’s – are reinforced by immediate reference to the war. It is not a war between classes or cultural groups but “a mutiny of the living against the dead”⁶⁵ (536) that further blurs the line and widens the crack between enemies and friends, ““those who’ and ‘those for whom’”⁶⁶ (526). Alexander Spektor has remarked that “I don’t believe it is an accident that...the philosophical predicament of the narrator is written against the background of World War I, where the experience of treating human life as a statistic, as pure matter, is accompanied by a complete loss of meaning, the transformation of ‘I’ into nothing” (Emery & Spektor 2017).

The corpse is drawn to the wounded and dying soldiers, who die far away “in order to not alarm us”⁶⁷ (527) just as he is drawn to all those who remain unseen by mainstream society. He is captivated by the soldiers’ numerical representations in the booklets that provide the list of names of those killed or missing in action, and by their physical appearance when the wounded and dying arrive in Moscow. The corpse, however, then mirrors society’s response as he “hardly

⁶⁴ “ia zhdal etogo: chem chashche menia udostoveriali, tem nedostovernee stanoveilsia ia samomu sebe...chem chashche raz”ezzhaiushchisia remingtonovy strochki uveriali menia No.-om, roscherkami podpito, tem podozretel’nee stanovilsia ia k svoei “deistvitel’nosti,” tem ostree chuvstvoval v sebe i takogo I etakogo...kaverny v ‘ia’ opiat’ stali shirit’sia.”

⁶⁵ “i nachalas’ edinstvennaia v letopisiakj planet bor’ba, tochnee, miatezh zhivykh protiv pervykh”

⁶⁶ “tekh, kotorye’ ot ‘tekh, kotorykh”

⁶⁷ “chtoby ne trevozhit’ nas”

see”⁶⁸ these men, and for the rest of the night after he observes them is tormented instead by the “persistent eye sockets”⁶⁹ of an imaginary 0.6 of a person (528).

It is a figment like this 0.6 of a person, the corpse informs Shtamm at the end of his letters, that he himself aspires to be in Shtamm’s world.

I’m counting more on the archipresidual law of the association of ideas and images. Even now everything, from the blue flat spots on the wallpaper to the last letter on these last letters to you have entered your brain. I am already quite entangled in your so-called “associative strings”; I have already managed to get into your “I.” Now you have your own figment. [...] I warn you: [...] attempts to untangle associative threads and remove the alien, the image that has entered into them only more firmly fixes it in your consciousness. Oh, I have long dreamed, after all the unsuccessful experiments with my “I”, to try to settle into at least someone else's. If you are at all alive, I have already succeeded. See you later.⁷⁰ (540-541)

The corpse has drawn Shtamm (or Krzhizhanovsky the reader) into a liminal zone, beyond the threshold and amidst the cracks in reality. Babcock-Abrahams notes that “in one way or another they [tricksters] are usually situated between the social cosmos and the other world or chaos” (Babcock-Abrahams 1975, 159). In this liminal space the corpse has overtaken Shtamm’s psyche. Shtamm, incidentally, remains unaware of this, as in the end “he imagines”⁷¹ that he has returned to his ordinary self (Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 542). The reader, having learned the corpse

⁶⁸ “ia pochti nichego ne videl”

⁶⁹ Neotstupnoiu pust’iu glaznits”

⁷⁰ “Gorazdo bol’she ia rasschityvaiu na arkhiprozaichneīshii zakon assotsiatsii ideī I obrazov. Uzhe dazhe seīchas vse, ot sinikh ploskikj piaten na oboiakh do posledneī bukvy na ētikh vot lestakh k Vam v mozg. Ia uzhe dostatochno tsepko vputan v Vashi t.n. ‘assotsiativnye niti’; uzhe uspel vsochit’sia k Vam v ‘ia’. Teper’ I u Vas est’ svoī premysl [...] preduprezhdaiu: [...] popytki rasputat’ assotsiativnye niti i iz”dat’ chuzherodnyī, vvivshīsia v nikh obraz tol’ko vernee zakrepliaet ego v soznanii. O, mne isdavna mechtalos’ posle vsekh neudachnykh opytov so svoim ‘ia’ poprobovat’ vselit’sia khotia by v chuzhoe. Esli By skol’ko-nibud’ zhivy, mne ēto uzhe udalos’. Do skorogo.”

⁷¹ “emu mnilos””

is also a double of Krzhizhanovsky, is in a sense likewise invaded, whether acknowledged or not. The corpse/Krzhizhanovsky is thus established as metafictional trickster, one who critiques the logic and rationality of his “victims” by drawing them into disorienting liminal space. There, along similar lines as Woland’s physical, and often fatal, punishments, he metes out judgement that results in psychological death as one psyche overtakes another. As a writer who is like the corpse, Shtamm is perhaps judged especially harshly for his dependence on logic instead of the fantastic, a theme further explored in *Munchausen*.

Violations of the Sacred: “Fantom” [The Phantom] (1926)

Krzhizhanovsky does not appear to have attempted to have “The Phantom” published during his lifetime. Although he included it in an unpublished collection of his own, *Chem liudi mertvy* [The People are Dead], it seems he did not even read it at literary gatherings (Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 668). It has also thus far not been published in the English collections of his work, although it appears in Muireann Maguire’s translation of a series of Russian Gothic stories, *Red Spectres: Russian Gothic Tales from the Twentieth Century* (2012). Perhaps as a consequence of these setbacks, it has received less critical attention than other works. Toporov situated it within his discussion of city space and the perception of reality (Toporov 1995, 561), while Irina Belobrovtsseva analyzed how Krzhizhanovsky establishes syntactic parallelism between the corpse and his “father” Dvuliud-Sklifskiĭ (Belobrovtsseva 2005). Vitaliĭ Goroshnikov discussed it in relation to what he proposes is Krzhizhanovsky’s existentialist philosophy (Goroshnikov 2005). One reviewer referred to it simply as “a super strange tale of fetal vigilance” (Báez 2013).

“The Phantom” relates how a medical student, Dvuliud-Sklifskiĭ, and his lab assistant Nikita accidentally bring the embalmed corpse of an infant to life during a medical birthing

exam. The child, Fifka – so named “who knows by whom”⁷² (Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 546) – is abandoned by his inadvertent maker to wander the streets of Moscow. He pursues Dvuliud-Sklifskiī throughout his life, and it is suggested that Fifka eventually murders him.

Dvuliud-Sklifskiī’s name is linguistically based upon Ukrainian, Polish, and Russian. “Dvuliud” means literally “Two-person,”⁷³ while “Sklifskiī” furthers this sense of duality by evoking both Polish (-vskiī as a typical Polish name ending) and the Russian word “skleivat’,” which carries the meaning “to glue together.” It is apparent that, as in the case of the letter-writing corpse and his doubles in “Autobiography of a Corpse,” Dvuliud-Sklifskiī and Fifka are in fact opposing doubles. One is living and the rationalist, while the other exists between life and death and is an embodiment of the unexplainable. It is worth noting that Fifka, the other half of Dvuliud-Sklifskiī, appears at the crucial moment Dvuliud-Sklifskiī passes his exams and becomes a doctor and thereby fully associated with the rational. Fifka can be read as Dvuliud-Sklifskiī’s attempt to discard the irrational. In a semi-Freudian sense, he is the physical realization of this discarded component of Dvuliud-Sklifskiī’s personhood. His existence is a prediction of post-Soviet literature, wherein “the repressed returns as the uncanny in a repetitive, compulsive way” (Etkind 2009, 644).

As is the case in “Autobiography,” there is a similar matryoshka layering to the narrative structure. The order in which characters appear is the unnamed narrator, Dvuliud-Sklifskiī, and thirdly Fifka, the embalmed child. Like “Autobiography,” it is suggested that it is the uncanny that triumphs in the end. In this case, this occurs through Fifka’s apparent murder of Dvuliud-Sklifskiī.

⁷² “cvoë nevest’ kem predumannoë imia”

⁷³ Maguire translates the first half of Dvuliud-Sklifskiī’s name as “Twoman.” She suggests that “Sklifskiī” may refer to N.V. Sklifosovsky (1836-1904), a renowned Russian physician (Maguire 2012, 224).

Of the three short stories I discuss in this chapter, the trickster's relation to the sacred, which Lipovetsky argues is the most important distinguishing characteristic of the trickster (Lipovetsky 2011, 33), comes through in its most obvious form in "The Phantom." This motif appears largely in the form of violations. The trickster is, Hyde remarks, the character who "threatens to take the myth apart. He is an 'eternal state of mind' that is suspicious of all eternal, dragging them from their heavenly preserves to see how they fare down here in this time-haunted world" (Hyde 1998). Fifka's trickster violations include his impure birth via the birthing simulator, the "phantom" of the story's title – although the narrator later uses this title to refer to Fifka as well (Maguire 2012, 223-224) – and close association with childbirth and cadavers (Makarius 1993). These are contrasted with frequent biblical allusions and Fifka's peculiar redemptive possibilities. Fifka's existence is a focused attack upon Dvuliud-Sklifskiĭ's quasi-religious dependence on logic, order, and perception of reality as something that can be concretely and collectively seen, experienced, and explained.

Fifka's relation to the sacred is indicated first by his birth brought about by Dvuliud-Sklifskiĭ and his assistant Nikita. It is an inverted virgin birth: the biblical, Christological parallel is established by reference to Fifka's head being "dressed in a crown of suffering"⁷⁴ and the "crucified legs"⁷⁵ of the phantom (that is, his "mother" the birthing simulator) (546; 548). Even Fifka's dreams are "without form and void"⁷⁶ (561).

Fifka's relation to taboo-breaking is established by his aforementioned inverted virgin birth, as well as by the more obvious fact that he is a grisly, decomposing corpse from whose mouth and nose drip alcohol and embalming fluid (546). These components of both an "impure" birth and death are both clear markers of taboo subjects (Makarius 1993). According to

⁷⁴ "odeli golovu nerozhdennogo v stradal'cheskiĭ venets"

⁷⁵ "raspialiv nogi"

⁷⁶ "dazhe sny moi stali bezvidny i pusty"

Makarius, the trickster's relation to the sacred draws on the fact that he himself is the abject and taboo-breaker. Fifka's inverted virgin birth seems at first to pollute rather than sanctify him. He must therefore "remain marginal and peripheral, forever betwixt and between" (Babcock-Abrahams 1993, 148). His coupled monstrosity and Christological association purvey a "sense of ambivalence...between the monstrous and the divine" (Beal 2002, 6).

Fifka confirms his trickster tendencies by inhabiting highly liminal spaces. When Dvuliud-Sklifskiĭ flees, Fifka wanders Moscow, visible only to dogs and children. The latter cry at his appearance, while the former chase him to the outskirts of the city. He is driven to take refuge in vacant lots and cemeteries, appearing at street crossings only at night (557). The liminality of all of these spaces is obvious, and in keeping with trickster imagery serve to emphasize and "dramatize the contradictory interrelation between heterogeneous systems" (Achilles and Bergmann 2014, 6) that Dvuliud-Sklifskiĭ refuses to accept. He also serves as a boundary-crosser and mediator between the incompatible opposites of life and death, and being and non-being. As in Shtamm's case, Dvuliud-Sklifskiĭ meets his undead double only after he has crossed over a physical threshold (Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 545) into the birthing exam lab (a scene that Fifka later mirrors when he finds Dvuliud-Sklifskiĭ). This emphasizes his movement from the rational world to the irrational, marginal one that is the trickster's domain.

Fifka quickly comes to realize that adults do not notice either liminal spaces or their inhabitants. Instead they "notice only those who need them, and only to the extent they have need of them"⁷⁷ (Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 557), and Fifka is not among those needed. Having discovered this, he wanders about the city and eventually crosses paths with Nikita. This meeting takes place, markedly, in the trickster's domain of twilight. Nikita accepts, houses, and feeds

⁷⁷ "liudi zamechaiut lish' tek, kto im nuzhen, i lish' nastol'ko, nastol'ko on im nuzhen"

Fifka, and takes him to see his “mother” the birthing simulator.⁷⁸ In a somewhat matricidal fashion, Fifka later uses her as firewood. Nikita is notably also the only person who does not recoil from touching Fifka, and in fact takes on an almost maternal role, according to Fifka’s account. After Nikita’s death by old age and hunger during wartime, Fifka decides to search out Dvuliud-Sklifskiĭ.

