

**After the End of the Line:
Apocalypse, Post- and Proto- in Russian Science Fiction since Perestroika**

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Abstract

This thesis examines concepts of history and culture in six texts published between 1986 and 2006, as they relate to the loss of Russia's future, according to Mikhail Epstein, with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The works, paired by decade in three chapters, are Vladimir Voinovich's Moscow 2042 (1987) and Andrei Bitov's "Pushkin's Photograph" (1989); Andrei Lazarchuk and Mikhail Uspenskii's Look into the Eyes of Monsters (1998) and Tat'iana Tolstaia's Slynx (2000); and Sergei Luk'ianenko's "Girl with the Chinese Lighters" (2002) and Aleksei Kalugin's "Time Backwards!" (2005). Though the authors are typically associated with different genres, all works make use of the cognitive estrangement characteristic of science fiction to forge a parable of current conditions, and thereby gain new insight into questions of history and culture.

Given the nature and mood of the fall of Communism, apocalypse (or utopia, another end to history) is the dominant myth informing these visions, a further heuristic tool of science fiction. Through the conventions of the genre, notably the *novum* (Darko Suvin's term for a new element shaping the imagined world) and its counterpart in Epstein's *kenotype* (an expression of new social phenomena), the works typify their respective periods of perestroika, the post-Soviet 1990s and the early twenty-first century, as well as imagine social alternatives that move toward Epstein's concept of a proto- era, a future for Russia after the future. What emerges from a unified study of these texts is the value their authors find in the tools of science fiction for renewing imagination and coming to terms with the unknown. To recognize the enduring potential of the future, its incompleteness and unknowability, is to challenge the very idea of the end of time – be it apocalyptic, utopian or postmodern.

Résumé

Cette thèse examine les concepts de l'histoire et de la culture en six textes publiés entre 1986 et 2006, en relation avec la perte du futur Russe, selon Mikhail Epstein, suite à l'écroulement de l'Union Soviétique. En trois chapitres, les écrits sont classés par décennies comme suit : *Moscow 2042* de Vladimir Voinnovich (1987) et *Pushkin's Photograph* d'Andrei Bitov (1989); *Look into the Eyes of Monsters* d'Andrei Lazarchuck et Mikhail Uspenskii (1998) et *Slynx* par Tat'iana Tolstaia (2000); *Girl with the Chinese Lighters* par Sergei Luk'ianenko (2002) et *Time Backwards!* d'Aleksei Kalugin (2005). Malgré le fait que les auteurs sont habituellement associés à différents genres, l'ensemble de ces textes se servent de la caractéristique d'aliénation cognitive que la science fiction apporte afin de forger une parabole des conditions courantes, et ainsi acquérir un nouvel aperçu dans l'histoire et la culture.

Étant donné la nature et l'atmosphère de la tombée du Communisme, l'apocalypse (ou l'utopie, autre fin à l'histoire) est le mythe dominant qui informe ces visions, un outil d'apprentissage supplémentaire de la science fiction. A travers la convention du genre, notamment le *novum* (terme utilisé par Darko Suvin pour décrire un nouvel élément formant le monde imaginaire) et son contrepartie *kenotype* d'Epstein (une expression d'un nouveau phénomène social), les écrits exemplifient leurs périodes respectives de perestroïka, les années '90 post-Soviet et le début du vingt-et-unième siècle, ainsi qu'imaginer des alternatives sociales qui se rapprochent du concept de proto-era d'Epstein, un futur pour la Russie après le futur. Ce qui émerge d'une étude unifiée de ces textes est la valeur que les auteurs trouvent aux outils de la science fiction pour renouveler l'imagination et venir à terme avec l'inconnu. De reconnaître le potentiel résistant du futur, l'incomplet et l'inconnu, est de mettre au défi l'idée même de la fin des temps – qu'elle soit apocalyptique, utopique ou postmoderne.

A note on translation and transliteration:

All translations have been prepared by the respective authors of English publications of articles and primary texts, unless otherwise indicated in the endnotes. If available, the translation of a primary work was used for quotations, but checked against the original to ensure accuracy; in cases of discrepancy the quotation was paraphrased or omitted rather than altered. For the sake of consistency my translations of titles are used in reference to all primary works, even for those works for which there are no English publications.

Throughout the main text of this thesis the American Library Association and Library of Congress system of transliteration has been used for Russian words and names, with the exception of names spelled otherwise by convention or, in the case of authors of translated articles, as given (e.g. Epstein instead of Epshtein); and without diacritics or ligatures.

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A note to anyone interested in the subject matter: as a class project I recently compiled a list of online resources on Russian science fiction, mostly aimed at the English reader. It links to many authors' personal sites, collections of works, and pages about conventions and awards. Find the St. Sputnik Project at jfouts.slog.org.

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Introduction: The End and Everything After

To know what the end of the world is like
one must live through it, not perish with it.
- Wendt and Geddes (87)

By the end of the twentieth century Russia had come, to borrow the phrase, unstuck in time. Fukuyama considers the country's departure under perestroika and glasnost from the historical path prescribed by communism to have spelled the "end of history" for the Soviet Union (15); while Epstein goes so far as to say that Russia had lost its future by the 1990s, that indeed "our past and future have exchanged places" (71). Any sense of historical confluence, of pride in and connections with the past or of prospects for the future, was unmoored if not abolished. The resulting question, as Epstein poses it, became "how to live after one's own future, or, if you like, after one's own death" (ibid).

The collapse of historical perspective in the 1980s undermined all cultural bases, leading, says critic Zolotonosov, to a profound sense of an ending; and by the time communism fell, Russians had the sense of living in a post-cultural, post-historical void. "[T]here is nothing to take from history into the future and there is nothing to be proud of in the past," he writes; "the connection between times is disintegrating" (163). An apocalyptic pall was cast over the country, judging by such dire pronouncements, the expression of which is seen forming a large element of the six works to be examined, as will be detailed below. Casting the voiding of culture in terms of the loss of "social mythology," Zolotonosov notes the "impossibility of life in the absence of a basic myth," considering Russia to have joined the ranks of postsocialist, postindustrial societies characterized by a "feverish ... search for a new social mythology" (157). Indeed, as Philip Rahv observed in 1965, "The craze for myth is the fear of history," when historical progress is perceived as marked more by loss than growth; the mythic principle then

appeals for its “illusion of stability” (114). Myths moreover “develop our creative intellectual capacities, [which] can be employed in dealing with reality itself,” Casey Fredericks wrote in 1982, seeing the loss of myth as the loss of the ability to think creatively about the universe (37, 3). Esteeming literature as a source and perpetuator of social mythology, Epstein, Zolotonosov and others wrote at this time of the need for new directions and developments in literature to break this stagnation and restore some sense of culture and history.

Since the issues highlighted above speak of temporal estrangement, the loss of historical orientation and a sense of the future; and since critics indicate the need for a literature that contributes to the formation of a new social mythology, this thesis will examine specimens of that genre traditionally concerned with visions of the future and with modern forms of myth – science fiction. Fredericks demonstrates the mythological nature of the genre, the use in such works of ancient myths and the establishment of new ones drawn from modern technology and sociology (30). In the Russian context, addressing the genre of *nauchnaia fantastika* – “scientific fantasy,” a term predating the English “science fiction”² – Evgenii Neelov examined in 1986 the “mythologizing” nature of NF (10). He studies several seminal works in this light, including Aleksei Tolstoi’s *Aelita*, Ivan Efremov’s *Tumannost’ Andromedy*, and Arkadii and Boris Strugatskii’s *Trudno byt’ bogom*, the latter two authors being further considered by Yvonne Howell as shapers of “modern myths for the intelligentsia to live by” (98). These three works incidentally represent the three major periods of Soviet NF writing, the 1920s, 1960s and 1980s, though the genre is considered to have roots earlier, in the late nineteenth century (Menzel 110).

NF is uniquely fitted to address the above issues, characterized as crises of imagination and history, as it concerns itself primarily with imagination and history. The Strugatskiis, for instance, “used the conventions of science fiction and/or fantasy to make an imaginative leap out of the existing world order, and set up an experimental new order”³ (Howell 98), while NF in general “always relates to history – the future as prolonged history, or the development of present reality” (Menzel 125). Moreover, insofar as these crises resulted from the eschatological nature of the collapse of the Soviet Union, SF is accordingly considered “the contemporary form of apocalyptic literature,” says SF scholar Robert Galbreath, since both are defined by a sense of radical discontinuity (56). Epstein highlights the value of imagination and fantasy in exploring new, post-apocalyptic possibilities, considering it “necessary to affirm the social status of imagination, which creates the future,” while noting that “a nation deprived of its imagination,” as the Soviet Union was and as post-Communist Russia was in danger of becoming, “loses its ability to create the future, to answer its own aspirations. Gradually, it drops out of the circle of history” (316-17). He campaigns for ideas that conflict with current knowledge, for ideas that are able to amaze, as he considers wonder “the starting point of the cognitive process” (319). Works of NF such as the six to be examined answer this call for ideas able to amaze, to open the imagination to new possibilities, and to foster cognition of the present situation.

The six works, chosen for their use of the conventions of NF in examining the development of Russia’s ahistorical situation, are paired and arranged according to their decade of publishing between 1986 and 2006. For the late-Soviet period in chapter one, these works are Vladimir Voinovich’s Moskva 2042 [Moscow 2042; 1987] and Andrei Bitov’s “Photografiia pushkina” [“Pushkin’s Photograph”; 1989]. For the early post-

Soviet era, in chapter two, the works are Posmotri v glaza chudovishch [Look into the Eyes of Monsters; 1998]⁴ by Andrei Lazarchuk and Mikhail Uspenskii, and Tat'iana Tolstaia's Kys': roman [Slynx; 2000]. In chapter three, covering the early twenty-first century, the two works are Sergei Luk'ianenko's "Devochka s kitaiskimi zazhigalkami" ["The Girl with the Chinese Lighters," 2002]⁴ and Aleksei Kalugin's "Vremia – nazad!" ["Time Backwards!," 2005].⁴ The subjects of these works will be glossed below, but suffice it to say now that a consideration of the authors indicates this thesis is not simply a genre study of NF, in the sense of a selection of writers usually associated with the literature. Voinovich, Bitov and Tolstaia are traditionally placed well outside the purvey of NF,⁵ but are seen in these works borrowing the tools of the genre to the same effect as the four others who professedly consider themselves NF writers.

Nor is this a comparison or equation of critically "high" and "low" literatures. To be sure, NF is today eschewed in Russia as "glossy junk [in a] literary ghetto" (Kaplan 62), a label shunned by even the more fantastic writers, such as Viktor Pelevin. Nor has the genre been the subject of as much critical study as it received in the 1970s-80s, despite the boom in popularity of NF and fantasy⁶ since 1989 (Menzel 117). But the simultaneous consideration of these authors from different literary backgrounds and the use in their works of the methods of NF will demonstrate the unique perspective it affords on Russia's post-historical situation. It will also highlight these differing authors' similar means of addressing the same issues, while at the same time indicating what differences, if any, come with their dissimilar perspectives.

This mix of authors invites further explanation of the selection criteria for the works, which critics have already placed in a variety of other literary categories. Since this thesis is aimed at characterizing reactions to the loss of Russia's future and the

resulting sense of historical inversion, these works were chosen because they: 1) use estrangement and cognition, to be explained momentarily, to form a defamiliarized vision of their own historical situation; and in so doing, they 2) demonstrate an interaction between two or more time periods, to the effect of positing an end to a phase in history and the beginning of a renewed era – an apocalypse. This interaction may be through the device of time travel or by other means, and may be between the present and future or any other combination. What is important is dialog between a familiar time and an *other* – as indeed the future is to Epstein “the ultimate horizon of all otherness,” the “most ‘other’ we can ever encounter or experience” (337).

Cognition, an epistemological concept, speaks in this context of a new understanding of history in the midst of Russia’s temporal confusion. It is, in these works, the apprehension of what new directions the country may take in a future after the end. Cognition is achieved in SF through the device of estrangement – as Epstein said, through wonder, the starting point of the cognitive process (119). Put another way, insofar as cognition means arriving at an answer, estrangement can be understood as rephrasing the question. This literary device, called also defamiliarization – *ostranenie*, was first delineated by Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovskii in 1917 and applied to SF in the 1970s by Darko Suvin, former editor of Montreal-based Science Fiction Studies. Suvin defines SF (and I use his definition, especially when dealing with those works which do not willingly apply the label to themselves) as “the *literature of cognitive estrangement*,” determined less by its relation to science and the future than by its positing of loci and persona dramatically different from those of the author’s empirical time and place (as opposed to more naturalistic fiction), yet not impossible (as opposed to the more fantastic) given the cognitive norms of that same environment (Metamorphoses 4, viii).

Suvin uses “cognitive norms” as a wider application of empirical knowledge than “science” in the Western sense, more analogous to the Russian *nauka*, which encompasses other branches of knowledge such as cultural and historical sciences; and “novum” to refer to that new element in an SF work that separates its subject or setting from the familiar, on a spectrum from a single technological innovation to an entirely new social system. His novum shapes the estranged chronotope of an SF work, a new time-place that presupposes, interacts with and transforms the author’s and readers’ native environment. This new imagining is “the reality that displaces, and thereby interprets” the author’s native chronotope (Metamorphoses 67).

The subject (viewer) of the SF chronotope as mirror, the “self” with which the “other” of the novum interacts, is the conception of empirical reality held by the collective addressee of the text – just as Zolotonosov concludes that experimental post-Communist literature challenged “not the system itself, but the reader created by the system” (167). Such is SF’s epistemological capacity, for cognitive estrangement to stimulate “the mind’s ability to adjust itself to a new set of experiential or intellectual coordinates,” that is, not simply to new facts but “being shocked into whole new *systems* of thinking or experiencing [whereby] whole new worlds of perception are opened up” (Fredericks 37, 38). In sum SF enables, through these tools, readers to see their world anew, to imagine new possible worlds, and to evaluate their world against those other possibilities – a fitting recipe for moving beyond a zero-point culture and opaque future such as Russia was experiencing at the end of the twentieth century.

Suvin’s novum is analogous in significant ways to Epstein’s kenotype, a “new form” in art and literature that expresses some historically new idea or experience. Epstein defines his kenotype as “a cognitive, creative structure, reflecting a new

crystallization of some broadly human experience, occurring in concrete historical circumstances ... and appearing as the first embodiment of a potential or future development” (324). Compare to Suvin on the novum, “always a *historical* category since it is always determined by historical forces which both bring it about in social practice (including art) and make for new semantic meanings that crystallize the novum in human consciousness” (Metamorphoses 80). Wherever applicable, such novums and kenotypes will be highlighted in the chosen works, with further examination given to their historical circumstances and historically new ideas.

As Suvin’s schematic of SF is applied to the chosen works of the three defined periods, most attention will be afforded their demonstrated concepts of history – the accessibility or mutability of the past or future, and the cyclicity or linearity of history – and elements of mythology, be they ancient and established or of a newly imagined culture. And as their treatment of the theme of apocalypse is examined, it is expected that works of the first period will address this attitude within the perestroika paradigm; works of the second, understood according to the post-apocalyptic scenario, will suggest alternatives to nullified culture and an absent future ; and those of the third will reflect new attitudes toward Russia’s past and future as the protostage of a new culture-in-development takes shape, a move beyond the limits of the post- mentality.

To be more specific regarding the content of works from the first period, the 1980s: Moscow 2042 demonstrates an interaction between the perestroika era and an imagining of a near-future Communist paradise achieved; while “Pushkin’s Photograph” tells of an attempt at contact between a distant communist future and Russia’s imperial golden age, the birth of modern literature at the time of Pushkin. Both will be considered as apocalyptic fictions, addressing the end-times mood of late Soviet culture in an

estranged, NF chronotope of dual-temporality that questions the finality of both the future Communist utopia and the anticipated eschatology.

In the second chapter, addressing works and social attitudes in the 1990s, Look into the Eyes of Monsters is clearly a specimen of what critics consider popular-consumption NF, while Slynx serves as an apt reflection of the post-Communist decade, having been published in 2000 but written over a period since 1986. Both will be read as post-apocalyptic fictions, looking back on the lost world and forward to the establishment of a new culture. The former work sends poet Lev Gumilëv on various missions throughout Russian history, demonstrating a sense of the presence and mutability of the past; while the latter imagines a primitive, post-cataclysmic village 200 years in the future, built on the site of abolished Moscow, whose residents struggle with their past and have no direction for the future.

The works chosen from the early twenty-first century will be treated according to Epstein's concept of a proto- epoch, a move beyond post-Communism and -utopianism toward a more open view of the future. "Time Backward!" by young NF writer Kalugin (b. 1963) tells first of several trips from the future into present-day St. Petersburg for the searchers' relatives, something familiar that they can relate to, then posits a situation where the world has literally run out of time in the future and must borrow it from different periods in history in order to prolong its existence. The second, "The Girl with the Chinese Lighters," is by a better-known author, Sergei Luk'ianenko (b. 1968), made famous by his Nochnoi dozor [Night Watch, 1998] series of novels and films. His short story tells of another search across time, as a girl from the future has lost her father in seventeenth-century Japan and turns to a resident of modern Moscow for help.

The results of the inquiry of this essay should extend a number of answers to the aforementioned critics' questions: what do these works show as worth taking from history into the future, what is there to be proud of in the past, and how does one shed the dictates of utopianism and focus once more on the open possibilities of the future. An answer will also be advanced to a further question, in terms of genre: why would authors who traditionally fall outside the realm of SF choose to use its tools and conventions – not only the literary devices of estrangement and cognition, which may be found in many literatures, but specifically such tropes as mark genre SF, such as time travel and the post-apocalyptic community. It will be seen that, due to the merits of these tools in addressing an estranged situation such as Russia experienced, the NF genre is uniquely suited for cognition of a potential future after the future.

Notes to Introduction

1. Mythology is for this study understood as the stories a culture tells itself about itself, a way to interpret the past and approach the future. Barthes defines myth as a mode of signification, a system of communication and understanding founded in history and limited, as a particular system, to a particular society and historical context (10), and in this way myth may be understood as functioning similar to ideology. Lakoff and Johnson see myths as a necessary asset to culture that “provide ways of comprehending experience; they give order to our lives ... All cultures have myths, and people cannot function without myth” (185-6).

