The Fiction of Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky:

A Fractured Reality

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Abstract

This Master's thesis examines the worldview of Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky as represented in his fiction. Such an approach is justified both by the strangeness of Krzhizhanovsky's fictional worlds and the relative dearth of scholarship on the topic; although the bulk of his fiction was written in the 1920s, Krzhizhanovsky's works only gained critical attention in the West within the past ten years. This thesis aims to prove that Krzhizhanovsky views reality as fractured and uses his fiction to draw attention to this fragmentation and to examine the implications of life in a fractured world. In Krzhizhanovsky's stories, the logical chains of cause and effect break apart into a chaotic world that cannot be explained by philosophical reasoning and cannot support a coherent ethical system. As a consequence of fractured reality, its component parts – discrete objects, individuals, and moments – become more meaningful and Krzhizhanovsky turns to art and imagination as an alternative to fragmentation. The first chapter analyzes the philosophical background to Krzhizhanovsky's fiction, arguing that Krzhizhanovsky adapts certain ideas from the Vedanta, Leibniz, and Kant but largely rejects metaphysics as a source of knowledge. The second chapter shows how Krzhizhanovsky uses distortion, synecdoche, and personification to depict the fractured world, fractured body, and fractured self, respectively. In the third chapter, the thematic implications of fragmentation are examined, as Krzhizhanovsky both acknowledges the challenges of authorship in a fractured world and yet affirms the value of the imagination as a productive force.

Résumé

Cette thèse examine la vision du monde de Sigismund Krzyzanowski telle qu'elle se représente dans sa fiction. Une telle approche se justifie par l'étrangeté des mondes fictifs de Krzyzanowski et par le manque relatif de l'étude sur le sujet ; bien que la majorité de sa fiction a été écrit dans les années 1920, les œuvres de Krzyzanowski seulement ont gagné l'attention critique dans l'Ouest au cours des dix dernières années. Cette thèse cherche à prouver que, de l'avis de Krzyzanowski, la réalité se fracture et qu'il utilise sa fiction pour attirer l'attention sur cette fragmentation et pour examiner les implications d'existence dans un monde fracturé. Dans les histoires de Krzyzanowski, les liens de cause à effet se brisent en morceaux, laissant un monde chaotique qui est impossible à expliquer avec le raisonnement philosophique et qui ne peut pas soutenir un système éthique cohérent. En raison de la réalité fracturée, ses éléments constitutifs – des objets discrets, des individus et des moments – deviennent plus significatifs et Krzyzanowski affirme la valeur de l'art et de l'imagination comme une des alternatives à la fragmentation. Le premier chapitre analyse le contexte philosophique dans la fiction de Krzyzanowski, affirmant que Krzyzanowski adapte les idées du Vedanta, Leibniz et Kant, mais rejette généralement la métaphysique comme une source de connaissance. Le deuxième chapitre explique comment Krzyzanowski utilise la distorsion, la synecdoque, et la personnification pour dépeindre le monde fragmenté, le corps fragmenté, et le soi fragmenté, respectivement. Dans le troisième chapitre, les implications thématiques de la fragmentation sont examinées, puisque Krzyzanowski reconnaît les défis de l'écriture dans un monde fracturé même qu'il défend l'imagination comme une force productive.

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Note on Transliteration

Transliterations from the Cyrillic follow the modified Library of Congress system, omitting diacritics and ligatures. Exceptions are made for proper names, which are given their most familiar spelling.

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Introduction

"A philosophy of life is more terrible than syphilis," proclaims Saul Straight, the disillusioned author-philosopher from Krzhizhanovsky's 1930 story, "Someone Else's Theme" (*Memories of the Future* 65).[1] Straight's philosophizing drives people away and infects his literary output; unable to publish his works and unable to connect with others, Straight abandons his writing and pursues other methods of self-fulfillment. Written from 1929 – 1930, the story incorporates elements of its author's struggle with literature as well. Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky was born in Kiev in 1887, traveled through Europe after university to continue his education, and moved to Moscow in 1922, beginning what was to be the most productive decade of his life as a writer of fiction. However, only nine of Krzhizhanovsky's 150 or so short stories and novellas were published during his lifetime. Struggling to support himself, Krzhizhanovsky turned to literary criticism in the 30s, to translation in the 40s, and, by the time of his death in 1950, had given up writing altogether, according to the biography that Karen Rosenflanz provides in *Hunter of Themes* (7). It was not until Vadim Perelmuter's discovery of Krzhizhanovsky's works in a Moscow archive in the 1980s that his stories could finally begin to find an audience.

A first encounter with Krzhizhanovsky's fiction is jarring and disorienting; his works defy categorization and yet, despite Straight's warning, this thesis will follow previous scholars in attempting to distill a "philosophy of life" from Krzhizhanovsky's tangled, intellectual prose. The reader of Krzhizhanovsky's stories can sense that the author has a distinct and unusual approach to the world, but cannot easily translate this sense into an understanding of the

[1] Translations of Krzhizhanovsky's stories are taken from the NYRB Classics editions of *The Letter Killers Club*, *Autobiography of a Corpse*, and *Memories of the Future* and will hereafter be referred to as *LKC, AC*, and *MF*, respectively. Otherwise, translations are my own and are based either on works in the third volume of Krzhizhanovsky's *Sobranie sochinenii* (SS) or on az.lib.ru.

principles shaping his worldview. His fictional worlds are too impossible to be realistic, too close to the world to be pure fantasy, and too abstract to be a simple expansion of the real along the lines of science fiction. No generic category can fully account for the fundamental metaphysical difference between reality as it appears in Krzhizhanovsky's prose and in the living world of the reader.

"Experimental realism" (*eksperimental'nyi realizm*) is perhaps the best classification for Krzhizhanovsky's works, a term of his own invention[2]. In "Fragments on Shakespeare" (1939), he defines experimental realist works as those that that deviate from "the proper dimensions" once and only once: their sole fantastical element is a product of hyperbolization, but they otherwise adhere to the rules of reality. Although elements of Krzhizhanovsky's fiction seem to belong in a fantasy story, from talking frogs to disembodied heads to a factory of dreams,[3] the author treats such topics with a seriousness that implies they are features of the real world that have simply been overlooked. "Hyperbolization does not aim to depart from a realistic mode of seeing, but rather to implement this realism according to a special aesthetic principle," explains Naum Leiderman in his analysis of Krzhizhanovsky's unique intellectual worlds (522). In a sense, one could view socialist realism through this perspective, as a "realistic mode of seeing" is enhanced by an ideologically conscious "depiction of reality in its Revolutionary development," as the 1934 Charter of the Union of Soviet Writers states (297). However, despite the similar hyperbolization of reality in both socialist realism and Krzhizhanovsky's works, each has a different temporal orientation shaped by their desired outcome. While socialist realism exaggerates elements of the future to show the personal and social developments that the reader

[2]Although Krzhizhanovsky applies the term to Shakespeare, Emerson, Kalmykova, Leiderman, Maguire, Perelmuter, and Turnbull all categorize Krzhizhanovsky himself as an "experimental realist."
[3] In "Bridge over the Styx" (1931), "Red Snow" (1930), and "The Branch Line" (1928), respectively.

can anticipate, Krzhizhanovsky exaggerates the present chaos and fragmentation to disillusion his readers about the world in which they live.

Maxim Gorky, the doyen of socialist realism, offered a critique of Krzhizhanovsky characteristic of the contemporary critical response: in brief, Krzhizhanovsky's writing was not bad, but it was untimely, with too much philosophy and not enough social-mindedness. Gorky concluded that publication of such work would be irresponsible because "some young minds will be permanently dislocated" (qtd. in Rosenflanz, *Hunter of Themes* 16). Decades later, the very qualities that prevented Krzhizhanovsky's writing from reaching a contemporary audience have become the qualities most appreciated by a modern audience. His stories' potential for dislocating his readers leads critics to analyze the particular realms of Krzhizhanovsky's fiction that might unsettle the inquiring mind – minus space, the fourth dimension, a pneumatosphere, a phonosphere, a unique chronotope, and a fantastical world of imagination all appear in Krzhizhanovsky's oeuvre and all supplement traditional understandings of reality.[4] This thesis will continue the critical tradition that attempts to explain Krzhizhanovsky's view of reality as depicted in his fiction, arguing that the defining characteristic of Krzhizhanovsky's prose is the sense of fractured reality.

The first major scholarly work on Krzhizhanovsky did not appear until almost fifty years after his death, in the form of a 1993 article by Vladimir Toporov expanded into a book chapter in 1995. Despite the delayed critical response, the body of literature on Krzhizhanovsky has been growing in recent years; this review focuses on scholars who take a broad approach to Krzhizhanovsky's fiction and go beyond an analysis of his style to examine the reasons behind Krzhizhanovsky's literary choices. Toporov and Karen Rosenflanz provide an overview of

[4] Set forth by Toporov, Rosenflanz, Leiderman, Belobrovtseva, Kalmykova, and Ballard, respectively. Each term will be examined in more depth in the context of my arguments.

Krzhizhanovsky's treatment of space and of language, while Leiderman and Alisa Ballard discuss Krzhizhanovsky's intellectual and imaginative worlds in depth.

While Toporov is perhaps best known as a foundational scholar of the "Petersburg Myth," the area of study that posits special characteristics of the city based on analysis of its representation in literature,[5] he uses Krzhizhanovsky's texts as a basis for a similar treatment of Moscow. Toporov argues that, for Krzhizhanovsky, the definitive spatial characteristics of Moscow are its sense of stifling constriction, the presence of cracks that open up to a void, and the significance of the material basis of the world, distorted as it may be (Toporov 480-95). Even beyond Krzhizhanovsky's description of the city, Toporov contends that space is a central authorial concern, hypothesizing that Krzhizhanovsky was an agoraphobic. He cites the prevalence of cracks throughout Krzhizhanovsky's works, claiming that "the principle of *crackedness* itself provides a deep and fairly complete introduction into the metaphysics of space in Krzhizhanovsky's world" (506), and suggesting the term "minus-space" to describe the dark interior of the cracks that pervade Krzhizhanovsky's fiction. Toporov correctly identifies the thematic importance of cracks in Krzhizhanovsky and the unusual understanding of metaphysics in his works, but his arguments could be expanded beyond an examination of the spatial realm. This thesis will relate crackedness to ethics and to reality as a whole, focusing on the fragmentation that cracks create rather than on the minus-space within the crack.

Rosenflanz responds to Toporov's analysis of Krzhizhanovskian space in her article on the fourth dimension by considering distortions in time as well. She convincingly shows how the theories of Henri Bergson, Hermann Minkowski, and Peter Ouspensky shaped Krzhizhanovsky's conception of time and concludes that, "Krzhizhanovsky does indeed succeed in expanding the

[5] See Toporov's "Peterburgskii tekst: ego genezis i struktura, ego mastera" (274-281).

horizons of the imagination" ("Krzhizhanovsky's Fourth Dimension," 550) by questioning the perception of linear time and geometric space. In the only English monograph on Krzhizhanovsky to date, *Hunter of Themes* (2005), Rosenflanz analyzes the stylistic, philosophical, and thematic importance of words in Krzhizhanovsky. She draws parallels between Krzhizhanovsky's brand of modernism and the writing of the futurists and categorizes his many types of wordplay. With paranomasia, the most significant device, "the sound association prompts the initial mental joining of images and then serves to support (sometimes unconsciously) the logical verisimilitude of the proposed connection" (Rosenflanz, *Hunter of Themes* 44). Krzhizhanovsky's use of the association between sound and meaning can be seen in his world-building, based on the triad of *bytie* (existence), *byt* (daily life), and *by* (fantasy), and in his playful treatment of Kant's name, as he populates his works with a host of paronomastic doubles such as Kint and Krantz, characters in "The Unbitten Elbow" (1927) and "Yellow Coal" (1939), respectively.

Turning to philosophical problems in Krzhizhanovsky, Rosenflanz shows how his view of the material world was shaped by Kant. She argues that in Krzhizhanovsky's early stories, he "reflected a largely positive attitude toward Kant and his philosophical system" (*Hunter of Themes* 59), but that later stories such as "Postmark: Moscow" (1925) show "the path of progressive disillusionment with idealist metaphysics" (*Hunter of Themes* 61). While I agree with her latter point, in my first chapter I will argue that Krzhizhanovsky tempers his respect for Kant with an awareness of the isolating effect of philosophical abstraction. Rosenflanz continues her discussion of Krzhizhanovsky's philosophy with a very thorough and convincing argument that the frequent image of the eye in Krzhizhanovsky's fiction represents how individual perception shapes and limits one's view of reality. Despite the importance of philosophy in

Krzhizhanovsky's works, Rosenflanz claims that the power of fiction is his central theme. Krzhizhanovsky's stories reflect the general value of fiction over reality and, specifically, "the opposition of creation to philosophical determinism" (Rosenflanz, *Hunter of Themes* 82). Rosenflanz then expands her analysis of the word in Krzhizhanovsky from the stylistic to the thematic plane, showing how the importance of words demonstrates the larger importance of fiction. This thesis will attempt to expand on Rosenflanz's conclusions by considering the reasons behind Krzhizhanovsky's valorization of fiction – arguing that the author's sense of reality as fractured is at the heart of his rejection of philosophy, his focus on individual words as sources of meaning, and his creation of fictional worlds as refuges from the real.

While Rosenflanz represents Krzhizhanovsky's authorial development as an increasing commitment to imagination over intellectualism, Leiderman views Krzhizhanovsky as an advocate of reason above all else. He suggests that Krzhizhanovsky uses his art to explore one central question: "Is human reason really capable of going beyond the confines of the skull, the boundaries of words, to embrace a world that exists according to its own objective laws, not dependent on man's subjective will or representations?" (511). Although this question is indeed central, I would dispute Leiderman's interpretation of Krzhizhanovsky's answer. Leiderman believes that Krzhizhanovskian characters feel obligated to continue their struggle for understanding despite the daunting limitations of subjectivity, claiming that Krzhizhanovsky "does not turn away from the chaos of existence and does not intend to console himself with all manner of deceptive illusions" (534). While I agree that Krzhizhanovsky's protagonists value intellectual engagement with the world, it seems that Leiderman understates the extent of the pessimistic view of rationality expressed in Krzhizhanovsky's works. Rather than remaining

trapped in the futile task of understanding, Krzhizhanovsky's characters find an escape in art and fantasy.

Ballard writes about Krzhizhanovsky's theoretical view of the theater and its relevance to his fiction. By synthesizing references to *bytie*, *byt*, and *by* from Krzhizhanovsky's articles and stories, she constructs a comprehensive picture of each term's significance as an entire conceptual world in Krzhizhanovsky. In short, "the metaphysical world (*bytie*) is phenomenalized in the physical world (*byt*), and the physical world is brought into view by the subjunctive, as-if world of fiction (*by*)" (Ballard 558). Ballard's insights will be of particular use in the section on metapoetic elements of Krzhizhanovsky's fiction in my third chapter. While Ballard provides an excellent explanation of Krzhizhanovsky's tripartite worldview, she focuses her argument on Krzhizhanovsky's theater, arguing that the scenes materializing in front of the audience's eyes "possess the autonomy to be conceived of as a world" (555). This thesis will elaborate on Ballard's summation of Krzhizhanovsky's theoretical stance with greater application to his fiction and will balance Ballard's focus on Krzhizhanovsky's idealistic view of *by* with greater attention to his pessimistic treatment of *byt*.

Toporov, Rosenflanz, Leiderman, and Ballard all examine different aspects of Krzhizhanovsky's work, but they share a fundamental assumption: that reality in Krzhizhanovsky's fiction is somehow different from reality as is seems in the real world, as if distorted, elevated to an intellectual plane, or enhanced by imagination. The above authors focus on the outward manifestations of this reality, supplemented in Rosenflanz's case with an overview of Krzhizhanovsky's philosophical roots and in Ballard's case with an explanation of his aesthetic theories. This thesis attempts a more encompassing approach. Rather than a close study of one particular symptom of life in Krzhizhanovsky's fictional world, I will attempt to

define the primary tenet of Krzhizhanovsky's metaphysics, drawing on the philosophical concepts with which he engages, the stylistic representation of reality in his works, and the thematic conclusions he comes to in his stories.

The dominant element of Krzhizhanovsky's worldview as it is expressed in his fiction is that reality is fractured and not fully comprehensible, rather than whole, absolute, and knowable. Krzhizhanovsky responds to common conceptions of reality held by the masses and philosophers alike. Most people do not stop to question the nature of the world; they do not suspect that what they see in front of their eyes might only be a fragment of a larger reality, or that what they see might not even be real at all. Ballard explains that, in Krzhizhanovsky's understanding, everyday life, or *byt*, is "the world that most believes itself to be real and that insists that *only it* is real" (559). Krzhizhanovsky also depicts the opposite, but equally flawed approach of philosophers who constantly question the nature of the world as it is perceived but, in doing so, assume that it is possible to understand the world. They do not consider that logic may not be an appropriate tool if the world itself is illogical.

In contrast to false assumptions of about the possibility of knowledge, Krzhizhanovsky's fiction recreates reality in a way that emphasizes its fractured quality and thus its unresolvable uncertainty. The infinite number of wandering cracks that run through the fabric of existence provide a metaphysical commentary on the complexity of a world that denies complete knowledge as well as a social commentary on the chaotic nature of life in the early years of the Soviet Union. The disorder of a post-revolutionary society with rapid urbanization, modernization, and general reorganization of life, the jarring imposition of a new ideology that presumes to meddle with time itself through historical revisionism, and the isolation that comes from impersonal bureaucracy, anti-individualism, and institutionalized doublethink – all this is

reflected in Krzhizhanovsky's aesthetics of fragmentation. Leiderman also notes the socio-political situation as a contributing factor for the development of Krzhizhanovsky's worldview, as "alongside the foundations of the old world, *all* foundations are destroyed, including those fundamental and "eternal" foundations without which life in general is impossible" (525). The destruction of the fundamental foundations of life, as Leiderman puts it, can also be understood as fragmentation of reality. As metaphysics covers a far greater scope than does sociology or politics, it remains the most productive focus for analysis, although the latter factors certainly play a role in shaping Krzhizhanovsky's worldview.

I contend that, in response to fractured reality, Krzhizhanovsky's fiction sets forth the possibility of finding meaning in the smallest forms of existence. The larger the scale of inquiry, the more chance one has of being confronted with cracks. Instead, turning to parts of the whole, to a single tree – even a single leaf – rather than the entire forest, to words rather than entire books, to a single idea rather than an entire conceptual map, can provide a fragment of certainty in one's quest for understanding. Although the suggestion that fractured reality causes this artistic approach is my own, the recognition that there is meaning on the smallest scale appears throughout scholarship on Krzhizhanovsky. Writing about Krzhizhanovsky's unique chronotope, Vera Kalmykova states that his central theme is "the small, the smallest details, parts of the whole" ("Krzhizhanovsky's Archaics"), a claim echoed in Sergei Biriukov's analysis of the "smallest of the small" (*naimali*) in Krzhizhanovsky. Focusing particularly on language, Biriukov argues that, "the particular attention to laconicism, to the minimum unit of expression, for example to proverbs, sayings, aphorisms, 'thoughts,' the semantics of names… all this creates the unique script of the author" ("Krzhizhanovsky's Smallest of the Small"). For

Krzhizhanovsky, language is not just a means to communicate his view of fractured reality; it is valuable in itself as a productive response to fragmentation.

Focus on the smallest units of language allows for a degree of certainty in a fractured world; however, in addition to reducing the scope of one's approach to the world, language can also provide a different approach altogether, creating fictional worlds of art as an escape from fractured reality. The dual positive functions of language – upholding small certainties and large fantasies – correspond to Toporov's concept of plus-space. Plus-space brightens Krzhizhanovsky's stories' otherwise gloomy focus on the dark-minus space lurking within the cracks of existence. In contrast to this dark uncertainty, plus-space "is the space about which the writer can still manage to say much in few words… being rooted in some ontological and noumenal depth, at the same time it easily and naturally reveals, in all of its semantic fullness, its name, which constitutes a world as an image of some harmonious ideal" (Toporov 477). Plus-space provides an element of harmony in Krzhizhanovsky's fractured world in part because of the unifying force of language. When what is said – the word's "semantic fullness" – corresponds perfectly with that is meant – "the image of some harmonious ideal" – art is functioning to its fullest potential, creating the convincing vision of an ideal despite the limitations of the real. The power of art is a positive force in Krzhizhanovsky's world that acts as a counterpoint to reality.

Although elements of my conception of Krzhizhanovsky's worldview coincide with other scholars, my argument differs in its use of fractured reality as, ironically, a unifying concept to draw together the topics of Krzhizhanovsky's metaphysics, stylistics, and thematics. The first chapter will discuss some of Krzhizhanovsky's philosophical influences, which are especially relevant because of the many allusions to philosophy in his works. Hindu philosophy contributes

to Krzhizhanovsky's understanding of the self as seen in the dichotomy between body and soul and between individual and society. Krzhizhanovsky adapts Leibniz's theories to express pessimism about the possibility of full knowledge while maintaining hope in discrete units of meaning. Finally, Krzhizhanovsky uses Kant as a symbol of the problems of philosophical inquiry, but accepts the philosopher's theory that there is more to reality than what one can perceive.

The second chapter will cover the primary stylistic implications of fractured reality in Krzhizhanovsky's art. Distortion warps the very physics of time and space, while synecdoche reflects the fragmentation of the human body. Personification of inanimate and even abstract objects challenges the nature of life and personality, as does Krzhizhanovsky's tendency towards human protagonists who are more dead than alive, uncertain of their own existence.

In addition to fragmented physics, bodies, and selves, the stories themselves often break apart into loosely connected subplots, often with different narrators struggling with self-expression. Literature's role as a challenging but essential means of communication is a central theme for Krzhizhanovsky, one that will be addressed in the final chapter through analysis of the authors, imaginers, books, and ideas that run throughout his stories. Krzhizhanovsky's frequent use of seemingly fantastical devices to serve the larger function of realistically representing fragmentation draws attention to the literary devices in their own right. The focus on the tools of art leads art itself to become autonomous, as letters, words, and themes come alive. Words that are truly alive can only exist in a dynamic world of art, which Krzhizhanovsky asserts in his writing as an alternative to fractured reality.

Chapter One: Philosophical Background

Before discussing how Krzhizhanovsky's unique worldview shapes his fiction, one must understand what shaped this worldview – the philosophical and religious undercurrents of his works that draw from sources as various as Thales and Schopenhauer, Christ and Allah.[6] While there is no single philosophical system that Krzhizhanovsky agrees with entirely, he resurrects individual philosophers as characters in his stories and engages with fragments of their worldviews rather than responding to the whole. Krzhizhanovsky has a complicated relationship to philosophy; his is always the thinking of an artist, not a logician, but he uses his artistic thinking to offer creative responses to philosophical models. Ballard notes that, "Krzhizhanovsky's self-narrative of his early formation as a thinker is built around the dichotomy of philosophy and literature/theater" (557), referring to his dual passion for Kant and Shakespeare. This dichotomy appears in his fiction not only in the form of allusions to philosophers, but in the integration of their concepts into the fabric of his created worlds. Indeed, Leiderman views this combination of art and philosophy as the central element of Krzhizhanovsky's fiction, which, he argues, operates on two planes:

> The first level for plot events, the second a generalized philosophical plane. But the first plane is subordinated to the second, functioning either as a graphically visible illustration of the philosophical idea or, more often, as a testing ground, where the abstract idea is regulated by the self-developing rules of a fictive artistic world (521).

In the next chapter, more attention will be devoted to Krzhizhanovsky's use of fiction to actualize abstract concepts; this chapter shows how Krzhizhanovsky contrasts the logical nature of philosophy with the fantasy of art to show the ultimate superiority of imagination over reason.

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[6] As seen in "In the Pupil" (*AC* 51) [1927], "Memories of the Future" (*MF* 144) [1929], *The Letter Killers Club* (51) [1926], and "Two Tufts of Wheat" (*SS* 188) [date uncertain], respectively.

Although, as Leiderman says, the philosophical plane predominates in Krzhizhanovsky's fiction, it consists of a profoundly personalized version of philosophy, as Krzhizhanovsky's idiosyncratic interpretation of logical, holistic theories warps them into fragmented fictional versions of their original state. Krzhizhanovsky goes beyond engaging with abstract theories to respond to their creators directly, incarnating real-world philosophers as fictional characters and using them as symbols of a particular concept, or even of philosophy as a field. According to Ballard, "Shakespeare and Kant stand in as metonymic signifiers for their respective disciplines" (555). Ballard goes on to distinguish between two distinct meanings of philosophy for Krzhizhanovsky: the positive process of engaging intellectually with the world or the academic tradition of reducing the complexity of the world into restrictive logical structures.

> [Krzhizhanovsky] does not critique specific claims made by philosophers as strong or weak results of the general philosophical thinking that he embraces; rather, he broadly criticizes the work of German metaphysicians and other philosophers for having too limited a worldview and for wrongly claiming to discover truths about the world. (Ballard 558)

Krzhizhanovsky's fiction reflects a sense of the world as chaotic, incomprehensible, and fragmentary, while philosophers typically seek order, knowledge, and wholeness; fictional worlds put abstract theories to the test to reveal their shortcomings.