Fifka’s and Dvuliud-Sklifskiĭ’s meeting likewise takes place at dusk. Dvuliud-Sklifskiĭ, unwell from years of alcoholism and thereby perhaps mirroring Fifka’s embalmed state (Fifka’s gradual decay is described by Fifka himself, and in gruesome detail), is browsing the books on his shelves. These are, significantly, the works of Duhamel, Feuerbach, Vaihinger’s *Philosophie des Als-Ob*, and Richet’s *Metapsichologie*, each of which presents possible life philosophies and differing ways of understanding Fifka’s appearance, and indeed of reading “The Phantom” itself.

While Nikita accepts Fifka unquestioningly, Dvuliud-Sklifskiĭ stubbornly appeals to science and reason. When Fifka arrives at his door he reacts coolly, echoing their first meeting in the birthing examination room and responding “as though it were a laboratory experience”⁷⁹ (553). He attempts to bring metaphorical light to the situation by holding up a lighted match over the threshold to Fifka’s face (553). The latter is horrifying enough to give merit to Maguire’s analysis of Fifka as an expression of the Gothic-horror monster trope. Fifka himself is not unaware of the element of terror he brings: “yes, it [light] protects – from wolves and ghosts. But I cannot be driven away with matches. Even the sun cannot dispel me from you, we who call ourselves ‘people’”⁸⁰ (553). Fifka’s arrival and comment to Dvuliud-Sklifskiĭ highlight the

⁷⁸ The “women” in “The Phantom” are, like those in “Autobiography,” associated with the liminal trickster. In “The Phantom” they are even more so “betwixt-and-between” reality and fantasy. Both Fifka’s “mother” and love interest are mannequins, *representations* of women only.

⁷⁹ “kak esli by èto byl laboratornyĭ opyt”

⁸⁰ “da, èto pomogaet: ot volkov i prevideniĭ. No menia chirkom i spichkami ne prognat’: ved’ dazhe solntse bessil’no rasseiat’ vas, nazyvaiushchikh sebia liud’mi”

“paradox of the monstrous:” Fifka is “the other within” Dvuliud-Sklifskiī, the chaotic or unexplainable other that the latter has attempted to remove from himself (Beal 2002, 5).

Dvuliud-Sklifskiī, however, still refuses to acknowledge the reality of and his connection to this visitor. Fifka’s existence does not fit within the realm of his logical experience. Over the threshold Dvuliud-Sklifskiī informs him that “there is no need to assign a match to what logic can do...you are a fact, but, so to speak, a fact without facts. In short: a hallucination. And I, I would not be a doctor if...”⁸¹ (553-554). Fifka, for his part, insists that Dvuliud-Sklifskiī has created an “impenetrably imaginary”⁸² world, which Fifka, using the trickster’s mirroring technique, argues is a mathematical equation in the same way that Dvuliud-Sklifskiī attempts to explain life as a whole (554). Overwhelmed by meeting the reality of his own ideas applied to himself, Dvuliud-Sklifskiī still appeals to reason, pleading with Fifka to “stop riddling, give me a moment to think”⁸³ (554).

Fifka does not deny that he may be in fact fictional. He does, however, deny the division of fact and fiction:

Silly latch consciousness. It is fiction that is the foundation of everything: all actions, the very possibility of a human action, what together is called “reality.” And since nothing can be maintained upon fiction, there is nothing: neither God, nor the worm, neither I, nor you, nor we. Because everything is determined by the other, then only the other exists, and not the thing itself.⁸⁴ (555)

⁸¹ “nezachem poruchat’ spichke to, chto dolzhna sdelat’ logika...ty – fakt, no, tak skazat’, besfaktnyī fakt. Koroche: galliutsinatsia. I ia, ia ne byl by vrachom, esli b...”

⁸² “neprobudno mnimy”

⁸³ “ne skorogovor’, dai dodumat”

⁸⁴ “glupeīshīī zashēlk soznaniia. Fiktsia, na kotorōi derzhitsia vsē: vse postupki, samaia vosmozhnost’ chelovech’ikh deīstveī, slagaiushchiasia v tak nazyvaemuiu “deīstvitel’nost’.” I tak kak na fiktsii derzhat’sia nichego ne mozhet, to nichego i net: ni Boga, ni chervia, ni ia, ni ty, ni my. Poskol’ku vsē opredeliaemo drugim, to i sushchestvuet lish’ drugoe, a ne samoe.”

Fifka threatens the boundaries of Dvuliud-Sklifskii's "I," not only with his philosophy but with his very existence. He argues, in fact, for "a premise of phantomism"⁸⁵ (555), an idea which Krzhizhanovsky explores further in *The Return of Munchausen*. He insists upon a world wherein reality is full of cracks and seams and the unexplainable, where life and death are nebulous and refutable. Non-being colliding with being "threatens man's ontic self-affirmation" (Tillich 1973, 49). Babcock-Abrahams has noted that it is the trickster who "temporally and spatially...tends to confound the distinction between illusion and reality, if not deny it altogether. In fact, he casts doubt on all preconceived and expected systems of distinction between behaviors and the representation thereof" (Babcock-Abrahams 1975, 155).

Fifka as a trickster serves as a mediator between life and death, and religious sacrality and abjection. Like the corpse in "Autobiography," he offers a strong critique of reason as a reliable source of information about the world as it is or is not. He proposes instead a way of being not reliant upon reason as the only explanation of experience. Krzhizhanovsky's fiction is often what Burovtseva terms "on one hand, a synthesis of image and concept, and on the other, a breakthrough through everyday life – into being"⁸⁶ (Burovtseva 1998). The narrative is the beginnings of Krzhizhanovsky's exploration of fantasy as an antidote for excessive logic, an idea more fully articulated in *The Return of Munchausen*.

Leiderman writes that "the position of a Krzhizhanovskian character is imbued with a tragic dignity. He does not turn away from the chaos of existence and does not intend to console himself with all manner of deceptive illusions" (Leiderman 2012, 534). Fifka draws attention to and refuses to accept Dvuliud-Sklifskii's chronic dependence on these illusions, which include

⁸⁵ "predoposylki k fantomizmu"

⁸⁶ "odnoī storony – sintez obraza i poniatiia, s drugoī – proryv cherez byt – v bytie"

alcoholism, logic, and even his vague opinions about romantic love.⁸⁷ Meanwhile Dvuliud-Sklifskiī, belying his name, refuses to accept Fifka's (who is after all only an embodied fraction of Dvuliud-Sklifskiī's psyche) view of the world as truth. Dvuliud-Sklifskiī's refusal to acknowledge the incompleteness of knowable reality – the cracks and seams in his own perception of it – results ultimately in his death. Fifka functions as a possible redemptive figure who forces the truth of reality upon Dvuliud-Sklifskiī, perhaps in part explaining the Christological imagery that is attached to him. Makarius notes that

because he takes upon himself the gravest of social faults-breaking the rules upon which the social order depends-the trickster incarnates embryonically the expiatory being who will take upon himself the sins of humanity and set humans free, by virtue of the familiar process of redemption. (Makarius 1993, 83)

Similarly, Babcock-Abrahams notes that the trickster's "beneficence, though central, results from the breaking of and the violating of taboos" (Babcock-Abrahams 1975, 148). In Krzhizhanovsky's narrative, this violation materializes as a reanimated corpse with whom Krzhizhanovsky connects biblical allusions to emphasize redemptive possibilities. Fifka's beneficence appears as a kind of inverted voice of reason arguing against Dvuliud-Sklifskiī's narrow view of the world as wholly explainable. Fifka offers Dvuliud-Sklifskiī a chance to reunite and accept the two halves of his being that are currently embodied as Fifka the irrational and Dvuliud-Sklifskiī the scientific. Dvuliud-Sklifskiī, however, is not willing to even consider that science – or any philosophical system – cannot explain all phenomena. Fifka despises Dvuliud-Sklifskiī for his inability to imagine a world without black and white systems (e.g., life versus death, hallucination versus reality), while he respects (to some extent) Nikita, who accepts

⁸⁷ The artificiality of Dvuliud-Sklifskiī's world is accentuated by frequent references in the text to chemical compounds, alcohol, and poison. Fifka also mocks Dvuliud-Sklifskiī's conception of love by his own "relationship" with a mannequin.

and accommodates Fifka's existence unquestioningly. Maguire notes that Fifka compares Baron Munchausen's exploits and Christ's (Maguire 2012, 224). Both figures have traditionally been associated with a preference for avoiding dichotomous thinking, and both have their own controversies surrounding their existence.

As in "Autobiography" there are echoes of themes Bulgakov explores in *Master i Margarita* [Master and Margarita]. An individual's ability to accept the unfamiliar, illogical, and unexplainable is deemed a strength and merits rewarding, and the demonic figure (Woland) functions in a semi-redemptive capacity. Krzhizhanovsky's Fifka as a trickster similarly operates within a creative-redemptive role. It is, as Campbell notes, in the end "not society that is to guide and save the creative hero, but precisely the reverse" (Campbell 1953, 391).

Liminality and "Seams" [Shvy] (1927-28)

"Seams," like "Autobiography of a Corpse" and "The Phantom," was not among the handful of stories published during Krzhizhanovsky's lifetime. Critical literature on it is not exceptionally more extensive than that on "The Phantom" although theoretical approaches have been relatively varied. Stuntz argues that Krzhizhanovsky is exploring Leibnizian philosophy (Stuntz 2016, 35), while Rosenflanz posits that the story, among others by Krzhizhanovsky, portrays the author's interest in the fourth dimension (Rosenflanz 2012, 546). Irina Lunina mentions it in connection with her anthropocentric approach (Lunina 2009).

The plotline of "Seams" is a simple one: a down-and-out, out-of-work, starving author-philosopher wanders the streets of Moscow. He draws attention to and critiques the divide between "plus-Moscow" – where the successful and accepted members of society live, to whose culture he responds with an emphatic "no" (Krzhizhanovsky 2001a, 401) – and "minus-Moscow" – where all those who do not fit into the new Soviet society live unseen. He eventually makes his way to a graveyard at the outskirts of Moscow. There, like Fifka and the corpse of

“Autobiography of a Corpse,” the unnamed narrator is at the end of the tale left straddling the apparently irreconcilable oppositions of life and death. And like those two protagonists, the narrator has his own doubles in the form of his fictional acquaintances Purvapakshin (Toporov 1995, 169) and Dr. Schrott. These doubles, appearing throughout in Krzhizhanovsky’s oeuvre, are not uncommon inhabitants of the realm of the trickster. Babcock-Abrahams has noted that tricksters frequently have “an ability to disperse and disguise themselves and a tendency to be multiform and ambiguous, single or multiple” (Babcock-Abrahams 1975, 159). While a main component of the three narratives discussed in this chapter possess (or, more often, are possessed by) this multiplicity, unlike Dvuliud-Sklifskiĭ and Shtamm this unnamed narrator accepts his doubles. In this narrative, all four traits of the trickster are present to varying degrees. The unnamed narrator’s liminality is a constant feature, and his ambivalent role and relation to the sacred is established as well, although this is to a lesser extent.

Turner’s concept of liminality was first applied to the trickster by Babcock-Abrahams (Lipovetsky 2011, 30; Babcock-Abrahams 1975, 158). Lipovetsky has since argued that it is a key characteristic of the trickster figure. It is certainly a strong component of “Seams,” the narrator of which the reader meets walking a Moscow street (Krzhizhanovsky 2001a, 397). Indeed the entire narrative, with the exception of the narrator’s (presumably final) arrival in a graveyard outside Moscow, takes place on the city roadways. The marginality attached to the trickster, notes Lipovetsky, “helps explain why the trickster so typically appears as a gentleman of the road” (Lipovetsky 2011, 30).

Liminality is a “period and area of ambiguity, a sort of social limbo” (Turner 1974, 57). The liminal character inhabiting this space is, therefore, one who is solitary, “the man fighting alone against a universe of hostile, spiritual powers” (Ricketts 1966, 336). The narrator of “Seams,” is an educated, philosophical, and out-of-work author, and introduces himself as one

step beyond even this. Overlooked by “plus-Moscow,” his existence depends solely upon himself: “I’ve been switched off from all eyes; from all memories; soon even the window panes and puddles will stop reflecting me...I do not exist – so much so that no one has ever said or will say of about me: he doesn’t exist”⁸⁸ (Krzhizhanovsky 2001a, 97). He is fascinated by loneliness, not only his own but also that of others, whom he follows in order to possess a “human solitude in the palm of [his] hand”⁸⁹ (411).