2. Hereafter, SF (science fiction; the abbreviation is common in studies of the genre) will be used to refer to the genre at large, including its Russian representatives, and NF (*nauchnaia fantastika*) will refer specifically to the genre as it is in Russia. Critics may variously characterize SF and NF in terms of the issues they address and the general tone of writers, and Russians use NF as a broader category, encompassing some of what English critics would consider fantasy, but the two national traditions are equated in their use of the tools of estrangement and cognition.

3. Such experimentation, it is interesting to note, is a benchmark of Soviet NF with its unique position within socialist realism: it was the only adult literature officially exempted from the demands of realism and thus a possible competitor to state ideology in its positing of alternative models of society, yet it kept close ties to mainstream socialist realism in its formulaic structure and popularization of Soviet scientific and technological progress. After the Stalinist period of near-future stories, a time when NF writers themselves declared that the genre had all but vanished, NF achieved a more independent character in its boom of the 1960s-70s, continuing to challenge the ideology and visions of more mainstream socialist realism (Britikov 60).

4. No published English version, so all translations are my own.

5. Though Tolstaia is a mainstream author of the elite caste, Slynx was voted among the twenty most popular NF works of 2000 by fans of the genre and considered for the Russkaia Fantastika prize (“Russian ... Award”). The two works by Voinovich and Bitov, meanwhile, have been variously categorized as dystopian or meta-utopian, fictions bordering on SF. Though they lend themselves to such a reading, no overt connection has, to my knowledge, yet been made.

6. In her 2005 study, Birgit Menzel describes the large and active fan-base behind NF today, in the form of magazines (most notably Esli and Zvezdnaia doroga), web sites, and yearly awards and conventions. Additionally, the new genre of *fentezi*, marked by a swords-and-sorcery ethos in a pre-modern chronotope, has risen in prominence since the end of the Soviet Union. It has in fact eclipsed NF, which for a short period in the early 1990s all but disappeared (indicative of a larger turn of attention at that time away from the future and toward the past), and now stands beside detective fiction as the leading genre of popular literature (110+).

Chapter One: Apocastroika, 1980-1990

[T]he meaning of history is its movement toward an end.

- Berdiaev (171)

Or, as they joke in the streets of Moscow, we are witnessing apocalypse in a single country.

- Epstein (72)

Because critics in the late- and early post-Soviet periods speak of ends and crises, the main issue to address in this section is how Bitov's "Pushkin's Photograph" and Voinovich's Moscow 2042 respond to anticipations of the end. Literary treatments of post-Soviet culture crises will be examined in the next chapter, but the present concern is how, as the Communist system and society were unraveling under perestroika and glasnost', these examples of the NF genre responded to the prevailing cultural sense of an ending and moved toward the writing of new cultural myths to gird society after its future had passed.

In addition to Fukuyama's estimation of a *de-facto* end to world history with the retreat of monopolistic Communist ideology in the late 1980s, Edith Clowes notes the fear of many Russians "that the absence of an authoritarian hierarchy portend[ed] an apocalypse, the onslaught of complete political and economic disorder" (3). The impending crisis further took on mythical, supernatural overtones in the psychological aftermath of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster of 1986, says David Bethea, as in the observation in one newspaper that *chernobyl*' is Ukrainian for wormwood, the name of the poisonous fallen star in Revelations that portends the apocalypse (272). "The atheistic public had to acknowledge, on the strength of this mesmerizing coincidence, that history's plot may not be authored by humanity 'from within,' but by God 'from without,'" an apprehension attesting to "what readers of Soviet-Russian literature have

never completely forgotten – that even in the most secular society the Book, or its equivalent” – that is, a supernatural source of revelation and historical authorship – “is a *sine qua non*” (Bethea 272-73).

A myth of the apocalypse¹ was thus planted in the collective mind of late-Soviet society, just as apocalypticism was “in the air” before the 1917 revolution: Bethea cites “an explosion” between 1890 and 1917 “of apocalyptic literature [and art] unlike anything hitherto or thereafter seen in the annals of Russian culture” (108). Similar works of what he calls apocalyptic fiction – stories that “are actually *about the End*”² – appeared during perestroika. He names Venedikt Erofeev’s Moskva-Petushki (Moscow to the End of the Line, 1989)³ as an example of contemporary stories that, like their predecessors, explore “what it really signifies to experience apocalypse and revelation *in our time*” (105, 34). The revolution was the experience of apocalypse for the first Soviet generation, as writers including Bulgakov and Platonov sought in their work the meaning of this specifically Russian crisis; but “[c]ontemporary writers, most of whom were born after the revolution and thus have no direct recollection of it as a sacred or ‘Great Time,’ still need some informing myth” (Bethea 273). Such an application by successive generations of the apocalyptic paradigm to their own time accords with what Frank Kermode calls the myth of crisis. “We project our existential anxieties onto history,” whereby the paradigms of apocalypse, the perception of each generation of moments of crisis as ends and beginnings, “continue to lie under our way of making sense of the world” (97, 28).

This myth likewise informs “Pushkin’s Photograph” and Moscow 2042.⁴ Both works fulfill Bethea’s criteria for apocalyptic fiction specific to Russia, that such stories

- (1) invite the reader to interpret current events (a time of crisis) through the prism of Revelation; (2) create an intentional modal confusion, one that

cuts across the grain of novelistic realism, by introducing a character who comes from a temporality *beyond* and who presents a revelatory message to other characters still trapped *in history*; and (3) use as their primary means of moving their stories forward, to the end, the apocalyptic images of horse and train (iron horse) (105).

Both make prominent use of the theme of apocalypse and its anticipation; both are framed by a setting contemporary to perestroika, seen as a time of crisis; and as works of NF both use the novum of the time machine to enable their protagonists' movement from the beyond into history. The time machine may be taken as a re-imagining of Bethea's apocalyptic horse or train, but both works do make explicit use of traditional imagery as well.⁵ Time travel enables Bitov's protagonist, Igor' Odoevtsev, to fly from a satellite society in 2099 to the Tsarist past in order to capture Pushkin's image for posterity, as well as attempt his own mission of saving the poet from his untimely death (an eschatological event, for which historical record is his revelatory text); while Voinovich's narrator, Vitalii Nikitich Kartsev, takes a Lufthansa flight sixty years into the future out of pure curiosity, only to find that his record of the journey has become a revelatory text prophesying the end of the future Communist society.⁶

The myth of crisis lends meaning to an age by viewing it from beyond the end – in effect making the present end-determined, as does the paradigm of utopian fiction, which also swelled in popularity (especially utopian SF) beginning in 1890 (Ryan-Hayes 203). Bethea equates utopian and apocalyptic myths in their sense of an end to history, but the opposing impulses do not simply comprise two sides of “one eschatological coin,” as they represent “radically different conceptions of what constitutes narrative authority in the historiographical process” – in the apocalypse myth, narrative authority comes from

outside human history; in the utopian, from within history by human effort (15). He sees apocalyptic fiction as a counter-model to the utopian myth as it persisted under the artistic dominance of Socialist Realism. The coming of revelation from *beyond* the end in apocalyptic fiction conceives of time *after* the end, analogous to Epstein and Fukuyama's posthistorical present, and in the Russian context weakens the claim of Soviet utopianism to *be* the end of human history. It is not enough, Epstein cautions, to be anti-utopianist or postutopianist in order to overcome utopianism – to simply posit an equally dogmatic reverse of the utopian value system; rather, one must re-achieve the open-endedness of time and restore to the future its attributes of the unknown yet possible (335).

In devaluing the eschatological claims of Communist utopianism, not on its own terms but from a perspective beyond the end, apocalyptic fiction performs a task similar to that of meta-utopia. This genre originally delineated by Gary Saul Morson, says Edith Clowes, does not merely propose substitutions for utopian ideology but seeks to transform its mentality by questioning utopia's very basis, its notions of time, place, and so on. "This writing 'about utopia,' with its penetrating insight into utopian modes of thinking, is a powerful stimulus to those seeking social and political alternatives to a long-standing authoritarian culture," representing "a much greater immediate challenge to current leaders," Communist or otherwise, "than dystopian novels" (4-5). Together with Moscow 4042, which she places in this genre, "Pushkin's Photograph" can also be seen to conceive of contemporary Soviet reality ironically, as a realized (but flawed and, essentially, apocalyptic) utopia, and thereby examining and deconstructing such claims to the future. As well, meta-utopia intersects the genre of SF not only through its use of parody, as Clowes observes, but also through its practice of estrangement in positing

utopia in the present and in “imagining and articulating kinds of social consciousness other than the authoritarian ones traditional in Russian life” (4).

The use of the NF genre to tell an apocalyptic story is not surprising in the age of Chernobyl and Mir, disastrous and fantastic realities in the 1980s that may have been the stuff of pulp fictions earlier. These specific events indeed bear on these two works, as global nuclear destruction and orbiting satellites operate in the background; the latter is given a kenotypic treatment that will be examined below. Reading these two works by Bitov and Voinovich as apocalyptic fiction in addition to science fiction also suggests why authors not aligned with the NF genre would choose to borrow its tools and methods, having found it useful for a modern telling of an end-times tale. Indeed, the later work of two of the most notable contemporary NF authors, the Strugatskiis, seen alternatively by Clowes as meta-utopian, is described as “apocalyptic realism” by Howell (98).

Like the Strugatskiis’ apocalyptic NF – and as a uniquely SF innovation on Bethea’s first criterion for apocalyptic fiction – Bitov and Voinovich’s texts do not explore the paradigm of apocalypse as applied directly to their own time of crisis in the 1980s but to an estranged setting. The SF novum of the time machine, paired with the apocalyptic prism of revelation, creates a chronotope that illustrates and explores the crisis moment – it functions as what Kermode would call “a figure for the co-existence of the past and future at the time of transition” (100). This dually shaped chronotope both reflects and transforms the reader’s contemporary reality, opening the works to more freely explore questions of time, determination and historical meaning. Such questions are addressed in an estranged arena that is less the time-space destination and more the subjective chronological experience of the time traveler, for whom the technological novum affords a chronotope of mixed time, his own and the new. What the protagonists

experience in this subjective time, where they succeed and fail, and the nature and source of their revelations – both those they impart and receive – comprise the mirror aimed at the authors’ native paradigm, indeed at the readers created by the (Communist utopian) system.

Meta-utopias likewise create a subjective “chronotope of personal space” and aim to transform contemporary mentalities in their “claim to refine their readers’ aesthetic, social, and political sensibilities” (Clowes 67, x). Such claims recall the response of post-Revolutionary apocalyptic fictions (such as those by Bulgakov and Platonov) to the Revolution’s failings and excesses, by advancing not a transformation of the world through political means but an artistic transformation of how people *see* the world. Emphasis is thereby shifted from an apocalypse of revolution to an apocalypse of consciousness, “a personal eschatology achieved through the agency of the poetic imagination” (Bethea 37-8), much as contemporary meta-utopias respond to an apocalyptic “crisis of social imagination” by positing a social consciousness alternative to the failing and excess of authoritarian culture (Clowes 3). These alternatives are formed by probing the binary systems of values that inform both Soviet Russian utopianism and its aesthetic opponents, whether dystopian or realistic, and by imagining a consciousness (in terms of language, narratives and concepts of time and space) outside of all such binary systems. They examine society’s need for such fictions and suggest others, just as Paul Ricoeur notes that the apocalyptic model of narrative (and its modern form of utopia) “is only one paradigm among others, which in no way exhausts the dynamics of narrative” (*Time* vol. 1, 73). By reopening the future to the possibility of new tellings, they accord with Epstein’s notion of a literature that overcomes the imposition of certainty and necessity on the future not by merely defining itself in opposition to

utopianism, but by restoring “one’s love of the future, not as a promised state, but as a state of promise, as expectation without determination” (335).

Narrative framing in Bitov’s and Voinovich’s texts anchors the estranged times of crisis to the perestroika era, probing the boundaries of present-future binarism as they regard the present in terms of realized utopia and/or apocalypse. Moscow 2042 begins and ends in Munich in 1982, while “Pushkin’s Photograph” is told from the perspective of an author living in a remote Russian village in 1985 (one year before the launch of Mir and the perestroika reforms, and the disaster at Chernobyl). For Bitov the theme of crisis is tied to current events by wars and rumors of wars “over there”: “And today it finally turned out that there isn’t any war yet. But the day before yesterday it had broken out, and yesterday it was still possibly going on” (15-16). The narrator is in an amorphous time of crisis, questions of its proximity mooted by his observation that in the village “it’s as if there had already been a war,” while a nearby town is completely abandoned, “[a]s if they had run away in a hurry, from leprosy or a neutron bomb test” (55). For Voinovich the crisis is less imminent, less certain altogether, being projected sixty years in the future; but his apocalypse is rooted in the present since its instigators are contemporaries, and thus avoidable as one possibility among many. Not only is the end of Communism in 2042 a form of apocalypse, its very achievement takes on apocalyptic import judging by the social, moral and technological degradation Kartsev witnesses. Just as Bitov’s narrator suggests an apocalyptic tenor to the present,⁷ so Voinovich’s Communist future “is not particularly futuristic or fantastic” but rather, because of numerous ties to the narrator’s own time,⁸ “reflect[s] contemporary problems in the Soviet Union” (Ryan-Hayes 222, 225). As in biblical revelation, the moment of the apocalyptic realization of Communism is unknown to Kartsev, only heralded by signs and numerology. Nor is it a

certain vision of the future, as in utopian prescription that determines the present; instead it is a hazy vision that prompts more questions than answers.

Ambivalence toward the imminence and permanence of apocalypse indicates that even as these two works are structured by the myth of crisis, they question the finality of any eschatological event. Perestroika-era apocalyptic texts have learned from those of the Revolution era to distrust utopia – an end to history that, as Kermode says of apocalypse, has passed from imminence to immanence without brushing the face of reality (96). Pre-revolutionary apocalyptic fictions are characteristically negative crises of retribution and judgment inscribed “with the anxiety and suffering produced by living ‘under the shadow of the End’”; while works soon after 1917, by writers who anticipated “a *positive* apocalypse of universal reconciliation,” are instead “*prefigured* by the knowledge that the so-called *political* apocalypse of 1917 has *not* resulted in a mass transformation of old to new” (Bethea 106). In accordance with Kermode’s theory, once the revolution-revelation equation was disproven and a qualitatively new era failed to begin, writers tended to avoid literal depictions of an the end to history within time and instead fell to the lesser myth of crisis, aptly termed by Ricoeur a demythologized or “broken myth” (*Time* vol. 2, 26). In this way the negation of the myth is now contained in the myth itself, and hence apocalyptic fictions of the 1980s understand that no end or apocalypse – by man’s reckoning, at least – is total. This is the impossibility of completing history from within history, when “the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken” (Bakhtin 166); and this is the “self-irony of finality, which turns into yet another beginning,” as every human-conceived end only opens the way for another beginning: the preeminence of beginnings over ends inherent in the incomplete nature of time (Epstein 331).

Time in a meta-utopian fiction is “caught in a gridlock with the past, present, and future terribly entangled,” as such works “proceed from the assumption that the utopian ‘future’ is already with us and has, indeed, become past experience, a past that in no way suggests a more hopeful future” (Clowes 60). Nothing within this closed loop of time suggests escape, it must be sought elsewhere. It is a paradigm devoid of inherent meaning; meaning is only found in novelty, yet newness generated from within the loop is “inescapably related to something older than itself” and therefore tainted (Kermode 102). Meta-utopia, however, reintroduces a Bakhtinian sense of “novelness,” a challenge to boundaries through interrogation of and play with ideology and fantasy, a challenge to readers “to probe the ways in which all of our most cherished and ‘real’ values are ultimately fictions” (Clowes 93). It recognizes the rot at the core of utopia and exposes it, pulling the project apart from inside; while apocalyptic fiction pulls away from this stalemate by imagining a Last Word, a future and a quality of novelty, beyond all man’s transient last words, able to unwrite biographies and unsay what has been said (Bethea 40, 42).

Meta-utopia deprives the utopian project of its claim to the future by reestablishing utopia’s fictional nature, thereby demythologizing its guiding ideology. Clowes characterizes utopia as a collective myth “wholly committed to a single, unchanging image of one’s social landscape,” conditioning a community “to live within the geography in which it pictures itself, its past, and its future,” and resulting in ideological fixation and imaginative stagnation (53). Meta-utopia reasserts personal imagination and memory, repressed by the myth of utopia, as the two strongest and most constructive human faculties, whereby its new consciousness is shaped (ibid). Epstein similarly affirms the social status of imagination, which creates the future, and of

memory, which preserves a past “wiped out in the name of a future wrongly conceived,” vital components of the ability to conceive alternative worlds and social consciousness (316). Moscow 2042 and “Pushkin’s Photograph” are likewise concerned with demythologizing utopia, in terms of a manmade eschatology, to which end they explore memory and imagination as further components in the protagonists’ individual dual-time chronotopes. As Epstein sees a need to purify imagination of utopian elements, to free fantasy from coercion and restore it to a function of free creativity, so this purification is found, in these two texts, in revelation imparted from outside the bounds of utopian eschatology. The substance of this authoritative wisdom is its exposure of the brokenness of the myth of manmade eschatology, its reassertion of the fictional status of utopia.

Both texts treat the theme of imagination in terms of the image of the poet, embodied in the figure of Pushkin, and the theme of memory in terms of the record, such as official or personal accounts of history. The poet is able to create narrative alternatives to the utopia-apocalypse paradigm that underwrites historical record. Pushkin (and the at-risk golden past and creativity he represents) is the object of Odoevtsev’s search, and the narrator contrasts the two as different, indeed incompatible, types of poets – Odoevtsev as a poet who knows the future, from experience and memory, yet lacks creativity and does not write; and Pushkin as the genuine poet whom, as Ryan-Hayes indicates, utopian writers since Plato have recognized as dangerous (227). This incompatibility, as well as his over-exposure to historical record, prevents Odoevtsev from connecting meaningfully with the poet. Kartsev, meanwhile, is practically hailed in 2042 as the poet’s second coming, is even mistaken as a contemporary of Pushkin by the Communites, for whom all time before their own is “just a tangle of bizarre events that happened at more or less the same time” (Voinovich 254). Imagination and memory are bound together with

apocalyptic, meta-utopian revelation: they must be exercised in order to receive revelation, by seeking alternatives to utopian pretensions, and it in turn purges them of utopian determinations on history and frees them to approach the future anew.