"The Land of Nots" (1922), most fully expresses the limitations of philosophers, as it is about a nonsense world populated by beings determined to prove their own existence. Made up of nothingness and nonexistence, the Land of Nots seems to be a reverse image of the real world, the land of the narrator and his fellow "Ises" (*esti*). However, the fantasy has striking and unsettling parallels with reality. Both worlds are "a sphere that… seems flat" with "the seeming risings and settings of a sun that is in fact motionless to their little world" (*AC* 107) and, in both, children learn that "shadows are cast by things, but if one thinks about this sensibly, then one

cannot know exactly if shadows are cast by things or things by shadows" (*AC* 108). The inhabitants lack access to true reality, trapped within their individual perceptions. Philosophers, Nots and Ises alike, may try to discover greater truths through reason, but their task is doomed, as in the case of a wise Not who "mistook wooden shutters painted black for the outside world and jumped to conclusions. It happens" (*AC* 110). Allusions to Plato, Hegel, Spinoza, Fichte, Berkley, and Kant place them among the ranks of Not philosophers, blurring the boundary between the real and fictional worlds. Thus, the narrator's observation that "rather than try to prove oneself to oneself, rather than weave ideas about life, it would be far simpler to live" (*AC* 109) does not just apply to the Land of Nots, but reflects on the worlds of the narrator and readers alike.

A coherent philosophical system is not compatible with Krzhizhanovsky's view of the world as fractured and therefore antithetical to organization or even understanding. As Krzhizhanovsky writes in his article, "Philosopheme on Theater" (1923), "in both the fragments left behind by the Eleatics and in Spinozist ethics they are not able to think of existence (*bytie*) as anything but united." Although abstract concepts of existence may posit wholeness, the real world has no inherent logical order. In Krzhizhanovsky's fiction, one cannot determine cause and effect and every syllogism is suspect, as in "Red Snow" (1930), in which characters wait in line for logic and receive their ration of disordered syllogistic propositions, logical in name but not in fact (*MF* 120). Lacking a base in logical reasoning, all intellectual structures that make up a philosophical whole crumble into meaninglessness.

Despite the impossibility of certainty, of truth supported by logic, of a philosophy that finds order in chaos, Krzhizhanovsky continues to engage rationally with the world, unwilling to abandon the search for meaning despite his profound uncertainty that such meaning exists.

Although he is skeptical of the whole, he borrows individual parts of philosophical systems and reworks them, either constructing an intellectual argument against the ideas of other thinkers or putting them in a new context that reveals a different interpretation. Krzhizhanovsky's view of reality is especially indebted to Hindu philosophy, Leibniz, and Kant. He adapts the Vedic conception of body and consciousness to emphasize a sense of fracture in his world, he expands on the concept of Leibniz's monads to represent the optimistic belief in meaning present in the base units of reality, and he responds to Kant's noumena by embracing imaginative subjectivity over unknowable reality.

Krzhizhanovsky's Vedanta: Unity Denied

The Vedanta is a disparate group of ancient texts with uncertain authorship. It consists of the Upanishads, a collection of texts written in northern India by different unknown authors between 700 BCE and 100 CE to explain the deeper meaning behind religious rituals; the *Baghavad Gita*, written by the semi-mythic sage Vyasa sometime between 500 – 200 BCE to synthesize these ideas; and the Brahma Sutras, attributed to the same author and composed shortly afterwards as a summary and expansion of the main points of the Upanishads. [7] The Vedanta lacks a single figure to serve as a symbolic representation of the philosophy, and, indeed, lacks a single coherent philosophy at all, and so Krzhizhanovsky cannot reincarnate it as a recognizable character in his works, as he does with Western philosophers.

Although his engagement with Vedantic philosophy is less obvious, several explicit references to the Vedanta show Krzhizhanovsky's familiarity with its major themes. In "Seams"

[7] Although there are contradictory ideas within these texts and many possible interpretations, I will be focusing on the general themes they have in common. My argument rests on how to interpret Krzhizhanovsky's response to the Vedanta, rather than how to understand the Vedanta itself.

(1928), the narrator looks through "English editions of ancient Indian texts, copies of the Vedanta and the Sankhya, commentaries and compilations" (*AC* 64), proving his understanding through references to specific characters and styles of argumentation. In addition to philosophy, Krzhizhanovsky incorporates Hindu religious beliefs and Indian folklore into his fiction, as seen respectively in the mention of Vishnu in his 1929 story, "Memories of the Future" (194), and the reference to *Panchatantra* in his novel of 1926, *The Letter Killers Club* (86), and references fifth century Indic linguistic theory in his essay "Idea and Word" (1912). "The Stolen Bell" (date uncertain), which takes place in central India and references the Upanishads explicitly, draws on Indian culture and religion and uses Hindu philosophy as its organizing principle. Elena Kuzmina, in her analysis of Krzhizhanovsky's adaptation of Eastern traditions into fairy tales, argues convincingly that the story is a metaphor for the Vedantic conception of self. Krzhizhanovsky's obvious knowledge of the Vedanta justifies the examination of similar themes even in his stories that do not directly allude to the topic.

"Vedanta" means "the end or conclusion and, in an extended sense, the essence of the Veda," the sacred texts of Hinduism, writes Patrick Olivelle in his overview of the Upanishads (xxxiii). Within the Vedantic corpus, the Upanishads are the earliest and most influential texts and will be the source of most examples of Hindu thought given here. The term "upanishad" means both the "most fundamental connection" and "secret teaching"; the texts break down different elements of reality and examine them, such as breaking the body into its parts or breaking language into single words. After dividing reality into its component parts, the Upanishads then show the hidden connections between all things, emphasizing the underlying unity between body and soul and between the self and the outside world. In his fiction, Krzhizhanovsky takes the first step in this process, but not the second; he examines disconnected

parts of reality, but the parts never rejoin the whole, leaving the reader instead with a sense of fragmentation.

In contrast to the Christian belief that one's body is "the temple of the Holy Ghost" (*King James Version*, 1 Corinth. 6.19) and so should be ruled by the rational mind and moral sense, Krzhizhanovsky's concept of the relationship between body and soul aligns more with Eastern thought. The Vedanta represents body and soul as separate but equal, with consciousness as a mediator between the two. Atman is both the physical body and the core of individual consciousness, and Brahman is "the ultimate and basic essence of the cosmos" (Olivielle, lvi): although the two merge when a person learns to see the oneness in the universe, the unenlightened individual views Atman and Brahman as distinct entities. When one overcomes limited perception to see the true state of things, it becomes clear that "this self [*atman*] is *brahman* – this self that is made of perception, made of mind, made of sight, made of breath, made of hearing, made of earth, made of water, made of wind, made of space…" (Brhadaranyaka Upanishad, 4.4.5). This definition of self includes perception and the senses as well as the material elements of the body, all of which can be examined separately but are ultimately united.

According to the Upanishads, the body is something to be respected and cared for, rather than something to be mastered, as in the Western tradition. The Christian division of "spirit and soul and body" (1 Thess 5.23) exists in the Upanishads, but with the understanding that such division is simply a heuristic tool to better understand how the three ultimately come together. In a general sense, the physical body gathers sense perception and sustains the spirit and the soul, as the importance of lifebreath in the Upanishads shows.[8] The spirit, or conscious mind, applies

[8] See, for example, the Chandogaya Upanishad 5.1.2, Taittiriya Upanishad 2.3.1, Kaushitaki Upanishad 2.1.1, and the entirety of the Prasna Upanishad.

reason to perceptions to gain an understanding of the world and forms the core of the individual's sense of self. "The image of the physical human body is present even when the Upanishads are attempting to isolate that core" (Olivelle, lv), and spiritual processes are often illustrated with reference to the physical world. The soul is the element that bridges the gap between individual self and cosmic unity. "When the tip of a hair is split into a hundred parts, and one of those parts further into a hundred parts – the individual soul (*jiva*), on the one hand, is the size of one such part, and, on the other, it partakes of infinity" (Svetasvatara Upanishad, 5.9). Unlike the hierarchy of mind and body in the Western tradition, the ideal presented in the Vedanta is for the soul to fully recognize and accept both body and consciousness. Then, one can see "the self (*atman*) in just himself (*atman*) and all things as the self" (Brhadaranuaka Upanishad 4.4.23) – see the connections between soul and body (what is "just himself") and between soul and all of existence. Before the "fundamental connection" can be realized, one must have a sense of the essential and separate nature of body and spirit.

As an initial step in recognizing how the body relates to the spirit and to the outside world, the Upanishads often approach each part of the body separately. For example, according to Upanishadic scholar Brian Black, "different body parts of the horse sacrifice (*asvamedha*) are compared to the different elements, regions, and intervals of the cosmos" ("Upanishads") and "parts of the body were homologized with cosmic phenomena" (Olivelle, xlix). Fracturing the body is simply a tool for explaining hidden connections between different areas of reality, thus contributing to a greater sense of wholeness in the Vedantic worldview.

Krzhizhanovsky similarly maintains the image of the body and of physicality in general even when dealing with abstract themes, but he deviates from the Vedanta by denying the final step to unification. Instead, the division between body and spirt is yet another product of a

fractured world, as body and soul rebel against each other. In "The Bookmark" (1927), a peasant carpenter works his way up through the Party to become a bureaucrat, transitioning gradually from purely physical labor to intellectual work. However, when he happens to touch a shaving of wood, "his hand is suddenly alive with the old carpenter's reflex. Government official Tyankov tries – you understand – to pick up his pencil, but his hand refuses and demands its due" (*MF* 26). The body has desires separate from the controlling mind. "The Unbitten Elbow" represents an opposite, and even more dramatic, situation: the mind turns against the body when a man sets his will towards biting his own elbow.[9] The individual's inability to reconcile body and spirit represents a larger metaphysical division between matter and consciousness as well as an artistic distinction between reality and the imagination: the creative mind is capable of conceiving of something outside of the bounds of reality and working towards that impossible goal in a direct rejection of restrictive rules of the material world. "Lo posible es para los tontos [The possible is for fools] (*AC* 126) is the elbow-eater's motto. Rather than suggesting understanding and unification to cope with the divided body and spirit, Krzhizhanovsky embraces the division, personifying individual body parts to give them independence from the ruling consciousness and celebrating the imaginative self's freedom from the laws of the body.

Krzhizhanovsky's rejection of the Vedantic approach to mind and body is a necessary concession to his artistic goal of depicting fractured reality. Recognizing underlying unity is simply impossible in a world that lacks all continuity. In the Upanishads, the fracturing of the body and subsequent metaphorical connections drawn from those body parts is "used to indicate this hierarchic connection and dependence of one reality on another" (Olivelle, lv) and, in so doing, to imbue all aspects of life with a moral charge. One must venerate food and breath

[9] To bite one's elbow (*kusat' lokti*) is a Russian idiom expressing futile regret over a missed opportunity. For Krzhizhanovsky's elbow-eater, however, the idiom becomes a call to action rather than a statement of resignation.

because they sustain the body and therefore the soul; one must follow rituals because they have a hidden connection to cosmic order – every action is meaningful, because all things connect to the whole. The lack of connectedness in Krzhizhanovsky's world then takes on an ethical dimension as well, as things exist in isolation, if not outright conflict. The individual himself becomes subject to internal divisions, constantly at war with himself, like the elbow-eater who bit himself to death in an attempt to conquer his own flesh. The inhabitant of Krzhizhanovsky's world, unable to achieve the Vedantic ideal of unification of body and soul and unwilling to follow the elbow-eater's enraged assertion of mind over matter, has no choice but to accept the fractured nature of reality. The best one can do is to focus on disconnected elements as a source of knowledge, however small.

In the Vedanta, understanding the relationship of body and soul is a precursor to understanding the relationship between the self and external reality. "The final *upanisad* or equation is between Atman, the essential I, and Brahman, the ultimate real" (Olivelle, lvi). The ultimate goal on the path to true knowledge is to expand one's consciousness enough to recognize the outside world as part of oneself; all individual things are reflections of the whole. Just as nectar taken from individual trees becomes "a homogenous whole" when transformed into honey, as a sage explains to his son in the Chandogya Upanishad, "In exactly the same way… when all these creatures merge into the existent, they are not aware that: 'We are merging into the existent'" (6.9.2). Only by becoming aware of that process of "merging into the existent" can one achieve *moksha*, liberation from the cycle of reincarnation.

Although the lonely intellectuals that populate Krzhizhanovsky's fiction testify to the author's sympathy with both the general search for understanding and the specific longing of an individual to connect with the world, they can achieve neither understanding nor connection. On

the practical level, the world is loud, chaotic, and anti-intellectual; on the metaphysical level, other people might not even exist. In "The Stolen Bell," Krzhizhanovsky suspends his skepticism about man's quest for unity and draws directly from Hindu philosophy to craft a parable about the connection between the one and the many. When a bell-ringer enters the temple and realizes the bell is missing, he tugs on its rope in despair, only to hear the sound of the bell ring in his head. The genie that had inhabited the bell takes up residence in the man's ear, commanding him to find the thief. After long travels, the bell-ringer hears the echoes of the bell ringing in coins that are being minted and becomes a beggar to recover them. "As a cloud breaks up into droplets, just so my copper bell broke into small change and rings on your outstretched palm" (*SS* 201), showing that the essence of the whole is present in all of its parts. Kuzmina neatly connects this story with Vedantic tradition:

> Using the technique of visualization of abstract concepts, the author puts at the center of his narrative the vanished bell, which becomes a symbolic designation of Brahman as the absolute divine foundation of all things – the supreme spiritual unity… In the end, everything final, according to the Upanishads, has value only as a reflection of the eternal.

Just as every coin must join together to be reforged into the divine whole of the bell, so too must man recognize the image of Brahman linking him to his fellow man.

Within the limited scope of a simple parable, Krzhizhanovsky can present a world in which wholeness is possible; however, the rest of his works are more pessimistic, showing the ultimate failure of the individual's attempt to escape the narrow realm of his own consciousness. In Das' story from *The Letter Killers Club*, an idealistic scientist attempts to unite individuals into a harmonious whole by force. His scheme is to "organize reality according to plan and put paid to that amateurish 'I.' By replacing the jolts from individual wills with the jolts from one 'ethical machine' built according to the latest advances in morals and technology, one could

make everyone give everything back: a complete *ex*" (*LKC* 55). To become part of the whole, the individual must be crossed out entirely. The dystopian story ends with global dictatorship and the death of tens of millions in a clear condemnation of a world based on anti-individualism.

Even those who sincerely wish to connect with others are unable to do so, as people experience the world only through their individual perception and thus have no common experience of reality. The narrator of "In the Pupil" (1927) sees a tiny double of himself within the eye of his lover and, as he muses over the manikin's existence, begins to question the reality of people in the outside world as well.[10] "They exist, of course, while I look at them, but so do I exist while someone looks at me. But if that someone closes her eyes, then…" (*AC* 34). His image of himself is irreconcilable with how others perceive him, and so either he or the outside world must be wrong. To preserve the integrity of one's sense of self, one must shut out the outside world. In "Postmark: Moscow," when walking down a crowded street, the narrator laments that "to protect the life hidden between your temples from the life swirling about you… is impossible" (*AC* 173); he must seek physical isolation to protect his mental integrity. Despite Krzhizhanovsky's characters' constant striving to understand the world and themselves, they are unable are to make sense of a fractured world, unable to reconcile self and other. Faced with such uncertainty, retreat into the self is the safest response

This failure to truly know another person leads to a failure of any ethical system based around compassion, as a man trapped within himself cannot empathize with others. Saul Straight, the hero of "Someone Else's Theme," attempts to find meaning in the outside world by using stories to bring objects to life and by stealing and returning pets so their owners can experience

[10] One could also draw parallels between the predominance of miniature men in Krzhizhanovsky's works and the Vedantic embodiment of the self as a little man who dwells at the center of one's body. For example, in the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad, the self "slips out of the heart through these veins and rests within the pericardium" (2.1.19).

the joy of reunion. However, his attempts do not relieve his loneliness and he rejects compassion entirely. “To love another as yourself for a day or even two, that is doable, but to love him your entire life and from one generation to the next for two thousand years straight, that is psychological nonsense” (*MF* 78). Man cannot love his neighbor as himself because man’s sense of self is uncertain. In Krzhizhanovsky’s world, the central impediments to achieving Vedantic unification with humanity are the limitations of subjectivity and the fractured nature of the outside world.

Even if Krzhizhanovsky’s protagonists could connect with others, they likely would be disappointed: the vision of mankind in an abstract, spiritual sense has nothing in common with the dirty, loud, indifferent masses that exist in reality. In “Yellow Coal,” Professor Leker proposes spite as an alternative energy source after realizing the infinite supply of spite in society. The professor’s revelation comes as he stands on a crowded street and takes in “the gnashing steel rims and humming human swarms. The people changed, yet remained the same: jaws clenched, brows butting the air, elbows endlessly elbowing their way” (*AC* 138). The faceless flow of disembodied parts makes the crowd seem less than human, a swell of angry physicality. The body’s synecdochal fracturing also reflects the fragmented nature of the world. Rather than asserting lofty ideas of mankind’s spiritual potential or brotherly unity, Krzhizhanovsky’s representation of the masses emphasizes their physical nature to the point of grotesquery, showing the negative repercussions of the split between body and spirit.

In the Vedantic approach to understanding the world, one examines the constituent parts of the object of inquiry before learning to see how those parts relate back to the object and beyond, to an even larger whole. Man must be divided into body, spirit, and soul and all three must be understood before grasping their connection to an outside reality. This approach holds

true even when examining the very words that express Vedantic wisdom; examining a phoneme leads to understanding of the word in which it is contained and allows for conceptual connections to other areas of inquiry. Krzhizhanovsky shares the belief in the almost mystical power of language, in the unbounded range of associations within every word.

Although Krzhizhanovsky did not speak Sanskrit and his ideas about language certainly draw on far more than the Vedanta, it is impossible to read the Upanishads, even in translation, without a sense of the importance of phonetics, and so it is reasonable to consider this as yet another area of influence. When the Upanishads reveal the hidden connections between disparate objects, at times the sole point of contact is similarity in names. "This belief that what sounds alike must be alike was founded on the theory that the essence of a thing was expressed in its name and its visible appearance" (Olivelle, liv). For example, the Chandogya Upanishad claims that there is value (*sama*) in doing good (*sadhu*) and that venerating the Saman chant is a form of good, all on the basis of the words' similarity (2.1.1-4). Just as parts of the body connect to cosmic phenomena, so do parts of words. "All the vowels are corporeal forms of Indra. All the spirants are corporeal forms of Prajapati. And all the stops are corporeal forms of Death" (Chadogya Upanishad 2.22.3). True understanding of these connections is yet another means of seeing the underlying unity in the world, especially as words are the primary tools to transmit knowledge, and therefore central to the spiritual journey. "A man who meditates on that highest phoneme by means of this very syllable OM with all three of its phonemes [AUM]… enters into the effulgence in the sun" (Prasna Upanishad, 5.5). Words are symbols of and conduits for knowledge.

Krzhizhanovsky, too, goes beyond stylistics and elevates words to thematic importance in his stories on the basis of how they sound and how they exist in space as a collection of letters.

After her thorough and well-organized examination of wordplay in Krzhizhanovsky, Rosenflanz concludes that, "by highlighting formal similarities in the phonic or graphic aspects of words, wordplay elicits semantic associations and may thereby act to lend subconscious credence to statements in which it is incorporated… heightened awareness of language allows the perception of hidden connections and connotations to be extended to the multi-tiered literary work as a whole" (*Hunter of Themes* 55). She points to the introduction of "Thirty Pieces of Silver" (1927) for an example of the thematic important of sound in Krzhizhanovsky, as repetition of sounds close to '*gorst*' and '*stih*' ('handful' and 'verse') emphasizes the connection between the form of the poem and its content, the handful of silver. "Sound repetition unifies the themes internally… and interconnects them through paranomastic ties and poetic etymology" (Rosenflanz, *Hunter of Themes* 25). Irina Belobrovtseva expands on this argument in her claim that Krzhizhanovsky creates a phonosphere in his prose, using the sounds of words to enhance the meaning of the text. For example, he "uses devoiced consonants where reality is illusory, irrational (and therefore the sound melts and almost imperceptibly spreads, disperses" (Belobrovtseva, "Krzhizhanovsky's Phonosphere").

While both scholars give convincing examples of the importance of phonetics, the written word is paramount for Krzhizhanovsky. As Ioanna Borisova observes in her essay on Krzhizhanovsky's aesthetic views, "the sign and its metaphysics, the name as the sense of a thing, are the basic motifs of all Krzhizhanovsky's prose" (qtd. in Leiderman 513). Krzhizhanovsky's constant wordplay and his characteristic personification of words and even letters draw attention to the tools the author uses to create meaning, returning importance to the words themselves instead of using them merely as a conduit for ideas. For example, in *The Letter Killers Club*, the abuse suffered at the hands of critics transfers from the writer to his "flogged

and exhausted name" itself (10). Liederman, in his explication of the intellectual dimension of Krzhizhanovsky's works, argues that Krzhizhanovsky's poetics are "*a search instrument through which an author can seek the "signified" in the "signifier," that is, can seek the object-sense that human consciousness has fixed in the signs it has invented*" (513; emphasis in the original). Just as Vedantic philosophy draws attention to the hidden relationships between words and reality, Krzhizhanovsky brings words to life, often in a literal sense.

In Krzhizhanovsky, as in the Vedanta, parts of the whole are an important source of meaning. However, in the Vedantic approach, the meaning of individual parts contributes to a greater understanding of the whole, whereas Krzhizhanovsky's fragmented bodies, objects, and words never take the final step to unity. A harmonious universe accessible to human reason is impossible in Krzhizhanovsky's fiction, but one can still find meaning on a smaller scale. Although the Vedanta influences this approach, Krzhizhanovsky references it far less than he does Western philosophers. The philosopher figure for Krzhizhanovsky becomes an artistic character as well as an intellectual inspiration, embodying a particularly Krzhizhanovskian interpretation of their actual philosophy.

Krzhizhanovsky's Leibniz: Crackist Monadology

Leibniz invented "optimism and the legend about the best of all possible worlds," according to the narrator of "Seams" (*MF* 84). Krzhizhanovsky responds to the general sense of optimism that comes from Leibniz's belief in man's capacity for understanding, the logical proof of God's existence, and the perfection of the universe, while passing over the specific arguments with which Leibniz constructs his philosophy. Leibniz's ideas come to represent man's profound spiritual and ethical isolation through Krzhizhanovsky's allusions to pessimistic interpretations

of Leibniz and his characterization of a depressed Leibnizian philosopher in “Seams.” Although Krzhizhanovsky adapts Leibniz’s thoughts to correspond with the grim reality of life in a fractured world, reflecting a deep skepticism about the possibility of true understanding, his vision is not entirely hopeless. Leibniz argues that the monad is the base unit of existence and builds his philosophical constructions from there. Krzhizhanovsky does not build from the monad, but does suggest that it may be the sole unit of certainty in a fractured world, small enough to avoid fragmentation and to offer some chance of understanding.

Before analyzing Krzhizhanovsky’s reversal of Leibniz’s optimism, one must have a sense of the foundation of that optimism. In *Monadology* (1714), Leibniz’s most succinct expression of his philosophy, he posits the existence of monads as “the true atoms of nature and, in brief, the elements of things” (213). These simple substances are present in all matter, but are only termed souls in creatures where “perception is more distinct and accompanied by memory” (Leibniz 215). In addition to perception and memory, humans possess reason, which, according to Leibniz, “distinguishes us from simple animals…by raising us to a knowledge of ourselves and of God” (216). Human reason confirms God’s existence by realizing there must be an initial cause that is outside of the chain of contingent reactions determining events in the universe. This necessary substance is God and, “since this substance is a sufficient reason for all this diversity, which is utterly interconnected, *there is only one God, and this God is sufficient*” (Leibniz 218; emphasis in the original). As God encompasses everything in the universe, Leibniz argues that he must be perfect, if perfection is defined as “the magnitude of positive reality considered as such” (218). Finally, since God is perfect, the universe must be perfect as well. God selected this universe for a reason and “this reason can only be found in *fitness*, or degree of perfection that these worlds contain” (Leibniz 220; emphasis in the original). Using the same definition of

perfection, this universe then must contain as much variety as possible and be entirely interconnected.

Krzhizhanovsky's familiarity with Leibniz's theories is beyond doubt. Both "Memories of the Future" (*MF* 150) and "Seams" (*AC* 62) mention *Monadology* specifically, Leibniz is the subject of a number of Krzhizhanovsky's philosophical allusions, and he even appears as the titular character in "The Collector of Cracks (1927)" Although Krzhizhanovsky sympathizes with Leibniz's drive to approach life rationally and his search for underlying truths that structure the world, he is also aware of the limitations of philosophy in a world based as much on chaos as on order, where nothing can be certain. The monad at the foundation of Leibniz's worldview is symbolic of the divine structure inherent in reality, "since every monad is a mirror of the universe in its way, and since the universe is regulated in a perfect order" (Leibniz 221). In direct opposition to this sense of order, Krzhizhanovsky interprets the monad as a symbol of fracture, in that it is a discrete unit of matter, whole in itself and therefore cut off from the rest of the world. The individual as a monad is a figure of isolation, while the world as a collection of monads is a motley composite of disconnected entities with no unifying structure and therefore no possibility of complete and certain knowledge.