Liminal figures are “dark, invisible, like a planet in eclipse...they are stripped of names and clothing” (Turner 1974, 58). The narrator of “Seams” is forgotten by society to the extent that he questions his very existence: “I often hear, walking by the windows and spur stones, the sound of those little devils’ thin and tedious whistling: go away, go away. But I can’t go away – how can I go away, when I don’t exist?”⁹⁰ (Krzhizhanovsky 2001a, 397). Note, too, that the children whistle at Krzhizhanovsky’s narrator, as one would to an animal. Liminal figures are often “indistinguishable from animals” (Turner 1974, 58). It is similarly notable that the girl he briefly befriends and expresses a romantic affection for re-sews his coat buttons, since by reattaching his clothing she affirms his personhood.

These threshold spaces are, for the narrator, similar to those found in “Autobiography of a Corpse” and “The Phantom.” He lives in the “seams” in the Moscow streets and in society, those spaces which are “not ‘here’ nor ‘there’ but in a between”^{91 92} (Krzhizhanovsky 2001a, 398). At night he sleeps on a bench beside the tram tracks, further symbolizing the threshold-like space of his abode. The trams bring their riders to and from the structures of work and home,

⁸⁸ “vykliuchen iz vsekh glaz; iz vsekh glaz; iz vsekh pamiateī; skoro dazhe stekla i luzhi perestanut otrazhat’ menia...menia net – nastol’ko, chto nikto dazhe ne skazal i ne skazhet obo mne: net.”

⁸⁹ “chelovecheskoe odinochestvo bylo v [ego] rukakh.”

⁹⁰ “Chasto slyshu, shagaia vdol’ vitrin i tumb, kak smeshnye vspuchenie chertiki mne vsled – tokim i nudnym piskom: uīdi-uīdi. No i uīti ne dano, potomu chto kak uīti tomu, kogo net.”

⁹¹ “Da, vse ottego, chto ia mezh ‘zdes’ i ‘tam’, v kakom-to mezh”

⁹² It is interesting to note the similarity between this phrase and Turner’s now-famous one, “betwixt-and-between.”

through the narrator's "home" that is the permanent "period of margin or "liminality" [that is] an interstructural situation" (Turner 1964, 46).

Likewise Moscow "is full of walking people"⁹³ (Krzhizhanovsky 2001a, 413). Like the tram-riders, they are in liminal spaces only on their way *to* a somewhere. Consequently, these people only pass through the liminal space that the narrator inhabits full-time. Like Krzhizhanovsky himself, he is cut off by endless "closed-off thresholds"⁹⁴ (407). He is, as Ricketts remarks of all tricksters, permanently "a restless wanderer upon the face of the earth" (Ricketts 1966, 327). Turner terms this ambiguous figure, never settled in a structured social system, a lonely "passenger" in life (Turner 1966, 94). This term applies especially well to Krzhizhanovsky's own experience as a marginalized, unpublished (and, when published, not necessarily credited) author in the Soviet Union.

The few people that Krzhizhanovsky's narrator encounters in more intimate meetings during his wanderings about Moscow are always - temporarily - inhabiting similarly liminal spaces. "Sometime before dawn, pacing up and down the curve of an alley"⁹⁵ - note the liminal space, the directionless motion, as well as the liminality of a neither-day-nor-night time - he meets a man who is, ludicrously, expressing relief to God at the nonexistence of God (Krzhizhanovsky 2001a, 409). Likewise the girl who stops to speak to him, holding a "worn satchel with widening seams"⁹⁶ (thus demonstrating her own affiliation with the marginal) is met in a streetside haze created by the members of "plus-Moscow," a group of construction workers pouring asphalt (Krzhizhanovsky 2001a, 412).

The liminality of the narrator's space is accentuated by his ongoing experience of death while still living. He remarks of the residents of a graveyard that "in fact we are the same, they

⁹³ "ved' vsia Moskva – iz idushchikh liudei"

⁹⁴ "otchernutyi porogami"

⁹⁵ "kak-to pered rassvetom, shagaia vzad i vpered po privomy vygiby pereulka"

⁹⁶ "ee tugim okruglym loktem istertyi, v raspolzshikhsia shvakj portfel"

and I”⁹⁷ (Krzhizhanovsky 2001a, 397). While throughout the narrative the narrator is portrayed as dying from starvation, near the outset of the tale imagining his encroaching death in gruesome detail (398), the motif of death appears with particular distinctness in the final chapter. The narrator receives a visit from his fictional acquaintance Dr Schrott – a factual doctor who touted extensive fasting as a cure for various ailments⁹⁸ (Rosenflanz 2005, 120) – who tells him that “it’s not a Muslim graveyard you need”⁹⁹ (Krzhizhanovsky 2001a, 425). References to common symbols of death are numerous. The word ‘black’ appears eight times, and there is a “silence, like the silence in this Tatar graveyard”¹⁰⁰ (426). The narrator remembers a chess pawn¹⁰¹ “in mortal danger”¹⁰² who is eventually captured, at which point “the struggle...was over”¹⁰³ (426). Here, also, the reference the narrator makes to himself as a chess pawn accentuates the expendability of his person according to mainstream society, and according to the unnamed girl who, he discovers, already has a lover and is therefore uninterested in him romantically. Even the number of the final chapter is thirteen. Tellingly, the graveyard that the narrator is dying in is outside the city and not even a Russian one, cementing with finality his place as a permanently liminal figure.

Mark Altshuller notes that Erofeev’s protagonist’s journey from Moscow to Petushki is “the soul’s symbolic journey from darkness to light” (Altshuller 1982, 83, as quoted in Lipovetsky 1999, 67). While Altshuller argues that Erofeev’s liminal figure does fulfill his trickster role of “always winning” (Ricketts 1966, 12), and though both die in liminal spaces, Venichka in “an unidentified front hallway” (Erofeev 1994, 192), Krzhizhanovsky’s narrator

⁹⁷ “v sushchnosti, my odinakovye – i oni i ia.”

⁹⁸ In German ‘schrott’ means rubbish, scrap metal, or trash. The doctor’s existence (such as it is) is thus perhaps also a reflection on how the narrator is viewed by society, or the subconscious value he places upon his fictional doctor.

⁹⁹ “Vam by nado, sovstvenno, ne na musul’anskoe”

¹⁰⁰ “molchanie, kak zdes’, na tatarskom”

¹⁰¹ The motif of chess is a frequent one in Krzhizhanovsky’s prose.

¹⁰² “pod smert”

¹⁰³ “борьба ...кончена”

does not appear to experience any such spiritual epiphany, remaining a forgotten and marginalized figure to the very end. Much like Venichka, at the end of the narrative the unnamed narrator is left in a yet another liminal space, existing indistinctly between life and death. It is only the trickster that can do this, “‘hang[ing] suspended’ between life and death” (Lipovetsky 2011, 160).

Interestingly, Krzhizhanovsky’s narrator, like Erofeev’s, echoes sentiments from Stalinist rhetoric. In a speech given in the Caucasus in 1905, Stalin, calling into question not so much the political affiliation but the *personhood* of his opponents, asked “who [] these “persons” [are]” (Stalin 1905). Such a remark both questions the existence and the humanity of perceived opponents, and Krzhizhanovsky’s narrator of “Seams” offers a narrative on life and society from the perspective of one of these undesirable “nonpersons.” “I don’t exist,” says the unnamed narrator of “Seams” (Krzhizhanovsky 2001a, 397). The Soviet system created an abundance of liminal figures, Krzhizhanovsky and his narrator as nonconformist authors among them. “Seams” thus can be read as a semi-autobiographical perspective on the experiences of a societal outcast in the Soviet Union.

Although he is its victim, Krzhizhanovsky’s narrator remains ambiguous, simultaneously both a critic of the harsh world in which he lives and a passive recipient of his fate. “I cannot make it so that life, stepping over me, is different or nonexistent, and yet - I object”¹⁰⁴ (Krzhizhanovsky 2001a, 402). Yet shortly thereafter, in keeping with the trickster’s task of ambivalence and marrying of opposites, with apparent resignation, he declares, “let me drop into the street seam, let me live and die in a minusy, excluded, and rejected world. I accept it, and I will walk along the winding lines of all its seams, wherever they may lead”¹⁰⁵ (408).

¹⁰⁴ “Ja ne mogu sdelat’ tak, chtoby zhizn’, stupaiushchaia po mne, bylo inoī ili sovsem ne byla, i vse-taki – ia vozrazhaiu”

¹⁰⁵ “Pust’ menia obronilo vnutr’ ulichnogo shva, pust’ mne predetsia zhit’ I umirat’ v menisovom, vykliuchennom i otvertzhennom mirke, ia prinimaiu ego: i ia proīdu po izvivam vsekh ego shvov, kuda by oni ne preveli”

But in this inverted world, as author Adam Thirlwell notes, “everything that seemed marginal is in fact revealed as central” (Thirlwell 2013, xiv). Shadows, explains Krzhizhanovsky’s narrator, cast things (407). Moreover, he continues, in his most vigorous indictment of society, “if I receive from that other world nothing other than surfaces, shadows, lies, and covers, then I can suspect that under all their covers are lies, and that all their things are the shadows of my shadows”¹⁰⁶ (407-408). A trickster’s task, notes researcher Helena Bassil-Morozow, is to both mirror (here, through the narrator’s insistence that his shadows are society’s reality) and “always to defy...the system” (Bassil-Morozow 2017, 88).

The self-appointed duty of Krzhizhanovsky’s author-narrator as a defier of the system may be read as partially autobiographical in nature, an inquiry into the place of the creative individual in the new Soviet society that shunned much creative expression and artistic thought. Like Krzhizhanovsky himself, his narrator is an outcast from the society in which he lives, a creative individual with no space to express said creativity. The Soviet societal system was one which created an abundance of liminal figures, or “border subjects” (Lipovetsky 1999, 237), rejected authors like Krzhizhanovsky and Erofeev among them. These authors spent much of their lives as transient, marginalized individuals, and the narrator of “Seams” experiences a more extreme form of Krzhizhanovsky’s own experience as a societal outcast. Although he was an active theatre critic and lecturer, Krzhizhanovsky’s interest in writing fiction went entirely unappreciated during his life. His share of the world, like the narrator of “Seams,” was a metaphorical ten-kopeck coin in place of an active position in non-liminal, mainstream society (Krzhizhanovsky 2001a, 399). Many of Krzhizhanovsky’s narrators can be read as doubles of the author himself: as Nataliia Burovtseva notes in her PhD dissertation, “a hero of

¹⁰⁶ “‘ia ustraivaius’, kak umeiu, sredi svoikh minusov i tenei; otcherknutyi porogami, precherkivaiu mysl’iu: ved ecli ottuda, iz inogo mira, ne dano mne nichego, krome poverkhnosti, tenei, lzhe i oblozhkek, to i ia vprave zapodozrit’, chto pod vsemi ikh oblozhkami – lzhi i chto vse ikh veshchi – teni moikh tenei.”

Krzhizhanovsky's is always his own idiosyncratic twin, one of the incarnations of the author's thought"¹⁰⁷ (Burovtseva 1998).

Liminality, although not the only quality that defines a character as a trickster, is one that Lipovetsky associates as a facet of such a definition. The themes of the trickster's linguistic metamorphosis and fluidity of identity, his relation to the sacred, as well as the trickster as underground author, are similarly applicable. The trickster, notes Lipovetsky, is often a "true artist[] of language - language occurs as the sole sphere where their freedom, manifested through tricks, can be accomplished" (Lipovetsky 2011, 33). It is through this that Erofeev's Venichka, for example, declares his role as a trickster. He encounters and gives voice to angels, demons, God, and the devil, thereby "[undergoing] a metamorphosis, remaining his own person and simultaneously manifesting a different, and even a stranger's, consciousness" (167). Similarly one finds this in "Seams," wherein the narrator interacts with, and embodies, his fictional acquaintances Dr Schrott and Purvapakshin.¹⁰⁸ However, unlike Venichka, he remains aware of their material nonexistence: of Purvapakshin he says "I'm attracted to him –I almost love him, this man who does not exist"¹⁰⁹ (Krzhizhanovsky 2001a, 402).