These revelatory texts are shaped by meta-utopia's challenge to the assumptions of utopian ideology, most significantly to temporal assumptions. As meta-utopia's play with utopian models of time challenges standard notions of influence and causality, confusing historical document with artistic text, so Kartsev's revelatory text is his novel-within-the-novel, simultaneously a historical document and product of creative imagination, equal in truth to the events it describes (Clowes 63). Kartsev (who furthermore shares a porous border with the author) lives within his own apocalyptic text and, often in a state of intoxication, is unable to tell fiction from reality. Meanwhile Bitov's narrator renders experience into various "texts" through erosion of boundaries, according to Sven Spieker's study of "Pushkin's Photograph." Spieker sees in the work a confusion of such opposites as past/present, truth/fiction, and, I add, crisis/no crisis, an equivalence that creates an "immobile text [which] threatens the dynamism of beginning anew" (145). Influence and causality, history and art, are confused as Odoevtsev quotes poetry yet to be written, becomes a quotation himself of literary characters and historical figures, and even drives certain events in Pushkin's life, as when he inspires a poem or scares a fateful rabbit out of hiding in 1825. In many ways receiving divine knowledge means Kartsev and Odoevtsev must forget what they know and reject the texts of false prophecies. And though Kartsev's reliance on dubious personal experience and an admittedly shabby memory may cast doubt on his prophetic text, it will be seen that in contrast to Odoevtsev he is the more inspired, reliable prophet. That is, while his record is

based on experience, Odoevtsev's experience is only attainable through, and limited by, the (much edited) official record of his day.

Since the characters' main purpose in traveling to another time is to record what they see and hear, they become complicit in the utopian project to view not only the present age but all of history as determined by the utopian end, consequently denying them their own place in and experience of history. "The Soviet citizen has not been deprived of history and tradition, on the contrary, he has been choked to death by it," yet at the same time "the Soviet system has stripped its citizens of all opportunities for experiencing *themselves* in a historical context" (Spieker 166-7). Personal memory is subsumed under the utopian myth, one's sense of the past contemporized to "support and illustrate the postulates implemented by political leadership"; one is deprived of "any personal relationship with events. The world of what was once experienced was replaced by the world of what one was allowed to remember" (Balina 189). Odoevtsev is sent to capture Pushkin's voice and image in honor of the tricentennial of the poet's birth, an attempt to "correct [the] error of time" and "irritating lacuna" that the poet could not be photographed in life – all part of a larger project to conquer time⁹ and "restore the whole of former culture down to the tiniest detail" (Bitov 20, 23). Kartsev, who travels to the future on his own initiative, is asked by several of his contemporaries (some of whom, including Bukashev and Karnavalov, become prominent figures in 2042) to document the future and its secrets. Even if the desire of Odoevtsev's future to uncover the past, resembling the aim of Gorbachev's 1987 speech on "filling in the 'blank passages' of Soviet Russian history" (Clowes 3), lacks the overtly controlling, revisionist motives of the Moscowrep of Moscow 2042, it represents a similar attempt at historical representation such as that which meta-utopia undermines. Just as utopia closes off the

future, it does not find in full historical disclosure a conduit to the past; rather, it builds a wall around it, solidifying its meaning as one imposed narrative and cutting it off from any consequent dialogue with the present.

As an example of “antiquarian historicism,” which strives to preserve the past in its exact form (Clowes 62), Odoevtsev’s is a future that chooses to recreate rather than to create anew. (This behavior is indicative of the *post*-apocalyptic chronotope, which will be examined in the next chapter.) In Odoevtsev’s future reality, mankind lives in space stations above an earth which is seen (looking up, as if at the sky) as a deep black void, dotted with domes preserving its major cities and monuments, while projects are underway to restore terrestrial plants and animals. *Terra firma* has evidently been made uninhabitable by an apocalyptic event, suggested not only by the necessity to live off-planet but also by the description of bombs flying back up, “unscarring the earth,” and of crumbled cities re-blossoming as Odoevtsev races back through time. In meta-utopian terms, the kenotypical image of satellite-cities floating above a war-scarred museum-earth embodies the exchange of the higher, utopian locus for the lower – “the ‘more’ real with the merely real, paradise with the garbage pit” (Clowes 49). Space stations are similarly characterized in Voinovich’s future of 2042, free-floating prisons that preserve the past (symbolized by the grand leader Genialissimo and his classical furnishings, including a bust of Lenin) while separating it from dialog with the present.

Satellites in both texts serve simultaneously as a technologically estranged vision of the Soviet meta-utopia of the late 1980s, and as Epsteinian kenotypes for their value as “mysterious prototypes of the world that is to come [and] its eschatological indicators, arising out of darkness” (Epstein 48). A kenotype is “the crystallization of a historically new conceptual system [whose] meaning extends beyond the bounds of contemporaneity

itself,” addressing “not the beginning but the potential end of time, as a vast and growing source of meaning” (Epstein 325-27). The image of the space station is kenotypical in its multivalence: it comprises the notions of threshold, gateway and containment, a disembodied chronotope with its own unique time and space, just as the Mir (whose very name was multivalent, signaling both “peace” and “world”) contained within itself a cramped labyrinth of hoses, cables and scientific instruments as well as articles of everyday life, clothes, photos and books. Free-floating above earth and even the sky, the traditional realm of the future (Lakoff and Johnson 20) – its vulnerable occupants poised tantalizingly close to a sempiternic (deep-time) cosmos utterly devoid of life – the space station subverts the utopian notion of a “path” to progress yet serves its concept of a time and place separate from all else. In short, it is a paradox of manifold significance.

Bitov’s Sputnik of United Nations of 2099 is thus a window to eternity below and the earth above, a posthistorical “postutopia where the future has lost its transcendence by becoming reality and, thereby, history” (Speiker 161). An anticipation of Russia’s postfuture, it represents a choice between the potential of the (dauntingly) unformed and the (comfortable) limits of the known and historical. Odoevtsev’s society clings to the latter, to what better serves its rigid ideology: “the past itself occupies the very transcendent position which modernist utopianism had reserved for the future” (ibid). His society cuts off and contains the transcendent realm of the past, restricting access to museum-cities like St. Petersburg after preserving them like decorative clocks “tick[ing] away the time inside the dome... still chiming in the past tense, a sonic past-perfect” (Bitov 20, 19). The image naturally recalls the clock in Pushkin’s apartment-museum, stopped at the time of his death – its hands poised in the expectant duration between the humble genesis and feeble apocalypse of Kermode’s *tick-tock* plot (45). Kermode likens

the gap between *tick* and *tock* to the role of the ground in spatial perception, each characterized “by a lack of form, against which the illusory organizations of shape and rhythm are perceived in the spatial or temporal object” (ibid). This is why “[e]arth’s gravity is now somewhat dangerous in an ideological sense” (Bitov 21), representing a perspective outside of and thus challenging to the formation of utopianism and its illusions of shape and rhythm.

When the rallying cry from the 1937 centennial, “Forward to Pushkin!,” is raised again in 2099, no mention is made of writers or artists contemporary to this period, of any efforts toward original development toward the future; all energy goes into fully recovering the lost texts of the past, the lost culture and creativity associated with authors like Pushkin. Capturing the “true” image of the poet represents the restoration of historical continuity; Odoevtsev’s personal mission goes even further, poses Spieker, in speculating “that if the original sin of Russian culture (the killing of Pushkin) could have been prevented, so could much of the trauma that followed it” (Spieker 168-69). The undoing of this event, which Odoevtsev treats with apocalyptic import, seeing the death of Pushkin as the death of creativity, would equal an authoritative, revelatory unwriting of Russia’s biography (history) – the forcing of the hand of Pushkin’s death-clock. Odoevtsev fails, however, because his attempt is made from within the utopian gridlock, his mission a novelty tainted and doomed by the limits of official history.

Even after traveling back in time, Odoevtsev is still trapped within a sort of dome as historical knowledge defines the bounds of his experience in the 1830s. The ancient St. Petersburg of Pushkin’s lifetime exists, like a glass-encased clock, as if in a time before memory – as Odoevtsev observes, contrasting the city of 1837 to its appearance before the poet’s death, “almost nothing existed of that which will someday bear his name”

(Bitov 51). His acquaintance with the past is limited to official record and unofficial anecdotes, texts (which may as well be fictions) that are the products of a cultural memory that taints personal memory – a meta-utopian intertwining of fantasy and historical documentation into a mutually compromising relationship – and so he is able to see events only insofar as they are quotations from these texts. “[T]he rest (everything!) merged in a continuous and dangerous delirium of a completely different and inaccessible reality,” that is, the static past transformed into the continuous reality of the present, where “they, not knowing, were the ones who were able to see (if not to recognize) the ‘alive’ ... They were able to live, he was able to know” (Bitov 37-8, 29). Deprived of any opportunity to rely on personal memory, his presence in the past is defined by negation, being “absent in this century just as he had been absent from it before his arrival” (Bitov 38). As Spieker observes, history exists in the story “only to the extent that it excludes the spectator... [It] presents itself to the traveler as an invisible, vacuous space in which he does not belong” (151-2). Faced with this negation of identity in a history that he can know only through quotations, Odoevtsev himself becomes a quotation of sorts, conforming to the models of various literary characters and their circumstances. Revelation and novelty are not possible when he can live only according to the texts of official and cultural memory. When “the only images from the past which we are allowed to recognize are those already canonized by official culture,” especially when those images weave so thick a shroud as to completely obscure the past, it becomes necessary to forget official versions and visions in order to achieve freedom from imposed meaning and reconnect with any other meaning in history (Spieker 169).

By hiding his knowledge of the future, by consciously putting on a mask of ignorance, Odoevtsev is able to achieve some semblance of *living* in the past and

interacting with others. He gathers priceless and unique personal experiences, though he knows these are of no value to the future, which wants only slides and tapes. He even tries his hand at writing, since his pursuit of Pushkin is an effort to emulate the poet's creative powers as much as it is a search for insight beyond memory. Yet, again, he cannot transcend historical memory: his accounts of nineteenth-century life are confused with the future, and in creating memoirs of the twenty-first century he merely becomes a quotation of his near-eponym, Prince Odoevskii. Odoevtsev's role as poet-prophet, bestowed upon him by dubious revelation from the text of history, is contrasted with Pushkin's apparent sense of prediction which is founded in the true poet's creative imagination. Pushkin already knows everything "about me, about himself" and his impending betrayal by his wife and fateful duel, Odoevtsev gasps during their first conversation, as the poet appears as if transfigured before him in a white robe and silvery glow (Bitov 42). Even the narrator takes Pushkin's habit of steadying his shooting hand with a cane as "one more small proof that the poet foresaw his future" (Bitov 48).

Odoevtsev's central failure is his inability to forget Pushkin's death, to shed historical memory of the poet who "has survived in the archive of Stalinist culture" in a form so twisted as to be hailed as the true ancestor of Socialist Realism: "Since Pushkin has stayed alive, any attempt to remember him ends in failure" (Spieker 151, 25). That is, the living Pushkin cannot be remembered since he is obscured by the Pushkin of official record. The historical Pushkin is dead, his entire life in fact given meaning, as in the apocalyptic/utopian paradigm, through his death – Odoevtsev can only see a St. Petersburg dotted with what will become monuments to the still-living poet, who does not stay in one place long enough to hear warnings from beyond the grave but rushes off to the next event in his life. Pushkin, who naturally has no memory of his death, has no

interest in anything but life and creativity. “What does he care about my penicillin when boy-poets can run around the world with such names....” (Bitov 52, ellipses in the original). Pushkin’s life, seen from beyond his death, is a closed book if written according to the apocalyptic-utopian paradigm, one narrative interpretation of the “untold stories” of his life, from which emerges one interpretation of his identity; but to the still-living poet, “entangled in stories,” as Ricoeur would say, “narrating is a secondary process ... simply the continuation of these untold stories” (Time vol. 1, 75).

Odoevtsev’s story, with its challenges of memory and imagination that the time traveler fails to meet because the apocalyptic-utopian paradigm limits his ability to live and create, represents the narrator’s examination of his own historical situation. The narrator writes while sitting in his attic, equated to a satellite by its remoteness in time and space, suspended in a darkness that hides the surrounding landscape, “not a landscape but a whoosh of time” (Bitov 18). The inhabitants of neighboring villages have all “run off into tomorrow” but he remains in his personal chronotope, seeking to be disconnected from the wires and hoses of communal life – effectively from the pervasive ideology of the apocalyptic utopia that seems to surround him – since he cannot create while hooked up to a system where “[a] living detail can’t be found” (Bitov 55-56). Here in his own satellite he takes the path not chosen by those on the Sputnik of United Nations, looking not back on a confused history for meaning but inward, upon an eternal *tabula rasa* erased of official memory. He creates a meta-utopian realm by relying not on source materials on St. Petersburg history and Pushkin’s life and works – he has none at hand – but on his own unmoored memory and creativity. By crafting a story that reaches from an imagined, estranged future into the murky past he highlights the backward perspective on

Pushkin's life, given meaning through his death, that prevents Odoevtsev from bonding with the poet who, in his lifetime, gives meaning to his life through his creative work.

Compared to the living, divine insight attributed to the genuine poet, Odoevtsev's revelation can only come as quotations from dead texts. However true, his prophecy of crisis remains uninspired repetition, powerless to unwrite the death of Pushkin from Russia's biography. Instead, his own manuscript is unwritten by the 1824 flood examined in Pushkin's "Bronze Horseman" ["Mednyi vsadnik," 1837] and the only photos he produces are of its violent waves. This flood is treated metaphorically by the narrator as a tide of images of the past accumulated to the point of overrunning the present: "If you put a dam on time in an effort to store the past or accumulate the future, you will be flooded through the tiny little hole called 'now,' and you will choke in the flood of the present" (Bitov 56). Once Odoevtsev's manuscript is wiped clean – a vision of history washed away by the incompleteness of time – the narrator places a final period "like a monument," on the other side of which is the dawn "in our own personal time," emphatically "OUR time (mine and yours)" (Bitov 59). Having refictionalized utopia as an immobile text and closed it with a final period, the narrator emerges into the ongoing, unfinished text of the present with an eye toward the unwritten future.

Kartsev's revelatory text, drawn from his experience in a meta-utopian realm of confused historical determination and quotation,¹⁰ likewise reclaims imagination and memory from the dictates of utopianism. In 2042 he is faced with a world determined by record, like Odoevtsev's past, and that, like Odoevtsev's future, is not interested in, nor capable of, creating anything new. Its sole concern is keeping full grasp on the recording (and recoding) of the historical past. "They all quoted the Genialissimo frequently [but] the pronouncements, poetic turns of phrase, and sayings they ascribed to him were not ...

original” (Voinovich 129). On a larger scale every experience in the Moscowrep is a quotation of Kartsev’s, as recorded in his novel; and people, whom “[t]he author has drawn ... solely from himself” and to whom he ascribes his own virtues and shortcomings, are only quotations of a single person (Voinovich 4).¹¹ Kartsev, by merit of being “fully characterized internally by Voinovich,” stands alone as a fully-realized subject; all others, whose very names are merely extensions of their activities, “act chiefly as mouthpieces for ideas” which are not even their own (Ryan-Hayes 232). Only Kartsev’s experience is original since, even when it follows his novel, he acts out of a position of forgetting: after reading his novel he forgets how it ends, nor can he even remember the gist of conversations he has already had. Just as Bitov’s narrator achieves creativity by cloistering himself from the pervasive system of utopian ideology with its end-determined historical records, so Kartsev enters a private space of alcoholic amnesia, free to create by forgetting all else.

Kartsev’s esteem of himself as a realistic writer, who promises the reader that he will not deviate from the facts in his description, spells a reliance on his own perception of reality and refusal to allow the future to fill in its own blanks, to determine its own truth. Both Bukashev and Karnavalov, representing two sides of the utopian paradigm, want him to edit his novel so that their own preferred result is assured – to make his novel into a concrete and imaginatively dead “future history.” But by refusing “to harness his work and his imagination to one or another ideological construct or group claiming political control,” by “not wed[ding] himself to one single view of the future and offer[ing] no particular guide to his readers,” he achieves liberation from the utopian time-loop (Clowes 64). In all the novel’s debate on primary versus secondary matter, Kartsev’s conclusion echoes Ricoeur’s understanding of life and its untold stories as

primary and narration as secondary (Time vol. 1, 72). Kartsev comes to understand that the narration of life or history according to an end-determined paradigm precludes open, living narration as a continuation of untold stories.

Voinovich's depiction of the end of Communism anticipates Epstein's postcommunist proclamation that "[t]he 'communist future' remains in the past, but this only means that the future has been cleansed of yet another specter, or idol, and such cleansing, or demythologization, of time is the proper function of the future" (331). In the same way, Genialissimo Bukashev tells Kartsev that he considered it necessary to bring the "historical experiment" of Communism to its absurd fullness – an equation of all opposites – in order to destroy it and give humanity "an immunity which will last for many generations into the future" (Voinovich 402). This immunity is not only against Communism but against any such advance on an objectified future that does violence to the past and present. "Only the future conceived as already attained and under control is abolished ... be it called communism, industrialism or avant-gardism" (Epstein 335). Once society is inoculated against such narrative paradigms, once the future is purged of its collusion with utopia, then again are opened the free possibilities of a future that forever stands beyond each *soi-disant* end. This is the decisive revelation Kartsev receives.

Kartsev applies this divinely inspired knowledge in crafting his apocalyptic novel, refusing to let the future write itself, to edit its characters and events; rather, he filters it through his own haze of intoxicated amnesia. It emerges as the chimera of a drunkard whose senses, if not his honesty, invite doubt and thus leave the future an open question, demythologized as an eschatological myth and deprived of its power to determine the present. It is an apocalypse softened at the edges, a future "not written down from utopian

dictation” but that, rather, “wipes away rigid strokes and creates ... one of many possible sketches of futuricity” (Epstein 337). It places a love of the promise of the future above fear of an inevitable paradise, as its author is willing to let it be dismissed as “the product of an idle, inoffensive imagination” if only it bears no ultimate resemblance to reality (Voinovich 424) – if, instead, it bears the traits of “[t]he state of proto-,” which gives “any text the quality of a rough draft, of uncompletedness, and a certain rawness”(Epstein 337-8). In Voinovich’s text as in Bitov’s there is no final word on history, neither from the author nor from a demanding utopian ideology – the future is freed to speak for itself.