While Krzhizhanovsky challenges the Vedantic conception of self in his belief that the individual cannot escape his limited perspective and achieve true compassion, when responding to Leibniz, Krzhizhanovsky suggests that isolation of the individual is due to a basic issue in the organization of the universe – namely that there is no organization and any sense of connections outside the self is mere delusion. Man cannot escape the prison of the self, as the narrator in "Seams" fully accepts during his painful migration from Moscow to a graveyard at the bottom of

a ravine and his slow death from starvation. In keeping with his hopeless situation, the narrator interprets Leibniz in the most pessimistic manner possible:

> It is amusing that the most optimistic of all philosophers, Leibniz, could see only a world of discrete monads, of ontological solitudes, none of which has windows. If one tries to be more optimistic than the optimist and avow that souls have windows and the ability to open them, then those windows and that ability will turn out to be nailed shut and boarded up, as in an abandoned house. People-monads, too, have a bad name: They are full of ghosts. The most frightening of these is man. (*MF* 62)

The narrator cannot go beyond himself when searching for meaning in the world and so he comes to embrace the self, to accept his isolation and find meaning within his limitations. He misinterprets monads as "ontological solitudes" based on his own experience as a person who has been "crossed out and pushed aside" (*MF* 66).[11] Man's inability to connect with the outside world means that the only sense of reality comes from within. The narrator states that he is "no more real than my memories" (*MF* 68): The person-monad can only prove his existence with reference to himself and so must accept either isolation or uncertainty. True knowledge comes only from rejecting the outside world, as it is impossible to make sense of a fractured world. The narrator of "Seams" demands an all-encompassing rejection, arguing that, "Man, however, must be not only without man but without God; the tenet of divine omnipresence violates his right to solitude" (*MF* 71). Accepting the discrete monad as sole source of certainty and working within the bounds of the self makes for an incredibly lonely existence.

For Krzhizhanovsky, Leibniz represents the false idea that one can have both knowledge and the comfort of connection with others. Knowledge in Krzhizhanovsky's world means to accept the fractured and therefore incomprehensible nature of reality and the flawed perception

[11] The sense of monads as expressed by the narrator of "Seams" contradicts Leibniz's assertions that "each simple substance is a perpetual, living mirror of the universe" (220). Again, the actual meaning of Leibniz's philosophy is less important than the question of how Krzhizhanovsky interprets Leibniz.

of the world seen through individual consciousness. The only way to find meaning in the universe and a connection to something larger than oneself is to abandon the search for truth and cling to an archaic belief in wholeness. The narrator of "Seams" pictures this impossible Leibnizian experience of the world as a body squeezed by a mechanical brace to deaden its pain. The brace is philosophy, positing monads as part of a larger structure, "a complex chain of things" (*MF* 84), so that the individual self in the grip of the brace can experience a sense of harmony and faith in God and the power of reason. However, this harmonious world is a delusion. Instinctively, the individual, "sensing objects in the outside world as foreign and not being ill with them, begins to want so-called truth. Cognition is the return of things to their original existence: pain" (*MF* 84). Pain, therefore, is truth in Krzhizhanovsky's world. The truth is that the individual exists in a state of brutal isolation, unable to connect to anything in the fractured world, unable to make sense of things, but equally unable to abandon the attempt at making sense. Leiderman argues that in Krzhizhanovsky's works: "since the human being is endowed with reason, one is *obliged* to make sense out of things constantly, to cognize one's own existence" (512; emphasis in the original). Although full knowledge is impossible, even failure can provide partial understanding and therefore some consolation. Any small amount of hope possible in Krzhizhanovsky's world rests in the individual's creative potential to enjoy fantasy removed from the grim reality that defies philosophical understanding.

Beyond questions of the individual's ability to obtain knowledge and human connection, Krzhizhanovsky is skeptical about underlying moral order in the world. Again, Krzhizhanovsky uses Leibniz as a mouthpiece to reject philosophical structures in a way that is in direct contradiction to Leibniz's actual view that the human world is a "moral world within the natural world" (224). The mind is a reflection of the divine and so the collection of all minds exists in a

harmony "between the physical kingdom of nature and the moral kingdom of grace… this harmony leads things to grace through the very paths of nature…there will be no good action that is unrewarded, no bad action that goes unpunished" (Leibniz 224). Clearly, at the most basic level, Leibniz believes that actions have consequences and that some actions are better than others; Krzhizhanovsky creates an anti-Leibniz in "The Collector of Cracks" to refute even this simple formulation. The titular character, the narrator's philosophical guide, is Gottfriend Lövenix, whose surname means "believer in nothing" and was, as Wolfgang Hübener relates in his 1978 essay "Meaning and Limits of Leibnizian Optimism," a contemporary nickname for the historical Leibniz (234). Krzhizhanovsky takes the meaning literally by bestowing it on the character who best articulates the author's concept of fragmented existence and the lack of wholeness in the world and who suffers from the uncertainty that results from this worldview.

"The Collector of Cracks" contrasts an imaginary world of wholeness and morality with the real world to emphasize the latter's lack of continuity and ethical accountability. The story begins with the narrator's fairytale of a good hermit given power over cracks by the Lord. For an hour each day, the Hermit preaches to the cracks that "it is wrong for God's world not to be whole… [cracks] destroy the union and loving convergence of thing with thing" (*AC* 90). The Hermit concerns himself with material unity as much as spiritual in a way that can be seen as a rejection of philosophical constructs in favor of practical action. When the world is whole, down to the very seams in people's craniums, "heads stopped growing and people could rest, for an hour or two, from their idea spurts" (*AC* 91). Rather than painfully struggling for understanding, in a world that is truly whole, people could live peacefully. However, such a world exists only in fairytales. Lövenix accosts the narrator to present his view of cracks in the real world and their ethical implications:

> If there is no single thread of time, if being is not continuous, if 'the universe is not whole' but cloven by cracks into odd, unrelated pieces, then all those textbook ethics based on the principle of responsibility, on the connectedness of my tomorrow with my yesterday, all fall away and are replaced by a single crackist ethic. The formula? Just this: For everything left behind the crack, I, who have stepped over the crack, am not responsible. I am here, the deed is there, behind me. I and what I have done are in different worlds, and between those worlds there are no windows. (*AC* 101)[12]

The Hermit's fairytale solution and Leibniz's philosophy are equally impossible. Just as the narrator of "Seams" asserted that souls have no windows, so too is the world of today closed off from the world of yesterday; reality is rent with cracks, with no continuity between actions, and so cannot support a coherent ethical system. Leiderman concurs with the interpretation of the story in an anti-philosophical vein, stating that, "The image of the crack and of "crackedness" is the universal emblem of a chaotic, diffuse, anti-harmonious world structure, the symbol of a flight from reality and the disintegration of the wholeness of a worldview" (532). The final disintegration of philosophical constructs comes in the form of Lövenix's death. He writes to the narrator, "One of you poets – this was long ago – went down into the chasms of the Kingdom of the Dead. The metaphysician should as well" (*AC* 105), thereby framing his death as a larger statement about the futility of metaphysics. Orpheus' art gave him power even in the underworld, while the metaphysician has nothing to contribute to either world and is better off out of the way.

Krzhizhanovsky and his characters distort Leibniz's theories to represent something diametrically opposed to the originals. Although Krzhizhanovsky's world bears no resemblance to the philosopher's optimistic idea of a universe composed of a coherent structure of monads suffused with the image of the divine, it is not entirely a picture of despair – some of Leibniz's

[12] Rosenflanz sees instead the influence of Uspensky in Krzhizhanovsky's image of the crack, arguing that it is a source of mystical enlightenment rather than an ethical dilemma ("Krzhizhanovsky's Fourth Dimension" 544). Considering the use of Leibniz to deliver this message, it seems more fruitful to interpret the story along the lines of philosophy rather than mysticism.

optimism endures. Philosophy pretends to a level of certainty that cannot be supported, but the possibility of knowledge remains. Indeed, intellectual engagement is the most effective approach to fractured reality, allowing one to find some small islands of certainty and order amid the chaotic flow of existence. Lövenix himself explains that the optimal response to a world of cracks is to "not surrender one's consciousness to the yawning crack. The man who, having exactly calculated the hour and second of the cataclysm, contrives by force of will and faith to exist along in nonexistence, that man shall enter death alive" (*AC* 105). Krzhizhanovsky's characters often struggle with a sense of their own nonexistence; by resisting metaphysical despair but refusing to abandon intellectual striving, one can maintain a strong sense of self and thus the vitality necessary to face even death with confidence. Although Lövenix literally intends to explore life's final crack, his statement also affirms the general value of the rational mind fighting against hopelessness.

Despite Krzhizhanovsky's skeptical response to Leibniz's *Monadology*, I contend that Krzhizhanovsky adapts the concept of the monad in a way that is uniquely his own and that provides a rare source of hope in the face of fractured reality. Uncertain of larger truths, Krzhizhanovsky directs his art towards the small, viewing the smallest meaningful units of reality as having the greatest potential to be understood. For a character living in Krzhizhanovsky's fractured world, one can make sense of individual moments despite the discontinuity in time and find more meaning in basic objects than in the complex whole to which they belong. For the author, individual words become more significant in light of the challenges of communication and the single creative idea has more truth and power than a complicated system of thought. This focus on the small, on life at the level of monads, provides an alternative

to complete pessimism and resignation while still remaining true to Krzhizhanovsky's worldview.

Krzhizhanovsky's Kant: Shadows Casting Things

In "Fragments on Shakespeare," Krzhizhanovsky credits the playwright with "saving [his] brain" from Kant's "metaphysical delusion." While metaphysics casts doubt on the real world, theater simply creates an alternative world, populating it with dynamic characters that have no doubt of their own existence. "Kant takes the whole world, from star to speck, from the eyes…Shakespeare makes the world – with pen, hammer, and brush – for the eyes" (Krzhizhanovsky, "Philosopheme on Theater"). Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) calls reality into question by emphasizing the distance between the true nature of objects and the perceptions of those objects. Reminiscing about his first encounter with this theory, Krzhizhanovsky writes:

> [Kant] erased the thin line between 'I' and 'not-I,' between object and subject. Before, it seemed that everything was so simple: things cast shadows, but now it turned out that shadows cast things, and maybe there aren't any things at all, but only 'things in themselves.' But how do shadows exist then? And it means that 'I' is a shadow. (Fragments on Shakespeare).

As the young intellectual grew into his role as an author, metaphysics continued to shape his thinking. While Shakespeare and his characters continue to represent the viability of artistic worlds as an escape from the real, Kant is more overtly visible in Krzhizhanovsky's fiction.[13] Rather than ignoring uncomfortable ideas, Krzhizhanovsky uses his stories to wrestle again and again with "metaphysical delusion."

[13] Hamlet comes to life in *The Letter Killers Club*; Kant or a double appears in "The Catastrophe" (1922), "Biography of a Thought" (1922), "The Unbitten Elbow," and "The Land of Nots," as well as in the poem "Kant's Skull" (date uncertain).

For Krzhizhanovsky, Kant serves two functions: he is a symbol for philosophy in general, representing the negative effects of theorizing about life and not just living it, and he is the source of ideas about perception that Krzhizhanovsky engages with despite his rejection of overarching philosophical systems. Throughout his fiction, Krzhizhanovsky creates a "network of references to the relationship between shadows and things analogous to that between noumena and phenomena.[14] This thematics is naturally extended to an examination of the correlation between reality and fiction" (Rosenflanz, *Hunter of Themes* 58). The realization that one can know only shadows and never the things themselves might seem to be another blow to the inquiring mind struggling to make sense of a fractured world, yet Krzhizhanovsky and his characters neither reject this concept nor do they give up hope of understanding. "Krzhizhanovsky's ethical stand on creativity does not permit him to disregard the position of his opponents," notes Leiderman (510); instead, Krzhizhanovsky's characters accept the premise of Kant's phenomenological theories but come to a different conclusion. They turn their backs on the thing-in-itself and go beyond the phenomenon to embrace the creative mind in which it was conceived. The common experience of reality (*byt*) is blind to the vast crack between the subject and object because it falsely assumes that things are as they seem. Similarly, a philosophical exposition of existence (*bytie*) fails in that it cannot account for the fragmented nature of the world – philosophy is reliant on logic and fractured reality is inherently illogical. Krzhizhanovsky's fiction asserts the value of the world of fantasy (*by*), as art is an escape from the impossible task of making sense and happy retreat into nonsense.

[14] Although the choices of shadows and things may seem more like an allusion to Plato's Allegory of the Cave than to Kant's noumena, Krzhizhanovsky is not writing about the process of acquiring knowledge; instead, he is questioning the very possibility of such an endeavor.

As a character in Krzhizhanovsky's works, Kant shows that the attempt to explain the world rationally is both doomed and inapplicable to real life, which is better lived than intellectualized. Standing in line for logic, characters in "Red Snow" have replaced religion with philosophy as a source of consolation, discussing hopelessly jumbled theorems and syllogisms and using the name of the supreme metaphysician as an oath. A man in the midst of the illogical debate exclaims, "Why the Kant…" (*AC* 120), metonymically reducing the philosopher's theorems to a single name and to an unresolved question. The narrator cannot find the solution to his problems in philosophy and continues to wander the cold Moscow streets, starving and alone. The condemnation of Kant is a condemnation of philosophy for constructing systems of thought that deny man's past belief but do not offer convincing replacements.

Kant represents philosophy in general and his doubles, Kint and Krantz, are particularly negative representatives of philosophers. When faced with the grotesque spectacle of a man attacking his own flesh in "The Unbitten Elbow," "A professional philosopher, Kint caught the elbow-eater's metaphysical meaning right off the bat" (*AC* 129). Kint interprets the elbow as a representation of the thing-in-itself which the man tries and fails to sink his teeth into. Kint's ability to fit the elbow-eater's anomalous action so easily into a logical worldview makes his philosophy suspect, as does his popularity with "elderly but wealthy ladies" (129) and the "crowds [who] flocked to see the dirt-cheap metaphysical wonder" (130). To Krzhizhanovsky, serious ideas deserve serious consideration; popularizing philosophy to give the masses a false sense of intellectual engagement is a crime against ideas.

The ethnographer Krantz in "Yellow Coal" goes a step further by proposing a philosophical system that would amount to a crime against humanity. According to Kant, people only know the world through sense-perception and experience, rather than through access to

universal concepts. For Krzhizhanovsky, this is a sign of individual isolation, which Krantz's proposal would increase by declaring that each person has a different ethnicity. The narrator dryly states that "this eminently logical philosophical system would saddle the earth with some three billion absolute monarchs and, in consequence, countless wars of aggression and spite" (*AC* 142). Logic can lead so easily to such grim ends because, as the narrator of "Someone Else's Theme" observes, "logic and cold are undoubtedly related" (*MF* 82). Reason can be carried too far and must be tempered by something more as a check against dispassionate cruelty.

Krzhizhanovsky represents logical constructs as violent in their attempt to force the world to fit a preset mold. The human mind is not capable of grasping the full complexity of fractured reality and so can only create imperfect philosophical systems that are bound to fail. Paradoxically, by attempting to address the ever-present element of chaos in existence, philosophy leads to more chaos in its construction of false systems. Both "The Catastrophe" and "Biography of a Thought" directly quote Kant's statement in *Practical Reason* (1788) that "two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily we reflect upon them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me" (5:161.33-6). A fairly mild statement in itself, Krzhizhanovsky brings the formulation to life dramatically. In both "The Catastrophe" and "Biography of a Thought," a philosopher thinks about "the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me" as an abstract concept, and the power of his intellect has a concrete effect on the "starry heavens" and the "moral law" within the world of the story. In the former work, Kant's conception does violence to reality by overthinking it, and in the latter the conception suffers at the hands of those who cannot comprehend its full meaning.

The unnamed Sage in "The Catastrophe" is yet another incarnation of Kant, as the story references both the *Prolegomena* (1783) and *Theory of the Heavens* (1755), this time using the philosopher as a representation of pure reason devoid of compassion. As the Sage's mind ruthlessly pursues understanding, he literally strips the meaning from things: each thing has its meaning in "a single copy" which can be removed and forced into a "hostile and alien brain" ("The Catastrophe"), leaving only a meaningless husk behind. Chaos progresses steadily, as the narrator notes, "route: the starry sky above *us*- the moral law within *us*" ("The Catastrophe", emphasis in the original), modifying Kant's statement to draw the reader into the story. Things lose their meaning, then people lose their sense of self, and finally time loses its linearity.[15] The Sage does not stop to consider the fear of people confronted with metaphysical uncertainty; his philosophy demands truth, even if it is at the expense of happiness. However, he cannot live up to his own standards, as the final step of his thought is to examine the relationship between his "I" and reality. "And before the '?' touched the 'I', the I, having leapt out from the quotes, took to its heels while saying vulgar words. That is how the Sage died" ("The Catastrophe"). Krzhizhanovsky considers the ethical implications of subjecting life to philosophical examination and questions whether an increase in knowledge that leads to such ontological uncertainty is truly worthwhile. The narrator wonders "whether the stars flickered *differently* after Kant than they did before Kant" and reminds his readers to "respect the inviolability of the *other's meaning*" ("The Catastrophe," emphasis in the original). Philosophers operate on a plane of abstraction removed from reality, but their theories can affect the real world and so must be handled responsibly.

[15] The distortion of time in "The Catastrophe" will be discussed in the following chapter as an example of how Krzhizhanovsky represents fragmented reality stylistically.

"The Catastrophe" draws the reader's sympathy to fragile reality assaulted by the force of the human mind; "Biography of a Thought" portrays the opposite situation: the reader sympathizes with a thought too grand to be appreciated by the dull masses. In both cases, the realm of abstract reason is incompatible with practical life. The titular thought, "the starry heavens above me the moral law within me," springs to life in the head of a wise philosopher and, although its conception rocks the foundation of reality for a brief moment, the man maintains his grasp on the idea. The thought can enjoy her full potential in the capacious mind of a genius, but she is nearly suffocated by the process of being captured in ink, typeset, and absorbed by the eyes of lesser thinkers. "The 'starry sky,' hidden in letters, tried to balk, but the pencil, having grasped the sky by one of its stars, by its own long beam, began by dragging the stars, from them the moral law, onto the square of a notebook" ("Biography of a Thought"). The insight of a genius is, to most men, something to be crammed in their brains during an exam and promptly forgotten or something to be pared down into a quote with no context, no intellectual weight. Characters find philosophy as a whole to be inapplicable to daily life and so they shrink the "moral law" until "it could fit comfortably even on the cautionary tin sign adorning the avenues of public gardens: 'Don't pick the flowers,' 'Don't walk on the grass'" ("Biography of a Thought"). Whether the bulk of humanity or the lofty philosophers are to blame, the fact is that abstract systems simply do not correspond to concrete reality.

While the conflicts in "The Catastrophe" and "Biography of a Thought" come from the degree of philosophical reason present – too much and too little, respectively – "The Thirteenth Category of Reason" (1927) broadens the issue by suggesting that, for some situations, reason simply is not appropriate in any amount. The narrator meets an old gravedigger who is "clearly out of his head and lives inside an apperceptive tangle whose knots Kant himself could not untie.

For you see, all those who are… evicted, so to speak, from all twelve Kantian categories of reason, must naturally seek refuge in a thirteenth category, a sort of logical lean-to slouched against objective obligatory thinking" (*MF* 125). The story the old man tells of following a revived corpse around the city has no place in a logical understanding of reality. However, as Biriukov observes, "removing every-day [*bytovuiu*] and existential [*bytiistvennuiu*] logic, Krzhizhanovsky constructs super-realistic logic that is more accurate and more insightful. Thus the writer does not fall into the false gravitas of seriousness, constantly leaving gaps for the comical" ("Krzhizhanovsky's Smallest of the Small"). By suspending his skepticism and listening respectfully, the narrator is able to enjoy the man's story and appreciate his truthful insights into the isolating nature of life (or afterlife) in the crowded, impersonal city. He realizes that "one can sometimes learn more from water stains than from the creations of a master" (*MF* 132); there is more value in an open and creative worldview than there is in a rigidly ordered, preconceived logical understanding of reality.

Kant's texts become less and less relevant the more one is involved with actually living. In "Idea and Word," Krzhizhanovsky argues that even the language that philosophers use relies on dead words that are too removed from life to have any real impact:

> Metaphysics relates with the word exactly how the Idea relates with it. The Idea isolates metaphysics from life, frees it from the distorted tangles of human selfishness (society), and forces it away from life into inaction and soundlessness, to serve only Itself. The metaphysician, isolated by the idea, in his turn takes the word from the street and, having freed it… from the confusion of threads of associations, separates it from life. ("Idea and Word")

The neat conceptual structure of the world the philosophers create in the abstract cannot accurately represent the active, noisy tangle of reality. Philosophers become increasingly removed from reality in their pursuit of abstractions. They struggle to express even their limited understanding of the world and no matter how much they learn, there is always more to discover.

Philosophy is a doomed pursuit. The impossibility of complete knowledge makes the philosopher in "Spinoza and the Spider" (1921) a pathetic figure, as his constant thinking and writing can never fully express the natural laws he studies. In contrast, the spider that inspires the philosopher "knew just as much as he needed to know… he enjoyed the great privilege that had, since ancient times, been bestowed on the ancient and noble spider family, shaggy-handedly, from great grandfather to grandfather, from grandfather to father, and from father to him – freedom from thinking" ("Spinoza and the Spider"). Attempting to understand the world and, worse still, attempting to capture this vague understanding with paper and ink traps the philosopher in isolating intellectual turmoil, whereas living life without overanalyzing every part of it allows for meaningful action.

Life in the real world must be experienced first-hand and cannot be accessed through logical thinking. Instinct and emotion can bridge the gap between people in a way that language and philosophy cannot. In one of the stories from "In the Pupil," a man uses his words to woo his love, explaining first how to use a kerosene stove and then "expound[ing] the premises of a Kantian critique" (*AC* 54). The girl listens to both with equal attention, putting the practical and philosophical on the same level. She disregards the literal meaning of his words and understands only that the man loves her. The couple then abandons philosophical abstractions in favor of the active experience of love, as people truly in love have no need for empty words.

Just as philosophy is unnecessary for those who are truly happy, it also cannot help those who are truly suffering from deprivation. The narrator in "Seams" is an intensely intellectual character, but even he is more dependent on the material than the metaphysical. His poverty affects the quality of his thoughts and he alerts the reader that, "these jottings will work like that: sandwich—metaphysics—sandwich—metaphysics… So many ten-kopeck coins, so many

worldviews" (*AC* 64). The lofty search for meaning in the universe sounds more like a transaction with a vending machine. In "Someone Else's Theme," a philosopher also exchanges his wisdom for food, bartering with the narrator: "If a philosophy of life is more than you can afford then perhaps you'll be satisfied with two or three aphorisms" (*MF* 54). There is no place for intellectual pride when one is starving to death; man cannot live on philosophy alone. A former philosopher jokes in "The Bookmark": "What a life! Don't even have time to contemplate the world" (*MF* 48). Philosophy is a luxury dependent on the necessities of everyday life for survival. Just as food and shelter take priority over intellectual abstraction, human connection is another requirement of life in the real world, albeit significantly harder to achieve.

"Postmark: Moscow" presents a man's development from an intellectual who believes he can understand the world rationally to a tentative empiricist learning to appreciate the noise, humor, and concreteness of city life. The narrator arrives in Moscow with Kant's *Critiques* as one of his few possessions and the goal of understanding his new city. However, during long walks through the city streets, experiencing the crush of other people and constant onslaught of images, he realizes that words cannot grasp the essence of Moscow. "Hence the terrible crush inside Moscow minds… images on top of images, more images on top of them; there's no room for ideas: They are conceived somehow sideways, sandwiched in amongst the sunny scenery" (*AC* 183). Life is not always pleasant, as the fragmented and disorienting sequence of images suggest, but it leads to greater understanding of reality than does philosophy. The narrator sees Moscow as a city of things, certain of itself and in no need of metaphysical enlightenment. His quest to understand the city is isolating; it reinforces his status as an outsider. At the end of the cycle, he wonders if he should sell his Kant and if he could even find a buyer. The experience of

life distances him from the philosophy he once sincerely considered, allowing for a lighter approach. The narrator repeats the joke that one should not "believe Kant when he says that a stick is a thing-in-itself; no, a stick is a thing-for-others" (*AC* 203). By abandoning his futile attempt to reduce the complexities of life into an abstract conceptual structure, the narrator can participate in the real world and gain a more nuanced understanding.

Although Krzhizhanovsky often uses Kant as a stand-in for metaphysics in general, he also engages with specific elements of Kant's philosophy, using fiction to explore the limitations of human knowledge. Despite reaching different conclusions, Krzhizhanovsky agrees with Kant's basic arguments about noumena and phenomena and so an explanation of the topic as it appears in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is a helpful precursor to understanding Krzhizhanovsky.