The trickster's relation to the sacred appears in "Seams," although perhaps to a lesser extent than others among Krzhizhanovsky's body of creative work. Lipovetsky argues that this relation is paradoxically achieved through the trickster's transgression and boundary-breaking rather than obvious ties to sacred symbols (Lipovetsky 2011, 34), although specific references to religious themes or passages appear occasionally in "Seams." There is an ongoing concern with the (non)existence of God, and biblical allusions appear, as in "The Phantom," in inverted forms:

¹⁰⁷ "geroi Krzhizhanovskogo – vseгда ego svoeobraznyĭ dvoĭnik, odno iz voploshchenĭ avtorskoĭ mysli"

¹⁰⁸ Both of these figures are inherently negative and take stances of obstinate refusal, Dr Schrott as a doctor advocating starvation as a cure for ills and Purvapakshin as an embodied "no." In this way the narrator of "Seams" is comparable to Ilya Erenburg's trickster Khulio Khurenito, who is similarly an advocate of the right to refuse (see the second chapter of Lipovetsky's *Charms* for a discussion of Erenburg's character, including his preference for "no").

¹⁰⁹ "ia vlekus' k nemu, malo – ia pochti liubliu ego, ètogo cheloveka, kotorogo net"

“yes, blessed are the wolves, for they believe at least in blood,”¹¹⁰ remarks the narrator on one occasion, and on another, continuing his mimicry of the Beatitudes, “patience – you will be given your share of the earth”¹¹¹ (Krzhizhanovsky 2013, 399, 400).

Lipovetsky's conception of the trickster as underground author is one that supports the autobiographical tone that I have suggested can be read in Krzhizhanovsky's work, in “Seams” as well as the metaplayer author-trickster of “Autobiography of a Corpse.” The “Seams” narrator is, after all, an author himself (Krzhizhanovsky 2001a, 403). Lipovetsky argues that these kinds of connections show the author as a “meta-trickster” whose tricks take place in “the domain of language and consist of an irreverent game of opposing discourses” (Lipovetsky 2011, 160). This game appears in all three short stories discussed in this chapter. Although Krzhizhanovsky’s tricksters do not appreciate their societal marginality and invisibility, perhaps above all else the narrator-trickster of “Seams” is concerned with his right to say “no” to the way society around him functions. It is, after all, the trickster’s “time-honored privilege not to participate in life” – principally to refuse to participate in or adhere to a society’s social requirements (Bakhtin 1981, 161).

Conclusion

In these three short stories discussed in this chapter, I have argued that characteristics of the trickster figure appear in a selection of Krzhizhanovsky’s narrators. In “Autobiography of a Corpse,” the first of these narratives addressed, I have shown that this narrator can be read as an image of Krzhizhanovsky himself as the “meta-trickster” who is ultimately playing the trick on the reader of the narrative. The corpse mediates between life and death and maintains an ambivalent position, first critiquing (most significantly by his own suicide, but also by his

¹¹⁰ “da, blazhenny volki, ibo oni uverovali – khotia by v krov”

¹¹¹ “terpenie – tebe dadut tvoiu doliu zemli”

references to blindness and association with structural liminars) and then pseudo-supporting the social system by reversing his position. In “The Phantom,” Fifka’s role as a trickster appears most cogently in his relation to the sacred, which is established by inverted biblical imagery and his role as the possible redemptive figure/portion of the psyche for Dvuliud-Sklifskiī. The trickster’s “sacred amorality” (Hyde 1998) emerges through Fifka’s mediation between abject and sacred, abject because he is an “impure” figure due to his birth and zombie-like existence, sacred because he offers Dvuliud-Sklifskiī redemption through the acceptance of truth as more complex than physical realities. In “Seams” the trickster’s liminality – apparent throughout all three stories – appears particularly strongly, as those places he inhabits are chronically at the margins of city life in minus-Moscow. This figure, like the corpse of “Autobiography,” is also easily read as partially autobiographical.

These liminalities of territory and affiliation that the narrators experience emphasize what Norton calls “intellectual liminality” (Norton 1988, 69, as quoted in Balduk 2008, 25). Having rejected the “truth” conferred by the state, they are “positioned as madmen” (25). They are figures that live on the fringes of society, largely unseen by members of the mainstream society. They are also “marked by impurity” (in the form of their ghostliness) and “stamped with ambivalence” (Makarius 1993, 82). All three narrators are located in the realm between the living and the dead, and through this they serve as particularly powerful boundary-breakers. In some cases a trickster can also be the figure who creates or defines a previously unnoticed boundary (Hyde 1998). This appears in the case of the unnamed narrator of “Seams,” who draws attention to the vast differences between inhabiting plus- and minus-Moscow.

The trickster’s mediation between life and death and the straddling of opposites also serve as explorations of the tensions between being and non-being, Krzhizhanovsky’s most

“beloved leitmotif” (Rosenflanz 2012, 547). This theme further accentuates the trickster figure’s paradoxical nature as the reconciling embodiment of irreconcilable oppositions.

CHAPTER 3

Master of the Universe:

Krzhizhanovsky's Baron Munchausen as a Trickster

We see the trickster as man fighting alone against a universe of hostile, spiritual powers – *and winning* – by virtue of his cleverness. The trickster is man, according to an archaic institution, struggling by himself to become what he feels he must become – master of his universe. (Ricketts 1966, 336, emphasis added)

Introduction and Background

In this chapter I discuss Krzhizhanovsky's 1928 novella *Vozvrashchenie Miunkhgauzina* [The Return of Munchausen]. While those characters discussed in chapter two of this thesis carry strong elements of the trickster trope, I propose that Baron Munchausen appears as Krzhizhanovsky's most cohesive and "polished" trickster, to whom all four of Lipovetsky's suggested trickster characteristics apply well. Although all of these characteristics appear in subservience to the themes of "truth in lies" and the conflict of being versus non-being, I have divided this chapter into four sections corresponding with Lipovetsky's categories. As a subcategory of liminality, I also discuss Munchausen's hypnogogic spaces.

Of all Krzhizhanovsky's fictional works, *The Return of Munchausen* was the "one he fought hardest for" (Turnbull 2016, xii). Unlike "The Phantom," which appears to never have been read even at literary gatherings, Krzhizhanovsky made multiple attempts to have *Munchausen* published, and even to have a film version produced. In 1925 a film studio, Mezhrabpromfil'm, rejected his film proposal entitled *The Return of Munchausen* (Shul'piakov 2001). In 1928 Krzhizhanovsky attempted to publish his novella of the same name through the publisher Zemlia i fabrika [The Land and the Factory]; his long-time friend Mstislavskiĭ did what he could to persuade the publishing house to accept it (Fuflygin 2004). Although initially considered for publication, Krzhizhanovsky was skeptical about the long-term success of such a

venture, and indeed the prospective publishers of the Baron shortly thereafter shelved it (ibid.). It appeared only in 1990, in Perelmuter's collection named after the novella itself.

At its simplest, *The Return of Munchausen* relates the outrageous exploits of Baron Munchausen and his travels throughout the Soviet Union and Europe. The eccentric and fantastical Baron as a literary character first appeared in 1785 as a collection of tales, *Baron Munchausen's Narrative of His Marvellous Travels and Campaigns in Russia*. Supposedly by a Hanoverian baron, the collection was in actuality written by Rudolf Erich Raspe (1736-1794). Raspe was a German author, librarian, and geologist with, like Krzhizhanovsky, an interest in Leibniz, having translated a collection in 1765 titled *Oeuvres philosophiques latines & françoises de feu Mr. de Leibnitz*. Raspe, by his biographers' accounts a roguish, somewhat trickster-like figure himself (Thackray 1987), was inspired to write *Baron Munchausen* by his 1773 visit with a factual Baron Hieronymus von Münchhausen (1720-1797). Von Münchhausen was an amiable and hospitable man with considerable military experience in the Russian army and a penchant for storytelling (Turnbull 2016, viii). Raspe's original English version was not an immediate success, but Gottfried August Bürger's 1786 German translation was, and the unfortunate actual Russian baron was inundated with unwanted guests and ceased both his storytelling and hosting of dinner parties (ibid.).

The exaggerated and absurd – if repetitive and two-dimensional – nature of the original Munchausen tales and character have lent themselves well to a certain level of appropriative creativity. Translators added their own embellishments to the original stories, and there have been numerous film interpretations of the work. The medical community has borrowed the name as well. “Munchausen syndrome” was first coined as a term by a medical doctor named Richard Asher in 1951 and refers to individuals falsifying illnesses in order to receive unnecessary medical care. Asher wrote that “the persons affected have always travelled widely; and their

stories, like those attributed to him [Baron Munchausen], are both dramatic and untruthful. Accordingly the syndrome is respectfully dedicated to the baron, and named after him” (Asher 1951, 339). Asher, interestingly, refers to these individuals specifically as “tricksters” (ibid.).

Within the literary community Munchausen has historically been connected with Gulliver. (One might read Krzhizhanovsky’s *Munchausen* as a continued exploration of the Gulliver theme, which was of great interest to him throughout his creative life.) Tolkien, in his well-known essay “On Fairy Stories,” suggests a parallel between the two – both excluded from fantasy literature, in his argument (Tolkien 1983). The first American edition of the book, based on the 1973 Kearsley version, carrying a remarkably wordy title, began with *Gulliver Revived: or, the Vice of Lying Properly Exposed*¹¹² (Gudde 1942, 372). Critic Sarah Tindal Kareem comments on the notions attached to the latter half of this title, identifying Munchausen as a “new liar” – a figure “embodying an illusionism proffered as cure for delusion...the Baron prescribes aesthetic illusion as a cure for societal ills” (Kareem 2012, 484), a term and definition that fits the trickster – and Krzhizhanovsky’s Munchausen – well.

Interpretations, and reinterpretations, of Munchausen situate him well within the category of trickster, and Krzhizhanovsky’s Munchausen continues this tradition. The critic A.G. Tseitlin remarked that Krzhizhanovsky could have approached Munchausen from several angles: firstly, as simply a tale of astonishing adventures, or secondly as a political satire. Krzhizhanovsky, however, took a different approach, styling the story as the narrative of a “a dreamer who fenced against the truth,”¹¹³ (Perelmuter 1990), one who “parried facts with fantasy”¹¹⁴

¹¹² The full title is *Gulliver Revived: or, the Vice of Lying Properly Exposed; Containing Singular Travels, Campaigns, Voyages, and Adventures in Russia, the Caspian Sea, Iceland, Turkey, Egypt, Gibraltar, Up the Mediterranean, on the Atlantic Ocean and Through the Centre of Mount Aetna, Into the South Sea. Also, an Account of a Voyage Into the Moon and Dog-star; with Many Extraordinary Particulars Relative to the Cooking Animal in Those Planets, which are There Called the Human Species.*

¹¹³ “mechtatel’, fekhrovavshii protiv istiny”

¹¹⁴ “parirulia fakty fantazmami”

(Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 262). Krzhizhanovsky's Munchausen, living in London and Berlin, goes to the Soviet Union as an undercover correspondent, hosting several talks on his experiences there once he returns to London. His stories are met with great enthusiasm from the British public, who attempt to have a statue erected in his honour. The Baron, however, is depressed that he has been "out-fantasized"¹¹⁵ (250) by the Soviet Union, and retreats to the pages of his own book.

Stylistically reminiscent of "Autobiography of a Corpse," *The Return of Munchausen* utilizes the "Chinese-box," or multi-level, matryoshka-narrative approach that Krzhizhanovsky uses so frequently in his prose. Munchausen, like the tricksters I have discussed in the second chapter, possesses multiple doubles through whom the trickster is observed. The trickster (Munchausen) appears only in relation to someone else, for without an audience he does not exist. In this case his audience is all of the Western world, and his especial friend is the somewhat skeptical poet Ernst Unding. Unding functions in a similar way to Shtamm in "Autobiography" and Dvuliud-Sklifskii in "The Phantom." He is, like these other characters, the outermost, encasing character or layer of the narrative, the creative (or potentially creative) individual who encounters the trickster-narrator. Munchausen himself appears to be the author of *Munchausen* (Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 261), and as such is also a double for Krzhizhanovsky, the meta-trickster.

Liminality as a Literary Device

As I have shown in the preceding chapter, liminal spaces and figures are of great interest to Krzhizhanovsky in his work during this period (1925-28). Protagonists occupy the most interim, marginal places – crossroads, train tracks, dimly-lit streets, graveyards, city outskirts – and are themselves neither dead nor alive. This last trait is one that they share with Munchausen,

¹¹⁵ "perefantaziruiut"

who is a self-proclaimed “provisional corpse”¹¹⁶ (Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 205). There are certain similarities between *Munchausen* and the liminality showcased by Krzhizhanovsky’s short story protagonists. The short story as a genre takes particularly well to explorations of liminal themes, as does travel literature, which is often attached to the “transgressive plot” and “ambivalent characters” (Achilles and Bergmann 2014, 4). Thus liminality appears as a structural device, rather than just as a textual motif, since it is built into the form of the story’s genre. In Krzhizhanovsky’s *Munchausen*, the strong emphasis on traveling as well as the narrative’s inclusion of hypnogogic spaces (the theoretical mental zone an individual experiences at the boundaries of sleep) further accentuates the liminal structure.