Thus in their estranged visions of perestroika-era apocalypticism these meta-utopias by Bitov and Voinovich undermine the finality of the myths of both utopia and apocalypse, reestablishing their fictionality and demonstrating that no such end to history is really the end. They furthermore highlight imagination and memory as tools for breaking the stalemate of the end-times paradigm – personal memory, purged of the end-determined meaning utopianism imposes on the past and capable of dialog with other times; and creativity, able to continue writing a national and cultural biography for the future. These works represent a move toward the building of a future-oriented culture, rather than one robbed of its future by an ideology that espouses an ultimate end to time. This is the progression toward Epstein’s proto- culture, which will be further traced in the following chapters.

Notes to Chapter One

1. “Apocalypse” – Greek *apokalipsis*, lit. “a lifting of the veil” – by definition refers to a written forewarning of future events by divinely inspired vision, but the term is often used to refer to the prophesied cataclysm itself. The term will here be used in both senses, with specific references to either made clear (e.g. “revelatory text” to refer to the written vision).

2. He further defines the genre: “an apocalyptic fiction is not an apocalypse, but a modern equivalent of one, a kind of sacred text or version of *the Book* through which the character and the narrator and, by implication, the reader – all in their separate, self-enclosed realms – are made privy to a ‘secret wisdom’ from another space-time” (Bethea 33).

3. Though not officially published in the Soviet Union until 1989, Erofeev wrote this work in 1969. This is the case for other of Bethea’s apocalyptic fictions, such as Bulgakov’s *Master and Margarita* (written over a period from the 1920s-40s but not published in full in the Soviet Union until 1989), as well as for the Strugatskii brothers’ “apocalyptic realism” to be mentioned below. Delayed publication is typical for many glasnost’-era texts, but when this is true of an apocalyptic fiction, it is interesting how it mirrors the “sealing away” of biblical revelations, whose intended audience was professedly future generations.

4. *Moscow 2042* is traditionally read as dystopian satire or even anti-antiutopian, dealing with areas closely related to a theme of apocalypse that receives little critical attention as sub-themes in themselves. Presenting the work as dystopia, Ryan-Hayes does acknowledge in passing that the replacement of Moscow with a new dystopia “introduces a darker, apocalyptic strain” into the novel (Ryan-Hayes 210).

5. Though horse/train imagery is an important element in Bethea’s notion of apocalyptic fiction it is parenthetical to my argument, so I will say only enough to establish its use in *Moscow 2042* and “Pushkin’s Photograph.” Regarding the time machine as its uniquely SF figuration: Odoevtsev’s machine, disguised as an old-fashioned cane with a collapsible seat, and Kartsev’s passenger jet – both of which carry them swiftly across time and space, traversing decades in hours – would seem to perform the function of “a concrete way to visualize the rapid and ominous passage of time in space,” a symbol for “eschatological transit, for the tumultuous ‘ride’ from one space-time to another” (Bethea 45, 47). Odoevtsev’s cane, which he rides astride, suggests the horse, while Kartsev’s plane is closer to the description of a train as a self-enclosed ensemble of origin and destination, in which the rider does not hold the reins but is driven. Moreover, the train passenger “feels *cut off* from nature and the outside world and begins to experience the space-time of the journey in *relative terms*,” which in the case of the plane’s breaking free of gravity and traveling near the speed of light, arriving sixty years in the future three hours later, is a literal application of Einsteinian physics (Bethea 58-9).

More traditional horse/train symbols also mark the two texts. The most prominent in “Pushkin’s Photograph” is the reference to Pushkin’s “Bronze Horseman” and Odoevtsev’s experience in the flood and descent into madness mirroring Evgenii’s in the poem. Trains also are mentioned, once after Pushkin’s death (“for some reason [Odoevtsev] hung around the lycee and almost fell under the first steam engine, heading toward him straight from Pushkin’s death”) and twice when Odoevtsev imagines him still alive, riding that same first train from St. Petersburg to Moscow (Bitov 44, 51, 54). The most prominent use of train-like imagery in *Moscow 2042* is in the steam-powered cars, menacingly belching fire and smoke, that prowl the Moscow streets, though used here not as a symbol of technological progress but of the backwardness and technological degradation of the Communist city-state. Images of horses abound, from Rudi owning racehorses to Sim making his triumphal entrance to seize power in Moscow on a white horse, with matching robes and boots – just as he first appeared to Kartsev sixty years earlier. Of most interest is the equestrian statue Kartsev first sees with the Genialissimo on the horse in place of the original Iurii Dolgorukii, only to be replaced later by Symich. Kartsev sees this statue for the second time just before witnessing a public execution ordered by the new despot (Voinovich 413).

6. Other prophetic characters abound in the two works. Bitov’s narrator is visited in 1985 by Chistiakov, a vagabond of indeterminate age, “a lush, a poetic soul” (significant to apocalyptic imagery, he shakes his head “like a horse” and his “brother works on the railway”), who asks for a cup of water before giving a detailed account of a war that had broken out within Russia’s borders, then disappears by morning (Bitov

16). Sim, the future destroyer of the Moscowrep, is visited in childhood by a tattered wanderer with a bushy, tangled beard who asks for a cup of water and tells the boy that he shall become Sim the First, tsar of the Russians, then vanishes (Voinovich 280).

7. The story of Odoevtsev that Bitov's narrator tells is a continuation of a story, pulled from a folder of rejected beginnings, that he began writing seventeen and a half years earlier. Here must be noted the influence of Prince Vladimir Odoevskii's *unfinished* apocalyptic work 4338-i god. Peterburgskie pis'ma [Year 4338: Letters from Petersburg, 1840]. It is a fragment of a larger work the prince intended to write, about Russia's past and present as well as its future, but he died before he could finish it. Odoevskii's name prefigures Odoevtsev's, albeit obliquely, and the latter is said to have "had ancestors in the Pushkin epoch, those same Prince Odoevtsevs" (Bitov 25). This connection has significance, as will be seen below, for Odoevtsev's living in the past as a quotation (in the case of his name, a misquotation), and in the dialog between Odoevtsev and Pushkin as different types of poets -- the government in Odoevskii's utopia, "in an un-Platonic twist, is ruled by 'the leading poet of our time'" (Bethea 156n.16). The Odoevtsev/Odoevskii connection made here is also significant in light of Bitov's larger works, most notably Pushkinskii dom, in which earlier generations of the Odoevtsev family are the main protagonists.

8. Conditions in Moscowrep such as broken telephones and elevators, lack of hot water and pothole-riddled roads are familiar to the Russian reader, Ryan-Hayes notes, in addition to Kartsev's repeated observations that society and government function as they had in his day, and his recognition of familiar faces. Moreover, she sees the use of Red Army imagery from the Russian Civil War as indicating that many negative aspects of society "[have] not changed in the Soviet Union over its entire history" (Ryan-Hayes 217). Even in Communism's replacement by tsarist dystopia social changes are more superficial than qualitative, says Booker, symbolized by the replacement of an equestrian Genialissimo statue with that of Karnavalov (Booker 134). In apocalyptic terms the riders of the fateful horsemen are interchangeable, illustrating the impermanence of any specific vision of humanist eschatology.

9. In an interesting point of contact between this imagined future and the author's society, the celebration speaker proclaims that "the first time machine was invented in Russia almost two centuries ago" -- that is, in the early twentieth century -- and "has taken us to the distant future, instantly leaving the rest of the history of the Earth in the distant past" (Bitov 22). This is perhaps a reference to the Revolution and Soviet utopian project, with its emphasis on conquering time and speeding the advent of the future, or more likely to the literature thus inspired -- pre-Revolutionary NF or the genre of Socialist Realism, such as in Kataev's Vremia vpered'! (*Time Forward!*, 1932). The practice figures into literal time machines as depicted in such works as Maiakovskii's Bania [*Bathhouse*, 1930].

10. Some unwinding of this labyrinthine narrative situation is necessary in order to properly determine Kartsev's place in it and his role as prophet. By the time of Kartsev's trip to the future as told in the *external* novel, it appears that he has already made the trip, returned and written his own, *internal* novel, which those in 2042 treat as a revelatory text and which, in the *external* novel, he changes. Kartsev had no direct hand in the shaping of the Moscowrep (though many of his contemporaries in 1982 did), but its officials believe that since he recorded its history and its apocalyptic end, he can also unwrite its fate by rewriting his prophetic text. (Such games with time are typical of SF time-travel stories, another facet the genre lends to apocalyptic/meta-utopian fiction.) It is significant that within the *external* novel he encounters his *internal* text as if for the first time, meaning that, unlike Odoevtsev, he has no memory whatsoever of the record that determines the distant time to which he travels.

11. Among the numerous parodic responses in this novel is a wide thread of possible allusions to Valentin Kataev (the name alone is not far removed from Vitalii Kartsev), who lived until 1986. The very treatment of time travel as a reality recalls the speeding of time through production in his seminal Socialist Realist work Time Forward!. Characteristics shared by Moscow 2042 and Kataev's work in the 1970s-80s, as described by Shneidman, include a mix of truth and fantasy, including a subjective account of the author's contemporaries; reliance on imperfect memory to tell a first-person narration; and interaction between different time periods (Shneidman 62-74). This connection, apparently overlooked in the critical literature to date on Voinovich's work, warrants further study to determine its full import.

Chapter Two: Et Memento et Alieno Mori, 1991-2000

Romulus said: "The stars have willed it,
And we have regained our ancient honor."
Remus replied: "What was before
We must forget, let us look forward."
- Nikolai Gumilëv, "Founders" (62)

Let us hope that it is only the way of a new conquistador,
whose victories and conquests lie still ahead.
- Valerii Briusev, appraising Gumilëv's early poetry (68)

Communist utopia's pretension to be the end of world history was ultimately disproved by the enduring uncompletedness of history. The worst of apocalyptic expectations were likewise disappointed by that same aspect of time – the end of a way of life did not bring an end to life itself – and Russia entered, as Epstein says, a period of postfuture at the dawn of the last decade of the twentieth century (xi). The *tock*, to continue Kermode's metaphor, that knelled the death of the Soviet Union meant "an inversion of beginning and end, an almost impossible anomaly of time" as the future now lay in the discarded past (ibid). In narrative terms, this anomaly is akin to the formless period between *tock* and *tick*, an unorganized and unlimited sequence representing "purely successive, disorganized time" (Kermode 45). Marina Timchenko applies such a concept to Russian art in 1992: "contemporary artistic culture bears witness to the fact that a defined period of its self-realization is ... complete, and that the next period has not really begun," as if culture had halted before flowing into a new channel (129). Thus while the two perestroika-era works previously examined dealt with expectations of an end, the two post-Soviet texts in this chapter probe the certainty of an end to a phase in Russian culture and the uncertain search for a new beginning.

The chosen novels by Tat'iana Tolstaia and the team of Andrei Lazarchuk and Mikhail Uspenskii continue to explore, as in previously discussed works, the interaction

between different time periods; the theme of memory and imagination and their roles in regarding the past and shaping the future; and the search for revelatory or authoritative texts. Slynx and Look into the Eyes of Monsters (hereafter, Look)¹ are thematically post-apocalyptic and stylistically a hybrid of NF and the younger genres, in Russia, of fantasy and alternative history; more on this in a moment. They are also uniquely situated amid genre developments of the 1990s that saw a marked rise in the popularity of both historical novels and fantasy. Themes of personal responsibility and revelatory texts – in the sense now of revelation of the form and nature of culture, rather than an apocalyptic foretelling – are common to all genres concerned, though they take differing approaches. All use the theme of history as their medium for storytelling but it will be seen that, while historical fiction reverts to earlier models in suggesting a path for Russia's future, NF and *fentezi* suggest a re-evaluation of the previous century and an escape from the limits of inherited models of culture. The revelations characters seek in Slynx and Look are about rewriting present culture in the face of lingering habits of ideology such as those Communist utopianism instilled. This they do in a manner similar to other challenging types of literature in the 1980s and 1990s (see Zolotonosov's appraisal of such writers below), by examining that handmaiden of ideology, language. Language will be examined in terms of texts (extending from prose to accounts of history), which together compose a single cultural text through the mediation of art, embodied as before in the image of the poet.

In terms of genre it will be fruitful, and most appropriate considering the apocalypticism of the fiction and cultural concepts discussed in chapter one, to treat the two works primarily as post-apocalyptic SF, what Gary Wolfe calls "stories that begin at the end of the world" (8).² In such works apocalypse "means the end of a way of life, a

configuration of attitudes, perhaps a system of beliefs – but not the actual destruction of the planet or its population.” Such works may thus be regarded as “tales of cosmological displacement: the old *concept* of ‘world’ ... in the sense of economic and political systems, beliefs and behavior patterns ... is destroyed and a new one must be built in its place” (1-2). Post-apocalyptic fictions are, above all, about renewal. Crucial judgments arise, says Eric Rabkin, in comparing the destroyed world with that for which it makes room, just as “the hope of the world under Noah’s rainbow is brighter than that before the flood.” The potentiality of this new world, what will be further examined as a proto-phase in the next chapter, offers the chance to fashion a new life to one’s own tastes: “the goal of world destruction is world creation, pro-creation, and re-creation for ... the self” (ix-xv). As apocalyptic fictions these two texts offer examples of the adaptation and renewal necessary for surviving in the post-disaster chronotope, where time is halted and nothing new can develop, the features of the cultural landscape are bleak, and survivors must decide to what extent they will either preserve the culture lost or remake the world. Language, again, deserves special attention, as its use in the novels illustrates the inevitable and indeed necessary mutations that enable the writing of new cultural texts.

Just as apocalyptic expectations marked social attitudes and were reflected in the literature from the perestroika era examined above, so the post-apocalyptic scenario is an apt estrangement of early post-Soviet Russia. The “apocalypse” of the end of Communism meant for Russian society the loss of the unified cultural text of Soviet communality, “a soviet master narrative that had produced a distinct kind of conformism as well as a distinct form of dissidence” (Boym 151). This feeling of loss, Boym writes, was both celebrated and mourned in the post-Soviet press, “but there was no clear agreement as to what exactly constituted that cultural text in the first place” (ibid).

Culture, according to Iurii Lotman and Boris Uspenskii, can be “understood as a non-hereditary memory of a group” which “always appears as a system of values” (“Binary” 30). Every new period in Russian culture, they write, is marked by a radical break with the past while at the same time certain texts are preserved by “the mechanisms of memory” (“Binary” 31). Accordingly, because the early 1990s were “a time of ultimate uncertainty and acute frustration with respect to social identification,” as Russians experienced “a state of social uncertainty [and] conceptual disorientation,” they sought resolution “in a manner familiar to them – through reversion to historical analogies” (Dubin 72). After initially rejecting the Soviet past as “marking time on the sidelines of civilization,” by the middle of the decade they sought to regain a sense of national identity by aligning with “an imagined common past” – indeed by preserving “an enthusiastic reverence for the idea of the past as obviously and incomparably more profound, genuine, and instructive than the current environment – more ‘real,’ one might say, than any reality” (Dubin 73, 71).

Dubin explores the popular historical novel in this respect, but the rise in popularity of fantasy and decline of SF in Russia in the 1990s is also part of this trend of turning away from the future and toward the past. “All contemporary Russian fantasy novels have switched their attention from utopian futures to alternative concepts of history [and a]ll writers are more or less preoccupied with the topic of the vanished empire,” Menzel says in her survey of the NF and *fentezi* genres (149). This is the genre of alternative history – imaginative explorations of the past rather than visions of the future, myth and magic or other non-empirical elements replacing the technological fetish of satellites and time machines in the works’ presentations of an estranged form of their authors’ time and place (Menzel 118-9). Kaplan further describes historical fiction’s

treatment of the past not as its purpose but its medium, a means of investigating “general human problems: duty, power, moral choice, or spiritual quests.” Alternative history, in which history is imagined to have taken a different course at some key point and the results extrapolated logically, may likewise serve as the medium for exploring human problems (Kaplan 83). With the loss of the Communist future, both historical and science fiction display a concern more with defining present culture through the examination of past models than seeking the shape of tomorrow. There is therefore little in such works that expresses the love of the future that Epstein indicates as so crucial for a post-historical, post-utopian society to restore the momentum of its halted stream of culture, indeed to rejoin the flow of history. In their post-apocalyptic scenarios of culture frozen in an ahistorical wasteland, a mystic and mythic estrangement of early post-Soviet Russian society, Slynx and Look take a critical view of this preoccupation with a fabricated past and indicate the need to be receptive to changes in the future in order to rebuild culture in a new direction.

To further orient these works by Tolstaia and Lazarchuk and Uspenski within the NF genre: in his 2002 study of modern sub-genres of NF, Kaplan categorizes Look as a mystical thriller, in which the setting is the author and readers’ empirical time and place but into which the supernatural intrudes; and Slynx as among works that are in equal parts NF and “mainstream” (generally outside of NF/*fentezi*), its fantasy element based on cultural tradition and serving “as a point of departure for the author’s thoughts” while also setting their tone (67, 83). Look may be similarly categorized. And as works that explore the interaction between time periods Slynx and Look use as their tools not a time machine but the post-apocalyptic devices of death or destruction; immortality and a concomitant long-reaching individual memory; and the survival of fragments from the past. The latter

serves, as Lotman would say, as texts within texts, preserved, as stated, by the mechanism of memory and intruding from one culture into the next, from one time period into another (“Text” 378).

The plots of the two works can best be recounted according to Wolfe’s formula for end-of-the-world fiction. Characters of such works experience or discover the cataclysm, then journey through the post-apocalyptic wasteland, establish a new community, contend with the re-emerging wilderness, and finally struggle to decide which values will prevail in making the new world (Wolfe 8). These elements are represented to varying degrees in Slynx, which places the nuclear event of the Blast³ two hundred years prior to the narrative, the survivors of which establish a community, Fëdor-Kuzmichsk, on the site of ancient Moscow. Society is split into the Oldeners, who remember life before the Blast and seek to restore culture (earmarked as perestroika-era in nature, seen in the reminiscence of the Oldeners described below) holus-bolus, and the Golubchiks (a pre-Revolutionary form of address approximate to “my dear”), essentially mutated backward peasants. The wilderness outside the city gates is a clear threat, embodied in the eponymous Slynx, and a decisive struggle over formative values – the choice between the preservation of old life and art or the creation of new – occurs at the end. The one missing element from the formula of post-apocalyptic fiction is a journey through the wasteland of space, a significant deviation because in its place is static confinement to the village, figuring the attitude of historical malaise that the work examines. Protagonist Benedikt can be said to journey through time, though, as he encounters vestiges of the lost world in the forms of words and images, familiar to the contemporary reader, that jar dramatically with the bleak cultural landscape around him. The quest to found a new community is cast in similar terms – not a physical village,

which has already existed for generations before Benedikt, but a search for the means to reestablish culture in terms of art, morality and ideology.