For Kant, humans cannot know the world beyond their individual perspectives; human understanding is "an island and enclosed by nature itself within limits that can never be altered" (251). These limits are sense perception, the only method through which humans can learn about the world, as reason processes and unifies discrete experiences to gain more general understanding. Individuals perceive things through phenomena, by "having recourse to the conditions of sensibility and so on to the form of appearances… if we take away these conditions, then all meaning, that is, any reference to an object, is gone; and there is no example we could use to make it understandable to ourselves just what kind of thing could be meant by such concepts" (Kant 254). Although people may construct concepts about a thing, without the support of direct experience, then there is no way to connect those concepts with reality. "Understanding can never go beyond the limits of sensibility within which alone objects are given to us" (Kant 256). There may well be more to objects than what man can perceive, but that

'something more' cannot be known. Thus, the phenomenon, or thing as it is perceived, is distinct from the noumenon, or thing-in-itself. "By noumenon we mean a thing **insofar as it is not an object of our sensible intuition**" (Kant 258; emphasis in the original). Its existence can be posited, but, without recourse to sense-perception, "its objective reality cannot be known in any way" (Kant 260). Despite man's inability to grasp true reality, the world of noumena, Kant responds to his theory fairly hopefully, suggesting that noumena provide limits to the understanding, thus refocusing the mind on the productive area of perception rather than pure conception that is impossible to prove [252].

In contrast to Kant's calm and logical acceptance of the impossibility of full knowledge, Krzhizhanovsky was deeply shaken by this idea upon his first encounter with Kant, as he recounts in "Fragments on Shakespeare," reminiscing about spending late nights as a schoolboy grappling with the "metaphysical delusion" brought on by reading Kant. Through frequent reference to the world of noumena, Krzhizhanovsky demonstrates his continued preoccupation with this concept, as well as his grudging acceptance of its basic tenets. In "Jacobi and 'As-If' [*Jacobi i Iakoby'*]" (1919),[16] Krzhizhanovsky places Kant's theories in opposition to Friedrich Jacobi, an early Kantian critic. Jacobi takes the concept of noumena to its logical extreme, suggesting, "The thing we have called – in our as-if systems – 'the world' is only an 'as-if' world reflected in our 'as-if I's" ("Jacobi and 'As-If'"). The vague uncertainty that comes from an awareness of the limitations of perception expands to a fundamental question of the nature of reality itself, key to Krzhizhanovsky's worldview. Logic led Kant to his unsettling conclusions, while Krzhizhanovsky's fiction demonstrates a skepticism about the value of metaphysics and an

[16] The similarity of the two words in Russian is another example of Krzhizhanovsky's wordplay. Biriukov argues that Krzhizhanovsky focuses on the "minimum units of language" by examining their shared linguistic heritage in a Indo-European proto-language, thus showing "accidental harmonies" that shape the world ("Krzhizhanovsky's Smallest of the Small").

appreciation for the illogical fantasies of dreams and art. The terrifying muddle of the world has no full explanation and so imagination, rather than analysis, is the most effective response to fractured reality for Krzhizhanovsky and his characters.

Kant's logic may have led him to the truth, but not necessarily to the final truth. Krzhizhanovsky is sympathetic to those who try to fully know the things around them, despite the ultimate impossibility of such knowledge. For example, in "The Unbitten Elbow" the philosopher Kint correctly observes that "the Lord God himself… cannot arrange things so that two and two do not equal four, so that a man can bite his own elbow, and thought can go beyond the bounds of the boundary concept" (*AC* 132). However, Kint is a ridiculous figure, while the elbow-eater is sympathetic, on a romantic quest to go beyond the bounds of possibility, to conquer his own limitations. In his rejection of accepted truth, the elbow-eater is akin to the protagonist of Dostoevsky's "Notes from the Underground" (1864), who compares the rigid rule that two plus two is four to an unbreakable stone wall erected by nature and rants:

> My God, what do I care for the laws of nature and arithmetic, when, for some reason I dislike those laws and the fact that twice two makes four? Of course, I cannot break through the wall with my forehead if I really do not have the strength to knock it down, but I am not going to be reconciled to it simply because it is a stone wall and I do not have enough strength. As though such a stone wall really were a consolation, and really did contain some word of conciliation, simply because it is as true as twice two makes four. Oh, absurdity of absurdities! How much better it is to understand it all, to recognize it all, all the prohibitions and the stone wall; not to be reconciled to one of those impossibilities and stone walls if it disgusts you to be reconciled to it. (Section III)

Rather than contenting themselves with intellectual abstraction, both the Underground Man and the elbow-eater take a concrete, literal approach to truth, as the former beats his head against the rules of nature and the latter tries to take reality in his teeth.

The physicality of this search for meaning contrasts with a metaphysical approach to the world. Kant may say that phenomena are the only source of knowledge, but his dense, highly

conceptual writings seem highly removed from the concrete objects waiting to be perceived. Ballard nicely articulates this issue of metaphysical thinking:

> *Bytie* is the space of Plato's Forms and Kant's noumena. Metaphysicians are at home there, which is explained by the fact that metaphysicians, Krzhizhanovsky writes, have hyperopic vision: they can see only from a distance, while things up close appear blurry and out-of-focus – as though not real. This seeming irreality indicates to the metaphysician the presence of a "something beyond," for example, the unseeable noumena of Kant's philosophy, which correspond to phenomena that are visibly present before the subject. (559)

Although Krzhizhanovsky does not dispute the existence of noumena, metaphysicians' blurred view of objects is a serious challenge to their approach, especially considering the sympathy with which objects are treated in Krzhizhanovsky's world. Metaphysicians may debate the presence of "something beyond," but artists can see something within, such as when the theme-catcher finds stories hidden with everyday objects.

Krzhizhanovsky's reservations about logic taken too far and about the hyperopia of metaphysicians lead him to interpret Kant's theories in a negative light, using the noumenon as a symbol for the uncertainty of fractured reality. Noumena and phenomena appear across Krzhizhanovsky's oeuvre in the image of things and their shadows representing the difference between actual reality and mere perception. A Kantian interpretation of this image would be to explain that the thing-in-itself is unknowable, but can be understood via perception of its shadow; Krzhizhanovsky multiplies the metaphysical uncertainty about reality by suggestion that shadows cast things, turning the order of the world on its head.

In "The Land of Nots," the narrator challenges those who assume that the world is logically ordered. Instead, "if one thinks about this sensibly, then one cannot know exactly if shadows are cast by things or things by shadows – and if one oughtn't case aside, as pure ostensibilities, Not things, Not shadows, and the Nots themselves with their notional notions"

(*AC* 108). The initial uncertainty increases until the narrator rejects the whole world as unknowable. Similarly, the narrator in "Seams" has accepted his exclusion from a world based on false assumptions of wholeness and certainty. He lives in a minus-Moscow, "a city not of things but of reflections…In my ghostly, minusy little world, only minus-truths makes sense – only facts that have fallen on their heads. Therefore, shadows cast things" (*AC* 70). Although Krzhizhanovsky's interpretation of Kant is so disorienting as to be appropriate only for life in a ghostly minus-city, Krzhizhanovsky suggests an alternative to hopeless metaphysical confusion.

In contrast to *bytie,* the lofty and inaccessible world of metaphysics, and *byt*, the material world that seems whole but is truly fragmented and uncertain, the world of *by*, pure fantasy, offers an escape. "Events of this world are propelled by potentiality, imagination, and freedom" (Ballard 560); the creative mind is free from the uncertainty of phenomenological knowledge, as objects in a fantasy world need not relate back to reality. In "Postmark: Moscow," the narrator observes that metaphysicians "can only try to trace moving shadows. But shadows shorn of things—everyday life (*byt*) shorn of existence (*bytie*)—are powerless and illusory. Then again, if things must be shorn of their shadows, *bytie* of *byt*, one mustn't stop halfway; one must take *byt* and lop off that obtuse "t": *by* ("as if") is pure subjectivity, a fusion of the free phantasms" (*AC* 188). Rather than wrestling with the impossible task of metaphysics or blindly accepting the falseness of the everyday, art allows one to embrace uncertainty and imagination. Rosenflanz argues that, for Krzhizhanovsky, "The Kantian *mirosozertsanie* [worldview] of a world strictly divided into things and unknowable things-in-themselves was too dogmatic in its insistence on a single truth; it is superseded by an endlessly malleable, variable, multi-tiered *mirosozertsanie* in which the creation of fiction endows the ultimate mental freedom on the writer" (*Hunter of*

Themes 82). Creative fantasy triumphs over fractured reality by rejecting the abstract object and the perceived object in favor of the imagined object.

In Krzhizhanovsky's fiction, Kant represents a metaphysician so caught up in thoughts that he has forgotten how to live. His concept of noumena constitutes a serious assault on assumptions of certainty, but neither Kant nor metaphysics in general offers a convincing solution for Krzhizhanovskian characters struggling with the problems of fractured reality. Kant writes that the search for the unknowable noumena will prevent the mind from "losing itself in follies and fancies" (253) by providing limits to intellectual inquiry. However, for Krzhizhanovsky, the creative mind cannot be limited; in fact, the best response to reality is for characters to turn away from the world and chase their "follies and fancies" unchecked by logic.

Conclusion

From gifted fifth-grader grappling with Kant before bed to disillusioned author brought to tears by his love for Pushkin,[17] Krzhizhanovsky read widely and deeply throughout his lifetime and his richly allusive prose testifies to his knowledge of world literature, science, linguistics, psychology, philosophy, history, religion, and folklore. However, when Krzhizhanovsky's fiction goes beyond mere allusion to direct engagement with other thinkers, it does not convey the author's love of literature, but his frustration with the written word, with philosophical abstractions, and with the impossible task of understanding the world.

One might be tempted to cast Krzhizhanovsky as a pessimist: in his works, the Vedanta conveys a sense of fracture rather than the belief in a harmonious universe, Leibniz's theories are metaphors for human isolation rather than affirmation that this is the best of all possible worlds,

[17] The former episode is recounted in "Fragments on Shakespeare" and the latter in a memoir by Anna Bovshek, Krzhizhanovsky's wife (qtd. in Emerson, "Introduction" xiii).

and Kant's brilliant striving to expand human knowledge is dismissed as futile. Krzhizhanovsky's ultimate response to philosophy seems to be to reject it as a whole and, indeed, to go even further, to reject the possibility of full knowledge in general. However, as Krzhizhanovsky uses his fiction to examine the full implications of various theories and respond to their limitations, one can see the emergence of a philosophy of his own, based on more than just the negation of previous thinkers. Krzhizhanovsky's criticism of philosophers who pretend to certainty shows that he prioritizes uncomfortable truths over comfortable lies such as the false sense that the world is whole and knowable. Krzhizhanovsky does not just assert his concept of fractured reality in his fictionalized debates with metaphysicians – it is a central element of his authorial style. Krzhizhanovsky uses his art to construct a faithful portrait of fragmentation and uncertainty.

Chapter Two: Stylistic Fracturing, Artistic Wholeness

Krzhizhanovsky's youthful encounter with Kant's theories left him with a sense of existential uncertainty that no future forays into philosophy could dispel and thus led to his belief in the fragility of the logical constructs that explain existence. His relocation to Moscow early in his writing career and subsequent experience with the chaotic, impersonal nature of everyday life in a big city and the particular struggles of an aspiring author contributed to his understanding of the world as disordered and impersonal.[18] In Krzhizhanovsky's eyes, reality is both illogical and chaotic and art depicts this state of being through an aesthetic of fragmentation. Krzhizhanovsky's literary style reflects the disordered modern world, explodes the illusory whole of existence, and emphasizes the meaningfulness of the resultant parts despite their lack of integration with the whole. This chapter will explore the ways in which Krzhizhanovsky's style contributes to the fracturing of the material world, the human body, and the psyche: distortion breaks apart the linearity of space and time, synecdoche emphasizes fragments of objects rather than the whole, and personification challenges assumptions about what it means to be alive by animating the inanimate.

Fractured World

The material world follows rules. Time marches forward to the beat of a clock's regular ticking, meters of space fit together squarely in patterns that follow geometric formulas, and the human body obeys the chemistry of the brain rather than the fantasy of the mind. Although the world may seem jumbled and confusing even for those who are not Krzhizhanovskian characters,

[18] For example, the protagonist in "Postmark: Moscow" is an aspiring author who ultimately abandons his attempt to capture the city's spirit in literature.

the general assumption is that events can be untangled to form a logical chain of cause and effect. With access to the right information, anything can be explained. However, when the logical underpinnings of reality come into question, everything in the realm of the real falls apart. In Krzhizhanovsky's fiction, effects splinter off from their causes as things happen with no explanation; reality cannot be explained with reason. Distortion of time and space represents the uncertainty of the physics of the material world and the fractured nature of life without logic.

However, in keeping with Krzhizhanovsky's use of experimental realism, deviations from the normal flow of time and fabric of space are not a fantastic impossibility; they take place within an otherwise realistic world. If, as Shakespeare says, art should hold "the mirror up to nature" (*Hamlet,* 3.2.22), Krzhizhanovsky's brand of fiction presents images seen through a funhouse mirror, with the added complication of uncertainty about which is more real, the image or its reflection. In "Seams," a character laments that his only remaining source of happiness is "overturning all verticals; extinguishing the imaginary sun, entangling the orbits and the world in worldlessness… I can do this: Overturn the meanings" (*AC* 65). Considering Krzhizhanovsky's challenges to accepted ways of viewing the world, distortion of time and space in his works is more than a stylistic device of fantasy, but a way of faithfully representing fragmented reality. Objects, the spatiotemporal realms they inhabit, and the very words used to describe space and time are all subject to disintegration.

As an author Krzhizhanovsky explores questions of time as they relate to narrative chronology and individual subjectivity, but as a thinker he goes beyond an exploration of perception to challenge the very nature of time. The distortion of linear time is the ultimate consequence of fractured reality: the lack of continuity introduces the problem of "crackist ethics," as has been discussed in the previous chapter, as well as the possible solution of finding

meaning in the individual moment, the smallest unit of time. Another refuge from the chaos lies in embracing subjectivity and an artistic worldview, as events need not unfold linearly in literature.

The fragmentation of reality is often axiomatic in Krzhizhanovsky's stories; however, when the process of fragmentation is itself a theme, it begins with broken things and ends with broken time. As the final strand of logic to unwind, time is the ultimate reflection of the state of reality. "The Collector of Cracks" begins with the narrator' fairy tale about cracks in objects. Even this has a moral implication, as the pious Hermit lectures the cracks, "It is wrong for God's world not to be whole… You destroy the union and loving convergence of thing with thing" (*AC* 90). Lövenix, a poet-metaphysician in the narrator's audience, takes what he terms the "Theme of Cracks" (*AC* 94) seriously and brings it to its logical conclusion: cracks in time. Just as gaps between one slide and the next in a film projector are imperceptible, "it turns out that the sun may be taken out of orbit for 99/100ths of a day and we, who live under that sun, won't notice… will rejoice in an illusory sun" (*AC* 95). This distortion of continuous sequential time presents the ultimate assault to assumptions about reality, makes a coherent system of ethics impossible, and leads Lövenix to choose death as the only escape.

Discontinuous time makes love impossible as well as ethics. Lövenix recounts an encounter with a crack in existence as he was hurrying to a rendezvous with his lover. He steps onto a shadow and "for an instant the shadow engulfed everything… having winked out, everything had winked back and was as it had been before that instant, yet *something* was missing" (*AC* 98). Lövenix is no longer in love; the crack disrupted the continuity of his emotion. The philosopher's metaphysical explanation suggests a direr interpretation of the nature of love which "In the Pupil" echoes, as an erstwhile lover explains, "The real love object is constantly

changing, and one can love you today only by betraying the person you were yesterday" (*AC* 49). Love is not lost due to the productive process of individual's development over time, but to the frightening fragmentation of the world. Life in the present is possible only because it rejects the past; losing one's faith in time means losing faith in everything else.

The events of "The Catastrophe" follow a similar trajectory. The thoughts of a careless Sage "passed from thing to thing, finding and removing their 'meaning' from them" ("The Catastrophe") and the ensuing chaos takes the form of literal fragmentation caused by semantic and ontological fracturing. "Each thing, however small and decayed, had an incredibly dear and necessarily necessary need for its own irreplaceable meaning" ("The Catastrophe") and breaks apart without it. In typical Krzhizhanovskian style, Kant's statement about "the starry sky above" and "the moral law within" becomes a literal directive rather than an abstraction: first the Sage's mind pulls planets out of orbit and then swoops lower and tips church steeples into the mud. The fragmentation then moves from the material world to the metaphysical, as "some scattered people even confused their own 'I'" while others "uncovered reason, poking it right in the facts" ("The Catastrophe"). Disintegration of meaning becomes an attack on space and time, as the Sage's final thought strips meaning from time and leads to "a grievous *timelessness*" ("The Catastrophe," emphasis in the original). Krzhizhanovsky unravels the strands of logic that weave together to define reality, fracturing objects, meanings, and, ultimately, time itself.

Krzhizhanovksy's realistic approach to, and literal treatment of, abstract constructs such as the nature of time is a key feature of his fiction; he believes in man's obligation to engage rationally with the world, thus making art a tool for exploring reality rather than an escape into the unreal. Leiderman argues that Krzhizhanovsky's central philosophical preoccupation is with death, whereas I believe that fractured reality is a larger concern, but in either case the solution to

uncertainty is “the capacity of a person to think, analyze, prod out an explanation for that which originally is perceived as muddled, terrifying, incomprehensible” (Leiderman 510). Max Shterer, the protagonist of “Memories of the Future,” devotes himself to untangling the mystery of time by means of reason, taking an insistently literal approach in every aspect of his studies. Clocks show the passage of time, but Shterer believes that time itself is contained within clocks, conflating the representation of an abstract concept with the concept itself. By refusing to make any assumptions about the nature of time, Shterer is able to question its very foundations.

The image of the clock appears throughout Krzhizhanovsky’s oeuvre as a representation of the traditional understanding of time – clocks stall in “The Collector of Cracks,” declare their independence in “The Catastrophe,” and trap time and thoughts in a circle in “The Land of Nots;” in each case, their malfunctioning is a product of the collapse of logic. Clocks provide a visual representation of time, but, in “Memories of the Future,” Shterer takes the image for the thing itself, centering his early studies of time around the clock. Distraught over a broken clock, upon learning that it can be fixed, the boy asks, “If time breaks, will we mend it too?” (*MF* 137). The child’s naiveté forces the reader to confront the concept of time as fragile and reliant on humans. Similarly, when young Shterer switches the minute and hour hand on his family clock, his father’s subsequent confusion shows “how even such a simple inversion disturbs the running of mental mechanisms” (*MF* 136). Shterer’s father bases his perception of time on the clock, a material object, and the malfunction of the object easily leads to confusion about the very concept of time. The term “mental mechanisms” hints at the fragility of logic by comparing the rational mind to a delicate clock immediately after a reference to “the clock gone mad” (*MF* 135). For Shterer, the clock does not merely measure time; it embodies time, leading to his conclusions that “the circular motion of yardsticks measuring time (in other words, clocks) is

determined by the nature of the material that they measure, that is to say time" (*MF* 149). Shterer references time as something material and conflates temporal and spatial realms, therefore reflecting Krzhizhanovsky's tendency to literalize abstract conceptions and bend, break, and reshape them.

Such a literal approach to conceptual problems also characterizes Shterer's understanding of language, as he takes a fairy tale about a clock as fact and takes idiomatic expressions at their literal meaning, blurring the boundaries between reality and art with his grounding in the material world. As a little boy, Shterer was fascinated by the story of an old clock and his sons, Tick and Tock. He misses the obvious fantasy and instead tries "to make the leap from word to deed" (*MF* 134) by leaving home in search of Tick and Tock. Despite his father's admonishment, Shterer never seems to realize the unreality of certain forms of language. Idioms such as "Time marches on" and "Take your time" take on a new life in Shterer's speech, as he uses them in all seriousness, proclaiming, "Time marches on… but I'll make it dance in a circle" and "Time is taking all my time. Don't wait" (138). [19] By asserting time's physicality and attempting to master it, Shterer brings philosophical concepts into the realm of the real, leaving the linearity of time vulnerable to fragmentation.[20]

Although a certain degree of fragmentation is inevitable in Krzhizhanovsky's fictional worlds, a possible solution lies in finding meaning in the composite parts of linear time – the discrete moments. Moments, in their minuteness, are less vulnerable to fragmentation and, in their ephemerality, convey a sense of fleeting beauty. Saul Straight, the artist-philosopher hero of

[19] This appears in other stories that examine the metaphysics of time, as in "The Catastrophe": "In the meantime (is there time?)" ("The Catastrophe").
[20]Rosenflanz provides a more focused analysis of time in Krzhizhanovsky and its philosophical influences, noting, "Shterer's initial time contraption is a means of internalization of all external perception that will serve to extract time from its physical bounds" ("Krzhizhanovsky's Fourth Dimension" 548).

"Someone Else's Theme" pronounces that "beauty is not an attribute, a permanent quality, it is only a moment in an object's development, it cannot be contemplated, but must be caught" (*MF* 72). However, living in the moment is no easy task; it requires resignation to the uncertainty of the future, the pain of the present, and the distance of the past.

Rather than positive examples of such an approach to life, Krzhizhanovsky's stories are testaments of those who realized too late the mistake of taking happy moments for granted. In "The Bookmark," a well-off couple stage a dinner party in the style of their impoverished past – a cramped room, no heat, poor food, and intense political discussions. The privations of the past, seen through the perspective of time, take on a new value, as their former struggles demanded the couple's full attention, life demanded to be lived moment by moment. The man reminds his friend, "How can you be so cavalier? Throwing months around like that. It seems funny now, but in those years – it's true – we calculated to the day" (*MF* 46). Despite the hardship, the couple finds themselves missing the purposefulness and intimacy of sharing in the struggle for life. Similarly, in "Memories of the Future," Shterer realizes that his knowledge of the future came at the expense of his enjoyment of the present. After his disappointment with the future he was so eager to reach, Shterer finds refuge in nostalgia instead. He recalls "the good old years. Since I didn't understand, I'll have to go through them again and again until…" (*MF* 186). Shterer hopes to find insight by looking to the past rather than the future and by appreciating specific units of time rather than studying it as a whole.

This focus on the smallest meaningful units of time is not without a price. Embracing the moment means removing the protective distance between oneself and the immediacy of life, removing the comforting conception of the wholeness of time and embracing its fragmentary instances, jagged though these parts of the whole may be. According to the narrator of "Seams,"

a philosopher of nonexistence and lonely suffering, "The mind… builds space and time so as to be able to hurl its pain away – to enpast and enspace it [*oproshlit' i oprostranstvit'*]… but as the pain is externalized, the metaphysical person-in-pain, who gives up his only existence (pain) in being cured, is cured, in essence, of himself" (*AC* 83). In this sense, time and space work against reality, distancing the self from its perceptions. Pain exists in the instant; accepting pain is a way of proving one's own existence, of reinforcing the truth of the moment over the uncertainty of past and future.

While distortions in time require a conceptual leap to grasp, Krzhizhanovsky's warping of space provides more tangible evidence of the fragmentation of reality. Space is a central concern for Krzhizhanovsky and his characters, both in the basic struggle to find a room in crowded Moscow and in philosophical explorations of the interplay between reason and right angles, open walls and open minds, minus-space and crossed-out people.

Krzhizhanovksy's narrators are typically starving authors who use art to escape the claustrophobia of their small, shabby, windowless rooms. In "Autobiography of a Corpse," a room materializes like magic for journalist Shtamm, as a stranger writes down an address and then "a three-by-four slip of paper torn from the notepad had miraculously turned into lodgings measuring one hundred square feet" (*AC* 2). The room in question is small, dark, and the recent site of a suicide, but a luxury despite all that. The narrator's room in "Quadraturin" is "a living cage" (*MF* 4), a mere eighty-six square feet, Shterer's room in "Memories of the Future" even smaller at seventy-four square feet, and the room in "Postmark: Moscow" smaller still at fifty-four square feet. The inclusion of the specific measurements reflects their importance to author and inhabitants, emphasizing both the need to have a room of one's own as well as the inability of such cramped spaces to stimulate intellectual expansion. "When an idea in my head starts

pacing and I want to do the same, I lock up my three paces and dash out into the street" (*AC* 173), writes the narrator of "Postmark: Moscow." Limited space corresponds to limited thoughts.[21]

When faced with uncertain reality, one retreats to what is small and therefore sure, such as the individual moment of time; however, when it comes to space, there is such a thing as too small, too limited. Rosenflanz notes that "the word 'square' [*quadrat*] is frequently used negatively by Krzhizhanovsky to indicate the square-meter confines of the three-dimensional living spaces… these cubicles are closely associated with lack of creativity, disillusionment, literally and figuratively boxing in their protagonists within the constraints of *byt*" ("Krzhizhanovsky's Fourth Dimension" 540). The drawbacks to being boxed in are reinforced by their opposites, the benefits of resisting the cage-like squares. Once the walls fly off the city and leave it open to the full expanse of space in "A Conversation of Two Conversations" (1931), the physical change in the city's geometry leads its inhabitants to open their minds as well. Also, in "The Pegasus Square" (1921), the protagonist initially enjoys staring at constellations and dreaming. After his marriage, his only source of happiness is "a study shaped like an irregular quadrilateral, the corners of the painfully awkward square stretched irregularly, crawling to and fro. It didn't suit as a dining room. The bed could in no way fit. And so the four-cornered nonsense went to the man as a "semblance of an office." He loved this room: it was reminiscent of something more distant and sweet" ("The Pegasus Square"). The wildly angular room mirrors the twists and turns of the outside world rather than reinforcing the false concept of space as regular and measurable and so allows the man to connect his small space to the cosmos outside. Tellingly, once he moves into a new house with an "accurately measured rectangle" ("The

[21] Belobrovtseva expands on the connection between language and space in Krzhizhanovsky, arguing that he uses the sounds of words to create the texture of a particular environment.