When Krzhizhanovsky introduces Baron Munchausen, the latter is living in Germany. The poet Unding calls upon the Baron in his study, a somewhat surreal place where muddy footprints come “jumping”¹¹⁷ after their owner (Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 135), stairs “run”¹¹⁸ beneath feet (145), and sleeve cuffs “crawl”¹¹⁹ after hands (136). The study, significantly less of a border space than those wherein the reader meets Krzhizhanovsky’s other tricksters, is, however, a “resting place” and therefore still capable of “suddenly turn[ing] into a crossroad” (Hyde 1998). This indeed does occur: “Tomorrow,” announces the Baron, “I intend to pay a visit to the fogs of London. And to those who live in them. Yes, the whitish fleurs, rising from the Thames, know how to de-contour contours, cover up landscapes and worldviews, shade facts, and...in a word, I’m going to London”¹²⁰ (Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 137, ellipsis in original).

¹¹⁶ “uslovnnyĭ trup”

¹¹⁷ “прыгаіа”

¹¹⁸ “pobezhali”

¹¹⁹ “popolzla”

¹²⁰ “zavtra ia namerevaius’ nanesti visit tumanam Londona. Zaodno i zhivushchim v nikh. Da, belesye flery, podymaiushchiesia s Temzy, umeiut raskonturivat’ kontury, zavualirovat’ peĭzazhi i merosozertsaniiq, zashtrikhovat’ fakty i...idim slovom, edu v London.”

The travel literature genre, note Achilles and Bergmann, is “constitutively close” to those “transitions, threshold situations, and questions of liminality” (Achilles and Bergmann 2014, 4). The Baron spends the majority of the narrative crossing literal borders, traveling first from Germany to Britain and then throughout the Soviet Union. After his return to London, he leaves to become for some time a “Mr. Everybody” living in an undefined location¹²¹ (Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 240), before at last coming to rest between the pages of a book. It is presumably his own book, with which he is seen throughout the narrative. He shelves himself between a volume of Adam Smith’s philosophy and a collection of traditional fantastic travel literature, *A Thousand and One Nights* (261). This unusual final repose is one the Baron chooses out of resignation and failure. One can assume that if he had not been “out-fantasized” by the Soviet Union, he would have carried on his adventures indefinitely, in keeping with Raspe’s Munchausen.

A second device that Krzhizhanovsky employs that further accentuates the macro-liminality of the narrative, and the sudden shift of the study from a resting place to a journey, is the Baron’s hypnogogic experience near the outset of the novella:

He tries to get up, but drowsiness has weighted his body, clouded his thoughts – and reality, together with the red-haired miss, is silently stepping, is going beyond the threshold.

And beneath confused eyelids come a series of visions: a dreamed car carries Munchausen along dreamed streets; they are strangely deserted and dumb... Johnny stops the rustling of the tires at the Colonnade of St. Paul. Munchausen had already lowered his foot to the step, when suddenly the cathedral came to life, its head under a gigantic round hat bent down, its cross butting the air. Arching its gigantic gabled back the monster,

¹²¹ “adres otpravitel'ia: g. Vsiudu, tridviatyĭ dom na tridesiatōi ulitse.” Turnbull translates this as “Someplace, Somewhere, Beyond the Seven Seas” (Krzhizhanovsky 2016, 95).

moving all its bell-shaped tongues, shouts: “Sir, how can I turn into Saul, going straight ahead and without turning around?”...Munchausen has no thought of sitting down: “how can you sit there, when Saul is turning into Paul, there is no street, and nothing is left?”¹²² (153)

In his discussion of hypnogogic themes in literature Peter Schwenger remarks that this in-between state “is the most elusive of realms, for it takes place at the very borders of consciousness, the place where consciousness is taken over by something else that thinks otherwise than do our daylight minds...It is the most difficult thing in the world to grasp that liminal space” (Schwenger 2012, 40-41). In this scene the Baron is therefore aligned with the liminal, but in a less textual manner. Unlike the tricksters of “Autobiography of a Corpse,” “Seams,” and “The Phantom,” all of whom emphasize their liminality by their position in society and their consequently marginalized, borderland geographical haunts, the Baron’s physical location in this instance remains unchanged. Instead it is reality itself that steps over the threshold, away from the Baron. This occurs at the moment when the Baron is between sleep and wakefulness and this jumble of thought is separated from a conscious direction, thereby “dissolv[ing] the cogito and the self with it” (Schwenger 2012, 61). Schwenger remarks that “to be ‘cast free’ in this sense is not liberating but disorientating: losing situatedness, one loses self. In the dark there is no boundary, there is no center, there is no way to connect the swarm of points, whether spatial or mental...the impersonal fact of existence without

¹²² “on probuet priprodniat’sia, no dremota otiazhelila emu telo, zatumanila mysli – i iav’, vmeste s ryzhevolosoī miss, neslyshno stupaia, vykhodit za porog.

A pod smezhennymi vekami chereda videniī: sniashchiīsia avtomobil’ vezet Miunkhgauzena po sniashcheimsia ulitsam; oni stranno bezliudny i nemy...Dzhonni ostanavlivaet shurshanie shin u kolonnady Sv. Pavla.

Miunkhgauzen uzhe opustil nogu k stupen’ke, kak vdrug sobor prikhodit v dvizhenie, golova ego, pod gitantsko-krugloī shapkoī, nakloniaetsia, bodaia krestom vozdukh, dvuskatnaia spina vygnulas’ i chudovishche, shevelsia vsemi svoimi kolokol’nymi iazykami, kruchit: “Sēr, kak proīti v Savly, priamo ne svorachivaia?”...Miunkhgauzen i ne dumaet prisazhivats’ia: “Kak vy mozhete sidet’ tut, kogda Savl v Pavlakh, ulitsy net, i voobshche nichego net.””

regard to a coherent existent, the awareness of Being detached from one's own particular being" (54).

This concept of losing self, the navigation and exploration of the boundary between "I" and "not-I," is one of Krzhizhanovsky's dominant themes throughout his prose. Rosenflanz refers to it as his "beloved leitmotif of the shadow and non-being" (Rosenflanz 2012, 547). The Baron becomes even more textually comparable to the tricksters I have discussed in chapter two when he becomes very nearly, but not quite, a corpse. While exploring Russia the Baron takes a tram (a method of travel through a liminal zone). While riding the tram Munchausen finds himself without the correct ticket and is sentenced to death for his three unpaid kopecks. As a trickster, Munchausen "counter[s] with a series of deceptions and slip[s] from the trap" (Hyde 1998): he argues that his wrongdoing was a "result of provisional reflexes"¹²³ (Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 205) rather than criminal intent. The court agrees to provisionally execute him via a firing squad armed with popguns (205). As a result of his escape, Munchausen finds himself a *provisional* corpse¹²⁴ (205, emphasis added), by this also foreshadowing his similarly inconclusive demise at the end of the narrative.

In this way Munchausen becomes even more fully a member of Krzhizhanovsky's liminal, minus-world than before. It is also not clear how, or if, he exists in the physical world outside of his book. This is a point of concern to the poet Unding as well. "I'm interested in the specific *how*,"¹²⁵ he tells Munchausen (139; emphasis added). Munchausen introduces himself as an escaped illustration, showing Unding the page he has left (143), but does not specifically answer Unding's inquiry; he cannot do so and maintain his trickster's ambivalence. Facts are particularly onerous to Munchausen, disrupting the beauty of what is perceived: "that fragrant

¹²³ "resul'tat kompleksa uslovnykh reflekslov"

¹²⁴ "uslovnyĭ trup"

¹²⁵ "No menia interesuet konkretnoe *kak*"

ambergriis is in fact the excrement of a sperm whale, while the fresh-cut flowers in which a lovely girl has hidden her face are in fact a blooming bunch of genitalia. Who needs that idiotic in fact?"¹²⁶ (166). Munchausen is a proponent of, and is himself – like many of Krzhizhanovsky's themes – "fantasy living in reality"¹²⁷ (Burovtseva 1998). This embodied opposition of fact and fantasy is best discussed in an analysis of the trickster's role as ambivalent mediator, which is closely related to his/her liminality (Lipovetsky 2011, 30).

No Truth to Lie About: A Failure of Ambivalence and Mediation

Ambivalence and mediation as attributes "constitute the core of the trickster trope" (Lipovetsky 2011, 29). Munchausen's role as a trickster is reliant upon his fabrications and his motto of "*Mendace Veritas*" (truth in lies) (Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 163). All of his trickster characteristics function in subservience to this. His task is to embody the connection between truth and falsity and show their relativity. As a trickster he "works 'by means of a lie that is really a truth, a deception that is in fact a revelation'" (Hyde 1998). He critiques black-and-white conceptualizations and obscures dichotomous thinking by showcasing ambiguities and incongruities, embodying and reconciling paradoxes. When he travels through the Soviet Union, however, he finds himself "out-fantasized." This is a country, he discovers, so full of changing truths that it cannot be lied about¹²⁸ (Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 253).

The reader meets Munchausen when he is a successful trickster, fulfilling his function as a mediator between possible absolutes. In Germany he serves as a muse to the doubtful poet Unding, who tells Munchausen that

¹²⁶ "что blagoukhannaia ambra na samom dele èkskrement kashalota, a buket tsvetov, v kotoryi priachet litso prelestnaia devushka, na samom dele lish' sviazka otorvannykh polovykh organov rasteniĭ. Komu nuzhno èto duratskoe na samom dele?"

¹²⁷ "fantaziia, ozhivshaia na iavu"

¹²⁸ "Strana, o kotoroi nel'zia solgat"

between us – as a poet I am ready to believe that you are you, but as a sober-minded person – [...] Of course I recognize a kind of diffusion between being and non-being, between ‘I’ and ‘not-I’, but still, how can it be that we can sit here and converse without the aid of an auditory and visual hallucinations? If in the word ‘friend’ which you have given me there is at least some meaning, then...¹²⁹¹³⁰ (138).

Upon hearing this request, the Baron responds, partially as the creative double of Unding, with “only allow me to escape occasionally – I cannot do otherwise – from the mud of truth into free fantasy”¹³¹ (139). He then recounts to Unding a long tale of his experiences traveling through time. The Baron’s surreal story effectively clears away Unding’s skepticism, rerouting him towards renewed creative potentials through an awareness of the limits of logic and an appreciation of fantasy, the ordinary seen differently. After he leaves Munchausen’s study, Unding feels the sensation of the Baron’s handshake as the metal of a newly fired musket, indicating his revived poetic creativity as a result of his time with the Baron. He sees natural phenomena – stars, trees, the lamps, a shadow, the paths – with an increased level of awareness, and as he walks he begins “listening attentively to the rhythm of his steps, he turned assonances and rhythms over in his mind, a familiar habit, and his external world narrowed to the radius of his fedora – and a mute keyboard of words began waving its keys”¹³² (147).

Here Munchausen as a trickster is mediating between reality and fantasy, offering “fabulation, feigning, and fibbing, the playful construction of fictive worlds” (Hyde 1998), assisting a grateful poet in the execution of his craft, cautioning Unding, “do not bore into all and

¹²⁹ “mezhdū nami – kak poet, ia gotov verit’, chto vy – vy, no kak zdradomysliashchiĭ chelovek... Konechno, ia priznaiu nekuiū diffuziū mezh byl;iu I nebyl’iu, iav’iu v ‘ia’ I iav’iu v ‘ne-ia’, no vse-taki kak moglo sluchit’sia, chto vot my sidim I beselduem bez pomoshchi slukhovoĭ i zritel’noĭ galliutsinatsii. Esli v slovo ‘drug’, podarennom vami mne, est’ khot’ kakoĭ-nibud’ smysl’, to...”

¹³⁰ “In his last letter to Unding, Munchausen echoes this statement: “ostav’te mne, drug. Esli vy podlinno mne drug” (253).