Though Look is more easily categorized as alternative history than post-apocalyptic, it does feature a few elements of Wolfe's formula which lends it similar import to Slynx for its examination of historical attitudes. Look illustrates the same bleak landscape and need for adaptability for living in the new world and building anew. A journey through the "wasteland" of time is a prominent theme, as the poet Nikolai Gumilëv is saved from execution at the hands of the government in 1921 and becomes an immortal, time-traveling white magician. He proceeds to fight supernatural forces and Nazi occultism throughout time, waging war as he did in life – with words as well as guns. The theme of past cataclysm is prominent both in the all-consuming war between primordial adversaries that serves as deep background to the narrative (essentially making all of human history post-apocalyptic; a major goal of Gumilëv's search through the landscape of time is the knowledge and relics of this ancient culture); and in Gumilëv's own "death," his personal eschatology, and the new life he begins. In exchange for being trained in the mystical art of poetry he must completely abandon his old life of publishing, a difficult decision for him. The alternative history element is seen in the interventions of the poet and the cabals of white magicians, who decide they have humanity's best interest at heart. This is seen for instance when the Union of Nine, a branch of the cabalistic Fifth Rome⁴ which the poet joins, has infiltrated Russian patent bureaus for three centuries, quietly squelching inventions it considered harmful to humanity or that humans were not yet ready for. It is "owing to these small victories," Gumilëv learns, "that mankind still continued to exist," though as the twentieth century

progressed the dangers of science and technology threatened to outstrip their efforts (Lazarchuk and M. Uspenskii 410).

The practices both of preserving history and seeking alternative explanations were begun under Gorbachëv, Boym notes, with the perestroika-era emphasis on commemoration and documentation, maturing in the post-Soviet years as “utopian nostalgia” and “the belief in concealed facts [and] various conspiracies that prevents Russians from knowing their true history” (152). Popular historical novels, writes Dubin, raise to the status of myth the past and its recurring types of individuals and events, cultural ideals which form the common conception of the social text. In depicting their own “version of the national past [which faces] virtually no intellectual or artistic competition,” popular historical novels offer a model which “repeats the structure of the basic and habitual identity conflict, the failure to take control of one’s own life,” a history which “recognizes only that which can combine with symbols of continuity and unchanging existence” (Dubin 76, 84). Post-apocalyptic fictions, by way of contrast, depict a dramatic break with continuity and an utterly changed existence, paving the way for the survivor to “make *the* world into *his* world. Or *her* world. But not, please, someone else’s world” (Rabkin xii). So it is with alternative or “virtual” history NF, occupied largely with an “alternative national future, i.e. with sociological and political fantasies... an alternative social constellation after ideologies and political boundaries have collapsed” (Menzel 141-2). NF/*fentezi* works like Look and Slynx are concerned with the reclamation, from a utopian ideology disproved by history, of not only the inheritance of cultural texts but also the mechanisms to write new ones.

Language, which is given special significance in both works, is key in the creation, operation and definition of cultural texts. Lotman and Uspenskii see a

“relationship between social processes and the state of the standard language,” to the extent that “the real life of a society [is] a text (‘parole’) organized according to a specific cultural code (its language)” (“Binary” 21). This poses a special challenge in the post-Soviet context, inasmuch as language, and thus reality, was for seventy years inextricably charged with ideology. “Soviet ideology has assimilated so many words that all words come to constitute a single language unit, signifying nothing but the ideology itself,” to the effect that language and ideology mirror one another, writes Epstein (155). This practice persists in the post-Soviet period, he continues, as ideologemes (words and phrases that control and restrict evaluation of ideas) such as motherland and memory are “the currency used in Russia to buy power, work, [and] life” (162). Whatever conclusion is reached about what constituted the cultural text of the Soviet master narrative, this legacy of ideologized language must be confronted if a new text is to be drafted as the blueprint for society in the future, as Slynx and Look demonstrate.

The works both acknowledge and challenge the inherited system of ideologized language by treating words as vessels of metaphysical truth and power. Letters, names, words and ultimately books are treated as the keys to recovering culture in Slynx, while poetry and names are given the power of magical incantations in Look. Menzel notes that many of the writers who practice fantastic realism, “the major paradigm for all post-Soviet literature,” use NF formulae “to create virtual realities as devices and metaphors, because their major concern is to construct and deconstruct language” (139). Similarly, and especially significant given the mutation of language in Slynx, David Dowling observes of post-apocalyptic literature that “[v]ery few fictions ... take advantage of the inevitable mutation of language to create an imaginative world” (98). Characters in Slynx who suspect that significance can only be found in the lost past seek the meaning of

certain arcane words, such as “stallion,” in order to reconnect with that golden time. Poetry is given such power to affect reality in Look that it is regarded as a weapon, a source of destructive “mental energy” – Gumilëv learns, for instance, that St. Petersburg was renamed Leningrad in 1924 in order to form a protective dome against the poetic invectives of Sergei Esenin (Lazarchuk and M. Uspenskii 87-9).

Post-Soviet NF and *fentezi* aim to construct and deconstruct language in a fashion similar to the work of the writers of the 1980s and ‘90s whom Zolotonosov describes, such as Timur Kibirov and Sasha Sokolov. Their violation of common standards of literary etiquette and aesthetic principle can be seen as a challenge to the dominant social text and the highly ideologized language in which it was written (Zolotonosov 167). The Soviet system of ideologemes does not allow one to fight the system on its own terms because it defines all terms in the argument, nor can one “fight Soviet Marxist ideology by logical means: ideology is invulnerable to logical critique because it is free to use the components of various logics in response” (Epstein 126). NF/*fentezi* of the type represented by Slynx and Look go beyond the bounds of logic in their introduction of supernatural and mythological elements into a Soviet-style system of ideologized language, in order to seek out a deeper significance in language and thus free it to compose a new type of cultural text.

Based on the power of the manipulation of language and information, NF author Kirill Es’kov¹ goes so far as to call the present age – a time when it can be said that “Armageddon was yesterday” – “*the magic phase of the development of civilization*” (10). He defines “magic” as the direct manipulation of the material world through information, an age-old practice but one that only now, in the era of global information systems, means that a single magic act can have far-reaching consequences. He gives the example of

global financial markets, which “live according to entirely magical laws: being structured purely of information, they, nevertheless, completely dictate behavior for the ‘real sector of the economy’” (11). This world of technology may seem a far cry from the post-apocalyptic village of Slynx and the mystic arcana of Look, but the principle of information-magic is the same and in fact highlights another aspect of the works’ estranged vision of post-Soviet society. This is because Es’kov further defines this stage of technological development, and the nature of this information, as the “*management of hereditary information*” (8), which I suggest can be understood as Lotman’s cultural texts preserved by memory. In the after-the-end scenario, wherein the survivors’ storehouse of lost-world texts outweighs their own present culture, civilization can indeed be said to be structured purely of information. The stage of cultural and technological development in the post-apocalyptic chronotope is not a return to the stone age but rather the phase, like our own, of the management of hereditary information. How that information is understood and utilized will determine the shape of the new world that replaces the old.

Language holds the power that it does in Slynx, inspires such awe, reverence and confusion, because it exists in a conceptual vacuum. The Blast effectively ejected society from all now-current conceptual systems, and the village stands at the razed center of technological development, ideology and religious choice that Zolotonosov ascribes to post-Soviet culture (158) – potential development in every direction, but no movement yet. Amid this bleak landscape linger relics from the two centuries before the blast: irradiated books, harmful to the touch; obscure customs and social practices followed merely out of habit, such as old holidays and reverence for or resistance to the powers that be, empty pretense either way; and ideas and language, many common words as mutated as the residents of the village.

From the position of a zero-point culture, any relic from the past is potentially a foreign text that poses a challenge to the system, which must either reject or absorb it. In “[t]he introduction of an external text into the immanent world of another text... [t]he external text is transformed into the structural field of the other text’s meaning, and a new message is created” (Lotman “Text” 378). That the various segments of society fail to understand this new message, however, is due largely to insufficiencies in and incompatibilities between their respective languages. Two almost mutually exclusive strains of language have emerged – that of the Oldeners, with words like “responsibility” and “education” that are often misspelled, mispronounced and ultimately meaningless, and that of the Golubchiks, with their “worrums” and “marshrooms.” “When it comes down to it,” says Benedikt, “the Oldeners don’t understand our words, and we don’t understand theirs” (Tolstaia 20). Nor does either side recognize the other’s culture, since it does not resemble anything in its own conception. These languages and the viewpoints they represent would have to be synthesized into a new cultural text if they were to have any hope of advancing cultural development a single inch.

The power of language in Look is more supernatural in nature, but is used to the same effect – it defines reality and harkens back to lost, pre-apocalyptic knowledge. In his training and covert travels through the world and centuries, Gumilëv becomes familiar with the true power of ancient poems, such as “the recitation of the unknown poetess Raav” responsible for destroying the walls of Jericho – verses kept under special protection, useless until their true sound can be learned (Lazarchuk and M. Uspenskii 88). This is a power of language the Bolsheviks have recognized, he learns, and why they treat poets as such threats to the state. “This [poem] is exactly what Comrade Stalin had in mind when he said that there are no fortresses which the Bolsheviks cannot storm,”⁵

poetic warfare in fact constitutes a “wide front of development,” in that “The best representatives of the working class and the poorest of the peasantry are being brought up and trained in the basis of versification. The red magic of the word is at work in the Republic of Soviets, comrades!” (Lazarchuk and M. Uspenskii 89). Gumilëv is recruited to join the Fifth Rome because the “White Guard ... knew well enough the force of a poetic word and did not at all hide the knowledge, having declared it in separate poems” (Lazarchuk and M. Uspenskii 89). He expressed reverence for language, and thus an inkling of its supernatural power, as depicted in poems like “Slovo” [“The Word,” 1921] and many of his articles. “If the sun could be stopped by the Word,”⁶ reasons his recruiter, Iakov Vil’gel’movich, after reading Gumilëv his 1 Sept. 1921 Petrogradskaia pravda obituary, “would it be that hard to turn back events?” (Lazarchuk and M. Uspenskii 29). As he soon discovers, his saviors do indeed wish to use his knowledge to stop time and restore the lost culture.

The Oldeners in Slynx as well as the mages of the old orders in Look desire to inhabit the detritus of the old world, in effect to stop time. The intelligentsia of Fëdor-Kuzmichsk fondly recall the trappings of lost society – jeans, conferences, shirts with cuff links – and believe that culture is found only in the past, which is indeed more real to them than reality. This is reflected in their archaic language and debates on “nationalistic tendencies,” “Slavophilism” and other concepts which bear no relation to the neo-primitive world around them. Their desire, as expressed by Nikita Ivanich, “a former museum employee who has never relinquished his responsibilities,” is to preserve and “re-create the lofty past in full measure” (Tolstaia 111, 117).

Similarly, Gumilëv’s mentors reveal that it really is possible to stop the sun with a word,⁷ and tell him to learn this power to prevent the knowledge of the creators of the

world, the Founders, from being lost. Before destroying themselves in war these deities had invested their knowledge in lesser, mortal creatures. “With their death will be lost all knowledge of the Founders. And it is necessary for people to obtain it independently. It is unknown whether they have enough time and strength. Especially time” (Lazarchuk and M. Uspenskii 469). Post-apocalyptic literature often illustrates the dangers of survivors looking too much toward the past rather than adapting to their environment and working toward the future. Such works highlight “the dangers of a community turned too much inward” in response to the outside threat of nonbeing, in contrast to the adaptive, “dynamic interaction with the environment that must take place in order to rebuild. Civilization cannot be preserved; it must be rebuilt” (Wolfe 12).

Whether a culture structures itself as static or dynamic determines its success in accepting a foreign text, which in the post-apocalyptic scenario could be fragments of the past or new challenges. Memory is one key in this regard, and should ideally serve the purpose of adaptation. “The memory of a culture is constructed not only as a store of texts,” some canonized and some excluded, “but as a certain mechanism for their generation,” while a “living culture cannot constitute a repetition of the past; it always gives rise to structurally and functionally new systems and texts” (Lotman and B. Uspenskii “Binary” 65). The culture of Gumilëv’s cabals has become static, with their focus on the past while at the same time forgetting their initial purpose (so forgotten as to be left unmentioned in the narrative). Many secret orders survive merely by inertia, as for example the order of the Peacock Fan whose members meet every hundred years only to decide the place for the next meeting (Lazarchuk and M. Uspenskii 393). This loss of purpose leads to the dangerous lack of understanding its members show toward the power of the word, “[a]s if children were given gunpowder and sulfuric matches,” ignorantly

practicing even dark arts (as opposed to Gumilëv's white magic) and "tightening into knots the cloth of the universe and shaming God" (Lazarchuk and M. Uspenskii 394). The culture of Fëdor-Kuzmichsk is likewise static, its Golubchiks having no appreciable memory of past culture and its Oldeners doing nothing more than reminiscing and waiting for culture to mysteriously return. There is no fruitful interaction between the two groups, and virtually no creativity – only quoting, misquoting, and copying from fragments of the lost world.

Yet there is potential for dynamic creativity, should the memory of the Oldeners and adaptability of the Golubchiks ever be fused in order to generate new texts. This fusion would require a unifying ideology such as was lost to Russian society with the collapse of Communism; the possibility for a new guiding ideology will be detailed in a moment. The Golubchiks, in their physical permutations, symbolize the innovation and evolution Lotman speaks of as resulting from explosions in culture (Kul'tura 24), novelties the Oldeners fail to recognize as legitimate alternatives to their expectations of cultural restoration. Mutation of language as well as people is a common theme in post-apocalyptic fiction, equated with the adaptation needed to build and inhabit a new world. "Mutant children are often seen as the true inheritors of the world," Dowling observes (104), and indeed the son of monkey-tailed Benedikt and his claw-footed wife is even further mutated into an animalistic furball. The Oldeners refuse also to acknowledge the Golubchiks' oral culture of myth, nor are the Golubchiks themselves seen committing their legends to the page. Original writing, they believe, is the realm of the government. Instead Benedikt and others copy old poems and works of literature, works divorced from their originary cultural context, much as Nikita Ivanich and other representatives of the intelligentsia post signs around the village naming long-gone landmarks and carve

wooden statues of Pushkin, their “be all and end all” – though Benedikt’s carving comes out looking “like a pure retard... A slap in the face of public taste,” in the words of one old dissident (Tolstaia 193, 151).⁸

The statue’s physical defects complement its mutation as a symbol, the image of Pushkin divorced from the poet’s creative aspect, as if denying the possibility that there could be a living Pushkin in their own primordial age. To the Oldener intelligentsia, Pushkin is the end, rather than the beginning, of their search for culture, and his like is not due to appear in society for perhaps thousands of years. Benedikt’s deformed carving also highlights the negative aspect of mutation in post-disaster fiction, that of degradation. What Dowling says of Philip K. Dick’s Dr. Bloodmoney [1965] applies here as well: “Everyone in the novel lacks something physical or spiritual and is therefore mutant in some degree, and only the communicators are able to bridge the gaps and restore wholeness” (110). The pushkins are an attempt at communicating something of the lost culture to the rest of society, but ultimately there are no successful communicators of any sort in Slynx, both because of their own mutations and because of the deformation of their message between tongues.

As symbols, defined by Lotman as conveyers of societal memory, all these signposts and pushkins – and to an even great extent words, language, literature and books as well – fail to “stand out from [their] textual milieu as a messenger of other cultural epochs” and transform the surrounding culture (Lotman “Simvol” 12). Rather, cultural context (in this case, amnesiac, zero-point culture) transforms them into endless mutations of their intended message. What has been lost to the main segment of society, the Golubchiks, is the ability to discriminate among texts, to have “an active effect on the process of self-organization” (Lotman and B. Uspenskii “Binary” 31). Lacking the depth

of memory required for a system of collective memory, as well as the moral values for a unified value structure, they lack the very mechanism for the generation of cultural texts.

Benedikt escapes into books in his search for lost culture, enamored of them not for their value as literature but simply *because* they are books. He understands that books are fragments of the lost past, and finds in them expression of what he himself has no language for: “We don’t have any words ... Just like wild animals, [no] words, just a bellowing. But you open a book – and there they are, fabulous, flying words” (Tolstaia 189). This is why he makes no distinction between a guide to knitting patterns or a romance novel – both are valuable as fragments of the lost language and culture. The Oldeners likewise fail to discriminate between jeans and Pushkin in their esteem for the past. Nikita Ivanich displays an attitude toward the written word no different from Benedikt’s, as he extols a set of instructions for a meat grinder: “The object itself may not exist, but there are instructions for its use, and we have its spiritual... will and testament, a missive from the past!” (Tolstaia 111). In the absence of a dynamic, substantial culture, they treat any book as an authoritative text, the only source of life and truth.

Benedikt covets above all the legendary “main book” that “holds the secret of how to live,” an undecipherable recipe for civilization whose “pages are all shuffled ... and the letters aren’t like ours” (Tolstaia 205; ellipses in the original). This is the authoritative text he seeks, the one which he expects would hold the key to restoring a unified cultural text – because of the authoritative status he invests in books, he cannot conceive of truth being found in life. Benedikt’s concept of the book is his misunderstanding, because of their different languages, of Nikita Ivanich’s metaphor of the Book of Being, in which is inscribed men’s innate moral law – even if hidden and indecipherable, he tells Benedikt, the book shines and “[o]ur life... consists of the search for this book,” a fact even Pushkin

knew (Tolstaia 138). Ultimately, they will search for a mythic or metaphorical book, a missive from the past, but never write one of their own as a stepping stone to the future.