Pegasus Square") for an office, his guardian angel reports that the man's soul has died, although his body lives on, cut off from the world by sloping roofs and claustrophobic quarters.

A confined area may limit the scope of the imagination, but leaving oneself open to the vicissitudes of space governed by an illogical geometry is just as dangerous, as the mind often cannot adapt to the challenges of navigating the fractures of time and space. Straight city streets become "muddled in a morass of bystreets, blind alleys, coursing, and windings" (*AC* 178) in "Postmark: Moscow" and the dissolution of line into curve in the physical world corresponds to the loss of a clear logical path in the mind. "That same maze – nonsensical, contradictory, taking you to the right only to make you turn left – muddled my thoughts" (*AC* 178), complains the narrator as he struggles in vain to find meaning in Moscow. Playing with the concept of linearity, the narrator applies Moscow's spatial distortion to literature as well, as the city's muses "know how to disrupt and discombobulate a line – with them it is always feverish and nervously dropping letters" (*AC* 181). Tormented by his struggle for self-expression, by his "fragmented lines" (*AC* 202), the narrator ultimately resolves to stop writing.

The dichotomous views of space as restrictive or terrifyingly vast plays out most fully in "Quadraturin," when Sutulin expands his tiny room with the help of an "agent for biggerizing rooms (*sredstvo dlya rashcheniya komnat*)" (*MF* 3), initially enjoying the extra space and then fearing the expanse of unknown emptiness. "The entire room, distended and monstrously misshapen, was beginning to frighten and torment him. Without taking off his coat, Sutulin sat down on the stool and surveyed his spacious and at the same time oppressive coffin-shaped living box" (*MF* 9). In her analysis of fantastic realist tropes in Krzhizhanovsky and Nikolai Gogol, Muireann Maguire argues that "the literalization of spatial dynamics… connects to symbolist figuration of space as an animate, often hostile force" (188). The animacy of space

further calls into question the functioning of reality and the nature of the true actors in the world. In the fight against space, Rosenflanz nicely articulates Sutulin's dilemma, explaining that the character, "incapable of conquering the new dimension, yet unable to return to his prior worldview, is lost both literally and figuratively" ("Krzhizhanovsky's Fourth Dimension" 543). He cannot recapture his past belief in the stability of space any more than he can return to his coffin-like room, as both represent the confines of restrictive logic. However, Sutulin struggles to cope with the fantastic, illogical distortions of Krzhizhanovskian reality.[22] Even his name, derived from the Russian word "to hunch" (*sutulit'*), suggests that he may have been better suited to claustrophobic quarters than to limitlessness.

When faced with the overwhelming expanse of space, boxing oneself in is not the only approach; instead, a bold mind can attempt to force the immense scope of outside reality to fit within intellectual constructs. Much like Shterer approaches the study of time with scientific rationality, the protagonist of "Autobiography of a Corpse" takes the same approach to protect against the disorienting effect of space. "Space, I reasoned while still in earliest youth, is absurdly vast and has expanded – with its orbits, starts, and yawning parabolas – to infinity. But if one tucks it inside numbers and meanings, it will easily fit on two or three bookshelves" (*AC* 8). The power of reason combined with art offers a way to acknowledge the truth of fractured reality from a distance rather than being overwhelmed by it like Sutulin, wandering in the dark expanse of his distorted cage. Although "Autobiography of a Corpse" consists of a dead man's letter to the new inhabitant of his room in which he committed suicide, the letter does represent the positive power of communication. The soon-to-be 'corpse' writes that, "Given all those

[22] Maguire also points out that, unlike in Gogol's "The Overcoat" and Sologub's "The Little Man," which deal with similar themes, "only in "Quadraturin" is the action of the fantastic unsolicited, unjustified, and apparently random in its choice of victim" (192) – yet another example of the lack of logic in the world of Krzhizhanovsky's characters.

failed experiments with my 'I,' it has long been my dream to inhabit someone else's. If you are at all alive, I have already succeeded" (*AC* 29). In contrast, Sutulin's lack of self-expression shows his inability to rely on reason or literature as a solution. As Maguire points out, he is barely able to formulate a complete sentence and ends with a wordless scream, having become "lost in an endless interiority he can neither map nor navigate" (191).

In addition to challenging the logic of space in general, Krzhizhanovsky often plays with dimension, shrinking the human body so that his tiny subject can perceive the world from a fresh perspective. This technique appears in "In the Pupil," "Itty-Bitties" (1922), and "The Wandering 'Strangely'" (1930), as well as "Red Snow," in which a man shrinks so small that he ceases to exist. Leiderman argues that the microscopic hero is a "materialization of the metaphor of the "little man" (524). However, Krzhizhanovsky's little man does not necessarily serve as social critique, as in Pushkin, Gogol, and Dostoevsky, or as satire in the style of *Gulliver's Travels.* Instead, the object of his tiny gaze is something much larger – the nature of reality itself. Despite the possible social reading of the fatal revolution of blood corpuscles in "The Wandering 'Strangely,'" the socio-political problems are seen "from the heights of philosophy, in light of those existential or historiosophical conflicts that the revolution itself had created, or rather prodded to the surface" (Leiderman 526). Similarly, "In the Pupil" uses discussions on the nature of love only to provide examples for larger metaphysical issues – perception versus reality and the discontinuous nature of time. Dimensional distortion can be terrifying and disorienting, but can also expand the scope of one's consciousness and allow for a fresh perspective on the world. Unclouded by a false faith in linearity, one can see the true nature of fragmented reality.

Fractured Body

The shrinking of the human body is an obvious form of distortion and gives the miniature man a close-up view of the fragmented world, but synecdoche allows for the fragmentation of the body itself. Synecdoche is the dominant element of Krzhizhanovsky's style, found in nearly every story and noted by Leiderman, Rosenflanz, and Kalmykova in their studies of his stylistics, and his use of the device is different from that of other authors. While Gogol, for example, uses synecdoche for comic effect or to identify a key image for characterization,[23] synecdoche in Krzhizhanovsky's fiction refers to a part that fails to relate back to the whole, thus emphasizing the fragmented nature of the world and individual. Furthermore, synecdoche narrows the reader's focus to the disconnected image as a small, and therefore more comprehensible, source of meaning. Krzhizhanovsky gives the part autonomy over the whole, as body parts function unchecked by the will of the person to whom they belong. The autonomous part turns the reader's attention to signifier rather than signified, transferring the autonomy from the imagined object to the word representing that object. In Krzhizhanovsky's fiction, the actualized synecdochal image represents the power of art to resist translation into bare reality, asserting imagination as an alternative.

Although synecdoche is typically the use of a part to represent the whole, Krzhizhanovsky's concept of fractured reality denies the wholeness of the world, and so the part stands alone. While Maguire claims that Krzhizhanovsky's use of synecdoche is simply an "homage to Gogol" (181), I find Leiderman's argument far more convincing when he asserts that synecdoche represents "the consequences of destroying the ontological integrity of the world…

[23] Such as the men in "Nevsky Prospekt" (1835) who are characterized only by their "unique whiskers, drooping with extraordinary and amazing elegance below the necktie" or the women reduced to "waists of a slim delicacy beyond dreams of elegance, no thicker than the neck of a bottle" (Gogol 210).

[it is] a means for demonstrating graphically the disintegration, the dissonance of all ties and clamps that hold meanings together" (527). Synecdoche is a stylistic representation of fragmented reality, showing the distorted world and uncertain self.

If parts fail to refer back to the whole, the entire linear order of the universe is challenged, as one thing does not clearly relate to the next. In "Postmark: Moscow," the narrator walks along with his head down and reports that "all I saw were the toes of shoes… those methodical toes tapped with utter indifference and mechanicalness, as if the distance from shoes to eyes was not five or six feet but… Jerking my head up, I would see to my amazement not faces and not eyes but the pied slopes of roofs" (176). This sense of estrangement in the approach to the body's composition and the perception of dimension indicates the distortion of the world itself.

Synecdoche also divides the body, thereby reducing the humanity of people described only by an external quirk. "Red Snow," particularly, overflows with the device, as the fog that shrouds the city streets provides a realistic excuse for fragmented vision. Instead of two passersby, Shushashin, the protagonist, sees only "two backs" (*MF* 110); "the earflaps flapped" (*MF* 110) to express speech in place of a mouth; potential employers are only "a dozen five-digit numbers" (109); "briefcases shoved past" on their way to work (111); and a conversation in line occurs between "the fur coat," "the thick English woolen," "a low forehead on a giraffish neck," "a rather hoarse basso profundo," and "the falsetto" (120-121). The fur coats, foreheads, and voices do not combine into a fully human image, remaining disconnected and preserving a sense of uncertainty about the whole instead.

While synecdoche in "Red Snow" fractures the individual self, in "Yellow Coal," crowd scenes described synecdochically show the inhuman nature of mankind. On a crowded train,

"Chests tried to climb up on backs, but the backs, brandishing spiteful shoulder blades, would not give an inch; tangles of hands gripped the vertical handrails with a predatory vigor" (*AC* 137). Not only are the entangled masses dehumanized, even the fragmented parts of the whole seem to radiate spite. A fight erupts from the negative energy of the crowd and is "instantly surrounded by a circle of gloating pupils, another circle and another; above the jumble of shoulders shoving, raised sticks threatened" (*AC* 138). The only contrast to this energetic violence is those who are too worn out by the struggle of life, passively accepting their suffering, fragmented in body and spirit. An onlooker's "knee knocked against an outstretched hand. Poking out of filthy rags, the hand was demanding a donation…the open palm continued to wait… the cripple's eyes, half blinded by pus, oozed with an insatiable, impotent spite" (*AC* 138). The man cannot be pitied because he is not fully a man, merely a revolting composite of synecdochal images.

Although synecdoche shows the fracture of the outside world, the individual, and society, it also serves a productive purpose, as the synecdochal image, detached from the whole, allows for a focus on discrete objects as a source of meaning. The chaotic whirl of disconnected thoughts and objects in a world without the unifying ties of logic overwhelms most seekers of meaning, as is shown by the disorienting effect of excessive space in "Quadraturin." Similarly, the protagonist of "Postmark: Moscow" struggles to understand the world and communicate his thoughts: "Moscow is too diverse, too vast, and its images too striking for someone living in it without eyelids to shield even a tiny pocket inside his skull… even the artist can scarcely breathe; images on top of images, more images on top of them; there's no room for ideas" (*AC* 183). In contrast, synecdoche puts forth one particular image, providing freedom from the obligation of making sense of the whole. Krzhizhanovsky uses synecdoche to represent Max

Shterer's single-minded focus on his research in "Memories of the Future." When Shterer visits the patent office, the other people in the waiting room are less real to him than is his time traveling device. He "stood in back of the last back. The back wore black, tinged with the green of years… the collar sighed, straining a smile through a silver mustache" (*MF* 173). Fully developed people are complex and therefore distracting, but synecdoche reduces the chaos of the world to a manageable level.

While the synecdoche in Krzhizhanovsky's fiction corresponds with his general emphasis on the small fragments of life, it also represents an alternative to reality through actualization of the synecdochal image, as parts of the whole take on their own autonomy. By drawing the reader's attention to synecdoche as a device, Krzhizhanovsky places the imaginative world of art in the foreground. The living device makes the stylistic effect of fracturing a literal fact, blurs the line between real and unreal, and testifies to the vivifying force of literary creation.

Actualized synecdoche is a way for Krzhizhanovsky to put "palpably visual flesh on the virtual reality that constitutes his artistic worlds" (Leiderman 518), bringing art to life. This appears most clearly in "The Runaway Fingers," a story devoted to and driven by a single instance of actualized synecdoche, in which a pianist's hand disconnects from his wrists and runs about the cold, wet city before finally returning to its body.

> Two thousand ears turned toward the pianist Heinrich Dorn as he calmly adjusted the wicker seat of his swivel chair with long white fingers… his fingers leapt onto the piano's black case – and cantered down the straight road paved with ivory keys. Polished nails flashing, they first set off from a high octave C…The fingers wanted to go farther, they stamped distinctly and fractionally on the last two keys… with a desperate tug the fingers suddenly wrenched themselves free, hand and all, from the pianist's cuff and jumped – diamond ring on the little finger glinting – down onto the floor. (*AC* 117)

While one might view runaway fingers as more a product of the fantastic than of the power of art, they do not adhere to the definition of the fantastic in the way that Kovalyov's nose does in

Gogol. According to structuralist critic Tzvetan Todorov, “The fantastic is that hesitation experience by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event. The concept of the fantastic is therefore to be defined in relation to those of the real and the imaginary” (25). In “The Nose,” people do not react to the animate nose strolling down the street, while Kovalyov blames both the devil and a curse for the strange events. These contradictory reactions contribute to the uncertain reality of the tale and place it within the genre of the fantastic. However, reality in “The Runaway Fingers” is not uncertain, but under attack. The response to the fingers is not ambiguous; everyone who encounters them is shocked and disturbed. The fingers defy the laws of reality in a way that is unique to products of art rather than the supernatural.

Kovalyov simply wakes up one day to find that his nose is gone for no clear cause, while the fingers’ autonomy is a direct product of synecdoche. Krzhizhanovsky takes the clichéd expression of a pianist’s fingers running over the keys to its logical extreme, allowing the fingers to literally run free. Inspired by a linguistic expression rather than an actual image, the hero of the story is synecdoche itself, the autonomous device instead of its embodiment in the fingers. While language is the inspiration, music is the direct impetus – one could argue that the fingers break free while playing the piano because they are transported by art, that art gives them the power necessary to assert their own reality in the face of the accepted limitations of logic. In his work on Formalism and in resistance to reducing the unique nature of art to a purely utilitarian purpose, Roman Jakobson formulated the phrase “the autonomy of the aesthetic function” (qtd. in Erlich, 185). Krzhizhanovsky, writing at the time when Jakobson was first developing his theories, shares the Formalist preoccupation with the literary device, taking it a step further by giving real autonomy to the world of art. Krzhizhanovsky’s playfulness with idiomatic language

and respect for the transformative power of music are the dual causes for the fingers' rebellion and so the rebellion is best seen in terms of art as well, as the actualization of the synecdochal image rather than as a random fantastical event.

Actualized synecdoche in Krzhizhanovsky is unique because it functions according to the tenets of experimental realism as opposed to remaining in the realm of the fantastic. The runaway fingers exist in the real world: they horrify observers, suffer the pangs of cramps, cold, and fatigue, and adhere to the rules of reality in every way except their impossible autonomy, thereby showing the intrusion of art into the world of the real. Krzhizhanovsky uses musical vocabulary to show how the logic of art imposes itself on the outside world. Initially, when describing the piano, distance is measured by the "black block" and the fingers move like feet – they "stamped distinctly… began galloping… slackened their pace… for a footfall" (*AC* 117). The dimensions of the outside world – blocks of space, traversed by footfalls – are superimposed on the musical sphere. However, once the fingers actualize their artistic potential and claim their autonomy from the pianist, artistic logic prevails. The fingers move "without missing a beat" (118), jump in "arpeggio-like leaps" (118), run by "sprinting prestissimo" (118), measure distance by "half a keyboard" (119), and flee "at the speed of Beethoven's *Appassionata*" (121). This new perspective, unusually small and unusually musical, functions as a form of estrangement from the real and displacement to the world of art. Outside of their usual context, terms appear in a new light, freeing their meaning and allowing for a focus on language itself.

While synecdoche is one of the most common devices in Krzhizhanovsky's oeuvre, the author extends his exploration of the autonomy of language by actualizing metaphors, entire idiomatic expressions, and abstract philosophical concepts as well.[24] In "Red Snow," the simile of

[24] See Leiderman, 517-20, for a thorough examination of each of these categories.

untying a day like a boot gradually takes on its own reality as "the ties became tangled and knotted, and the crowded day continued to bear down on his brain" (*MF* 117). In "The Catastrophe," people "went out of their minds and then ran back into their minds." Finally, "The Land of Nots" introduces an alternate world whose inhabitants are manifestations of philosophies that attempt to resist their own nonexistence.[25] In Leiderman's analysis of the above devices, he asserts that, "Creating new words and refreshing trivial ones, Krzhizhanovsky, by the very act of verbal play, directly and before our eyes demonstrates the enormous semantic potential concentrated in signifiers invented by human thought" (519). Verbal play infuses words with the author's imagination.

In Krzhizhanovsky's fiction, as words become more powerful, the objects they represent lose their meaning in comparison. When the narrator of "Postcard: Moscow" tries to see past the material world of the city to find meanings worthy of preserving in words, he realizes that finding meaning in the material world and in the names of things is a mutually exclusive process:

> For a poet, for instance, the name, the appellation of a thing – that *is* the thing, that real material, every sound and half sound in which is for him bethinged [*dlya nego veshchen*]; whereas the actual "things" are for him just glints on a bubble, and only when those thing-glints disappear, fall away from life, do the things' names begin to long for their things – and make pilgrimages to the Land of Nots. Yes, in order to begin to exist in lines and strophes, things must cease to exist in time and space: Names speak only of those things that no longer exist.[26] (*AC* 193)

To the individual's perception, the material world is just "glints on a bubble," an ephemeral reflection of unknowable reality, while the world of art can be entered through one's imagination.

[25] See Chapter One, pg. 15 of this work for an example of how Kant's concept of noumena is actualized in the form of a Not philosophers.

[26]The distance between actual things and glints on the bubble of course corresponds to the distance between things and shadows that Krzhizhanovsky uses to represent phenomena and noumena. See Chapter One, pg. 37.

The autonomous artistic device emphasizes the distance between life and art, drawing attention to the latter at the expense of the former. Krzhizhanovsky, in his dictionary article on epitaphs (1925), draws a connection between the real-world death that produces the artistic genre and the distance between an object and the art that describes it. In any creative work, he argues, "The image begins to fully live after the material subject of the image has disappeared" (qtd. in Ballard 568). The enduring life of art is more real, more concrete, than the ephemeral life of an object in the world. Considering the fragility of reality, art may be a source of comfort and certainty.[27] Ballard concurs with the idea that artistic freedom is a central value expressed in Krzhizhanovsky's work, noting that "We find that truth corresponds to the unbounded imagination, to fantasy that is recognized as fantasy, to the visible (on-stage) rather than the hidden (noumena), and to words regarded as independent beings and not merely references to things" (571). Krzhizhanovsky encourages his readers to recognize synecdoche for what is it – a product of art, not life – rather than assuming instantaneous transfer of meaning from author to audience. By respecting the autonomy of art and recognizing its distance from life, one can find meaning in imagination.

Fractured Self

With artistic devices such as distortion and synecdoche, Krzhizhanovsky uses literature to represent a truth about reality that goes beyond mere appearances. The illusory wholeness of the material world fails when one considers reality's logical underpinnings or lack thereof and so the aesthetic of fragmentation reflects the author's philosophical worldview as much as it does his

[27]While that may seem to be a rather hopeful response to the challenges of fractured reality, the next chapter will highlight Krzhizhanovsky's awareness of the many difficulties of creating a work of art or even in achieving meaningful communication, thereby complicating Leiderman's reading of Krzhizhanovsky as an optimist.

individual stylistics. While distortion of time and space challenges general views of physics and geometry, synecdoche constitutes a more immediate attack on the human body itself, shattering it into disconnected parts. The device also hints at a larger concern – the very nature of life – in its refusal to refer back to the whole and confirm the humanity that unifies the isolated parts. Krzhizhanovsky confronts the issue directly in his use of personification and its opposite, depersonification. His stories abound with objects claiming their own agency, dead men who seem to be alive, living men stripped of all vitality, and people whose very existence is uncertain. Personification, when applied to inanimate objects and even to abstractions, and depersonification, used to deprive living creatures of life, point to the fragile boundary between life and death and suggest an ambiguous third state of nonexistence peopled by those rejected by reality.

As an author, Krzhizhanovsky has the god-like power to bring things to life. He uses this power liberally, imbuing traits of life – actions, emotions, and interiority – almost indiscriminately: things as disparate as cats, stones, dead chickens, towers, books, letters, and words are as alive as humans, sometimes more so. Authorship continues to relate to vivification within the stories, as objects come to life when one can see the theme living within them. “The Bookmark” is the supreme example of personification in Krzhizhanovsky, as the driving force of the narrative is the protagonist’s need to create new stories for his bookmark to enjoy. Personification of the bookmark frames the narrative: in the beginning, “The bookmark looked affronted and slightly grumpy” (*MF* 16) and by the end, “The bookmark was still lying on the yellow bottom [of a drawer], having primly smoothed out its faded silk train, an ironic expectant expression stitched into its design” (*MF* 50). Additionally, personification is often the basis for stories within the work, as it leads to explorations of the unexpectedly rich lives of objects. By

personifying animals, objects, nature, and literature, Krzhizhanovsky continues to unsettle accepted views of reality, in this case fragmenting the boundary between animate and inanimate and between life and death.

Krzhizhanovsky's human protagonists, often calmly wasting away from starvation, are distracted from addressing their practical needs by their preoccupation with philosophy. The tale of the cat in "The Bookmark" deviates sharply from this tendency, painting a heart-wrenching picture of a cat fighting off death, trapped on a narrow ledge high above the city streets, battling fatigue, hunger, and the elements, which are themselves personified. "A downpour is lashing the ledge: the wet stone wants to slip out from under the tom's paws" (*MF* 23) and the wind "tries to wrest him from the ledge… takes a swing and sweeps him off" (*MF* 24). Faced with a world conspiring against him, the cat's desperate situation makes human political disputes and artistic aspirations seem ridiculous. The abruptness and finality of the cat's death, as he falls to the pavement, is run over by a car, scraped up by a street cleaner, and thrown in the garbage, emphasizes the fatal indifference of the world to an individual's suffering. Although Krzhizhanovsky is clearly able to represent the inner life of an animal touchingly, he does so rarely, perhaps because personification in this form is a more common artistic device and therefore does not function as estrangement from typical understandings of reality.

Personification of animals is an extension of humanity rather than the bold attack on life that comes from having an inanimate object appear more alive than a man. Krzhizhanovsky and his story-seeking narrators see vital potentiality throughout the nonliving world. When the protagonist of "The Bookmark" looks at food through a store window, the food stares at him in turn; "Those same defenseless, pimply chicken legs sticking out of greasy paper peered back with dead pomp" (*MF* 17). From small to large, all objects can transform into stories and receive

life through the power of art. A wood shaving blowing in the wind causes a "theme-catcher"[28] to exclaim, "Why if you straighten out its curls and look hard, there's substance enough for a short story" (*MF* 25). On a grander scale, the same creative mind brings the Eiffel Tower itself to life. "The tower wrenched its iron soles free of the foundation, rocked back, and lunged off… Less frightened than embarrassed by its clumsiness, the tower lurches into the next street" (*MF* 18). The inclusion of psychological insight makes the tower a sympathetic figure instead of just a mechanized colossus. Here, as in the story of the cat, personification of the non-human reflects critically on humanity. In this case, the countries of the world respond to the tower's animation by attacking it. Krzhizhanovsky criticizes the radical politics that make the tower a pawn in the larger struggle between the USSR and the West and faults human nature itself, so quick to default to violence when faced with that which it does not understand. Also in parallel to the cat's sad fate, the tower chooses suicide over continued life among humans in a final condemnation of the world's inhumanity.

Krzhizhanovsky uses personification not only to give life to inanimate objects but, in doing so, to create a contrast with lifeless humans. In "Memories of the Future," a nameless tenant in Shterer's former apartment is less alive than his briefcase. "From morning till late at night his briefcase steered him from meeting to meeting…come evening the briefcase bulged while the briefcase carrier felt flattened" (*MF* 181). Not only is the man more two-dimensional, his entire identity is defined only in terms of the briefcase. He has time to himself only when "the briefcase had – oddly enough – let the tenant go off by himself" (*MF* 181), showing its superior will. Apart from the rare moment of freedom, "His time was so exactly divided between

[28] The character's title is another reflection of his approach to art. While authors may create in a void, drawing solely on their own imagination, the term "theme-catcher" implies that the outside world contains a wealth of potential stories waiting to be recognized by a receptive mind.

his absence while present in various offices and his absent presence in the room" (*MF* 181). The man's "absent presence" emphasizes his depersonification. "The Branch Line" takes the relationship between man and briefcase to its extreme, as a worker in the world of dreams explains that the briefcase is a tool to allow dreams to infiltrate reality. "Just tuck this thing under your elbow and you – while standing up with your eyes wide open in broad daylight – will sink into the deepest sleep: you'll dream that you're a manager, a mover and a shaker, a public servant, an inventor of new systems, and this briefcase-shaped pillow straining under your elbow will propel you from dream to dream" (*MF* 97). The briefcase moves the man, rather than the other way around. Objects are free from the ontological uncertainty that plagues humans.