¹³¹ “tol’ko razreshite khot’ isdredka, inache ia ne mogu, iz tiny istiny v vol’nyĭ fantazm”

¹³² “vslushivaias’ v ritm svoikh shagov, on prevychnym psikhicheskim useliem zavrashchal v sebel assonansy I ritmy, vneshniĭ mir dlia nego stal koroche poleĭ ego fetra, - i nemaia klaviatura slov sashvelila svoimi klavischami”

everything with your eyes: if you bore through a barrel the wine will flow out and inside the hoops only a foolish and hollow emptiness remains”¹³³ (144)

Munchausen serves not only the poet, but the political world of Germany as well. He writes on Karl Marx and others in the local newspapers (147) and, telephoned by an ambassador, lends his assistance to diplomatic relations. He tells Unding that “a poet’s recognition of my being flatters me. But even if you stopped believing in me...the diplomats would not...you raise your eyebrows, asking why? Because they need me...being de jure, from their point of view, is no worse than existence de facto. As you can see, there is much more poetry in diplomatic pacts than in all your verses”¹³⁴ (139).

The Baron is equally effective in London. Having taken up residence at a cottage in Kensington amid his beloved London fogs, his love of disturbing the expected continues. He amazes Londoners when he plants seeds in the front garden from which spring vines that grow to the cottage’s third floor (they spiral through fog, of course) by the first nightfall. These vines are “clearly targeting the lunar heart”¹³⁵ and only recede when Munchausen scolds them (149).

The Baron likewise reminds London of the swiftness of changing perceptions of the trustworthiness of specific, dogmatic truths. Finding a set of statues, he calls over a “manservant,”¹³⁶ apparently a beggar:

“What is that?”

“A true representation of Truth and Lies, sir.”

“Which one of them is Truth?” The baron squints.

¹³³ “ne vsverlivaïtes; glazami vo vsekhi i vse: ved esli prosverlit’ bocku – vino vytechet, a pod obruchami tol’ko I ostanetsia glupaia i gulkaia pustota”

¹³⁴ “priznanie poëtom moego bytiia mne chrezvychaïno l’stit. No esli by vy dazhe perestali verit; v menia...to diplomaty ne perestanut. Vy podymaete brovi: pochemu? Potomu chto ia im neobkhodim...Bytie de-iure, s ikh tochki, zreniia, nichem ne khuzhe bytiia de-fakto. Kak vidite, v diplomaticheskikh paktakh gorazdo bol’she poëzii, chem vo vsekhi vashikh vershakh.”

¹³⁵ “iavstvenno natselivaïas’ imi v lunnyï serd’”

¹³⁶ “sluzhka”

“With your permission, sir, that one.”

“Last time, I recall, you said that one was Lies.” The baron winks, and his right eyebrow arches upward. The manservant, long accustomed to the quirks of this visitor, knows that the moment has come when one should not look at the Truth or at Lies, but at the silver shilling glinting between the rich visitor’s fingers, and then gratefully bow out and disappear.¹³⁷ (150)

Munchausen revels in forces that obscure. British reporters are eager to hear the Baron’s opinions on his “battle tactics...in the social sphere”¹³⁸ (151). His response is “smoke that makes noise”¹³⁹ – that is, speaking truth through obscuring perceived reality (145; 151). “In general,” he tells them, “I believe only two forces are real: noise and the mind. And if they ever joined up...”¹⁴⁰ (152). He is drawn to London fogs, foam on beer, and neutralizing greys. His favoured technique is “allowing black to become white and white to grade into black: through gray. Neutral tones in painting, neutrality in politics, and let the Johns, Michaels, and Zhans stare into the fog”¹⁴¹ (148). Words are his preferred method of communicating these truths. “It says in the Gospel: ‘In the beginning was the Word.’ This means everything must be begun with words...We Munchausens have always faithfully served fiction: my ancestor Gaïno participated in a Crusade...and a descendant of mine was a member of the Liberal party”¹⁴² (163). The

¹³⁷ “‘Chto èto?’

‘Pravdivoe izobrazhenie Istiny i Lzhi, sër.’

‘A katoraia iz nikh Istina?’ preshchurivaetsia baron.

‘S vashego rasresheniia, vot èta.’

‘V proshlyi raz, pomnitsia, vy nazyvali ee Lozh’iu,’ podmigivaet baron, i pravaia brov’ ego vygibaetsia kverkhu. Tut sluzhka, prevykshii uzhe k prechudam posetitelia, znaet, chto nastupil moment, kogda nado smotret; n na Istinu I ne na Lozh’, a na serebrianyi shilling, blesnuvshii iz shchepoti bogatogo posetitelia, potom blagodarno otkaniat’sia i ischeznut’.

¹³⁸ “taktika bor’by...v sotsial’nom plane”

¹³⁹ “Dym delaet shum”

¹⁴⁰ “voobshche, ia polagaiu...real’ny lish’ dve sily: shum i um. I esli b kogda-nibud’ oni soedinilis’...”

¹⁴¹ “neïtral’nye tona v zhivopisi, neïtralitet v politike, i pust’ sebe Dzhony, Mikheli i Zhany puchat glaza v tuman”

¹⁴² “v Evangelii skazano: ‘v nachale bylo Slovo’. Èto znachet: vsiakoe delo nuzhno nachinat’ slovami...My, Miunkhgauziny, vseгда verno sluzhili fiktzii: moi predok Geïno uchastvoval...v prestovom pokhode, a odin iz moikh potomkov byl chlenom liberal’noi partii.”

Baron's message, which he spreads far and wide to a receptive (notably Western) audience, is that there is fiction in all truths, all absolutes, all moral and political creeds.

Munchausen, so successful in Western Europe, is requested to serve as an undercover foreign newspaper correspondent in the Soviet Union. "*In partes infidelium, cum Deo*"¹⁴³ the Bishop of Northumberland tells him (173). On his way Munchausen offers (but ultimately fails) to meet with Unding, whose creative powers have failed due to the long period of time since his last visit with the Baron (174). The message here seems to be that one's creativity is an elusive affair. It is even associated with imagery of Christological suffering¹⁴⁴ (174).

Upon his return, London learns of Munchausen's visit to the Soviet Union. There, it seems, the unexpected is not received as well as it is in Europe. In the Soviet Union, for example, Munchausen realizes that his well-trained boots, capable of retrieving fowl under their own power (a commodity Raspe's Munchausen also enjoys), are terrifying the local villagers (173). He decides to use this to his advantage and use his boots as military troops to overrun the country, until he finds an old man attempting to steal them. Of this the Baron says "I believe...that sooner or later everything nationalized will return to its owners, as my boots returned to me. I at once told this to the defeated old man, adding that he should be ashamed that he in his grey-haired age had exchanged God for socialism"¹⁴⁵ (181).

Despite this inauspicious beginning, Munchausen makes various attempts to help the poverty-stricken citizens. In trickster fashion, he does this once by sawing horses in half to double the number of animals available, and on another occasion by explaining how banditry

¹⁴³ "to the land of the unbelievers, God be with you"

¹⁴⁴ Creativity as pain is a theme that appears elsewhere in Krzhizhanovsky's texts. His tale "Gus" [The Goose] explores a similar theme, albeit in a slightly more comic fashion. "Poetry," one goose tells the other, "is when your pen makes you hurt" [poëziia...Èto kogda tvoë zhe pero delaet tebe bol'no] (Krzhizhanovsky 2003, 207).

¹⁴⁵ "ia veriu...chto rano ili pozdno vse natsionalizirovannoe vernetsia svoim cobstvennikam, kak moi sapogi vernulis' ko mne. Èto zhe srazu skazal ia I poverzhennomu stariku, dobaviv, chto stydno emu, ubelennomu sedinoï, meniat' Boga na sotsializm."

might be rationalized and assists the highway robbers in blowing out the moon in order to provide a better cover of darkness for their looting (181-183).

Once the Baron arrives in Moscow he discovers that the Soviet Union is a much stranger place than he had previously believed. The economy “progresses” at the expense of the humanities: train engines run on burning books. “I must find out how long the supplies of Russian literature will last,”¹⁴⁶ remarks the startled Baron (186). The strange stories that have made their way to the rest of Europe, the Baron tells his rapt British audience, are all untrue. Things are much, much stranger than that. Poverty is so entrenched that when a Muscovite tries to commit suicide by hanging, it transpires that the rope is made of sand and instead of death, “he had to confine himself to a few bruises”¹⁴⁷ (187). Desperate scientists chase down cabs in order to scrawl their formula on the sides because there is no money for blackboards (190). A powerful politician, described in vague terms (his only distinguishing feature is the thirteen phones he keeps in his office¹⁴⁸), informs him that members of the literary world are either working steadily or starving (192), suggesting that Krzhizhanovsky, at least, found this last reality as absurd as using the sides of cabs for blackboards.

As structural liminars, women do not escape Munchausen’s attention. They are, according to the Baron, victimized equally by themselves and society. The “reorganization of love”¹⁴⁹ (208) has had negative effects on women. Science, however, has similarly suffered. A lecturer notes the importance of “being” and “to drink”¹⁵⁰ rhyming (212), and people are reprogrammed to speak only the latest correct jargon (213).

¹⁴⁶ “Po priezde v Moskvu vyiasno, nadolgo li khvatit zapasov russkoī literatury.”

¹⁴⁷ “vmesto smerti prishlos’ organichit’sia ushibami”

¹⁴⁸ It is reputed that Stalin kept numerous phones in his office, suggesting a possible link between Stalin and the unnamed politician mentioned here.

¹⁴⁹ “pereustroīstva liubvi”

¹⁵⁰ “byti” and “piti”

London is delighted with the Baron's presentation on his travels through the Soviet Union, but quickly notices something is amiss with Munchausen himself. Attempts to honour the Baron's apparently successful trip in absurd ways that would have previously pleased the Baron are met with Munchausen's animosity. After a last trick or two in Britain, in a final meeting with Unding the dejected Baron tells him that he is "bidding the alphabet farewell"¹⁵¹ – only the omega is left now (244). Before he departs, he explains to Unding what is in essence the methods of a trickster:

now, as always, in preparing to inject my phantasmagorisms into the minds of other people, I had to look for the slope and ramp from high fiction to vulgar lies, the only accessible one to eyes in blinkers, to cloudy sixteen-candlepower thinking, to a short-range imagination. It was necessary, as always, to dampen my colors, blunt the point, to use the usual nonsense from the usual newspapers as the basis of my fabric, keeping only my ducks.^{152 153} (101)

The "black and empty"¹⁵⁴ Soviet Union has beaten him at his own game of truth and lies (246). "I saw that facts...had become phantasms, and phantasms facts"¹⁵⁵ says the Baron (251). Heretofore able to brush away facts with those phantasms, he encounters in the Soviet Union a "country about which one cannot lie"¹⁵⁶ (253). In that country, which the Baron likens to a chess game (a motif Krzhizhanovsky returns to throughout his canon), he finds a "flat square between black and white waters populated with such incalculable meanings, reconciling in themselves so

¹⁵¹ "prostivshemusia s alfavitom"

¹⁵² "teper', kak i vseгда, gotovias' vchekanit' v chuzhie mozgi moi fantasmagorizmy, ia dolzhen byl otyskivat' naklon i ska tot vysokogo vymysla k vul'garnomu vran'iu, edinstvenno dostupnomu glazam v naglaznikakh, mutnym shestnadsatvechnym myshleniem, voobrazheniem korokogo radiusa. Prishlos', kak vseгда, pretushet' kraski, zatupit' ostriia, vziat' za osnovu tkani obikhodnye bredni prevychnykh liudiam gazet, ostaviv za soboi' lish' utok."

¹⁵³ Ducks are a recurring symbol of Raspe's Munchausen. Krzhizhanovsky similarly attaches this theme to his own version of the character.

¹⁵⁴ "temnogo i pustovo"

¹⁵⁵ "ia videl: fakty v osnovnom konture stali fantazmami, a fantazmy faktami"

¹⁵⁶ "Strana, o kotoroi nel'zia solgat"

many irreconcilabilities, opening up such distances, putting forward such facts that my fantasies could not catch up”¹⁵⁷ (253). The beaten, “out-fantasized”¹⁵⁸ (250) Baron returns as an illustration to the pages of his book, where Unding finds him with “shoulders hunched”¹⁵⁹ (260).