The lack of cultural creation in the village, as well as the failure to communicate between the two languages, stems from the loss of a coherent ideology to either follow or oppose. “An important source of inspiration, Standing Up to the System, had suddenly vanished [and now] can inspire neither the dissident nor the pathfinder to new ways,” Zolotonosov writes of early post-Soviet literature (158). The loss of this feature in the post-Soviet landscape is a major reason why the flow of culture, as Timchenko said and Tolstaia illustrates, halted before finding a new channel. Residents of Fëdor-Kuzmichsk find substitutes for such guiding ideology in ideologized language and reverence for government – ideology for its own sake, with no particular viewpoint at its center. This veneration is another aspect of their retreat into the past, a way of connecting with some form, however empty, of the lost culture. The Golubchiks feel they would not know how to live without the government to instruct them, and the reader senses that Fëdor Kuzmich, the diminutive head of state, is only behaving as he feels a government probably should; Benedikt’s father-in-law behaves the same way after seizing power. In all cases ideological language is used *because* it is ideological and thus, in the absence of any appreciable culture resembling the idealized past, taken as meaningful.

A unifying ideology inherent in the post-apocalyptic chronotope, holding the potential for communication and creativity needed in Slynx, is found in opposition to the encroachment of nature and chaos and the threat of destruction they represent. The first challenge to survivors once they have formed a community, writes Wolfe, is making the transition “from dependence on the detritus of the destroyed civilization... to reinventing” their way of life (13). This can be characterized as an ideology of adaptation, and is

necessary for the establishment of a type of culture which may serve as “an instrument of humankind’s triumph over the threat of nonbeing,” a task larger than any single culture’s self-given mission of enlightenment or messianism (Timchenko 136).

In Slynx, the eponymous creature represents an invisible menace lurking outside the bounds of the village waiting, according to legend, to deprive anyone who wanders near of reason, language and life. Threats likewise come from outside domestic boundaries in popular historical novels: “As a rule, these misfortunes come from without; they are caused by outsiders who are alien in language, lifestyle or creed” (Dubin 81). The powerful, leopard-like creature is contrasted with the mice that villagers catch for food and currency, symbolic of the small world of the peasant hut with which they content themselves. They likewise live a meager spiritual existence, content with the current level of knowledge and fearfully refusing to ask questions or seek anything outside their small conceptual sphere, rejecting experimentation not only out of fear of unpredictable consequences but also out of firmly held superstitious ignorance. Thus they would rather believe that the creation of something like fire is a mystery that cannot be known than take the initiative and attempt to create anything on their own. Similarly, the Oldeners eschew anything that does not fit with their memory of the past and their plan for its restoration. Both groups shrink back from fear of the annihilation the unknown outside represents – be it the wilderness, the future or unfamiliar cultural formations – into the confines of their own familiar cultures and memories.

The lack of any attempt to reach beyond one’s viewpoint or language is why statues of Pushkin or ancient poems do not survive translation from one culture into another, but are instead transformed in meaning to conform to the new context. Each culture must desire to understand others, Timchenko writes, for the sake of an

inclusiveness that will withstand the threat of nonbeing – questions of high or low culture are irrelevant when both are facing extinction, as in the post-apocalyptic scenario. “If culture really does become an instrument of humankind’s triumph over the threat of nonbeing, then that culture will almost certainly be characterized by inclusivity, by ... the presence of all voices” (136). In their primitive culture the Golubchiks cannot recognize Pushkin or the creative spirit he symbolizes, nor are the Oldeners able to recognize anything – no evolutionary innovation, like Benedikt’s tail – that does not conform to their view of historical restoration. Lotman writes that when such a life-death dichotomy, which deprives of meaning anything not possessing an end-point, is applied to culture, an otherwise free evolution is reduced to a mere chain which restricts the freedom of creation. The linear construction of culture only highlights death (Kul’tura 255).

Lotman conceives of an alternative to such binary models of culture in an inclusive ternary system, able to develop in new directions and better capable of surviving the shock of foreign texts, in the center of which he places “the creative personality” conducting an experiment with unpredictable results (“Kul’tura” 233). In order for freedom, found in the domain of art, to be apprehended there must be an observer outside the particular system of culture, anchored in extra-lingual or -artistic reality and capable of making that ethical evaluation (ibid). That is, more than one language is necessary to reflect “language-independent reality,” since one tongue alone cannot “exhaust external reality”; a system based on an inclusive principle is an open construct allowing the integration of foreign texts and ensures the existence of the Other individual, language or culture (Lotman “Kul’tura” 10). The Other is a fundamental “foundation for a developed social sense,” writes Dubin, “the transmundane as a generalized, meaningful partner,”

lacking in Russian, Soviet and post-Soviet culture, none of which “had a distinct, articulated level of ultimate values and ideal meanings” (86).

Poetry functions as such an Other, evaluative language in Look, its mystical power capable of evaluating the mundane sphere of language and culture, and of penetrating from language into extralingual reality. The figure of Gumilëv likewise functions as such a “creative personality” in the work. By shedding the “text” of his old life – his practices, such as publishing, and his very identity – in a presumed death he is able to attain that power of language in which he always expressed a belief in his poetry. He is seen, in his role as a creative personality and foreign text, exerting direct influence on many Soviet and Western authors as he roams the earth in various guises. In the guise of Friedrich-Maria Viland, a linguist, he encounters Mikhail Bulgakov in a Moscow park under some linden trees in 1928. The two converse briefly about conditions facing writers at the time, including the official vilification of “bulgakovists” and “gumilëvists” and the reeducation of dissident writers. “And you, as I understand, do not wish to be reeducated,” the disguised poet observes, to which Bulgakov nods silently (Lazarchuk and M. Uspenskii 102). By presumably inspiring Bulgakov to write Master and Margarita [1928-40], Gumilëv functions as the mechanism of genius or inspiration, one driving force behind Lotman’s explosions in culture (Kul’tura 24, 36).

In another incident he appears, as himself, to Vladimir Maiakovskii on 11 April 1930 to collect a debt. This scene accords with the decisive battle in post-apocalyptic fictions for which moral or ideological values will prevail in building the new system. Gumilëv, as a prophet of genuine inspiration, is opposed to the “false prophet” Maiakovskii, representing the type who “set themselves up as gods, as self-consciously supernatural figures in the mythology of the age to come” (Wolfe 14). Maiakovskii had

sold his soul for poetic glory seventeen years earlier, to a demon in the guise of David Burliuk, a fellow radical early-Soviet artist. “[A] most suitable name for a devil – Burliuk,” Gumilëv muses; “There’s something Gogolian in it” (Lazarchuk and M. Uspenskii 140). Here a different kind of explosive inspiration is contrasted to Gumilëv’s, one with an evil, destructive source. “[Y]ou really sold your gift – and betrayed people... what did Bulgakov do to you? Was he guilty compared to you?” Gumilëv tells Maiakovskii; “I came because you’re a poet who sold his soul to the devil! For universal glory! For – dust!” (Lazarchuk and M. Uspenskii 142-3). The two settle the dispute through a duel of sorts, a game of Russian roulette, which Gumilëv wins. Thus is decided which set of values or, in other words, which poetic language, which type of inspiration – the creative or the destructive – will weave the texts of the remade world.

The Golubchiks and Oldeners are not contrasted in such moral terms, but simply in terms of exclusive but potentially complementary viewpoints. In their separate languages the Golubchiks and Oldeners hold the potential for fruitful discourse, for an examination by each of the other’s culture, as when Benedikt, anchored in his zero-point cultural context, recognizes the lofty, meaningless talk at the Oldener funeral service as “total gibberish” or otherwise filters Nikita Ivanich’s talk of art and culture through his own naïve, pragmatic worldview; or as Nikita Ivanich criticizes the Golubchiks’ barbarism and attempts to teach them not only art, but also the fundamentals of civilization such as fire and morality. But both groups lack, as mentioned, the common code needed for communication, as their binary, ideologized language systems cannot recognize a third alternative. They exclude rather than include the *other*, be it the outside and unknown of space, time and knowledge, in the case of the Golubchiks, or the innovative and deviant in the case of the Oldeners.

This binarism comes to a head at the end of the novel, as Benedikt is forced to choose between saving his collection of books or saving Nikita Ivanich's life. The question is posed as an opposition between saving art – that is, the storehouse of artistic texts, the post-apocalyptic inheritance of hereditary information – or the artist, as Nikita Ivanich is tied to his wooden carving of a pushkin that will burn with him. Given the choice, “if you want to preserve art, then say goodbye to the pushkin. Either or,” Benedikt decides art is more precious (Tolstaia 271). Ultimately he loses both, when Nikita Ivanich ignites the fire with his own breath, a blaze that consumes the entire village, including the pushkin and the books, as well as the members of the new government who were about to execute him. He himself was not consumed because he “didn't feel like it” (Tolstaia 275). When Benedikt laments that life is over, he replies, “It's over... so we'll start another one,” finally making the decision to begin restoring culture through more than mere reminiscence: “There's no civilization, Golubchik. We have to do it ourselves, with our wood one,” Nikita Ivanich says to fellow Oldener Lev Lvovich, as both begin to float in the air and leave the scorched remains of Fëdor-Kuzmichsk behind (ibid).

In cultural terms, this destructive fireball is one of the explosions Lotman writes of which bring sudden, unexpected and unpredictable change, as in a moment of inspiration. Such a moment “conjoin[s] the unconjoinable under the impact of some kind of creative tension,” as between the translatable and untranslatable, an interaction which makes possible the penetration into extralingual reality (Lotman Kul'tura 36). The literal explosion in Fëdor-Kuzmichsk erases the boundary between the village with its cramped huts and the outside world, forcing its residents into the open and unknown which they had so feared. The fate of the village, according to Lotman's conception, would next depend on whether they continue in a binary culture system, which is easily destroyed by

cultural explosions, or establish an inclusive, ternary one, thriving on and striving for creativity and unpredictability. To this end, toward creating a new cultural text, Benedikt is left with Nikita Ivanich's advice to "Study your letters! The ABCs!" – that is, to return to the basics of language, to build a system unfettered by the old ideology – and to "Figure it out as best you can!" (Tolstaia 273-5). With nothing of the lost world left to preserve, and no walls protecting them from the unknown, the survivors are indeed forced, as Wolfe says of societies in post-apocalyptic fiction, to rebuild society.

Look finishes with just as open an ending, Gumilëv pondering the lingering effects of the wars of ancient adversaries. "And still you managed to release into the world so much poison that it has an effect even now, and will continue to have an effect for a thousand years more," the poet thinks to himself, and "did not begin to reach the end of this thought: he knew that all the same he would not think it through to the end. Because it isn't there, this end" (Lazarchuk and M. Uspenskii 545). The novel closes with the ring of a doorbell, symbolically the call of the future, the *tick* of a new cultural epoch. To step through the doorway would be to reenter the stream of history.

In order for a society to develop in constructive new ways, to forge new cultural texts amidst the post-apocalyptic landscape, it must be built so as to accept and incorporate foreign texts and novelties, other languages which may help evaluate its own canonized texts and so contribute to a fuller understanding of extralingual reality. Art, as the primary building block of culture, mediates the dialog between texts as the creative personality conducts his experiments and probes the bounds of the forbidden and impossible. As Look and Slynx demonstrate, older texts may be taken into account in rewriting culture but they cannot be treated invariably as models – the writing of a new cultural text requires a new language.

Notes to Chapter Two

1. There are no published English versions of these texts, so all translations are my own.
2. The type of fiction described as post-apocalyptic, post-holocaust or, more descriptively but less succinctly, “stories that begin with the end of the world” are not to be confused with the apocalyptic genre previously discussed. Apocalyptic fiction anticipates an eschatological event, using “apocalypse” in its original sense of revelation, a lifting of the veil; while in post-apocalyptic the crisis has already occurred, either as prologue or early in the story. Thus an apocalyptic work is about characters’ revelations of a potential end to time, and post-apocalyptic about life beyond an end of sorts.
3. Referred to as “Vzryv” – the Blast or Explosion – possibly in reference to Iurii Lotman’s 1992 publication, *Kul’tura i vzryv* [*Culture and Explosion*; no published translation]. Indeed, *Slynx* often reads as a textbook illustration of Lotman’s cultural concepts, as will be seen throughout this chapter.
4. The cryptic name Fifth Rome comes from its founders’ desire that there not be a fourth Rome. The Tsars had considered Moscow the Third Rome, successor to the Roman Empire, since shortly after the fall of Constantinople, the Second Rome, in the fifteenth century (Zernov). The name is a sign of the secret group’s original mission to halt the spread of Catholicism in seventeenth-century Russia, and by its numerical supersedence indicates their seeing themselves as coming from a position beyond history.
5. A reference to an oft-quoted slogan popularly attributed to Stalin, who used it during the First Five-Year Plan (1928-1932). Its use in 1921 within the narrative of *Look* is either an anachronism (which are not unheard-of in time-travel stories) or, more likely, based on the theory that the slogan began during the Russian Civil War (1917-1921) and was later appropriated by Stalin.
6. A reference to Joshua 10:12-14, when the sun and moon stood still for a day at the words of the warrior Joshua; this event is referred to in Gumilëv’s poem “Slovo.”
7. Gumilëv learns this fact after hearing a contemporary example of such manipulation of time, that Solzhenitsyn wrote *Gulag Archipelago* during perestroika but, since the work did not stand out in such an open, permissive period, sent it back in time to his young self in the late 1950s in a bid for notoriety (Lazarchuk and M. Uspenskii 468)
8. The Oldeners’ phrase about Pushkin echoes the oft-repeated (and mocked) words of nineteenth-century poet Apollon Grigor’iev, “Pushkin is our everything” [“Pushkin – eto nashe vsekh”]. His announcement opened up a can of worms, in the words of Svetlana Evdokimova, as it is indicative of the appropriation of Pushkin for various causes throughout Russian history (122). Its use by the intelligentsia in *Slynx* is no different. Another reference in the quotation that follows is to the title of a 1913 Russian Futurist manifesto, “A Slap in the Face of Public Taste” – which, incidentally, called for discarding Pushkin and the entire literary tradition in favor of a fresh spirit of creativity in the arts. The allusion in *Slynx* is quite fitting.

Chapter Three: Postcards from Beyond the Horizon, 2001-2006

[A]ll the past is but the beginning of a beginning.
- H.G. Wells (1902 lecture)

[I]n any case, [the future] will be devilishly interesting.
- Boris Strugatskii ("Eshche raz" 3, 1999)¹

The apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic paradigm is insufficient for understanding early-twenty-first century Russia, nor is it the most fruitful attitude for seeking a future after the future. The present era would instead fit better within, and be better served by, Epstein's concept of a "proto-" epoch – just as he considers the twentieth century to have begun well before 1900, he wrote in the mid 1990s that "the twenty-first century may be under way already" (280). This concept of a time "before the next" rather than, as in postmodernism or post-Sovietism, "after the last," is characterized by a fresh perspective on the future and its potential: "The epoch that comes 'after the future' does not simply abolish the future, but opens it anew" (334-5). Contemporary Russian culture, in particular, is "defined less and less by its relation to the communist past. Rather, this is the protostage of some as yet unknown cultural formation, whose name, thus far, can only be guessed" (338). The two short works^{1, 2} to be examined in this chapter – Aleksei Kalugin's "Time Backwards!"³ and Sergei Luk'ianenko's "Girl with the Chinese Lighters" (hereafter, "Girl") – will thus be studied for the forward-looking mentality they demonstrate, seeking inspiration in the future as an unrestricted realm of possibilities.

The future is a notoriously elusive if not utterly impenetrable subject in post-Soviet/nascent protostage Russia, an aspect of its unformed quality that challenges attempts to view it as a realm of positive potential. One of the lessons that historians and science-fiction authors alike gained from the abrupt collapse of Communism was the futility of attempting to predict what direction the country might take. "[G]iven the

volatility of political and economic life at the beginning of the twenty-first century,” Russian studies scholar Eugene Huskey notes in a 2003 article in the political science publication Demokratizatsiya, “attempts to divine the pace and direction of Russia's development during the next decade are certain to be inadequate” (115). He does, however, acknowledge the role of imagination in “bridging the gap between the theories and facts that we comprehend and the world that we do not yet know” (ibid), extrapolations such as is stock-in-trade for the SF writer. Nevertheless, even the eminent NF author Boris Strugatskii, writing in 1999, hesitates to venture a prediction for Russia’s future. “I, of course, do not know what sort of future – concretely – awaits us in the twenty-first century... all attempts to somehow detail the shape of the future appear aposteriori ridiculous” (1).

In the face of such doubt the future appears almost bleak, a realm of discouraging uncertainty. “As Russia lurches from crisis to crisis, it is difficult to be optimistic,” Stephen Blank observed in Demokratizatsiya in 1998. “Russia continues to confound our hopes and seems to be the exception to Western economic and political theories” (550). Writing one and two years later, respectively, V. A. Iadov, Director of the Russian Academy of Sciences Institute of Sociology, and Elena Bashkirova, president of the ROMIR group of companies, made similar remarks on the prospects for a fundamental transformation of post-Soviet society. Iadov observes that “present-day Russians ... are extremely pessimistic in regard to the future of the country and the general situation in Russia” (27), while Bashkirova speaks of a pronounced “lack of confidence in tomorrow, apathy and withdrawal” resulting from current conditions of instability, from even a sense of prolonged crisis (20). Both remark on the drastic narrowing of lives as a result of this

sense of crisis, socially – from the large *We* of the nation to the small *we* of the family – as well as temporally, the future blotted out by a need to merely survive today.

Such pessimism is at odds with Epstein's positive evaluation of the unknowns of the future, a temporality which serves as a "mechanism of pure negativity that nonetheless acquires positivity in us and through us" (337). As "Girl" and "Time Backward!" demonstrate, restoring a love of the future and finding inspiration in its otherwise threateningly unformed nature must involve an epistemological renewal, a transformation in how the future is regarded. Recent SF criticism likewise testifies that an ability to imagine life beyond the foreseeable future must be cultivated in order to envision positive changes. These developments may either be founded in otherwise abandoned hopes, or may not resemble anything hitherto conceived but must nevertheless be acknowledged as potentials that can be recognized in time. Such renewal requires what Epstein calls the "rehabilitation of the new," the cultural repossession – as examined in the preceding chapters – of originality, history, even utopia, from any foretelling or proscribing of the future (338). This rehabilitation of the building blocks of the future was suggested in the apocalyptic perestroika-era works, further refined in the post-apocalyptic fictions of the early-post-Soviet period, and these tools can now in the proto- era be put to use in seeking out and defining the shape of tomorrow.