In depictions of nature, Krzhizhanovsky turns the pathetic fallacy on its head; instead of unduly attributing human emotion to nature, nature becomes the source of agency, infecting the listless mass of humanity with its own characteristics. In "Red Snow," the fog is a character in its own right. It takes action, as when "the fog walked forty paces ahead of the eye, swathing all things in itself" (*MF* 110), showing the broad scope of its power over one's perceptions of the world. Nature exerts its control in the realm of language as well, as seen in idioms such as "fogging his mind" (*MF* 113). Additionally, the only other distinguishing characteristic of the man metonymically described by his earflaps is his "hoary blue-gray beard the color of fog" (*MF* 110). The fog gradually asserts its dominance over his fragile humanity; "The bent man's beard was becoming enfogged in the fog, and with every step he trampled himself lower and deeper into the stone" (*MF* 111). In giving life to nature, Krzhizhanovsky demonstrates the power of art, drawing attention to personification as a device, as well as the uncertainty of life.[29]

[29] Krzhizhanovsky personifies words and letters as well. However, this will be addressed in the following chapter, as personification of words serves a primarily thematic function, as opposed to the stylistic representation of fractured reality achieved in part through personification of objects.

By comparing personified objects and nondescript people, Krzhizhanovsky shows that the former are more active, more vital, and more present in the world of reality. In a fractured world, one cannot make assumptions about what it means to be alive because life does not always adhere to logic and because the gaps between individuals make it impossible to determine the humanity of one's fellows. Krzhizhanovsky uses depersonification to contribute to the uncertainty of life in fractured reality; he fragments the personality of secondary characters, blurs the boundary between life and death, and emphasizes the existential uncertainty of many of his protagonists.

Secondary characters in Krzhizhanovsky's works are often synecdochically reduced to a fragment of their body or, as Perelmuter observes, their personality does not extend beyond their limited role in the story. In "Quadraturin," Perelmuter sees all secondary characters as less than human:

> [They are] people-signs: people-functions (the landlady, for example, or the "Remeasuring Comission," or the man with the briefcase, where the main thing is the contents, not of the man but of the briefcase, the man could be anything), people-fictions (sounds- a knock on the door or on the wall, tramping, snatches of conversation, etc), people-phantoms ("gray man the color of the dusk seeping in at the window," "a broad black shape squeezed itself into the doorway"), people-weights ("the black mass muttered"), etc. ("Proza kak stihi")

By refusing to develop secondary characters beyond their immediate function in the story, Krzhizhanovsky mirrors the solipsistic worldview typical of his protagonists. Even within the fictional world of "Quadraturin," Sutulin, the main character, cannot be sure that the "man the color of the dusk" or the "broad black shape" are truly human. Unable to trust something as basic as the dimensions of his apartment, Sutulin has no hope of evaluating the question of what it means to be alive.

The technique of depersonification develops this motif of lifelessness beyond the secondary characters by showing dead people who are indistinguishable from the living and living people who wonder if they are dead. The key implication of fragmented reality is that it calls all basic assumptions about life and, indeed, goes beyond life to unsettled the boundary between life and death. Krzhizhanovsky's early philosophical readings left him uncertain about the reality of objects around him and caused him to conclude, "'I' is a shadow" ("Fragments on Shakespeare"). As challenging as knowing oneself is, fractured reality makes going beyond the self even more difficult. By showing that people cannot even identify a dead man in their midst, Krzhizhanovsky dramatically represents the inability of one man to truly know another.

In "The Thirteenth Category of Reason," people are too wrapped up in their own lives or too enmeshed in bureaucracy to recognize a dead man in their midst. Even the gravedigger, familiar with the animated corpse, easily loses him in a crowd, complaining that, "I began looking for him among the backs behind backs behind backs, all so rigid and stock-still you couldn't tell which was dead and which was alive" (*MF* 131). The gravedigger then generalizes from the specific situation to a general view of skepticism about life. "Any man I met, I stared: might he be my graveless wanderer?" (*MF* 132). The narrator of "Postmark: Moscow" experiences a similar confusion about the world around him, noting that, "What is dead is not entirely dead, what is alive is not fully alive… the living are sprinkled with the water of death, the dead with the water of life, and no one can tell who's alive, who's dead, and who should bury whom" (*AC* 192). His realization of the uncertain boundaries between life and death leaves him even more trapped in his own interiority, less able to make a human connection because he cannot conceive of a way to affirm the humanity of his fellows. Life, then, becomes the ability to connect with others, while death is uncertainty and isolation.

Depersonification challenges reality on an even larger scale by showing the world of the living as indistinguishable from the world of the dead, just as a dead man blends in to city life. The corpse in "The Thirteenth Category of Reason," daunted by the challenges of daily life in Moscow, wonders if he has, in fact, entered the underworld. His gravedigger companion corrects his mistake and explains that "your trials are still ahead of you, waiting under a cross. This here is what they call life" (*AC* 130). Krzhizhanovsky reinforces the uncertainty between this world and the one beyond in "Bridge Over the Styx," as a toad floating in the water between the worlds of life and death explains: "No matter how hard I looked, I could not tell the shores apart, life from death; both were burnt to ashes and deserted, pocked with deep funnel-like grave pits; fog mixed with a litter of poisonous gases blanketed the left and right distance" (*AC* 157).[30] Whereas mindless bureaucracy and the unfeeling crowds give an infernal sense to the world in the earlier story, the increased violence and suicide contribute here to the hellish nature of the life on earth. In both cases, social critique makes up one possible reading, but I contend that the major factor contributing to earth's similarity with hell is not socio-political issues of a particular time and place, but the larger existential uncertainty that stems from a sense of fragmented reality.

When Krzhizhanovsky's tortured protagonists turn their gaze from the world outside to their inner life, they often question whether they themselves are alive. In "The Pegasus Square," an unhappy man feels sapped of his vitality after limiting his imagination to adhere to his wife's rigid expectations of conformity. He asks her, "Is everyone dead there in the houses? They died long ago. And you and I, are we still alive, among the dead?" Feeling that he does not belong to the dull village society, the man's only reference point for his own existence is his wife. In

[30] See Beloborstova for examples of how Krzhizhanovsky uses repetition to form "a dream text with the inherent fluidity of sleep, distorted perceptions of time and space, and a resonant echo," further blurring the line between the toad's world and the man's.

"Postmark: Moscow," the narrator wanders through the city but cannot connect with others. His sense of self is so fragile that, when a man looks at him strangely, the narrator "was afraid to look in the mirror. What if under the brim of my hat, in place of my face, there was nothing at all?" (176). The isolation of life in a fractured world is a recursive process, as individuals doubt their own reality, become less willing to even attempt communication with others, and so become more isolated and more insecure.

While the above characters are simply questioning, the end result of a fractured identity and inability to differentiate between life and death is resigned acceptance. The narrator of "Seams" is so disconnected from life that he might as well be dead. "Sometimes I even sit down by a cross and iron fence and converse with those who never reply. In essence, we are the same – they and I. I stare at the nettles growing up over them, at the matted blades of dusty grass – and I think: we" (*AC* 61). Rather than struggling to understand the division between life and death, the narrator accepts his fate to live in an in-between state of nonexistence, saying that, "I don't exist – so much so that no one has ever said or will ever say about me: He doesn't exist" (*AC* 61). In a fractured world, there are no concrete boundaries, only a chaotic blur between real and unreal; full knowledge is impossible.

If objects can take on life, if the dead can penetrate the world of the living, and if real people can doubt that they are alive, than one can never know the true nature of life. The differentiation between life and death and the question of whether such a distinction even exists lies at the heart of Krzhizhanovsky's exploration of the uncertain bounds of reality. Leiderman sees the rationalizing response to the looming threat of death as the central motive of Krzhizhanovsky's fiction, arguing that the author's "major node of philosophical dispute... is bound up with the quarrel over whether existing exists" (511). In conjunction with his tendency

to actualize existential debates, Krzhizhanovsky literalizes the term "former people," taking the Bolshevik term for intellectuals and others of no use to the Communist regime, and using it to refer to those who are uncertain of their own place in reality— "crossed out people," as he calls them (qtd. in Turnbull x). Rather than continuing to seek meaning in a fractured world, Krzhizhanovsky's crossed-out characters turn to alternate sources of meaning that lie outside the bounds of logic. "Everyone is given to choose. Certain people have already chosen: some have chosen the struggle for existence; others, the struggle for nonexistence" (*LKC* 18), says an actor who wants to lose himself in his character and thus in the world of art as a whole. Krzhizhanovsky's fictional worlds are illogical pockets of nonexistence enriched by dreams, fantasy, and art, providing spaces inhabited by people neither dead nor alive and thus denying the sense that a concrete boundary defines the borders of reality.

Dreams blur with and cast doubt upon reality, as well as offer a temporary reprieve from real life. In "The Runaway Fingers," sleep is an artistic escape for a family struggling with poverty. The personified Sleep "told the poor souls his fairy tales. His words made the stains on the walls bloom with pink blossoms, while the clothes hanging overhead began floating along the line like a succession of snow-white clouds" (*AC* 122). Although this pleasant fantasy has an expiration date and "sweet dreams cannot withstand reality" (*MF* 94), dreams unsettle logic in a way that persists even after the sleeper awakes. In "Branch Line," Quantin,[31] a passenger on a train, reaches the world of dreams by "outstripping logic" (*MF* 89). In this fantastical land, populated by shadowy figures who produce dreams, "Understanding is strictly forbidden. Even dreams have the right to dream" (*MF* 98). The pleasure of dreaming is due specifically to its distance from rational thought. If the contrast between dreams and life is primarily a contrast

[31] "Kvantin" is the more accurate transliteration, allowing the reader to see Kant hiding within, ever present in Krzhizhanovsky's thoughts.

between illogic and logic, fractured reality challenges this boundary by undermining the rational structures used to explain the world. The dream workers in "Branch Line" take advantage of this fact, plotting to expand their world further into the realm of the real. Quantin overhears a lecturer telling his dream pupils, "Reality since Pascal's time has lost much of its constancy and invariability" (*MF* 100) and so is vulnerable to assault.

Dreams can threaten reality by providing an alternative means for viewing the world, thus questioning false assumptions of wholeness. Tintz, the protagonist in "Bridge Over the Styx," is unsure whether he is asleep or awake when he encounters his amphibian visitor from the underworld. However, the Stygian toad does not resent the challenge to his reality, responding, "Belief in my existence is what I need least of all: Being a dream has its advantages – it frees one from the constraint of connection… besides, if a dreamer may not believe in the reality of his dream, then a dream may doubt the reality of its dreamer" (*AC* 153). The uncertain position of an individual in a fractured world provides much of the tension that drives Krzhizhanovsky's stories, but access to fantasy and dreams can alleviate these concerns. Krzhizhanovsky states that dreams are valuable because they are "the only instance *when we apprehend our thoughts as facts*" (qtd. in Turnbull xiii, emphasis in original). Dreams, like Krzhizhanovsky's fiction, can give abstract concepts the illusion of a material existence. Unlike the false promise of meaning the real world, dreams are not expected to make sense; their nonsense has infinite potential to multiply as it is unchecked by the imposition of logic.

Krzhizhanovsky does not always explain away his phantasms by attributing them to dreams; more often, he embraces fantasy in the form of fiction. Literature not only enriches the world, it offers an alternative. In "Postmark: Moscow," the narrator visits the pond from Karamzin's *Poor Liza* (1792), but reality cannot compare with imagination. The narrator does

not recapture the romantic scene evoked by the story; he only sees "a stinking pool sunk like a round black blot inside its crooked banks… I turned right around and walked off: No-no, I must get back to the Land of Nots" (*MF* 195). Instead of expecting reality to reach the heights of his imagination, the narrator learns that he must retreat even deeper into fiction, this time to one of Krzhizhanovsky's own created worlds, referenced as if it were a geographical reality. His close identification with the world of art shows the narrator's preference for life in literature over life in fractured reality. In the past, he was "living inside a sealed envelope" (*AC* 171), involved with writing to the point of excluding real life. Although he claims to be "scrambling out" (*AC* 171) of his envelope in an attempt to end his authorial isolation, the narrator's metaphorical language and identification with literature suggests that he might be unable to leave the world of art. His later comment, "I can never leave my theme: I live inside it" (*AC* 172), confirms this. The narrator is isolated from the teeming life of the city and finds a refuge in art.

The Letter Killers Club similarly asserts the value of imagination over reality. The club allows for the free exchange of ideas without the encumbrance of the physical trappings of literature; it is, as its founder explains, a garden where "All my most exquisite phantasms and monstrous inventions might, far from people's eyes, grow and bloom for themselves" (*LKC* 11). Those who are especially drawn to such a garden are people who have become disenchanted with life, such as Zez, who has "his obol clenched firmly between his teeth" (*LKC* 109), as if he were a Roman corpse prepared to pay the fare for his journey into the realm of the dead. In Rar's tale about the Kingdom of Roles, an actor takes such a journey, travelling to a world inhabited by past versions of Hamlet. Stern, the actor eager to merge completely with his role, claims that he is "a man who has envied his shadow: it can grow smaller or larger, whereas I am always equal to myself, the same man of the same inches, days, and thoughts. I have long since ceased to need

the sun's light, I prefer the footlights" (*LKC* 25). In the Krzhizhanovskian dichotomy of shadow and thing, shadows typically represent uncertainty about one's sense of self and of the outside world. Through the power of art, that uncertainty becomes a positive force. Theater is an alternate world in which an actor can overcome his static self and become like a shadow, unfixed and mutable.

The Krzhizhanovskian ideal, albeit largely impossible, is unity of life and art, following the example of the writer in "Someone Else's Theme" who, at the end of the story, "became not 'he' to the theme, but 'I'" (*MF* 85). Ballard argues convincingly that this ideal can be realized when Krzhizhanovsky's typical author-character decides "to become an actor, a role that allows him to craft and re-craft his identity, creating art that continually anticipates and re-invents the demands of *byt*" (573). Theater allows the actor to take on new life through his characters, an especially appealing option considering the challenges of life as an individual in a fractured world. In *The Letter Killers Club*, Tyd, a club member, observes that there are two kinds of people: people-plots and people-themes. The former are driven by action, while the latter "exist immanently, their plotless lives are off the main roads, they are part of an idea, reticent and passive" (*LKC* 47). People-themes are especially receptive to art because they have no other driving force in their life, living in the state of alienation and near-nonexistence that typifies Krzhizhanovsky's characters. Emerson explains that the lives of people-themes are "all about a quest to uncover something else…to exist at all they must assume a role and continually remind themselves that they are playing it" ("Introduction" xv). People-themes have failed to find meaning in their lives and cannot even rationalize their existence in fractured reality; their retreat to art is a desperate last grasp at meaning.

While the role of art in Krzhizhanovsky's fiction is an optimistic alternative to fractured reality, one cannot ignore the pessimistic foundations that motivate characters' turn to art. Although Stern rejoices when he enters the Kingdom of Roles, his creator, Rar, commits suicide at the end of *The Letter Killers Club*. Ballard acknowledges that art is not a universally positive force for Krzhizhanovsky in her analysis of "Quadraturin". Instead, "The playing out of fantasy's logic in Krzhizhanovsky's stories can hurtle unstoppably toward distressing results… the fantastical *byt* does not [always] provide a happy alternative to the troubles of our real *byt*" (Ballard 573). While some Krzhizhanovskian characters are able to embrace their sense of nonexistence and take refuge in the illogical worlds of dreams, art, and imagination, others are too disoriented by fractured reality to escape the torments of their chaotic surroundings.

"Red Snow" provides an effective check for those too quick to read Krzhizhanovsky optimistically, as the story blurs the boundaries between the real world and the worlds of death, fantasy, and dreams, but does so in a way that intensifies the protagonist's hopelessness rather than offering a reprieve. The death imagery that pervades "Red Snow" shows the fragile distinction between this world and the next and expresses the author's metaphysical uncertainty and his character's utter despair. Shushashin, the protagonist, begins his day by putting on "the noose of his suspenders" (*MF* 109), a fitting preparation to face the almost demonic city. Moscow prefers to receive visitors when it is "black – when it's night both in windows and in people" (*MF* 110) and, as the story progresses, becomes increasingly dark in setting and tone. By the end of Shushashin's wanderings, the sky has hardened into "the heavy black marble of night" (*MF* 124), creating a feeling of claustrophobia and oppression.

In a city more dead than alive so that even death is no escape, Krzhizhanovsky carries depersonification to its extreme, extending it from the central character to infect all others he

encounters. Confirming the pervasiveness of desolation, Shushashin overhears a passerby say, "Our life has been permeated by nonexistence…What is death, after all? A special case of *hopelessness*…In hopelessness, too, you see, there's a razor-sharp delight…We'll learn not to live, we'll…" (*MF* 114, emphasis in original). Despite his dubious promise of "razor-sharp delight," the speaker ends with an unfinished sentence, reflecting his ultimate uncertainty and leaving the sense of despair unmitigated. The belief in one's own nonexistence, typically reserved for Krzhizhanovsky's existentially tormented narrators, has spread throughout Moscow in "Red Snow" and characters exhibit resignation rather than seeking alternatives. The very first conversation that Shushashin overhears is a man saying, "Oh dear sir, from your apartment, you say… But I've been evicted from my own head, and I'm all right. But you…" (*MF* 110). Homelessness is more of a concern than soullessness because the latter is simply inevitable. Shushashin agrees with these conclusions as, wandering onto a child's funeral, he thinks only: "Yes, it's cheaper that way" (*MF* 113). He has the "look of an inexperienced ghost who had strayed by mistake into the daylight" (*MF* 114), wholly unsuited for life in the real world, if such a thing even exists.

In "Red Snow," the desperation of life in Moscow deprives its inhabitants of their ability to imagine an alternative to fractured reality. When Shushashin goes home to "pull the darkness up over him" (*MF* 117) and go to sleep, he remains trapped in the city even in dreams. Although the events of his dream are more illogical than in life, the hopeless mood is unchanged. Shushashin wakes with a scream of terror, but finding himself back in the real Moscow cannot be much comfort. The story ends with Shushashin's reflection that "If you stun [thoughts]…they will float to the surface, only dead" (*MF* 124). Just as his dreams, based on thoughts about the city formed while awake, offer no comfort, Shushashin's thought suggests that literature, too, is

not an escape. The thoughts of an artist, when stunned by the process of shaping them into words, are like floating dead fish, deprived of whimsy or beauty.

Krzhizhanovsky uses personification to unsettle notions about what it means to be alive and, in doing so, to contribute to a sense of fractured reality. Beyond this general aesthetic goal, personification also reflects the importance of the small, of parts of the whole, and of the hidden creative potential of objects that take on a life of their own. Depersonification shows the self as unsure and cut off from connection with others, ultimately leading to a feeling of complete nonexistence that comes from being unable to find one's bearings in a fractured world. Although this sense of nonexistence can be terrifying and disorienting, it can also propel Krzhizhanovsky's characters into the productive world of art.

Conclusion

Krzhizhanovsky's stylistic fragmentation is the best approximation of fractured reality possible in the medium of literature. However, his view of the authorial process never discounts the limitations of language, and his works often contain a sense of regret that words are necessary at all, as pure ideas contain so much more breadth and force. In "Biography of a Thought," the process of encapsulating a brilliant idea into just a few words is akin to murder. "When the Thinker placed a clean sheet of paper before the Thought, it jumped back: 'I won't be put into letters!'" ("Biography of a Thought"). One must compromise the integrity of ideas for the sake of their own communication through writing. The struggle between the author and his words and between words and ideas is a central theme in Krzhizhanovsky's fiction: he betrays pure ideas by forcing them into words, but he atones for this violence in part by giving words the autonomy to subvert authorial control.

Chapter Three: Metapoetic Themes

Krzhizhanovsky's worldview as represented in his fiction leads him to grim conclusions about the nature of reality, the impossibility of full knowledge, and the challenges of authorship. Faced with the practical difficulties of getting his work published and his philosophical doubts about the feasibility of communication, Krzhizhanovsky's continued commitment to literature might seem surprising and, indeed, his author-characters continually question why and how one should write in and about fractured reality.

For Krzhizhanovsky, literature strikes a balance between telling the truth about life and creating fantasy as an escape. By representing reality as fractured in his art, Krzhizhanovsky shows the chaotic and unknowable side of life that is left out of realist literature based only on the world as it is perceived. Krzhizhanovsky fractures his novels into stories, stories into themes, and themes into core ideas, turning fragmentation to his own ends and using it to focus his works on achieving a central goal: to do what perception cannot, showing the cracks within the illusory wholeness of reality, uncomfortable though such a sight might be. However, Krzhizhanovsky's art is more than a reproduction of fractured reality: it is an alternative, a world of pure imagination free from the demands of logic and wholeness. Although literature restricts fantasy by putting ideas into words, it also gives new life to ideas by making their transmission possible and so, for Krzhizhanovsky, fiction is a compromise between the mental world of unbounded creativity and the fragmented everyday world.

Writing Reality

Krzhizhanovsky's fiction, while obviously not a purely realistic depiction of the world, does have its basis in reality. His writing is realistic not in that it reproduces the everyday world (*byt*), which is perceived to be whole. Instead, he examines the world of existence (*bytie*) and, failing to explain it with the logical conceptual maps of philosophy, concludes that it is instead "cloven by cracks into odd, unrelated pieces" (*AC* 101). Krzhizhanovsky uses his fictional world (*by*) to recreate the everyday world in a way that realistically represents his view of fragmented existence. However, as with any author, Krzhizhanovsky faces certain impediments in translating the world into art, as literature inevitably reflects an individual's perception of a thing rather than the thing-in-itself, it limits the complexity of the world by reducing it to letters, and it faces the technical difficulties of accurately depicting reality. Krzhizhanovsky attributes the challenges of understanding and communication to fractured reality and so these problems take on a central thematic role in his fiction, as do potential solutions.

By proactively embracing fragmentation, Krzhizhanovsky can isolate smaller and therefore more comprehensible and communicable elements of his stories. Many of Krzhizhanovsky's narrators write a frame story,[32] capturing the illusive themes of oral storytellers[33] who have abandoned the written word entirely after repeated rejections by the literary establishment. Krzhizhanovsky's characters narrow their focus in the search for meaning by sharing the products of their imagination with small, select audiences, hoping for effective communication; his own stories often break down to their basic themes, balancing a love of

[32] In *Letter Killers Club*, "The Bookmark," "The Collector of Cracks," "In the Pupil," "Someone Else's Theme," and "The Thirteenth Category of Reason," to name a few. In an unfortunate blending of the fictional and factual impediments to authorship, none of these were published during Krzhizhanovsky's lifetime.
[33] Such as Saul Straight in "Someone Else's Theme" and the theme-catcher in "The Bookmark."

words with an awareness of their limitations and encouraging the reader's imagination to compensate for the deficiencies of language.

Although authors can embellish their perceptions of the material world with imaginative descriptions, they can never access the noumena and so cannot move beyond their subjective view of reality. The sympathetic reader can appreciate seeing the world from another's perspective, but critics and editors in Krzhizhanovsky's fiction consistently insist that their reality is the true reality and reject anything that does not conform to their expectations. The narrator in "Postmark: Moscow" knows that editors will dismiss his work because, "They'll never find their Moscow in your fragmented lines, they won't bother about the imported thoughts of an imported person" (*AC* 202). Editors' and critics' inflated sense of their own infallibility stifle truly original authors who wish to convey their own worldview rather than parroting false assumptions of wholeness in a fractured world.

Commitment to their individual perception of the world leads Krzhizhanovsky's author-characters to confrontations with the literary establishment and to their ultimate rejection of literary production on a large scale. Truly original writers are, in Krzhizhanovsky's term, crossed-out people with no place in the narrow world of Soviet literature; there is, however, ample room for "a person able to cross things out" (*MF* 35) – someone comfortably casting judgement on others without creating anything himself. Critics make themselves ridiculous by insisting on judging art based their own limited understanding of the world. In "Pen and Ink" (1934), a stuffy academic tries to prove that the Pushkin's poem "Proserpine" (1824) was inspired by a trip to a historical banya, despite the troubling historical fact that "the water could not 'sparkle' because the banya was steamy and it didn't have electric lighting" ("Pen and Ink"). In addition to completely missing the point of the poem, the would-be critic fails in his

adherence to values of the time, trying to examine Pushkin's social background rather than the beauty of the language itself. In an even more ridiculous example, the critic in "Orpheus in the Underworld" (1937) is Cerberus, with each head supremely self-confident in its judgment and each in opposition to the other. They all demand that Orpheus spend eternity "learning music from our Stygian frogs. The basis of music is not in strumming but croaking" (*SS* 244), judging Orpheus' beautiful music according to chthonic standards.

Saul Straight, from "Someone Else's Theme," takes this attack on critics' usefulness a dramatic step forward by challenging their conception of their own existence. "A creature less real than the ink with which he writes takes up self-criticism in a desperate attempt to prove his alibi with respect to the book" (*MF* 60), to prove that his narrow and insipid life counts more than the vigorous and realistic portrayal of a character of his type in literature. The critic will die, having barely lived, while the character, "this fabricated, not-real "almost I" shall go on living and living" (*MF* 62). The critic's nonexistence harkens back to the blurred boundary between the real and unreal in Krzhizhanovsky's fiction, while also showing the impossible task faced by an aspiring author.

