# NARRATIVE RELIABILITY IN SELECTED WORKS BY BULGAKOV, NABOKOV, AND TERTZ

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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This work examines the use of ambiguous or obfuscating narrative devices in 3 works by 20th century Russian authors: *A Dead Man's Memoir*, by Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Eye* by Vladimir Nabokov, and *You and I*, by Abram Tertz. Bulgakov relies on diabolical imagery as well as characters that are by and large caricatures of how any decent person would behave. Nabokov employs several modernist tropes including skillful use of estrangement, as well as a bland tone towards occurrences that ordinary people would find miraculous. Tertz plays on the notion of a double identity by psychically linking two polar extremes until they are nearly unable to tell themselves apart from one another, causing one to crack and kill himself, thus restoring his observer to a more enlightened state. Each work uses the idea of narrative ambiguity and unreliability to demonstrate the incommunicability of one's artistic vision in its purest, platonic form.

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION: WHO CAN WE READERS TRUST?

The early to mid 20th century was not a good time to be an artist in the Soviet Union. This tumultuous period played host to some of the most repressive artistic censorship the country had seen. This was an environment wherein "a shift in the ideological climate or even Stalin's caprice could be enough to reverse the official evaluation of the work overnight."[1] As a result, many writers either wrote from exile (such as Nabokov and Shklovsky), or at the very least would attempt to get their manuscripts out of the country to be published in a less restrictive environment (such as Bulgakov, Tertz, or Zamyatin). Many of these so-called incendiary works, however, are not incendiary at all. Edward Brown provides a summary of Andrey Sinyavsky/Abram Tertz's defense at his own show trial which I believe is applicable to a large portion of the émigré and underground literature of the time:

> "Sinyavsky insisted at his trial that he was not moved by anti-Soviet sentiment or by any desire to damage the Soviet image abroad, but simply by the imperative need of a Russian writer to find readers somewhere for his most characteristic work when that work cannot be published in the Soviet Union."[2]

[1] Vickery, Walter N. *The Cult of Optimism; Political and Ideological Problems of Recent Soviet Literature*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1963. P.21 Print.

[2] Brown, Edward J. *Russian Literature since the Revolution*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1982. P.312 Print.

In this paper, I plan to examine three works by underground, exiled, or heavily censored authors of the Soviet period: Mikhail Bulgakov's *Dead Man's Memoir*, Vladimir Nabokov's *The Eye*, and the short story *You and I* by Abram Tertz. Each of these pieces utilize complicated or simply heavily abstract narrative devices that leave both the characters within them and the readers themselves unsure as to what extent they are able to take the events conveyed to them at face value, be they imparted either by other characters or some kind of omniscient narrator figure. In the surreal worlds of these three works, inhabited by actors and fakes, ghosts, or spies, the reader must perpetually ask themselves if everything they see is to be believed, and if not, how to find a viable way to the truth.

## CHAPTER II

## MIKHAIL BULGAKOV'S PERFORMATIVE REALITY IN *A DEAD MAN'S MEMOIR*

Mikhail Bulgakov's *Театральный роман* (published in English first under the title *Black Snow*, then subsequently under the alternate working title *A Dead Man's Memoir*, the latter of which I will use to refer to the novel from here on out) is an unfinished work about a writer named Maksudov's struggles in the worlds of publishing, then theatre, as he tries to make sense of the schism that seems to lie between those who create and those who perform. As he delves deeper and deeper into this realm, it begins to absorb him and slowly turn against him, to the point that distinguishing the difference between theatre and real life becomes a surprisingly daunting task.

While *A Dead Man's Memoir* is certainly a semi-autobiographical account (with Maksudov as a stand-in for Bulgakov, utilizing his nickname "Maka"[3]), this in no way makes the narrative itself any semblance of realist. William Riggan denotes two important elements pertaining to the unreliability of the use of first person narration:

> [first] the narrator's memory, selective processes, and attitudes in the telling of his story; [second] the auditor's assimilation, comprehension, and retention of what he hears.[4]

[3] Smeljanskij, Anatolij Mironovič., and Arch Tait. *Is Comrade Bulgakov Dead?: Mikhail Bulgakov and the Moscow Art Theatre*. London: Methuen, 1993. P.333. Print.