Imagination and memory are again key, and must now be used in a spirit of receptiveness to the unknown, able to recognize but not demanding the hopes and visions that postmodernism denies the future. Postmodernism or even postutopianism, terms Epstein uses synonymously, are insufficient and even harmful as guiding paradigms, since he ascribes to them the death of originality. Postutopianism fears the hopeful creativity that marked many utopian projects, rejecting its visionary quality along with

more notorious aspects such as the violence it did to the present “in the name of a future wrongly conceived” (Epstein 316). Apocalypticism and post-apocalypticism are likewise limited in perspective as narrative-shaping myths, producing fictions that often espouse a lack of confidence in the future, “doubt [of] both human potential and interventionist salvation,” because of their nature as reactionary attitudes to what they see as cyclical cataclysms (Galbreath 56). All such post-isms project into the future their fears about that which they follow and react to, in essence only strengthening the prescriptive hold of utopia/apocalypse on the future.

The proto- paradigm, in contrast, speaks not of prescription but of possibility: it “is a new, noncoercive attitude toward the future,” more “maybe” than “must be,” allowing originality to be reborn. The protostage is moreover

the epoch of ever-changing projects, whose realization becomes not a transfiguration of reality, but the simple fact of their proposal. So many mocked, forgotten, and already impossible modes of consciousness embodied in utopian and metaphysical projects will discover their potential just as soon as they are understood precisely as potentials lacking any dictates of obligatory existence (Epstein 338).

Darko Suvin singles out the utopian belief in the social good when he writes that “no *impulse toward salvation* of communities and individuals ... can be heedlessly tossed aside while we are lurching into a most dangerous unknown” (“Afterword” 265). Thus in the first decade of protostage Russia, when it seems that any prospects the future may hold are obscured by present conditions, time reduced to the now and life to mere survival, it is the ability to project long-held hopes into the future that holds promise for breaking the deadlock of the present. This is the era and the attitude of the future calling

to the present, the future “stepping up to us,” as Epstein puts it (337), inviting dialog rather than the imposition of one upon the other. Accordingly, the analysis of “Girl” and “Time Backward!” will focus on their exploration of the theme of dialog with the future, situated within the mythological archetype of the labyrinth (here used, as an SF device, in a temporal sense; to be expounded further below). The figure of the labyrinth has been used in many examples of literature (such as Jorge Louise Borges) and art (M.C. Escher), often connected with the search for knowledge, for revelation; it serves in these two works as the authors’ estranged form of a contemporary Russia that struggles to peer beyond the next corner. The labyrinth furthermore speaks of ever-forward movement despite the inability to see ahead, an orientation better suited for a proto- culture than, as before, the moment of apocalypse.

In one of his most recent articles, Suvin considers the value of far-forward-looking SF in the postutopian twenty-first century. When “a halfway good (never mind radically better) near future is today just not believable,” he wrote in 2000, “[w]hat Archimedean point can we, then, find to move the seemingly deeply frozen or even rock-solid (but, in fact, ocean-fluid) present? The far-off future, possibly” (“Afterword” 266).⁴ Similarly, in a 1998 Esli article¹ Leonid Leskov observes that utopian projects – that is, possibilities, cleansed of the dogmatism that made utopia so notorious in the previous century – are important for helping readers look beyond merely the next decade. “The value of Utopia consists in its capability of demonstrating to us possible models of the development of events in the long-term perspective. It can serve also as a warning of deadlocks in the directions of evolution” (17). In depicting possible long-term consequences of current trends or problems, works of NF such as the two to be discussed below provide a new perspective on them and perhaps suggest or at least prompt action to

be taken today. They can also, by using the rehabilitated tools of originality, memory and even utopia, suggest distant potentialities whose seeds can be now planted. By showing a meeting of the unknown future with the familiar present, they can address the need Iadov sees for “anticipating ... undesirable and dangerous types of natural, socio-economic and political change while promoting desirable ones” (24).

Both of these works by Luk’ianenko and Kalugin return to the device of time travel to enable the interaction between two different periods, though with a significant difference from Moscow 2042 and “Pushkin’s Photograph.” Whereas the works treated earlier centered on the perspective of one character traveling to another time, in these stories visitors from the future approach contemporary Russians – stepping up to them, as the future is now doing, in order to establish dialog. In “Girl,” a young girl from an unspecified point in the future appears to Valerii Pavlovich Krylov, a Moscow factory owner,⁵ to ask for help in finding her father, who has become lost in time. In order to do this she needs the Japanese carving he has just purchased as a gift for a potential client, representing his own plans for the near future which she asks him to sacrifice. Meanwhile in “Time Backward!” the narrator, Aleksandr Prokhorovich Pikarov, is visited in the summer of 2005 first by one descendent from the twenty-third century and soon by numerous others from even later epochs, ostensibly to celebrate his wife’s birthday but ultimately, as Pikarov finds, with the mission of saving their own (and humanity’s) future. Thus both works speak of a future beyond the foreseeable, the far-off future attempting to act as Archimedean fulcrum.

By coming from a time beyond the characters’ own, the visitors bring an element of Bethea’s apocalyptic fiction into the two works. The “revelatory message” that Sergei and the girl bring “to other characters still trapped *in history*” is an assuring message of

the existence of a positive future and an identifiably human race populating it. It is also a message of crisis, albeit not one that can be said to “invite the reader to interpret current events (a time of crisis) through the prism of Revelation” (Bethea 105). The “prism of Revelation” is not suggested in any way as strongly as in Moscow 2042 and “Pushkin’s Photograph,” as such imagery as the apocalyptic horse or train is absent; neither do the two short works seem “inscribed ... with the anxiety and suffering produced by living ‘under the shadow of the End’” (Bethea 106). Thus “Girl” and “Time Backward!” can be seen to fit the (post-)apocalyptic paradigm to a degree, but reading them against the proto- paradigm demonstrates how they move beyond the limits of apocalypticism to an orientation toward the future.

To be sure, the familial loss in “Girl” and temporal loss in “Time Backward!” suggest a shadow of an End, but it is not, as far as concerns the modern-day hosts to the visitors, an imminent eschatology. Rather, their scenarios (and the current norms which they, according to the conventions of science or apocalyptic fiction, reflect and estrange) may be said to convey the threat of the potential *absence* of a future as a result of inaction, of failure to respond to the challenge of the future’s approach. Insofar as the future may be a blind spot to the post-Soviet eye, the revelation experienced by the main characters in the two short works is regenerative rather than apocalyptic, a long view that posits the threat of a real end to history in order to mobilize action today. The future need not end, but it will in a profound sense be absent if those in the present succumb to pessimism as a result of their crises, if they lose faith in the potential reality of the future. These works move beyond the apocalyptic paradigm by presenting crisis not as certainty but as potential, one possible path in the maze of time that can be avoided.

Nor can the potentialities of the future be limited to models from the past, the bounds of the familiar such as that to which characters in Slynx and Look limited themselves. The upholding of the past as “more profound, genuine, and instructive than the current environment – more ‘real’ ... than any reality,” a history which “recognizes only that which can combine with symbols of continuity and unchanging existence” (Dubin 71, 84), stands in the way of breaking new ground, serving only to reject the unknown and deny the potentials of the future. This historically designated path to the ideal would include the customary conceptual systems of, for instance, government/dissidence as discussed in Slynx, wherein the individual conforms to certain social roles and has definite expectations for the direction of culture based on historical models. A new language, an evolution of cultural texts and conceptual systems, as was examined in Slynx and Look, is required for and in turn fosters a new type of future.

Most significant in these mixed-times narratives are the circumstances surrounding the visitors’ appearances and their reception by and interaction with those in the present. They come from the unknowable future, the future as Other, armed with the perspective of a time beyond the unnamed protostage – they know its name. As human beings they are familiar to Krylov and Pikarov, representing the known aspect of the future. In Pikarov’s case this is because they are his descendents,⁶ while Krylov recognizes the girl’s face in the Japanese netske⁷ carving he bought. He further remarks that the word for the carving is the same in Japanese and Russian, a familiarity in terms of language; and concludes that, given its resemblance to the girl, “centuries pass, people do not vary” (Luk’ianenko 3), akin to Strugatskii’s belief that humanity will remain recognizable in the future as kin to us today (3). The visitors may be taken to represent, in essence, an image of contemporary humanity living in the distant future.

At the same time the visitors represent the unknown, that which is commonplace for them but outside the language and knowledge of contemporaries. In this way they are an image of the future intruding into small, familiar spaces (such as Pikarov's small family gathering, the very picture of the diminished post-Soviet *we*), breaking the comfort of the known and beckoning their hosts to consider an unfamiliar life and time beyond their own. For example, what Krylov takes to be lighters in the hands of the carving of the girl, she tries to explain are devices for which "you have no such word. They're small pieces which serve for the creation of... there's no word for this yet either" (Luk'ianenko 6; ellipsis in the original). When Pikarov steals Sergei's time traveling device to visit the twenty-third century, he sees many incomprehensible things which he must relate to that with which he is familiar. When confronted with the chaotic vista of the future city, where multilayered images vie for attention, he can only compare it to an autostereogram, "at first sight seeming to be a senseless jumble of multicolored dots and strokes. In order to see the three-dimensional image hidden inside this mess, you have to hold the picture at a very specific distance from your eyes and try to unfocus your sight as much as possible" (Kalugin 261). An unfocused view of the future is necessary for allowing its proto-images to emerge on their own, rather than looking only for what one wants (or does not want) to see as in postutopianism. This unfocusing is akin to Kartsev's intoxicated account of the future in Moscow 2042, producing a rough sketch of only one possible future depending on what action, which path in the labyrinth, is taken today.

Unequipped with the sensory apparatus that mankind has developed in this future century, Pikarov panics and all but faints from the strain of trying to comprehend this swirling vista. The city is outside the bounds of his experience – it is a *novum*, an estranged text, presenting familiar images of nature and architecture in an unfamiliar way

– which he is unable to fully cognize and so attempts to understand and explain by relating it to something familiar. Krylov does the same when he mistakes the unidentified futuristic object in the hands of the carving for a lighter, automatically seeking a known correlative for the unknown form. Knowledge or understanding are not, however, expanded when the novum is incorrectly understood, the unfamiliar language misinterpreted, the estranged mis-cognized.

What is necessary for the correct apprehension of the unfamiliar is a revitalization of the methods by which we understand, what Soviet NF scholar Rafail Nudelman calls the “instruments of cognition.” “[T]he broadening of the spheres of cognition must be accompanied by a continual renewal of the instruments of cognition,” that is, “the cognitive intellect must check its former understandings and categories if and when it intends to use them for the cognizing of a fundamental *novum*” (191). Nudelman writes that Polish SF author Stanislaw Lem⁸ demonstrated this need for cognitive renewal through continual use in his works of the mythical motifs of labyrinths and “masks” inside them. Lem’s labyrinths are “always connected to the cognition of something new and unknown,” a chronotope of the wholly unfamiliar and disorienting, in which the wanderer encounters masks – “the shape in which the unknown appears to cognizing reason” – that invite dialog and understanding (181-2). These two works by Kalugin and Luk’ianenko can be seen to demonstrate the same need for and similar means of cognitive renewal, in order to successfully approach the unknowns of the future.

The epistemological challenges to which Lem’s labyrinths responded were those posed to the human intellect by the new and unknown as humanity began to explore space – the labyrinth gave cognitive form, a condensation into a finite physical space, to the vast and imposing cosmos. This is akin to H. Lewald’s appraisal of labyrinths in the

works of Jorge Louise Borges, representing “an irrational universe whose multiplicity, or unknown factors, exemplifies a lack of order or apparent purpose,” precluding a rational “analysis that might diminish man’s bewilderment or frustration as he searches for some sense, order or purpose in the world around him” (630-1). In borrowing the motifs of mask and labyrinth Kalugin and Luk’ianenko are similarly responding to the challenges of the future, which can be said to share the attributes of the vast, unformed and imposing cosmos. Their mazes condense the inconceivable future into a conceivable form, just as “labyrinth-stories... recreate the universe in miniature so ... the reader can conveniently inspect it” (Lewald 631). Thus what Nudelman says of mankind’s entrance into “the era of ‘cosmic initiation’” in the 1960s, which “demanded painful efforts on the part of the intellect to settle into these new surroundings, to comprehend this new existential situation with its cognitive paradoxes and dead ends” (Nudelman 190), is equally applicable to Russia’s initiation into the era of proto-.

Whereas the labyrinth “is a kind of embodiment in space of the ‘memory’ of the body’s route” and “wandering in a labyrinth is a wandering inside someone else’s memory” (ibid), this means in the case of “Girl” and “Time Backward” that the memory of the Other in which contemporaries wander is a memory – and thus knowledge and experience – of the future. Suvin champions the value of memory as against postmodernism’s rejection of memory and thus of history, its utopian denial of a history that may continue beyond today. Since it is difficult to map a future that few people alive today will see, “the only way that the possibility of a way out in the future can be imaginatively entertained is by mobilizing the past: the personal and collective memories” – that is, the tool of memory cleansed of utopian dictates. More than languid nostalgia, this can be “a defence against the onslaught of the present on the rest of time”

(“Afterword” 266). “Against the [postmodern] war on memory ... a cognitive memory – that is, drawing lessons about the open future as against the intolerable present out of a critically reworked past – remains an important part and parcel of” the continuing legacy of the Enlightenment, the cultural revolution of “*Sapere aude*: Dare to know!” (“Afterword” 267).

The labyrinth, as an Other’s memory, hides at its center revelation of an Other culture’s system of incomprehensible language or images “waiting to be named; for mythological understanding, their naming is their cognition” (Nudelman 181). The future represents such an esoteric sign-system to Epstein, “a language without grammar,” holding the promise of an as-yet unnamed cultural formation (337). There are also, again as mentioned, forms and concepts connected to the visitors in “Girl” and “Time Backwards!” for which their hosts do not yet have a name. The labyrinth is connected as well to the notion of rebirth, for whoever descends into it emerges as “new” or “reborn” – “exiting the labyrinth is equivalent to victory over death and the discovery of a new self” (Nudelman 182) – a new self in cultural as well as individual terms, a rebirth essentially into a protostage of history.

Masks within the labyrinth are equally multivalent, comprising the unknown, time, double, dialog and (self-)cognition. In the Greek myth of the Minotaur in Knossos’ labyrinth, “the mask returns the viewer to past times,” a link to the beginning of history, while in Lem’s work “it directs him to future times” (Nudelman 185). Lem’s masks are addressed to their viewers as doppelgangers – “themselves/not themselves” – a means of establishing contact between the viewer and the unknown. Masks “not only conceal but also give a glimpse into the enigma, or in any case hint at the fundamental possibility of its comprehension” (Nudelman 186). Rather than simply a disguise to render the

familiar unrecognizable, this mask is the familiar form in which the Other appears to the viewer, inviting dialogue and the possibility of understanding the unknown. The mask is, most importantly, the first step toward cognizing the Other, a surface of dialog or interface formed by a meeting of the complexity of the unknown with the limits of human consciousness. “[T]he mask is the ‘contact point’ of cognizing subject and cognized object,” a result of their mutual influence – the mask may be termed a mis-cognized novum, defying the viewer to correctly interpret it. “While the cognized, unfamiliar world forms a new human psychology ... the cognizing intellect introduces into this world its illusions, fears and hopes” (Nudelman 191). This mutual distortion, says Nudelman, is what creates the need for the renewal of the tools of cognition, the ability to see beyond a deformed, concealing mask.

As mentioned, the form of labyrinth in the two works is chronological rather than spatial, the route they trace through another’s memory being that in time instead of space. This is especially pronounced in “Time Backward!” in which Pikarov finds that time has become convoluted after the appearance of Sergei and the flood of other descendants – all masks, after a fashion, as they share his name, his blood, and to varying degrees his features. At the same time, they intimate while also concealing the unknown, relating to Pikarov certain details of the future but excluding others until a confrontation is forced. The descendents have been finding excuses to pay Pikarov and his wife visits for six months before he first notices that time has become labyrinthine. It begins with his buying Saturday’s newspaper on Friday; soon,

[i]t seemed that it was possible to leave the house at eight in the evening and return at five in the morning on the same day. Sometimes it turned out that you were in two or three places at once... It was as if time had lost its

mind. Or else the entire population of Earth had fallen victim to some unknown illness whose singular manifestation appeared to be that a person completely lost the ability to orient himself in time (Kalugin 254).

Sergei's evasive dismissal of this phenomenon as "temporal inversion" (ibid) prompts Pikarov to look behind the mask – that is, steal his descendant's temporal modulator and see the year 2246 for himself.

He arrives in a small booth opening into a larger area that he can only understand by relating to the familiar, to the waiting area of a train station. The mind-bending city he sees outside can be characterized as a mask and labyrinth in itself, described to the best of his ability as a series of cascading images on sequential layers of glass, each image replacing the other at dizzying speed. It is a place "where Mirages from all over the world have gathered, and each one tries to show itself in all its beauty." Gothic cathedrals, blossoming cherry gardens, as well as night and day and every season "all float, merge into one absolutely senseless picture, are dissolved in emptiness and again arise," giving the uninitiated viewer "the sensation of complete disorientation in space" (Kalugin 262). Disorientation is a common effect of the labyrinth, and Pikarov's response of unfocusing his sight is only appropriate. Labyrinths often illustrate "that looking closer to see more details can also mean seeing fewer details, or missing the 'whole picture' ... great distance is required to see the whole in the proper perspective," Allene Parker notes in her study of the archetype as used in Borges and the art of M.C. Escher (13-14). In the labyrinth of the future this means stepping back in an ideological sense, to allow the picture to emerge. Proper perspective on the labyrinth "allow[s] for multiple readings and interpretations" (Parker 12), which simultaneously serves Epstein's formless proto- future, Lotman's unpredictable experiments, and Leskov's utopian projects.