Insecure critics and timid, harried editors see a truly creative mind as suspect, leading the author to the conclusion that literature operates best on a smaller scale, where a sympathetic audience can appreciate his worldview without being threatened by it. In an attempt to be helpful, an editor tells Straight, "The only way we can work together is if you bring us facts and material… and let us draw any conclusions ourselves" (*MF* 39). Straight, of course, rejects the editor, much as Krzhizhanovsky did despite his own difficulties with publication. Recounting a meeting with a new editor, Krzhizhanovsky writes, "I must break it off. Maybe it's the last literary gate. But I'll slam shut even this one, because – either how I want it, or nohow" (qtd. in

Rosenflanz, *Hunter of Themes* 8). Editors attempt to quash the individualistic nature of authorial imagination, while Krzhizhanovsky and his author-characters embrace it.

A more specific problem to authorship is the practical limitation of form – reducing the world to fit the bounds of a story. Referring to socialist realist authors of the time, the narrator of "Postmark: Moscow" observes that "Their pencils are sharp, their eyes keen; everyday life has been placed under the strictest writerly surveillance, caught in the beams and not so much recorded as arrested, crammed into lines by main force" (*AC* 188). Although the references to surveillance and arrest indicate Krzhizhanovsky's particular dislike for the formulaic works of socialist realism and their unquestioning adherence to official standards, the sense of life being "crammed into the lines" is true of all realistic literature.

Every work of literature is a fragment of the complex real world, but some fragments are more valuable than others: Krzhizhanovsky contrasts the lengthy, unsophisticated works that make up the bulk of contemporary literature with short, powerful works rich in imagination, showing that well-considered brevity can make a work more meaningful. In "The Bookmark," the narrator describes contemporary literature as uninspired and not worthy of intellectual engagement:

> These [books] were unraveling signatures glued pell-mell into crookedly cut covers; along the rough and dirty paper, breaking ranks with the lines, brown-gray letters – the color of military broadcloth – rushed, these reeked of rancid oil and glue. With these crudely produced bareheaded bundles, one did not stand on ceremony… One consumed these texts posthaste, without reflecting or delectating: both books and two-wheeled carts were needed then strictly to supply words and ammunition. (*MF* 15)

The militaristic imagery emphasizes the purely functional nature of these texts and their rushed quality suggests that no thought is necessary in their consumption. Such is the state of the

contemporary novel; small wonder that the narrator prefers the theme-catcher's whimsical stories, the products of imagination rather than dull logic, brief tales with an infectious power.

"The Bookmark" and "Someone Else's Theme" are frames for explorations of diverse themes that cannot stand alone because their authors refuse to follow the conventions of literature. In the latter, the theme-catcher hints at what he would do if he were to write his story, but resists in favor of maintaining focus on the essentials, allowing the audience's imagination to fill in everything extraneous. In his story about the tomcat, he mentions that "One might recount the tom's dreams… but let's go on" (*MF* 22), relying on the drama of the plot to shape the listener's understanding of the cat's psychology. The theme-catcher later remarks, "To the tom, all of this (even were I to reveal it to him with the aid of some fictional device or other), all of this, I repeat, is of no use" (*MF* 23). He is aware of the tools of an author and consciously abandons them, preferring instead the sense of pure inspiration that comes from improvisation on a theme.

Realism, or at least the illusion of realism, functions as a check on the author's imagination, as he must create a believable world with which readers can engage. In "Thirty Pieces of Silver," rather than deviating from realism to increase dramatic tension, the narrator explains, "Here, in the manner of writers of legends, one might easily invent that the potter asked for some white wine but instead was given red, which tasted of blood, and so on – however, since I am not inventing, but telling the honest truth, I must confine myself to the fact[s]" (*AC* 164). The narrator continues to maintain that he is recording facts rather than inventing fictions. He dryly comments, after the tavern keeper's suicide, that it was "a good thing he did, too, for had he gone on living, my story about the thirty silver pieces might have run to thirty chapters and been suspected of Romanticism, or even mysticism" (*AC* 166). The narrator does not want to

be aligned with a particular literary school but with reality, striving to create the illusion that the tale exists outside of himself.[34]

Although Krzhizhanovsky takes advantage of some tropes of realistic literature, he criticizes those who blindly follow literary convention. Krzhizhanovsky characterizes those authors who have gained recognition in his time – a time of increasing state control of literature – as unoriginal and materialistic: they base their depictions of reality on preexisting assumptions, rather than staying true to their own unique point of view. In fact, as the theme-catcher complains in "The Bookmark," "We have no authors: we have only second-raters. Imitators. And outright thieves…. They look everywhere they can think of for themes – everywhere but inside their own heads, it doesn't enter their heads… to look there" (*MF* 28). These imitators repurpose older works, but do so without adding any of their individual insight or imagination, making art that is devoid of life. The theme-catcher, on the other hand, uses his infinitely productive creativity to infuse the world around him with new life, seeing the full history and hidden potential in every object. Even for the most realistic works of literature, Krzhizhanovsky sees authorial imagination as the factor that elevates mere writing into the realm of art.

Despite its disorienting effects, fractured reality has the advantage of allowing for greater freedom on the part of the realist author by denying the possibility of one single interpretation of the world. Krzhizhanovsky and his author-characters draw attention to the creative process that fills in the cracks of reality, emphasizing both fragmentation and imagination. In "The Bookmark," the theme-catcher changes the dimensions of the real world to add drama to his stories, as if taking advantage of the distortion caused by fractured reality. In telling of the plight

[34] While this might seem to be a common literary trope, it is uniquely Krzhizhanovskian: other authors suggest that the events of their stories really happened, but Krzhizhanovsky's point is that the story itself is real, that the theme has its own autonomous existence, as will be discussed in depth in the following section.

of a cat trapped on ledge far above the city streets, he adds, "It wouldn't hurt, it wouldn't cost us anything, to stretch the building up past the chimney tops – from four stories to thirty – to narrow the streets, cobweb the air with wires" (*MF* 22). Taller buildings do not make the story any less realistic, but by drawing attention to the process of manipulating reality the theme-catcher shows that, for him, life is subordinate to art.

In addition to adding drama, sacrificing the faithful depiction of reality can actually make a work more comprehensible to the reader by prioritizing larger insights over trivial details. The narrator of "In the Pupil" tells a fantastical tale about miniature men all trapped in a woman's eye, but it is also an agonizing story about the process of falling out of love. The narrator's central concern is to communicate that experience to his reader; all else, all unbelievable events, all literary flourishes, are subordinated to that central goal. Reflecting on his experiences, he considers "how to convey everything without saying anything. To begin with, I must cross out the truth; no one needs that. Then variegate the pain to the limits of my canvas. Yes, yes. Add a touch of the day-to-day and over all, like varnish over paint, a veneer of vulgarity – one can't do without that. Finally a few philosophical bits and…" (*AC* 60). The order of the writing process reflects the author's priorities. First comes fantasy, removed from truth but a faithful representation of his pain. Realistic touches are added next, but they are simply a means to an end. Rather than striving to accurately depict life, he simply needs to make his story relatable enough so that readers can be led to his central message. Finally, "bits" of philosophy are thrown in as an afterthought, to satisfy readers who still believe in access to a larger meaning beyond everyday life. This triad corresponds to Krzhizhanovsky's conception of *by*, *byt*, and *bytie* as three layers of the world and shows the preeminence of *by*, or fantasy, in shaping his aesthetic strategy. Both realism and philosophy, which functions along the same lines as realism in that it

promises a deeper understanding of the real, are secondary to the narrator's larger goal of communicating his pain to the reader.

Just as authors in Krzhizhanovsky's fiction take advantage of the uncertainty caused by fragmentation to enhance their realistic stories with imagination, they also embrace individual imagination over attempts at large-scale meaning by seeking small, creative audiences for their works. This often occurs through oral storytelling, as refusing to commit words to print maintains their freedom from certain literary conventions and from the limited perspective of those entrenched in the establishment. In both "The Collector of Cracks" and "The Thirteenth Category of Reason," a storyteller evaluates his listener before sharing his tale. In the former, the narrator reads a story that resonates with Lövenix and inspires his confidence; in the latter, the friendly gesture of a shared cigarette prompts an old man to begin his story and the narrator's reassurance of belief encourages him to continue. Tailoring one's audience to the story is a small step towards more effective communication in a fractured world. As the narrator of "The Bookmark" concludes, "One can write only about the crossed-out and only for the crossed-out" (*MF* 42); the ideal audience is composed of those who can see themselves in the story and connect life with art not on the grounds of realism but of the fragmentation common in both.

In "Postmark: Moscow," the narrator limits his audience to one, writing letters to a friend in the provinces; in addition to reducing his audience, he also fractures the form of his writings. Rather than following a particular plot, the work develops a loose theme: the meaning of Moscow. Divided into thirteen letters, all lacking a cohesive narrative, the work reflects the lack of cohesion in Moscow itself on the physical level, as a jumble of streets, images, and bodies, and on the metaphysical level, as the jumbled product of fractured reality that may have no meaning at all. Even on the semantic level, the narrator is "caught up inside a chaotic whirl of

words. An alphabet gone mad swirled about me on playbill pillars, posters, and plates of painted tin" (*AC* 174). This overabundance of life cannot be forced into a linear narrative; instead, the form of the work faithfully reflects the chaos of the subject.

The Letter Killers Club reflects Krzhizhanovsky's own stylistic fracturing of narration as well as his fictional authors' response to fractured reality: club members reject the written word, embrace brevity as a tool for greater understanding, and value the flexibility of imagination over rigid adherence to a realistic description of the world. The club is composed of former authors hand-picked for their receptivity to the idea of oral storytelling; the club's founder explains that, "My garden of conceptions is not for everyone. We are few and shall be fewer still" (*LKC* 11), valuing quality over quantity in an audience. The structure of the club prevents the rigid conventions of formal literature from intruding on a theme and permanently encasing it in printed letters. As its president proclaims, "Writers, in essence, are professional word tamers… professional killer[s] of conceptions" (*LKC* 9), but they must at least put conceptions into words to allow for the productive exchange of ideas. When the president first explains his beliefs to the narrator, "A triangular fingernail slid with a quick glissando over the swollen spines gazing down at us from the bookshelf" (*LKC* 5). In addition to the fingernail's synecdochal fracturing, the "swollen spines" emphasize the material nature of literature, a grotesquely bloated contrast to the unencumbered ideas the club members champion.

After Rar smuggles a written version of his play into the meeting, "This manuscript is committed to death: without spilling ink" (*LKC* 30), showing the deadly seriousness of the club's mission. Rejecting publication and its false assumptions of linearity and completeness, the members can reflect fractured reality more accurately. After Rar loses his manuscript, he abandons all formal markers of a play and simply narrates the action. Even then, his theme breaks down

further: “Forgive me, I got mixed up… allow me to skip ahead,” Rar apologizes (32), forced to focus on essentials instead of developing the theme with the help of his notes. The ending, too, is abrupt, as, after uncertainty and an ellipsis, Rar says, “I think I’ll leave off there. Without any unnecessary flourishes” (*LKC* 33). Indeed, rejecting “unnecessary flourishes” to come closer to the central meaning of a theme is at the heart of the letter killers’ mission, as simplification allows one to come closer to effective communication.

Freeing a theme from formal trappings also opens it to the possibility of imaginative reworking, showing the value of artistic creativity in the face of the rigid logic imposed on reality. When Tyd, another club member, finishes his story, a listener quickly remarks that it was “the masonry of your conception in some dozen bricks. We’re used to doing without cement. Therefore, since we still have time, perhaps you would agree to reassemble the elements of your novella in a different order?” (*LKC* 41). A second listener demands that Tyd “end everything not in life, but in death” (*LKC* 41), and a third requests a different title. This challenge demonstrates that authorial choices such as chronology, tone, and title are secondary to the pure idea. Tyd responds like a star athlete: “his entire shape – short and wiry, agile and precise – recalled the brevity, dynamism, and clarity of the novellas among which he evidently lived” (*LKC* 41). These novellas, as short and as flexible as possible, are the ideal art in a fractured world; they come as close as possible to pure imagination without losing their communicability.

The stories shared in the letter killers’ club are short but not simplistic; members reject the rigid conventions of contemporary literature as a whole, but make thoughtful use of particular devices that contribute to the meaning of their tales. The improvisational nature of oral storytelling makes more literary formulations particularly noticeable, as with Rar’s synecdochal statement that “The three mouths were all shouting at once about the mouth’s main purpose”

(*LKC* 86). While the tidy construction of such a phrase may seem to contrast with the club's goal of spontaneous imaginative creation, Rar's use of synecdoche emphasizes his central thematic investigation of the purpose of the mouth and therefore has a greater function than merely making his work sound more literary.

Similarly, Krzhizhanovsky avoids flowery language for its own sake, but uses literary devices deliberately to represent fractured reality in his works. Distortion, synecdoche, and personification may seem to distance a story from reality but, in fact, Krzhizhanovsky uses the tools of art to serve the cause of life. Superficial deviations from reality as it is perceived better reveal its underlying fragmentation. However, in another uniquely Krzhizhanovskian challenge to the mimetic function of art, these literary devices are not merely stylistic means to an aesthetic end. Instead, they take on a thematic function by drawing attention to themselves: words, letters, and thoughts come alive, calling into question the nature of life and of ideas and asserting the power of art in the face of fractured reality. Krzhizhanovsky uses art to convey his own brand of realism, but also to provide a creative alternative to the real world.

Writing Against Reality

Vivifying the trappings of literature is almost the natural conclusion to Krzhizhanovsky's persistent questioning of reality, the importance he gives to the smallest units of meaning, and the primacy of the intellect and imagination in his works. His inquiry into minute details of the world extends to the realm of art, bringing words new life by means of his puns, neologisms, and playful touch with metaphors and idioms.[35] Words then go beyond the author's creativity to claim their own autonomy. Liederman notes this as well, explaining, "Letters and books in

[35] See Rosenflanz, *Hunter of Themes* 34-54 for a thorough exploration of wordplay in Krzhizhanovsky's fiction. The discussion here will be restricted to personification of the word as such.

Krzhizhanovsky's stories are also characters, equal to people. And what imparts vital energy to them first of all are the meanings, the senses, that they can convey or preserve" (514). Initially acting only as signifiers of an object, words become material objects in their own right through the attention Krzhizhanovsky gives them. In contrast to humans living on the fringe of existence, unsure of their selfhood and unable to understand the world around them, the world of art is fully alive, populated by active words and letters and directed by ideas that also claim their independence from a controlling individual mind. Krzhizhanovsky's awareness of the challenges of realistically depicting a fractured world leads him to frequently deviate from realism in favor of impossible fantasies. Art and imagination provide the writer with a respite from engagement with fragmentations because they are untroubled by fracture, having never pretended to wholeness.

Taking on material existence in reality is the first step for words in Krzhizhanovsky's stories to gain autonomy and taking action in the world. In "Someone Else's Theme," the narrator "gathered up a fistful of words so as to shy them across the silence" (*MF* 77). The silence building between the narrator and the man he is asking for help is almost a physical barrier and so the words that break that silence take on their own physicality as well. The action in "Red Snow" takes place in a night-time dream version of Moscow and so, freed from the demands of logic, the author can literalize language even more easily. One character "seemed with every word to trample himself still farther into the ground" (*MF* 110), while Shushashin, the protagonist, "nearly knocked into these words emanating from the fog" (*MF* 110). Words are embodied to such a degree that they can buffet about the insubstantial and insecure Shushashin. Indeed, they are even superior to the man; trying to catch up with a man telling a story, Shushashin "wanted to come level with the end of the phrase, but his feet were suddenly stuck to

the ground" (*MF* 115). Man must search for his own meaning while words carry their meaning with them; man cannot escape his individual consciousness while words are infinitely transmissible.

The physicality of individual words extends to both formal and conceptual parts of a work of literature such as titles and themes, respectively. When, in "Someone Else's Theme," a former critic mentions a book that Saul Straight wrote and then tries to leave, the narrator restrains the critic. "I, not wanting to let the title go, grabbed the old man by the sleeve" (*MF* 64). Restraining the man allows the narrator to hold the title as well. While this phrasing seems fairly innocuous, placing it in conjunction with more explicit moments in which the abstract materializes shows that the human is less meaningful than the title. The subordination of man to idea is especially evident in "The Bookmark," when "The theme catcher gripped his listener's shoulder and elbow with the fingers of both hands, as though he were a theme in need of molding. The theme tried to jerk his arm away" (*MF* 28). The "as though" of the first sentence disappears as the theme's identity erodes that of the listener. Similarly, in *The Letter Killers Club*, a storyteller preparing to speak struggles to control his words. "He began carefully extracting them one after another, inspecting them and weighing them. The words came slowly at first, then faster and faster, all jockeying for position" (*LKC* 35). Not only do the words have a weight, they also have a degree of agency, expressed by their eagerness to take a position in the forthcoming story.

The autonomy of art unsettles notions about the nature of life. In "Postmark: Moscow," as the narrator searches for meaning in the city, all objects take on particular significance, especially those associated with creativity. Gogol's house "tells me more than Shenrok about the soul of one of its former tenants," the interior of Aleksei Khomyakov's home "will explain

everything more clearly and definitively" than a newspaper, and a tram with Vladimir Solovyov's name written on it is "far better than some books" (*AC* 172) as a source of understanding. The narrator's response to these three places, mentioned in just one page, indicates his belief in the power of objects to communicate meaning. While the narrator co-opts the meaning of these objects to serve his larger purpose, he acknowledges that they have inherent value apart from their usefulness to him. Going through his pencil box, he evaluates its contents. "There: a thick, ribbed, two-color pencil, it has the same rights as a pen… a round indelible pencil slippery with shellac, it has the same rights as a pen…" (*AC* 186).[36] Disregarding typical notions that only humans, or at least only animals, have rights, the narrator extends this consideration to pencils. When he closes his box, rather than putting the pencils away, he says that he is "putting my literature back, under its lid" (*AC* 186). Pencils are metonymic signifiers for all of literature and so have a share in the respect that literature deserves and the autonomy that it takes on in Krzhizhanovsky's world.

Krzhizhanovsky imbues abstract themes with life in addition to the physical trappings of literature. Inspired by the folk tradition that blames fever sisters for causing colds in the winter, Saul Straight tells the narrator of "Someone Else's Theme" about a novella he wrote based on the sisters. "I had, so to speak, to convince the widow virgins and their intractable father to quit that apocryphal story for a work of fiction" (*MF* 55). Rather than looking for an author of the folk story, Straight considers the work itself autonomous and asks the theme for its consent to take the story in a different direction. The characters are solely fictional, rather than fictional reworkings of living people, and yet they act as if alive, showing that the art itself has come to life.

[36] The word for "rights" in Russian is not similar to the word "writes" and so Krzhizhanovsky's use of this expression cannot be dismissed as mere wordplay.

Although one could argue that Straight addresses the fever sisters and their father as human characters rather than as an abstract theme, “Thirty Pieces of Silver” is free of this ambiguity; the theme takes action and expresses its will. The work begins with four verses about priests who use a suicide’s money to build a graveyard. In the next section, the author debates how to adapt those verses to prose, and his story comprises the remainder of the work. The four simple verses reflect the unlimited potential of individual imagination, because “With these four verses I could fill a dozen tomes and turn them into ten adventure novels” (*AC* 162). However, the author is not the only agent determining which direction his story will take. As he ponders over the lines, “Here the theme asked me a question” about the priests’ motives and, in response, “the fourth verse explains” (*AC* 163) by referencing specific details. The theme engages with the author in a synergistic search for truth, for a story that will be faithful to the theme’s independent identity. When the narrator puts the lines to the test of logic, “The theme began to frown: strangers there were many, land there was little; the bodies multiplied, not so the burial ground” (*AC* 163). Not only does the theme direct the author’s interpretation of the verses, it also suggests the best stylistic approach. The theme has such vitality that, for the narrator, “With each new paragraph, I find it harder to keep pace” (*AC* 168); initially on the same level as the author, the theme now surpasses him.

While the fever sisters in “Someone Else’s Theme” and the verses in “Thirty Pieces of Silver” work in tandem with their author to craft the perfect story, other fictional beings in Krzhizhanovsky’s oeuvre are not so cooperative and resist the control of an individual author. Instead, art becomes autonomous, claiming its own inherent meaning to such an extent that the reader, too, must wonder whether it might be more valuable to turn away from fractured reality in the quest for meaning and embrace art instead. In Krzhizhanovsky’s world of art, ideas are

autonomous as well, going beyond the limitations of the individual mind to exist in a sphere of creativity that is superior to everyday life.

As has been noted in the review of critical responses, Krzhizhanovsky's work includes multiple realms that are often closely associated with the medium of literature. While the concept of the chronotope, "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (Bakhtin 84), may be a useful tool to analyze other writers, Kalmykova views Krzhizhanovsky's representation of time and space as the base of his artist world upon which he constructs a world investigating "the meaning of words (things) in the dismembering of existence" ("Krzhizhanovsky's Archaics"). Kalmykova argues convincingly that Krzhizhanovsky's focus is less on the connectedness of space and time and more on the interplay of meaning and meaninglessness and thereby on fiction and reality, wholeness and fracture. In contrast to Kalmykova's conception of Krzhizhanovsky's artistic plane as a world of words; Leiderman believes that it is a world of ideas, which he terms the "pneumatosphere."[37] The pneumatosphere combines the thoughts and emotions of characters and narrators "into one unified, aesthetically signifying whole" (Leiderman 515). While I concur that in Krzhizhanovsky's art "a system of thought is materialized, turned into matter" so that the intellectual world can be "lived through aesthetically on a real plane" (Leiderman 515), I would argue that Leiderman overvalues the rational mind and does not account for the role of the creative imagination. Krzhizhanovsky's fiction, whether by means of its focus on the realms of language, thoughts, or both, transcends the real.

[37] Leiderman adapts this term from Pavel Florensky, a theologian and philosopher, who defined the pneumatosphere as a "special sphere of substance, drawn into the cycle of culture or, more precisely, into the cycle of spirit" (qtd. in Leiderman, 515).

Ideas are not the product of an individual mind in Krzhizhanovsky's world, as art gives ideas the freedom to exist outside the control of their originator. On the practical level, ideas can be shared between people through art, expanded upon by their every contact with a creative mind. On a more abstract level, ideas in Krzhizhanovsky's oeuvre are literally alive and possesses feelings, thoughts, and a sense of their own concrete identity, as if they existed in a state of potentiality before being actualized within a conceiving mind. While the belief in an unbounded world of imagination may seem impossibly utopian for someone who conceives of reality as fractured and of mankind as a lonely collection of "ontological solitudes" (*MF* 62), the theme of free ideas is more a product of the comparative isolation of the individual than of the uplifting power of art. Man's reliance on reason to approach the world is restrictive; imagination is not. Man is grounded in the fractured world of reality; ideas are not. The individual mind must contend with subjectivity, ignorance, and conventionality; ideas are unencumbered.

The autonomy of ideas reflects negatively on the limitations of life in the real world, thus privileging the world of art. Even the brilliant protagonist of "Memories of the Future" finds himself outpaced by his thoughts, "trying to catch up with his own head or, rather, one of its thoughts, skimming along like a dusky shadow over the snow" (*MF* 154). The thought is removed from the controlling mind, which is in turn removed from the physical body. Although the thought possesses a degree of materiality, the "dusky shadow" exists in a world of its own, one which man must struggle to access.

Thoughts have their own lives and agency, as is clear from the very title of "Biography of a Thought." The titular thought is conceived by a philosopher, imprisoned in a book, pulled out into the brain of a reader, and spread thin across generations of students, and yet she maintains her own consciousness amidst her interactions with the minds of others. Initially, she lived

comfortably within Kant's capacious intellect, but lesser minds cannot fully grasp her. When a thinker reads the words in which the thought is encased, "Suddenly sunlight hit the letters; a pair of narrowed eyes gliding across the pages – left to right and top to bottom – were drawing the Thought into captivity unawares." Living in an individual brain is claustrophobic compared to the world of pure conception that Krzhizhanovsky postulates in his stories.

One limiting element of the rational mind is its insistence on putting ideas into words. Biriukov explains that, in "Biography of a Thought," "The thought, of course, is not so very small… The smallest of the small is in fact this phrase ('The starry heavens above me and the moral law within me')" ("Krzhizhanovsky's Smallest of the Small").[38] Such phrases are easily communicable, a necessity in a fractured world, but they quickly lose their meaning. In Krzhizhanovsky's fiction, the autonomous idea is aware of the limitations of authorship and takes action to protect itself. The narrator of "Postmark: Moscow" complains, "I had only to rouse my words, and now they are tormenting me. A month or so ago I noticed that my theme was feeling cramped in envelopes: It kept proliferating under my pen" (*AC* 201). Feeling confined by words, the living theme forces the author to continue writing so that his words will come closer to representing the theme's full potential.