As a trickster, Munchausen attempts to function as a representative alternative to the “binary division” (Yurchak 2005) of Soviet ideology and the malleability of state-declared truth (which at any point may become falsity for ideological purposes). Soviet objectivism – that is, the illusory “official symbols” which cannot be “take[n] at face value” (Yurchak 1997, 162) are bewildering to Krzhizhanovsky’s Munchausen. His task, as Delektorskaia notes, is to be a “writer of incredible stories, building a world of lies, which is by definition the opposite of the world of fact”¹⁶⁰ (Delektorskaia 2000). His ability and duty to provide “truth in lies,” so effective and well-received elsewhere in the world, is unable to match the Soviet Union’s shifting philosophies, its “self-subversive nature” (Ledeneva 1998, 3). There, nothing remains true long enough to have an opposing falsity or fantasy.

No Sacred to Profane: Munchausen’s Relation to the Sacred

Fifka of “The Phantom,” discussed in chapter two of this thesis, establishes his relation to the sacred through his simultaneous taboo-breaking and redemptive possibilities. He marries the sacred and the profane by profaning traditionally sacred components of culture. This includes religion, through an inverted version of a virgin birth, and the supposed rationality-reliant Soviet society, through a critique of logic by his very (non)existence as a personified literary figure. In Raspe’s original collection Munchausen’s fusion of high and low appears throughout, largely in the Baron’s character as both a member of the aristocracy who finds himself in various

¹⁵⁷ “na ravninnyĭ kvadrat mezh chernykh i belykh vod, zaseleennyĭ takoĭ neischislemost’iu, razomknuvshĭsia v takie dali, kotorykh ne peredlinit’ nikakim dale, vydvinuvshĭ takie fakty, chto fantazmam ostaetsia lish’ – vspiat’.”

¹⁵⁸ “perefantaziruiut’

¹⁵⁹ “ssustiliv plechi”

¹⁶⁰ “sochinitel’ neveroiatnykh istoriĭ, stroiashchĭ mir vran’ia, po opredeleniiu protivopozhnyĭ miru fakta”

ungraceful scenarios – and as teller of outrageous tales. In apparent opposition at first to Krzhizhanovsky’s Munchausen, he insists they are always “*confined...to facts*,” but later asserts that “a traveller has a right to relate and embellish his adventures as he pleases” (Raspe n.d., 109, italics in the original; 123). Raspe’s Munchausen’s mediation between the high and low appears when, for example, he recounts the supposed illicit sexual exploits of Pope Clement XIV (1705-1774) with an oyster seller (80), thus marrying the sacred with a socially taboo border dweller, an impoverished, “loose” woman.

Krzhizhanovsky’s Baron is likewise concerned with providing a “comedic double” of authority (Lipovetsky 2011, 37). Taking as his patron saint St. Nobody,¹⁶¹ Munchausen parodies and emphasizes his lack of loyalty to and affiliation with mainstream religious or political institutions. His self-proclaimed duty is to critique socially sacred subjects, including God. “When you go to God, he is never at home. Let us try others”¹⁶² he remarks (Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 17). Among these other potential others Munchausen offers himself. “I know that only in children’s nurseries is that old fool Munchausen believed,” he tells Unding; “but then, only children understood Christ”¹⁶³ (247). His taboo violations, in keeping with the redemptive imagery he calls upon himself, are ultimately “accomplished on behalf of the society, for the society” (Makarius 1993, 72). For his tales and tricks he is honoured and consulted by Britain’s religious and political organizations, both of whom recognize their need of a taboo-breaking and redemptive trickster.

In Britain, these violations occur when the Baron critiques perceptions of truth and lies (previously discussed) and its close associate, sacrality. On another occasion (whereat

¹⁶¹ “St. Nobody” was created by Rodulfus Glaber (985-1047), a French monk and historian. Glaber decided to approach the Latin word *nemo* (nobody) as a proper noun: his St Nobody “*can* see and do what no man can” (Turnbull 2016, 121, italics in the original).

¹⁶² “Kogda k Bogu ne pridi, nikogda ego net doma. Poprobuem k drugim”

¹⁶³ “ia znaiu, tol’ko v detskikh komnatakh eshchë veriat staromu duraku Miunkhgauzenu. No ved’ i Khrista poniali tol’ko deti.”

Munchausen’s friend the Bishop of Northumberland is among the appreciative audience) the Baron recounts his latest adventure in Rome. A bit of flax found in a shop turns out to be from Pius X’s coronation, and the Baron discovers it is a shield “against smoke and all *gloria mundi*: nothing transitory, no glory of the world could pass through it”¹⁶⁴ (Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 160). If filling his ears with this flax repels the sounds of *all* “vanity”¹⁶⁵, “what would happen,” he asks, “if those dry and stiff fibers were given some slipperiness?”¹⁶⁶ (161). Keeping out every “sinful word”¹⁶⁷ (161) is not the Baron’s task. Eternally fond of smoke and fog, he insists upon inverting words and providing the lacking measure of confusion and inversion. A bit of goose fat provides the necessary lubrication. Testing out his theory at a meeting of Christian socialists, the Baron hears cursing instead of a speech, insults instead of cheers from the audience. Delighted, Munchausen decides “to filter the whole world through [his] deglorifying flax”¹⁶⁸ (162) – that is, through a filter that points to the profane in that which is held sacred. In this way Munchausen’s power is similar to that of Bulgakov’s Woland, whose “power appears as the adequate freedom from every generalizing concept, every dogma and every binary opposition” (Lipovetsky 2011, 39). It is apparent that even Britain has institutions that are too sacred to be profaned, even by Munchausen. He does not appear for an audience with the king of England, and “if punctuality is the courtesy of kings, then punctuality in relation to kings is a *sacred* duty. Ten centuries of history were overthrown by ten minutes: the king had waited”¹⁶⁹ (Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 238, emphasis added).

¹⁶⁴ “otgoniaiushchaia vmeste s dymom i vsiu gloria mundi; i chto skvoz’ neë ne proiti nichemu prekhodiashchemu, pekushchemusia o slave mirskoï.”

¹⁶⁵ “tshchety”

¹⁶⁶ “chto dolzhno proizoiti, esli sukhim i zhestkim fibram palki predat’ nekotorigu skol’zkost’?”

¹⁶⁷ “grekhovnoe slovo”

¹⁶⁸ “protsedit’ skvoz’ moiu deglorioriziruiushchuiu pakliu ves’ mir”

¹⁶⁹ “esli akkuratnost’ – vezhlivost’ koroleï, to akkuratnost’ po otnosheniiu k koroliam – sviashchennyï dolg. Desiat’ vekov istorii nisprovergalis’ desiat’iu minutami: korol’ zhdal.”

There is very little that the Baron holds sacred. He declares these to be “Freedom, immortality, God – those are the three legs of my chair”¹⁷⁰ (196). (Earlier in his narrative, he describes these three without labeling them as such (163-164).) He critiques God (or equally sacred beliefs) and has achieved immortality, and his freedom encompasses both of these. Words hold a lofty position in the Baron’s world, elevated to the status of the religious.

In the Soviet Union, however, the Baron sees that there is no sacred to be profaned. There, he tells London, “people cross themselves with neither their left hand nor their right”¹⁷¹ (187). The people are starving, and “everything has been eaten up, including the churches’ onion domes,”¹⁷² and paper-mâché Christmas-tree decorations serve as dessert (187). Russia itself is the only religion. A sidewalk prophet informs him that “SSSR” (USSR) stands for “Sancta, Sancta, Sancta Russia – thrice holy Russia...verily, verily, they say, one most holy and God-like”¹⁷³ (199). This prophet will not cross onto a cobbled street, for “people of my profession had best stay away from stones,”¹⁷⁴ he tells Munchausen (199), perhaps offering something of a warning to the Baron. Munchausen, confident in his ability to profane the sacred and escape unscathed as he does so successfully in Germany and Britain, strides onward, remarking that “in the Munchausen family, thank God, there are no prophets”¹⁷⁵ (199). Like Gorin’s and Zakharov’s cinematic version of Munchausen (and Bulgakov’s Woland as well) Krzhizhanovsky’s Munchausen “confronts an entire city of cynics” (Lipovetsky 2011, 56). Munchausen attempts to bring the Soviet Union, in trickster-fashion, “the playful element of life...based on a peculiar interrelation of reality and image” (Bakhtin 40, 1984).¹⁷⁶ He quickly

¹⁷⁰ “svoboda – bessmertie – Bog – vot tri nozhki moego kresla”

¹⁷¹ “ne krestiatsia ni levoī, ni pravoī”

¹⁷² “Vse s”edeno – do tserkovnykh lukovits vkliuchitel’no”

¹⁷³ “SSSR – Sancta, Sancta, Sancta Russia – trizhdy sviataia Rossiia...Istinno, istinno govoriat oni – o trizhdy sviatoī I edinoī: Bogu podobnoī.”

¹⁷⁴ “Liudiam moeī professii luchshe podal’she ot kamnei.”

¹⁷⁵ “v rodu Miunkhgauzinov net, slava Bogu, prorokov.”

¹⁷⁶ See Burovtseva 1998 for a discussion of Krzhizhanovsky’s embodied maxims in *Munchausen*.

discovers, however, that this is a world in which “play and fantasy are punished with death”¹⁷⁷ (Delektorskaia 2000). His tricks, even the accidental ones, are not received well and result in the death penalty.

The Baron is unable to profane the Soviet Union’s sacred for the same reason that he is unable to function as a mediator. He finds to his dismay that in every lie he tells “it seemed to me some truth crept in”¹⁷⁸ (248). Determined to make his stories less close to the “factual” truth, the Baron requests information from Muscovites who write to inform him that his lies, or some form of them, are in fact all truthful (250). Reality has become stranger than the Baron’s fantasies. “What fantastic stupidity,” he remarks of one letter; “I could never have thought up such a story”¹⁷⁹ (250). Thus on this front, as well as that of his role of mediation, the Baron finds himself out-fantasized. There is no sacred truth to make profane. It is notable that he takes his final refuge among words in his book. The right to words, and playful interactions with them, is the only idea he holds as the only truly sacred one throughout the novella.

Tricks as an Art Form

The trickster, argues Lipovetsky, “creates self-sufficient performances rather than pragmatic actions designed for a concrete purpose” (Lipovetsky 2011, 32). Lipovetsky concludes that the theatre and cinema are obvious receptacles for these “*performative arts*” (33, italics in the original). For his part Krzhizhanovsky maintained a lifelong interest and involvement in both cinema and theatre, and it is notable that he first attempted to bring his Munchausen to the film world. Lipovetsky identifies two key aspects of these artistic tricks: firstly, the textual presence of scenes set in theatres, and secondly, the realm of language as performative freedom (tricks)

¹⁷⁷ “igra i fantazm nakazany smert’iu”

¹⁷⁸ “v kazhdom slove mne chudilas’ vkravshaiasia istinna”

¹⁷⁹ “Kakaia fantasticheskaia glupost’: mne by nikogda takoī i ne pridumat’.”

(33). Largely absent from the narratives discussed in chapter two, both of these components appear in Krzhizhanovsky's *Munchausen*.

Performative Tricks and Theatre

Baron Munchausen's appearances throughout the novella occur in theatre-like spaces. Even Unding's visit to the Baron at the outset of the narrative is somewhat stage-like. The Baron's speeches in London take place in his Kensington cottage (Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 157), in a hotel (163), and at the Royal Society of London's grand hall (176). Munchausen uses them all – to varying degrees – to create theatre-like settings.

The Baron's performative tricks extend to include a form (or parody) of sculptural art as well. Not only does he commentate with apparent regularity on the allegorical statue of truth and falsehood in Kensington, but he is drawn to the *absence* of those representations of truth that have since fallen from grace and have been removed. "I must admit that I could never pass by the foot of an empty pedestal,"¹⁸⁰ the Baron tells his London audience (220-221).

Incompleteness, unfinishedness, always irritates me. So it was now: I quickly scrambled onto the marble of the pedestal and took a calm, dignified, and monumental pose. Down below there was a street photographer. I only needed to throw him a silver coin, and his head immediately dived under the black cloth. Standing with my arm outstretched to the setting sun, I could see a crowd gradually gathering around the monument, observing, with cheers of approval, this effective shot.¹⁸¹ (221)

The Baron requires himself to perform, and he requires an audience to appreciate his act. Indeed, he is willing to pay them for their attention (when in London he also pays the beggar to

¹⁸⁰ "Dolzhen priznat'sia, chto ia nikogda ne proiti mimo pustogo podnozhiiia p"edestala."