The motif of the labyrinth is less pronounced in “Girl,” suggested more by anachronistic details which may also serve as masks. Chronological disarray is limited to the appearance of the girl from the future (who at first appears to Krylov to be merely a beggar, a mask that is lifted as soon as they enter into dialog), though she does observe to Krylov, “your calendar is confused, you celebrate Christmas twice” (Luk’ianenko 3), a reference to the old and new styles of the Russian calendar. She chose to arrive at the middle point between the two dates, 31 Dec., in the hope that Krylov would be more inclined to give her the Japanese carving he just purchased. By entering the maze of time and arriving at a point between the two holidays, the girl seeks the spirit of generosity, a fundamental human trait, as if something hidden at the center of a labyrinth.

In bearing her likeness and holding those unidentifiable objects for which Krylov has no name, the carving is a mask, an attempt at contact, comprising both the familiar and Other. The truth behind this mask is that the girl’s father, lost in eighteenth-century Japan, carved it, giving it those attributes of familiarity and unfamiliarity as a clue for her to find, an attempt to contact her and prompt action. Only by putting that carving into a special device in her time machine can she find exactly when and where her father is. “And so, Valerii Pavlovich. I have a request for you,” she tells him: “Will you give me, a little girl lost in the darkness of centuries, a Christmas gift?” (Luk’ianenko 4). Indeed it must be a gift, since she explains time travelers are incapable of taking things from those in the past by force – just as the future cannot, in the proto- mentality and in contrast to utopianism, impose its will on the present, though the present can certainly make willing investments in the future for the sake of descendents. It is also significant that in order to find her father and so successfully peer behind the mask of the carving, the trinket would have to be destroyed. Because the mask in the labyrinth is one stage in a cognitive

hierarchy, which comprises “consecutive approaches to truth” (Nudelman 190), it must be discarded once it has served its function, which is to indicate the next step in the process of understanding the unknown.

In the end Krylov surrenders the carving so that the girl can rescue her father. As he is dejectedly musing over his decision, knowing that he has deprived himself of the business opportunity that the carving meant for him (a short-term prospect for the future), the girl reappears in the back of his car along with her father. In gratitude, the father presents Krylov with another carving, of a man in eighteenth-century Japanese dress anachronistically holding a beer bottle. Rather than giving it such an absurd name, however, Krylov decides to present it to his sculptor-monumentalist client under the title “Alchemist with a pestle,” the “work of an unknown master” (Luk’ianenko 8). Krylov thereby makes of this carving a new mask, which hints at while also obscuring the truth behind it. “The main thing is to give the correct name in time” (ibid), he reasons, reflecting on finding the truth behind the mask of the first carving – the naming, and thereby the cognition, of the Other culture’s symbols at the center of the labyrinth.

More than a simple holiday message of giving, the deeper truth behind the mask of the netsuke and Krylov’s surrender of it may be understood in several ways. Krylov’s gift does indeed speak of an individual charitably reaching beyond the immediate bounds of those with whom he identifies, overcoming the reduced bounds of the small *we* and a limited outlook on time; but his action has wider implication than charity. It also speaks of the role the individual may play in changing history – indeed Krylov changed the course of history as far as the girl and her father were concerned – as Iadov writes that Russian social theorists are beginning to understand. “[N]owadays the deciding role is played by subjective factors ... the capacity of social subjects, [such as] ordinary citizens”

to respond to internal and external challenges by promoting desirable over dangerous change (23-4). By making a selfless gift of it to a stranger, Krylov found behind the mask, which to him represented short-term personal plans, the capacity of the individual to promote desirable change with longer-reaching effect.

The individual is seen having an even wider impact in “Time Backward!,” one that will decide the very fate of future humanity. Pikarov confronts Sergei after returning to 2005 having found no answers, nothing easily cognizable, in the masks and labyrinths of the future, and so in the course of this dialog learns what lies behind the mask of his visiting descendents and the temporal labyrinth that began in their wake. They came in order to gather time from the past, as if it were raw material, so as to extend their own time, which had “run out” after a cosmic cataclysm. “[T]oward the middle of the thirty-third century a sharp deficit of time took shape in the region of the solar system,” causing mankind to fear the end of the universe itself; though no one knew whether this was the result of humans moving Earth into orbit around Venus to escape the dying sun, like ants in the meadow of the universe who have “decided to reorganize the anthill,” or if it was simply that “the Universe had reached the next scheduled stage of development” (Kalugin 266). The labyrinthine time Pikarov experienced was the result of time being pumped from the twenty-first century into the thirty-third – ““But what can you do,’ Sergei made a helpless gesture. ‘We all work on the future now’” (ibid).

In the end Pikarov agrees to help, by finding his own relatives between 1850 and 1940 as a pretext for pumping time from there into the early 2000s, and from there on to the 3200s. He sees it as making the present into a bridge between past and future. Eventually, says Sergei, they hope to dig their way back to the beginning of time, before Earth and man, in the expectation that “the future will join with the past and the time

stream will resume its usual channel” (Kalugin 268). In this way Pikarov will become one among a hierarchy of masks, successively harkening back to a fundamental point of origin at the center of the labyrinth, and leading, ultimately, to a profound renewal once humanity emerges from this maze – a renewal to which all human history will have contributed.

This hopeful project to save the future, continued in the face of uncertainty out of a need and desire to ensure human survival, underscores one of the renewing effects of contact with the system of masks. As each mask that falls away reveals yet others beyond, the explorer of the labyrinth must make a decision. “The choice between absolute gnostic pessimism (the labyrinth is devoid of a centre and a meaning) and cautious gnostic hope (the labyrinth leads to something) turns out to be necessary at literally every turn,” prompting the need to keep alive hope for a positive future, “not so much hope for the existence of an ‘absolute reality’ and ‘final truth’ as for the stubborn choice of reason to continue its search, in defiance of defeats” (Nudelman 187). Continual frustration of the search for knowledge in the labyrinth forces one to admit what he does not know, and “[s]uch a position is an honest one, especially in the light of the endless attempts throughout history to use this lack of knowledge to impose or justify a given set of moral interpretations” (Lewald 636). Such an admission precludes a claim such as utopia’s upon the future, but instead forces a more open approach, an unfocused view.

The elusive, persistent unknown can be a more effective prompt to action than the known, says Suvin, appraising Nudelman’s view on Lem’s epistemological masks and labyrinths. Suvin sees them “figur[ing] forth a Socratic skepticism: the only thing I may know is that I do not know (better than mythological, Newtonian certainty anyway).” Suvin finds more value in the acknowledgement of the unknown and subsequent search

for understanding than in the “dangerous illusion or fakery [of] scientific [or] religious fixed truth” – “understanding or wisdom is ... ineluctably a dynamic permeation and interfusion of the known with the unknown; and the unknown will never be finally known since history won’t freeze” (“Afterword” 253, 264).

Imagination and memory, freed from the dictates of the future in the two NF works analyzed in the first chapter of this thesis and refined in those examined in the second, are indispensable tools in shaping the proto-future. A belief in the potentialities of the future may in turn refine them, so that, paired with a hopeful, exploratory attitude that sees beyond today, they may be used in building foundations for the future in the otherwise impenetrable bedrock of the present. There are too many unknowns, admits Iadov, to “permit us to produce a forecast of the future that is in any way sound,” but “we are beginning to understand Russia with our heads, even as we retain our faith in a better future” (Iadov 30). Literature that tells stories of the proto-labyrinth – figuring an open-minded, transformative search for the shape and language of the unknown – forms a “fable,” says Suvin, in which no explicit moral “is imaginable and thus tellable today, unless it be the moral of open-endedness: History does not end” (“Afterword” 254). Indeed Russia’s history has not ended with the fall of the Soviet Union, nor need time stay halted in the age of postmodern, postutopian crises – the future yet beckons.

Notes to Chapter Three

1. There are no English publications of these texts, so all translations are my own.
2. Short stories were chosen as the two works for this chapter for several reasons: in order to expand, in terms of genre study, beyond the larger novels treated previously but also, and more importantly, as representative of the purely NF publishing conducted in the present decade. Both works are typical of what may be found in the pages of NF-exclusive magazines, such as Esl, a recent development since under Communism all short NF works were printed in scientific or youth-oriented adventure magazines, most notably Molodaia gvardiia (Menzel 133). The two works may also be found on their authors' personal web sites, and indeed the Internet is the arena in which much NF activity is conducted nowadays.
3. It should be noted that the title recalls Kataev's Socialist-Realist production novel Vremia vpered'! (Time Forward!, 1932), though Kalugin's short work is only loosely a parody, inasmuch as both share an emphasis on the future. See also ch. 1, n9.
4. Though separate from the Russian context, the Long Now Foundation is an excellent example of this principle in practice. Established in San Francisco in 1996, the foundation aims to introduce a counterbalance to "[c]ivilization ... revving itself into a pathologically short attention span" with its focus on passing trends and accelerating technology, says President Stewart Brand. "Some sort of balancing corrective to the short-sightedness is needed – some mechanism or myth which encourages the long view and the taking of long-term responsibility, where 'the long term' is measured at least in centuries" (Bracewell "Tick Tock" 6). Its founders are likewise concerned with the disappearance of the future, since for decades Western society invested the concept in the year 2000 with little popular conception of a future beyond that date. The concept of "the Long Now" is indeed an Archimedean point for moving the seemingly rock-solid present: "the consideration of longevity enables us to audit the consequences and boundaries of Modernism – and ... "the Long Now" might represent and authorize [sic] a shift in cultural practice: an alternative to the vertiginous tensions of Post-Modernism" (ibid).
5. The year in which the narrative occurs is not stated, but clues in the text, such as private business ownership, indicate the present. Furthermore, the date of the events in the story, 31 Dec., is significant as a threshold moment, one of change and new potential.
6. Note that Pikarov's meeting with (chronologically) distant relatives strengthens the work's ties with the labyrinth/mask motif, since in the original myth "Theseus ... meets in the labyrinth his *blood brother*," who embodies "the sin of the whole world, [a] symbol of the animal in man – in short, our Double, our Second Self" (Nudelmann 184). Moreover, while Pikarov is curious about the technological achievements of the future, his wife is more interested in what are to him mundane questions of family health and welfare. Neither concern is seen as more important than the other, but both pale in comparison to the threatened loss of the future that their relatives reveal.
7. A *netske*, more commonly spelled *netsuke*, is a fastener for small containers hung from the belts of kimonos beginning in seventeenth-century Japan. Carved from materials like bone and ivory, they usually depict people, animals and historical scenes. Of the several types of *netsuke*, the one in the story is likely a *katabori*, a three-dimensional figure one to three inches tall.
8. It is worth expanding on how Polish author Lem is familiar to the Russian reader of NF and may be considered part of the canon of the genre in the Soviet period alongside the Strugatskiis and Efremov. This is based on, among other things, the popularity of his novel Solaris, esteemed as "the bible of Russian NF" (Menzel 133) and produced as a film in 1972 under Soviet director Andrei Tarkovskii; and his prominent mention in A. F. Britikov's 1970 study Russkii Sovetskii nauchno-fantasticheskii roman [The Soviet Russian Science-Fiction Novel, 1970; no English translation], where his work is compared to the greats of Soviet NF.

Conclusion: Having a Wonderful Time in the Year 4338 – Wish You Were Here

So do you think the post-perestroika 1990s will be seen by Russians of the mid-twenty-first century as a time of superfluous people? No, guys, we are living in an era of dashing special forces personnel, cheerful policemen, gangsters driving Mercedes, and hard-boiled women.
- Viktor Miasnikov, "The Street Epic" (2003; 77)

Nothing so dramatic as the end of Russia's history resulted from the collapse of the Soviet Union, though the certainty of the future was indeed questioned during perestroika, followed by doubts about the prospects for a future after the future – for life, as Epstein puts it, after death (71). These doubts, and the baffled attitudes toward time that they engender, are seen in the terms in which Russia has been discussed since perestroika: first a sense of an imminent end to time in the late 1980s, an apocalyptic expectation, transitioning into a post-apocalyptic, temporally unfixed period in the early 1990s, "tumultuous times [in which] one year easily substitutes for ten (Miasnikov "Techno-Thriller" 68)," and now a position which threatens to grow stagnant if not worse for want of positive visions of the future.

We have seen how this disorientation of time is addressed in certain examples of the *nauchnaia fantastika* genre written in the past twenty years. It is hoped that the genre has demonstrated its literary value in expressing such inexpressible concepts as, and attitudes toward, a potential end to time and society. SF also offers perspectives on such concomitant questions as the possibility of rebirth; the social value of memory and imagination, and the relation of culture to history; and the persistence of the future as an unknowable, potentially productive Other. To be sure, the genre – or better, the epistemological tools of estrangement and cognition – of NF and related treatments of utopia have been used fruitfully one way or another by authors since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including Odоеvskii and Bogdanov, as a means of

expressing and exploring the inexpressible, both hopes and fears, especially during times of significant social change. It is not surprising that in exploring the above questions in recent years, otherwise mainstream novelists such as Bitov, Voinovich and Tolstaia should use as their heuristic tools the time machine, space station or culture-eradicating nuclear bomb – multivalent kenotypes, emblems of the times.

In these estranged chronotopes – from Bitov and Voinovich’s satellites, to Tolstaia’s post-apocalyptic Moscow and Luk’ianenko and Kalugin’s epistemological labyrinths of time – the six authors proffer alternate visions of the respective conditions under which they wrote, and grapple with the challenges of history since the decline of the Soviet Union. The first two authors demonstrate, through respective past and future visions with clear narrative parallels to the present, that whether one expected Communism to remain for decades or the country’s future to vanish along with the “apocalypse” of the Soviet Union, the future cannot be a productive Other if it is written in stone. Rather, Moscow 2042 and “Pushkin’s Photograph” accord with Epstein’s formula for a productive concept of the future, freed from the dictates of utopianism, freed to actually enjoy a level of uncertainty.

Continuing this thread, Tolstaia and Lazarchuk and Uspenskii demonstrate the need for receptiveness to the uncertainty of the future, to the potentially transformative influence of the unknown (the experiments of Lotman’s creative personality [Kul’tura 233], exemplified in both works by the device of language), as opposed to the cultural repetition of historical models. In the (post-apocalyptic) post-Communist era, they demonstrate, the future cannot be sought in the vanished empire. Finally, in order to receive and interact with this Other in a meaningful way, Luk’ianenko and Kalugin suggest a renewal of the instruments of cognition – in effect, a renewal of hope, a

decision to continue peering into the face of the (future as) Other, relying on memory to recognize the familiar and imagination to accept the unknown. Memory, in all six texts, is shown as the necessary tool for preserving the best of the past (while remaining cognizant of the worst), and imagination proven to be necessary for projecting the good into (and warding off the bad in) visions of the future.

In the hands of these authors the tools of NF were raised from pulp pages to address larger social issues – if the genre can even be said to have *been* a pulp fiction before the recent publishing boom, with its garish book covers and video game-based works. Consider the contrast between the general recognition afforded to Lem, Efremov and the Strugatskiis, who wrote almost exclusively in the genre, and the dismissal in Russia today of NF as “glossy junk” in a “literary ghetto” (Kaplan 62). “However talented an author may be,” Kaplan writes, “however profound the thoughts expressed in his or her books, however brilliant the language or well-portrayed the feelings, the brand name ‘[NF]’ excommunicates him or her from ‘serious’ literature” (ibid). He highlights Viktor Pelevin as an example of a widely popular author who began his career writing NF and still writes it frequently, but shuns the label so as not to be critically pigeonholed.

“By excommunicating science fiction,” Kaplan concludes, “‘serious’ literature is losing a good deal” (63). Oleg Divov¹ puts it this way in comparing NF to mainstream literature: “They consider fundamentally different problems. Of course, a fantasist always reflects reality. But, in contrast to a ‘mainstreamer,’ he doesn’t confine himself to established facts” (2). That is, while perhaps reflecting current conditions, NF writers also depict a world beyond them. This makes many mainstream readers feel uncomfortable, Divov adds, since it moves too far along the “axis of existential horror” – “It is ... customary to assume that Pelevin writes not about life, but about Buddhism. Otherwise

Pelevin would be discomforting and unfashionable” (ibid). What NF offers to the mainstream, then, is the challenge, as well as tools for the cognition, of the unknown, a renewal of the capacity of imagination in the face of what can perhaps be characterized as a general attitude of shame or fear of the visionary practice as a result of the failings of Soviet utopianism.

The use of the tools and methods of NF by the more familiar and critically respected of the authors in this thesis suggests a revised look at much writing since the late Soviet period. The possible Odoevtsev/Odoevskii allusion, for instance, not only in “Pushkin’s Photograph” but also in other of Bitov’s works in which he uses the name, most significantly Pushkinskii dom [Pushkin House; Rus. 1978, Eng. 1987], suggests a connection to the traditions of NF and utopianism that deserves further study. The alternative history genre, glossed in chapter two, may be one such area for examination – just as Slynx was nominated by NF fans for the Russkaia Fantastika prize, Vasilii Aksënov’s alternative history novel Ostrov krym [Crimea Island, 1979] received a Velikoe Kol’tso award (begun in 1981 in honor of Efremov) for long-form fiction. The Strugatskiis had won in that category the three previous years, and Pelevin the year after, all suggesting that NF fans discriminate more by a work’s content and less by the author’s traditional purview. This can be a fruitful approach.

While examples of borrowings from or incursions into NF was a main focus in choosing the first half of the texts for this thesis, much more research could be conducted in the works of the newest generation of “pure” writers of the genre, represented here by the second half of my texts. What are their appraisals today of the Soviet period, how do they frame their estranged memories; through what prisms do they filter the contemporary experience, with its social, cultural and political changes; and what are their imaginative

visions for the future? The nascent *fentezi* genre, which approaches the same issues through a different mode of estrangement, also deserves critical appraisal. This is especially warranted by its displacement of NF as the most popular fantastic genre, and its status as a major form in which Russian popular literature can be said to have come into its own following the flood of foreign material in the 1990s (Menzel 117).

Finally, those who habitually read NF, who form clubs and attend conventions, warrant further study as well. What now characterizes this mostly young readership, which during the high period of Soviet NF in the 1950s-70s was estimated at three million and comprised eighty percent of the technical and arts intelligentsia (McGuire 95). What new social mythologies do these readers find in the works of contemporary NF writers? If, as Epstein says, a literature is needed that fosters a love of the future in order to promote new directions of cultural development in protostage Russia, it may well be found in their hands – we have seen the keen interest they take in their country's, and the world's, future.

Notes to Conclusion:

1. No published English version of Divov's article, so all translations are my own.

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