Considering the relatively narrow scope of individual consciousness and the challenge of finding the correct words, ideas in Krzhizhanovsky's world take advantage of their autonomy to go beyond the individual, suggesting the presence of a separate world of art beyond consciousness rooted in reality. As the title implies, "Someone Else's Theme" is a story about storytelling and about themes that transfer from object to author, from author to manuscript, and from manuscript to other creative minds. When Saul Straight gives up writing, he bestows his

[38] The phrase is from Kant's *Practical Reason,* 5:161.33-6. See page 37 of this thesis for the full quote and its context in Krzhizhanovsky's work.

unfinished work on the narrator, who then addresses the reader directly. “All that mousing about with pens no longer concerns *me*. And the only thing I ask of you, the writer of my choice, is that along with the manuscript you accept the theme. You say it’s someone else’s? Well all right then! …I need only wish the *theme* a good journey” (*MF* 83). Untroubled by the unknown and reluctant future author, the theme is self-contained. Similarly, in “The Collector of Cracks,” Lövenix recognizes that he and the narrator are “connected, at least by a common theme” (*AC* 103) and so he tasks the latter with continuing his work. The narrator responds, “My fairy tale is finished. I surrender. But Lövenix’s figures want more: They want all concoctions, mine and not mine, written and unwritten” (*AC* 106). Although the independence of thoughts and themes demonstrates Krzhizhanovsky’s skepticism about the role of the author versus the universal power of imagination, it also illuminates an area of positivity in a world of isolation, as art can make connections between individuals, providing an area of common ground even for those trapped by their own subjectivity. The autonomous theme can bridge the gap between the mind in which it is conceived, the listener who then transfers it into words, and the reader who applies his own creativity to those words, expanding them in different directions.

By recognizing ideas as more free than individual minds, one can then see the potential of creativity as a whole to shape reality. Even Lövenix’s belief in people-monads trapped within their own minds allows for hope, as art can tap in to the unconscious. “People’s consciousnesses are coarse. But the unconscious… is always wise. The hand of the painter (who acts unthinkingly, unconsciously, when painting a signboard clockface) is wiser than the painter himself” (103). Lövenix refers to his mystical belief that all clocks stop at the same time to indicate a fracture in the temporal fabric of existence, but his point reflects more generally on art

in Krzhizhanovsky's world. Humans are limited by their reliance on reason but art can appeal to the pre-rational unconscious and express truths that the mind cannot explain.

Krzhizhanovsky's works establish fictional layers between the supposedly real world of his narrators and the artistic fantasies they create, thereby allowing characters from a story within the story to intrude on the narrator's world and dominate it. In "Philosopheme on Theater," Krzhizhanovsky writes: "Wanting to protect itself from reminders of its imaginariness, to localize its own unreality, everyday life constructs among its houses a special house labeled 'theater,' naively thinking that through its windowless walls, theater will not seep out any farther than 'theater.'" However, theater refuses to be contained and does indeed remind everyday life of the fraught nature of its reality. In *The Letter Killers Club*, Richard Burbage, in his role as Hamlet, intrudes on a rehearsal in the real world. Despite his fantastical nature, Burbage's performance exceeds that of the original actor because he has so perfectly merged life and art and, as Burbage brags, "How can you take a role away from an actor who's been taken away?" (*LKC* 27). The real Burbage died three hundred years before, yet he lives on as Hamlet. As a representative of art, Burbage's only violence against life is to oust the real man from his role as Hamlet, but the violence intensifies in "The Bookmark" when a character from a novel enters the real world to kill his author. The theme-catcher describes a story in which "a writer, at work on a novel, discovers a character missing. The character has slipped out from under his pen" (*MF* 29). In a duel for control of the character's life, the author dies and the character "can't do anything: without the author he is nothing, nil. *Punctum* [Period]" (*MF* 30). Although the character's final paralysis partially negates his victory, his ability to kill the author shows the vital potential that art has even in the real world.

In “Pen and Ink,” Pushkin’s poetry both defeats critics who enter the world of art and infiltrates the real world. Dolev, a stuffy director of Pushkin studies, falls asleep while looking at illustrations for “The Bronze Horseman.” As he dreams, the horse comes to life; it “made a slight jump and moved forward with wide trots. The flat expanse of the paper was unfolding as its scroll raced ahead of the horse.” The poem does more than come to life – the process of creation continues as Pushkin enters the scene and adds to his work. Brandishing his pen, Pushkin “wrote his thoughts right into the air with the sharp tip of the whip. And from this, just like a black flying cobweb, lines arose on the white space of the paper, lines grew up into stanzas and floated between grass and sky, a bit shaken by the weak breath of the wind.”

In contrast to Pushkin’s infinite creativity, academics limit themselves to searching for the poem’s final meaning. Two of Dolev’s employees fall into the page and attempt to capture the cobwebby verses, but they fail utterly. Dolev’s dream, the inky illustrations, and Pushkin’s poetry merge into a supreme representation of the world of art, something that intellectuals cannot access unless they couple their reason with imagination. Even after Dolev awakes, art maintains its hold on him: “Instead of articles on Pushkin’s illustrations, a fantastic story came about.” Artistic creation goes beyond the individual consciousness, moving from Pushkin to Dolev, and beyond the realm of imaginary, moving from dream to publication in the real world.

As ideas have power that extends beyond the individual, the author in Krzhizhanovsky’s world must recognize his relatively limited role as only one step in the ever-evolving process of creativity. The narrator of “Postmark: Moscow” acknowledges, “Words, once they’ve broken away from your pen, might as well go, like orphan urchins, where they will- they have *their own fate*” (*MF* 202); the author does not have the final say even over the products of his own imagination. Although Krzhizhanovsky’s stories are largely pessimistic, based around desperate,

starving, unpublishable authors uncertain of their own existence in a fractured world, their metapoetic layer offers a degree of hope: if the world of art is continually unfolding, such grim topics may not always be its primary focus. While the lack of final meaning may be disorienting for literary critics, it allows Krzhizhanovskian artists to pass their themes from one person to another, slowly knitting together fragmented personalities. Ballard explains that, in Krzhizhanovsky's world, "Only by embracing factionalism and creativity will art continue to be generated" (562), as the former breaks down conventions that no longer serve the cause of true art, while the latter is a productive and unifying force.

Krzhizhanovsky's openness towards the process of art corresponds to the value he places on seeking knowledge despite the impossibility of ultimate truth in a fractured world. In "Memories of the Future," Shterer's biographer misquotes Nikolai Nekrasov's "Knight for an Hour" (1862) as an epigraph for the time traveler: "Take me to the land of those who understand" (*MF* 214). When reminded that the phrase is "those who perish," the biographer simply responds, "It's the same thing" (*MF* 214). Despite this recognition that final understanding is possible only in death, the creative process lets Krzhizhanovskian characters move forward in life. "The text is seen not as fixed and given, but as a never definitive process" (565), as Ballard notes. This awareness is not only implicit in his fiction, but a central point of "Philosopheme on Theater," in which Krzhizhanovsky states: "The creative process has a beginning but does not have an end, and if it is usually stopped from without due to a purely practical need (for example, one cannot correct something already printed), then it continues from within." Publishing, by forcing ideas to materialize into letters and thereby enter the fractured world, imposes an artificial limit on creativity, while pure imagination cannot conceive of limits.

Against Writing

Krzhizhanovsky is an author writing about the impossibility of authorship. Despite his recurring theme of art's generative abilities, Krzhizhanovsky's sense of fractured reality leads to a worldview that cannot allow such positivity to go unchecked. Krzhizhanovsky's optimistic vision of the autonomous letters and themes that populate the world of art is clouded by the awareness that words are always insufficient. One must accept either the isolation of a purely cerebral existence or the limitations of communicating with others.

The very fact that Krzhizhanovsky's stories exist to be read is proof of his willingness to compromise the scope of his ideas for the sake of their transmissibility. In his essay "Idea and Word," Krzhizhanovsky explains this imperfect compromise. He argues that the central deficiency of language is that comes to the individual from without, while thoughts arise from within. "I feel as if my idea is my own, within me and grown by me, but I perceive words of my native language as something given to me, alien and poorly-fitted to my individual structure" ("Idea and Word"). Ideas grow organically, while words are prefabricated by others, and so it is possible to think things that simply cannot be expressed in words. "For the poet, human language is too abstract; for the metaphysician it is too sensual. It is clear that in the initial design of language both the brain of the metaphysician and the heart of the poet were forgotten and ignored" ("Idea and Word"). Krzhizhanovsky, combining brain and heart, philosophy and art, is doubly crippled by the insufficiency of language that is another form of fractured reality, in that there is an unbridgeable gap between the perfect form of the idea and the crudely material words that represent it. Typically, Krzhizhanovsky embraces brevity to minimize confusion, explaining, "The shortest line drawn from image to image – this is what verbal art is… One can hold a shorter line straight: for from A - - - - - - - B the sum of the points is less than from

A_____B…. intermittent hints (special ‘dotting words’) can substitute for the operating brush or word” (“Idea and Word”). Language is never perfect, but some styles are better than others; the Krzhizhanovskian task of striving for something while recognizing the impossibility of fully achieving it extends to the process of writing effectively.

Rather than bestowing this understanding on his author-characters, Krzhizhanovsky makes their gradual resignation to the disjunction between unbounded fantasies and physical literature a central theme. In transferring ideas to words, characters fear that their meaning will be lost entirely. Despite his infinite creativity, the theme-catcher in “The Bookmark” cannot get published because he cannot bring himself to put his best stories into writing. Speaking of a favorite theme, he admits, “I’ve often wanted to write it down, but I’m afraid I’ll spoil it” (*MF* 43). Oral storytelling allows the theme-catcher to improvise freely on a topic, while writing will only restrict him. In “Someone Else’s Theme,” the narrator tells Saul Straight’s story for him, thus distancing the originator of the ideas from the painful process of their transformation. Even so, the narrator agonizes over his task, explaining, “In squeezing my thoughts into these few phrases I have, of course, simplified them. As the number of lines in this crude sketch increased, as it covered itself with more and more strokes, it became fairly complicated – for me, at least – tangling me up most unfortunately in its angles and lines” (*MF* 74). As the thoughts become more simplistic, the writing becomes more complicated, moving ever further from the original meaning. The narrator considers how to disentangle himself from the morass of literature and from the disorientation that comes when “‘your I’ is missing, when you’re just the binding from which the book has been ripped out” (*MF* 74). The impossible task of representing reality paradoxically distances the author from reality, as his attempt to find the perfect words distracts

him from the real object that the words represent. Loss of meaning, both authorial and textual, is a necessary risk of turning imagination into literature.

Aware of the limitations of language, Krzhizhanovsky's characters are equally aware of the limitlessness of creativity, continually expanding the distance between what is said and what is thought. In "Memories of the Future," the narrator states: "A genius doesn't need to be taught imagination; suffering from his own excesses, he looks to people for only one thing – limits" (*MF* 136).[39] Although the genius in question is an aspiring time traveler rather than an author, the problem of transitioning from the realm of imagination to the real world applies in either case.

Titles without stories are the closest that literature can come to pure conception, although they distance it from effective communication. In "The Bookmark," the theme-catcher titles his stories even though they are simply oral improvisations intended for one-time consumption. "If the title is right, the whole text will hang on it, like a coat on a peg. The title, for me, is the first word (or words) of a story: it must pull all the other words after it, right down to the last" (*MF* 27). Just as the theme-catcher can look at an object and imagine its entire history, titles also serve as props for creativity. Krzhizhanovsky shares his character's fascination with titles, as evidenced by his 1925 essay, "The Poetics of Titles." According to Ballard, "As Krzhizhanovsky emphasizes throughout the essay, the title as a genre is not merely a handful of words functioning like a name for the principal text, but also a laconic reduction of that text. A book that exists solely in its title has inexhaustible potentiality" (567). The emphasis on the small, on discrete themes and evocative titles, is not merely the author's attempt to transmit his ideas in a

[39] Krzhizhanovsky's sense that people limit imagination corresponds to Kant's argument that noumena provide limits to pure conception; however, Krzhizhanovsky views this limitation as a negative imposition, while Kant sees it as productive refocusing of the mind.

fractured world. It also represents the text's freedom from the author and its power to inspire different ideas in the receptive minds of its audience, prompted only by a few words.

For Krzhizhanovsky, complete creativity is by necessity wordless; even within the mind, attempting to apply reason to imagination is to approach fantasy through a fractured perspective. Trying to make sense of a fantasy vision breaks the image of the whole by forcing it into fragments of thought, as Krzhizhanovsky explains in "Philosopheme on Theater": "The *by* [fantasy] world would not be known, pure freedom, falling into thinking, is controlled by its laws, it conforms to the principles of thought, that is, it ceases to be free." An unbounded world of fantasy may be the Krzhizhanovskian ideal, but its ephemeral nature drives creative individuals to choose enduring, if partial, written fantasies over the fullness of imagination.

The decision to choose authorship despite its challenges is made easier when characters realize the isolation of creativity that avoids words. Pure creativity demands isolation, shutting out the distractions of fractured reality. In "Philosopheme on Theater," Krzhizhanovsky makes the paradoxical argument that, "In order to see things, philosophy turns not its eye, but its back on them." Although the philosopher – or the artist – may see things better from a distance, doing so prevents actual interaction. Instead, they construct a separate world based on individual perception and imagination. Rosenflanz asserts that the belief that "each person is able to create his own alternative reality within the precincts of the mind through imagination… forms the core of Krzhizhanovsky's depiction of literary endeavors" (*Hunter of Themes* 77). In *The Letter Killers Club,* members attempt to share their fictional worlds with others while still avoiding recourse to the material world of books and letters. As their leader states, "To pluck out the depths of a soul, one must also close all its windows, all its outlets to the world" (*LKC* 15).

Seeking some greater artistic truth, the club members attempt to abstract literature as far as possible from reality.

Merely living life imaginatively is creating art, but it is art that cannot be shared. In order to create lasting art and to communicate to others, one must be able to turn the idea into the word and the words into ink on a page. The club attempts communication on a small scale, but ultimately falls apart, as members bicker over the correct direction for stories, one drops out and commits suicide, and the newest member steals the others' themes and writes them down. Although this is a betrayal of the group's goals, it finally allows their ideas to act in the real world instead of living in isolation. As Rar, the rebel of the group, argues, "A conception without a line of text…is like a needle without thread: it pricks, but does not sew. I accused the others and myself of fearing matter. That's just what I called it: matterphobia… I said that I doubted our conceptions were conceptions since they hadn't been tested by the sun" (*LKC* 81). Writing materializes ideas, allowing them to be stitched in a constitutive process that partially defies fractured reality.

Krzhizhanovsky's characters face "a choice between the work of the isolated clarifying brain and the products of the motley embodied world" (Emerson, "Introduction" ix), despite the fact that neither choice is fully satisfying. "It is always thus," writes Krzhizhanovsky in "A Conversation of Two Conversations," "in order to speak with oneself, one must turn one's back on the object of the conversation, that is, on the world; but whenever you're not speaking with yourself, you willy-nilly turn away from yourself. One must choose." Between creative imagination that cannot exist outside of the individual and imperfect communication in a fractured world, the latter option is the best course of action in Krzhizhanovsky's world. As the narrator of *The Letter Killers Club* concludes, "Words are spiteful and tenacious – anyone who

tries to kill them will sooner be killed by them" (*LKC* 111). Art has its own autonomy in Krzhizhanovsky's fiction and demands a place in the outside world, although the best that literature can offer in fractured reality is disjointed themes with broken images and philosophical musing that never approaches certainty.

Conclusion

Krzhizhanovsky respects the individual identity even of fictional beings and so allows his characters to wrestle with the problem of authorship that he, as a writer, has already realized has only one solution: ideas need to be put into words to actualize their generative power. Emerson convincingly claims that "Krzhizhanovsky's hero everywhere is the *idea* or concept (*mysl', zamysel*) trapped in the brain. His recurring plot: how to release an inner thought into the outer space of the world at the right time with enough nourishment so it will survive, make contact, explore – without being freighted down or fused with anything else" ("Introduction" vii). Ballard notes that this same concern is at work in *The Letter Killers Club*, as Rar "understands the vulnerability of the club's creativity: ideas only grow and blossom in transmission" (566). Hope in the power of ideas to shape reality makes the present state of life in Krzhizhanovsky's gloomy worlds more bearable. "Autobiography of a Corpse" is a depressing tale about human isolation culminating in suicide, and yet the lonely protagonist does find an audience, as his written work allows for a degree of connection with the world even from beyond the grave. In life, the protagonist made a "fatal miscalculation" when he "considered everything that took place under… [his] frontal bone to be absolutely unique" (*AC* 12). His absorption in his own mind takes him further from the world, as if he is vacuum-sealed in a glass prison of subjectivity. The desperately lonely man, identifying with this comparison, asks, "How do you put the air back

in?" and is met with the laughing reply: "'Very simple: Break the glass'" (*AC* 20). Suicide allows him to break out of his own consciousness and live only through his works.

According to Krzhizhanovsky's view of the world, comprise and acceptance of partial truth is preferable to comforting lies of wholeness and happiness. Krzhizhanovsky and his characters both recognize the limitations of language and assert the value of writing despite those limitations. In "The Bookmark," the theme-catcher admits in that there is no hope, although it is unclear what exactly is hopeless, thus making his statement broader and more definitive. However, the theme-catcher pauses after delivering this final pronouncement to the narrator, "smiling brightly and serenely, and repeating, no longer to me, but to the starburst of streets before him: 'And even so'" (*MF* 50). Krzhizhanovsky's worldview of reality as fractured leads to the logical conclusion of hopelessness – but fortunately the illogical nature of fragmentation and of art allows hope to persist regardless.

Conclusion

Authors struggle to understand the world, to put their ideas into words, to find a place for an original work in the moribund literary establishment, and to communicate effectively with a sympathetic audience. Despite his keen awareness of these challenges, Krzhizhanovsky views authorship not only as a worthy endeavor, but also as an obligation. In a world "cloven by cracks" (*AC* 101) in which "no one can tell who's alive, who's dead, and who should bury whom" (*AC* 192), artistic creation makes a positive contribution to the sum of reality and proves that the author is indeed alive and engaging with the world. In "Someone Else's Theme," Saul Straight believes that people are "the sun's debtors" (*MF* 62) because they live in reality, taking in sights, sounds, and smells without giving anything back:

> To try to do what one can, to give at least copper for gold, at least something for everything – that is the indisputable duty of anyone who doesn't wish to be a thief of his own existence. Talent is just that, a basic *honesty* on the part of 'I' toward 'not I,' a partial payment of the bill presented by the sun… That's why talent… is not a privilege and not a gift from on high, but the direct responsibility of anyone warmed and lighted by the sun. (*MF* 63)

Having seriously considered the question of whether or not one should write at all, Krzhizhanovsky and his author-characters give the same attention to determining the ideal content and style of their writing. Krzhizhanovsky's early metaphysical questioning shaped his understanding of reality and his stories attempt to convey this understanding as well as to cope with its negative implications.

According to his widow, Krzhizhanovsky blamed "a sober attitude toward reality" for his eventual decline into alcoholism (qtd. in Emerson, "Introduction" xii); I contend that the defining feature of this "sober attitude" was Krzhizhanovsky's sense of the fractured nature of reality.

This thesis examines fragmentation in Krzhizhanovsky's fiction according to his own tripartite structure of *bytie*, *byt*, and *by*, moving from the world of metaphysics to the everyday to the world of art. From his extensive knowledge of philosophy, Krzhizhanovsky adapts key concepts to fit his worldview, distancing them from the system to which they originally belonged. While the Vedantic approach to knowledge, Leibniz's concept of the soul as a monad, and Kant's unknowable noumena all take on new life in Krzhizhanovsky's oeuvre, he rejects metaphysics as a whole for its false claims to certainty. Krzhizhanovsky demonstrates the incongruity of logical structures by representing daily life as chaotic and fractured. Literary devices such as distortion, synecdoche, and personification unsettle typical views of reality, drawing attention to its underlying fragmentation. In addition to their stylistic function, literary devices play a thematic role in Krzhizhanovsky's work, as they represent the world of art in opposition to reality. Krzhizhanovsky uses his fiction in part to explore the process by which an artist comes to terms with his role in the world: while many characters embrace the ideal of abstract, unbounded imagination, his narrators accept the practical necessity of authorship. Krzhizhanovsky's grim view of reality as fractured does not lead to hopelessness but to a pragmatic evaluation of how best to live in the world and to the recognition of art and imagination as a productive reprieve.

Viewing Krzhizhanovsky's concept of fractured reality as a determining feature in his philosophical, stylistic, and thematic choices allows for a broader approach to his work, rather than focusing on particular stories or particular elements of his style, as has been in the case in much existing scholarship. Future studies could expand this approach even more by relating fragmentation to Krzhizhanovsky's nonfiction and plays, other philosophical influences, and the sociopolitical background to his work and by examining different stylistic manifestations of fractured reality. For example, greater attention could be given to Krzhizhanovsky's response to

the Platonic view of knowledge, Cartesian solipsism, or Schopenhauer's pessimism. Although Krzhizhanovsky's work was mostly unpublished, he was active in the Russian literary world of the 1920's and 30's and so could be considered in the context of other Russian modernists. Additionally, Belobrovtseva's work on Krzhizhanovsky's use of sound could be considered in context of alternate realms in Krzhizhanovsky's fiction, while Rosenflanz's study on wordplay provides rich examples of linguistic fragmentation.

While there are many opportunities to expand the study of how Krzhizhanovsky's philosophy shapes his aesthetics, this thesis responds to the basic question of how Krzhizhanovsky approaches art, concluding that his fiction compromises between addressing fractured reality and escaping it. When asked, "What mystical *something* distinguishes a creator of culture from its consumers?" (*MF* 62), Saul Straight responds sadly: "Honesty. Only honesty" (*MF* 62). Although the recognition of reality as fractured leads to painful realizations about the possibility of knowledge and human connection, Krzhizhanovsky's commitment to honesty in art prevents him from avoiding such uncomfortable truths. Rather than reproducing false images of wholeness, Krzhizhanovsky endeavors to faithfully depict the fractured nature of reality. However, Krzhizhanovsky's fiction is not just realism distorted by its author's fragmented vision; its pessimistic representation of reality is balanced by an assertion of the power of art and imagination. Krzhizhanovsky is a disciple of Kant and Shakespeare and, in his art, is true to the legacy of both. His sober sense of artistic responsibility leads him to convey the fragmentation that defines his metaphysical outlook, but he does so without losing sight of the playfulness and potential of art, maintaining a source of hope in a fractured world.

Krzhizhanovsky's general artistic position is oriented towards reality, but his works reflect the perspective of a creative mind viewing the world from a distance, using fiction to

enhance realism with imagination. Ballard explains that, for Krzhizhanovsky, "Literature is created in the distance or separation from a subject that is a feature of its non-existence" (568), in that art does not merely reflect reality but interjects an element of the unreal, the purely artistic, even when describing objects that exist in reality. While this process distances art from the real world, that is not necessarily a negative outcome for Krzhizhanovsky, as the real world is fractured to such an extent that it is itself almost unreal. Having failed to use logic to access the world of noumena, Krzhizhanovsky turns to imagination as a way to draw closer to the world of objects. Similarly, in the creative evolution of his author-characters, their struggle with life in fractured reality leads to embracing art as an alternative. By focusing his fiction on this process of artistic creation, Krzhizhanovsky is able to strike a balance between representing the limitations of life in fractured reality and the unbounded potential of imagination and fantasy.

Despite the conclusion that Krzhizhanovsky's central authorial goal is to represent fractured reality, the temptation to abandon *byt* entirely in favor of pure imagination runs throughout Krzhizhanovsky's stories and serves as a poignant counterpoint to his sense of the duties of authorship. Ironically, Krzhizhanovsky's philosophical, stylistic, and thematic approach to representing fragmented reality is itself fragmented by doubts. Krzhizhanovsky's lifelong struggle with editors, publishers, and unreceptive audiences is a grim confirmation of the truth of his conclusions about the challenges of communication in a fractured world and, perhaps, a motive to dream of escaping the isolation the that comes to those who reject the soothing lies that people tell themselves about the nature of reality. Writing that forgets the obligation to tell unpleasant truths and retreats wholly into pleasant fantasies might finally allow for connection with others and comfort from the metaphysical malaise of fragmentation. Krzhizhanovsky and his author-characters struggle between their intellectual conviction that they must engage with

reality by making a "partial payment of the bill presented by the sun" (*MF* 63) and their desire to hide in the misty haze of dreams. The fact that Krzhizhanovsky chose to write at all proves that he followed the former course of action, but his stories also attest to his wistful regret for the latter course. While this thesis argues that the sense of fractured reality is the defining characteristic of Krzhizhanovsky's work, it is perhaps more accurate to say that his central preoccupation is with the struggle between reality – fragmented though it may be – and art, which offers at least the hope of connection with others. This struggle, ultimately unresolved, is best expressed in the closing lines of "In the Pupil" as the narrator's voice merges with that of the author in a final plea for comfort and connection:

> Reader, you're turning away, you want to shake these lines out of your pupils. No, no. Don't leave me here on this long empty bench: Hold my hand – that's right – tight, tighter still – I've been alone for too long. I want to say to you what I've never said to anyone: Why frighten little children with the dark when one can quiet them with it and lead them into dreams? (*AC* 60)

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