¹⁸¹ "Nepolnota, nezavershennost' vseгда na mramor postamenta i prinial spokoinoiu, ispolnennuiu dostoinstva i monumental'nosti pozu. Vnizu prokhodil ulichnyi fotograf. Stoilo brosit' serebrianiuiu monetu, i golova ego totchaz zhe nyrnula pod chernoe sukno. Stoia s rukoī, protianutoī k padaiushchemu solntsu, ia mog videt', kak vokrug pamiatnika postepenno nakaplevalas' tolpa, nabliudavshaia, s vozglasami odobreniia, effektuiiu s'emku."

respond to his comments on the statue representing truth and falsehood). Without the attention of the people, Munchausen does not exist at all. “You have opened a running account for me in Being...In the future, it shall be as you please: acknowledge the account or close it. Essentially, if you shake me out of your pupils I will be as poor as nothing itself,”¹⁸² he tells his British audience (164). This is in keeping with Bakhtin’s understanding of the trickster (analyzed through his discussion of the rogue, the clown, and the fool): “their existence is a reflection of some other’s mode of being – and even then, not a direct reflection. They are life’s maskers; their being coincides with their role, and outside this role they simply do not exist” (Bakhtin 1981, 159).

This helps explain more generally why Krzhizhanovsky’s tricksters (Munchausen as well as the tricksters discussed in chapter two) straddle the oppositions of life and death and appear only in relation to someone else (an audience), but also explains why Krzhizhanovsky’s Munchausen insists upon onlookers. He requires them in order to exist. His stage can appear anywhere: an empty pedestal on the street or a hall in London, and the crowds that applaud or are amazed at his activities constitute his audience. He possesses the ability to create a stage wherever he wishes for one to appear. This includes when he is dragged into court, followed by a curious crowd (203), and when he faces a firing squad afterwards, during which scene the riflemen double as the audience (204). This self-generated theatre is one that tends to accompany the trickster. Bakhtin notes that tricksters

create around themselves their own special little world, their own chronotope...These figures carry with them into literature first a vital connection with the theatrical trappings of the public square, with the mask of the public spectacle; they are connected with that

¹⁸² “vy otkryli mne tekushchiĭ schet na bytie. Segodnia ia spisyvaiu so scheta dvesti. V dal’neĭshem – kak udobno: podtverdite schet ili zakroĭte ego. V sushchnosti, stoit vam vytriakhnut’ menia iz zrachkov, ia nishch, kak samo nichto.”

highly specific, extremely important area of the square where the common people congregate; second – and this is of course a related phenomenon – the very being of these figures does not have a direct, but rather a metaphorical, significance. (Bakhtin 1981, 159)

In addition to his created theatre, the trickster is often reliant upon language as means of communicating his message.

Language as Freedom

“Twists of language and discourse” frequently appear as characteristic of the trickster (Lipovetsky 2011, 33). In some instances, “language occurs as the sole sphere where their freedom, manifested through tricks, can be accomplished” (33). (This is similarly the case for Erofeev’s Venichka.) The reader will remember the weight Munchausen attaches to his freedom (Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 196), and the parallel importance of the spoken and written word. For Krzhizhanovsky, writes Burovtseva, “the true (supreme) freedom of man in our unfree world...is freedom of language and freedom within language”¹⁸³ (Burovtseva 1998).

This freedom sometimes appears as idioms realized in daily life. Eager listeners’ ears fall off and are swept away by Munchausen’s well-trained, attentive assistant (Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 158), and an awl in a sack can be sold in Moscow¹⁸⁴ (185). According to Burovtseva, the Baron’s entire narrative of his travels in Russia is the “realization, the revitalization of a whole series of proverbs, sayings, and cultural expressions”¹⁸⁵ (Burovtseva 1998). These proverbs are acceptable in language but when realized overturn the laws of reality (ibid.). Munchausen, often

¹⁸³ “podlinnaia (vysshaia) svoboda cheloveka v nashem nesvobodnom mire, po Krzhizhanovskomu, - èto svoboda iazyka i svoboda vnutri iazyka”

¹⁸⁴ The proverb is “Shila v meshke ne utaish” – literally, “you can’t hide an awl in a sack” (equivalent to “the truth will out”).

¹⁸⁵ realizatsiiu, ozhivlenie tselogo riada poslovits [i] pogovorok

quite artistically and with seemingly unlimited supernatural power, arranges these proverbs into real world phenomena.¹⁸⁶

It is significant that when the Baron is at last out-fantasized, he takes refuge in a book. That is, when he finds that his realized language is ineffective, truth having “dodged the man,”¹⁸⁷ he retreats, squashed into “two-dimension[al]”¹⁸⁸ language (Krzhizhanovsky 2001b, 262).

Conclusion

As a trickster, Munchausen appears as the most cohesive figure of Krzhizhanovsky’s writing during this time period (1925-28). He functions much as Bulgakov’s Woland does, a figure whose main function is, through his trickery and illusions, to commentate on the nature of truth and reality as subjective forces decided upon by government forces, and therefore subject to frequent change. Lewis Hyde remarks that

Under [the trickster’s] enchantment, illusion sinks below the threshold of consciousness and appears to be truth...there is a long tradition that locates art in that trickster shadowland where truth and falsity are not well differentiated...many of these statements are hard to understand if we cleave to any simple sense of what is meant by ‘truth’ and ‘lies.’ They are easier to understand if such opposites collapse, whereupon we are dropped back into the trickster’s limbo, where boundary markers shift at night, shoes have no heel and toe, inky cloud attacks transparency, and every resting place suddenly turns into a crossroad. These artists, that is to say, claim a part of trickster’s territory for their own, knowing it to be one of the breeding grounds of art and artifice (Hyde 1998).

This is a task the Baron takes seriously, and his work is, in the west, generally well-accepted. Hyde notes that “in spite of all their disruptive behavior, tricksters are regularly

¹⁸⁶ For a comprehensive list of these corporealized proverbs see Burovsteva’s dissertation.

¹⁸⁷ “uklonilas’ ot cheloveka”

¹⁸⁸ “v dvumer’e”

honored as the creators of culture” (ibid.). As personified creative impetus, meetings with the Baron serve to “quicken and brighten the pulse of ideas”¹⁸⁹ of poets and politicians alike (255).

Ultimately, however, the Baron, complacent in his belief that “a more necessary man than I, Baron Munchausen, you will not find”¹⁹⁰ (Krzhizhanovsky 2016, 10), finds himself outdone at his own game. In the Soviet Union the “clever wit of the rogue,” attempting to “introduce[] falsehood and duplicity into all human life” (Bakhtin 1981, 162) is met with a duplicity he cannot match. The Soviet Union, according to Krzhizhanovsky, is a state that can effectively destroy the most incorrigible and effective of tricksters. Like Krzhizhanovsky, Munchausen, a poet and writer, finds his creativity and imagination unappreciated and is forced to live as the hero only within the pages of his own books.

¹⁸⁹ “chastili i chetchili pul’s idei”

¹⁹⁰ “Bolee nuzhnogo cheloveka, chem ia, vam ne syskat’.”

CONCLUSION

The Trickster and the Author: Krzhizhanovsky and the Soviet Union

In these chapters I have attempted to provide an overview of Krzhizhanovsky's life and a possible approach to several key examples from his prose between 1925 and 1928. I have argued that the narrators of the short stories I discuss in chapter two possess certain characteristics of the trickster which are then brought together as a fully-formed trickster in *The Return of Munchausen*.

A notable similarity shared between all of Krzhizhanovsky's tricksters is their failure in the Soviet Union. Burovtseva has noted that unlike Dostoevskian heroes, Krzhizhanovsky's are "doomed"¹⁹¹ (Burovtseva 1998). "Crushed by an unbearable burden"¹⁹² (Vasiuchenko 1990), they are in the end unable to function in the Soviet system.

The trickster trope is one easily attached to the underground author (Lipovetsky 2011, 154), and I have mentioned earlier those critics who have drawn attention to the fact that Krzhizhanovsky's narrators are very often images of the author himself. They are highly creative, idiosyncratic individuals that reflect Krzhizhanovsky's own perceptions of the world, and perhaps reflect the author's belief in his own creative-redemptive authorial capacity as well. In the examples I have chosen (with the exception of Fifka, who serves only as narrator) they are all authors themselves, who find themselves overwhelmed by a system that at best does not see, and at worst extinguishes, all members of "minus-Moscow." Like Munchausen, in the end Krzhizhanovsky was doomed to live within the pages of his books, despite his certainty in the

¹⁹¹ "obrechen"

¹⁹² "plechi davit neposil'naia nosha"

literary value of his work.¹⁹³

The obstacles a critical, or even mildly dissident, Soviet-era author faced in having his work published usually prevented publication entirely, relegating nonconformist authors to, at best, circulating their books via underground samizdat publishing. The Soviet censorship system, formally developed in 1922, was, as author Adam Thirlwell notes, “a uniquely organized invention [that took] a malicious care for the interior lives of writers” (Thirlwell 2011). The “absorption of all forms of social life by the state” increased steadily between 1924 and 1953 (ibid.). This is apparent even from various writings of Soviet leaders. In 1922, Trotsky outlined in a note the future Soviet principles for literature, in which he comments that authors “carry an abyss of all kinds of prejudices inside them” (ibid.). Although in his 1924 book *Literatura i revoliutsiia* [Literature and Revolution] Trotsky seems much more hopeful about the future of Soviet authorship, he remains, somewhat paradoxically, very suspicious of all authors and the social power they wield. He warns, in no uncertain tones, of the threat that writers pose: “in the dualism of the point of view of these “fellow travelers [authors],” (note that he assigns authors a liminal space of “travelerism”) “which makes them doubtful of themselves, there is a constant artistic and social danger” (Trotsky 2005, 2).

It was in these early days of the Soviet literary chokehold that Krzhizhanovsky wrote most of his work. Deeply concerned with philosophical perspectives and exactly the kinds of dualistic viewpoints that made Trotsky so mistrustful of writers, Krzhizhanovsky was automatically relegated to the ranks of liminal figures himself, and this is reflected in his work. At least during this period, Krzhizhanovsky held a remarkably grim view of the Soviet Union. Bulgakov’s Woland, fuelled by unlimited demonic power, gleefully upends the system with his

¹⁹³ Alongside Krzhizhanovsky’s previously-mentioned belief in the “Lilliputian” nature of those individuals operating in the Soviet artistic realm is his well-known claim that “I am out of sorts with the present, but eternity loves me” [s segodniashnim dnem ia ne v ladakh, no menia liubit vechnost’] (Perelmuter n.d.).

unpredictable judgements. Unlike those tricksters whose failures “only spur[] [them] on to new adventures” (Lipovetsky 2011, 105), Krzhizhanovsky’s tricksters face an indestructible state structure and eventually pay with their lives for challenging it by their creativity and differentness.

Scholarly opinion remains divided over whether the trickster is best classified as “an individual following a particular pattern of duplicitous behaviour, or as some metaphysical spirit of disorder eternally present in any social structure” (Williams 2000, 11). Neither of these definitions is exclusionary of the other. As incarnated ideas and philosophies, Krzhizhanovsky’s protagonists are trickster-figures engaging in this particular type of behaviour and thereby embodying this “spirit of disorder” as their sacred duty to the world. This results in Krzhizhanovsky’s protagonists so strongly sharing the similarities they do, as they fulfill their specific cultural role of a nomadic and disorderly critic of society. At the same time, they echo Krzhizhanovsky’s own experience as a writer. His prose is “refined and whimsical, reflecting the complex work of thought”¹⁹⁴ (Vasiuchenko 1990), and the Soviet Union had little interest in such writing. The society in which he and his fictional tricksters attempt to function is not appreciative of the creative acts offered. This is regardless of how valuable, and even redemptive, these acts are portrayed to be to the society itself.

“Gullivers” (or Munchausens), remarks Vasiuchenko, “are always uncomfortable, and in an indestructible Lilliputian system they look quite bad”¹⁹⁵ (ibid.). Krzhizhanovsky concludes that they do indeed look “quite bad,” and that the system they face is indestructible. In Krzhizhanovsky’s mythos, centred on the trickster whose task is both to reflect the author’s own experience of marginalization as well as to threaten the system’s myth (truth) (Hyde 1998), even

¹⁹⁴ “izyskannaia i prikhotlivaia, otrazhaiushchaia slozhuiu rabotu mysli”

¹⁹⁵ “Gullivery vsegda neudobny, a uzh v nesokrushimom liliputskom stroiu smotriatsia sovsem plokh”

the most creative tricksters are no match for the ever-shifting dogmas of the Soviet Union.

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