[4] Riggan, William. *Pícaros, Madmen, Naïfs, and Clowns: The Unreliable First-person Narrator.* Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1981. pp. 20-21. Print.

He goes on to note that this leads to an inherent fallibility on both sides: the narrator can only convey the plot to the reader through a lens of his own personal experiences and biases, and the reader is unable to remove himself from the same in interpreting what is already a potentially heavily skewed text. Readers can never be sure whether the events are being relayed to them as they were, or in such a manner as to cast the narrator in a more favorable light than he may deserve (a prominent example of past use of this technique would be Dostoevsky's highly unsympathetic Underground Man and his persecution-mania). While Maksudov is certainly a more sympathetic protagonist as a struggling artist who simply wants to share his creations with the world, it cannot be claimed that he is immune to these same brands of bias and distortion. Smeliansky notes Bulgakov's use of estrangement (остранение) in Maksudov's descriptions of the Independent Theatre, saying that he "enters the theatre with the open heart of a child, seeing everything for the first time and describing it with primal words."[5] This is not to say that he uses an overly simplistic vocabulary, but it is not the technical theater vocabulary which Maksudov finds so impenetrable on his first visit to the theatre. As members of the company discuss the technicalities of producing his play, Maksudov declares "Между слушателями произошел разговор, и, хотя они говорили по-русски, я ничего не понял, настолько он был загадочен."[6] ("*There was a conversation between my listeners, and even though they were speaking Russian, I did not understand*

[5] Smeljanskij, Anatolij Mironovič., and Arch Tait. *Is Comrade Bulgakov Dead?: Mikhail Bulgakov and the Moscow Art Theatre*. London: Methuen, 1993. P.337. Print.

[6] Bulgakov, Mikhail A. *Teatral'nij Roman: Zapiski Pokojnika*. Moscow: Hudoz□estvennaa□ Literatura, 1966. *Библиотека Максима Мошкова*. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://lib.ru/BULGAKOW/teatral.txt>.

*a thing, it was so puzzling*")[7] Conversations such as the one referenced by Maksudov in the above quote are quite frequent throughout the novel, often bringing up names and terms with which neither Maksudov nor the reader would have any familiarity, all while speaking in ellipsis-laden, fragmented interruptions. On the one hand, Maksudov's estranged method of describing the theatre brings the reader in to his mind providing a clearer picture of how he absorbs his surroundings. At the same time, however, the reader is left just as in the dark as Maksudov is, because the bias inherent in his own descriptions is something that is fundamentally impossible to overcome, given the personal epistolary form of the novel.

Maksudov's reliability is further compromised by the inclusion of several hallucinatory dream sequences, reminiscent of Raskolnikov's fever dreams in *Crime and Punishment* or Bely's ever shifting realities of *Petersburg*. In a chapter entitled "The Catastrophe" ("Катастрофа"), Maksudov, having been at a writer's dinner after receiving word of plans to publish his novel, lies ill on the couch, imagining himself as an outside observer to the stories he had heard at the dinner or picturing figures both known and mysterious. He notes after closing his eyes that he saw a "лицо в очках" (*face in spectacles*) which leans forward and ominously says, "Возьми" (*Take* him). Maksudov is afraid, repeating that he would not be a part of the "new world" to which he bore witness the previous night (this is to say, the world of the elite names in literature[8]). While his hallucinations seem to be somewhat standard fare for fever-induced

[7] Bulgakov, Mikhail. *A Dead Man's Memoir: A Theatrical Novel*. Trans. Andrew Bromfield. London: Penguin, 2007. P.447. Print.

[8] Smeljanskij, Anatolij Mironovič., and Arch Tait. *Is Comrade Bulgakov Dead?: Mikhail Bulgakov and the Moscow Art Theatre*. London: Methuen, 1993. P. 334 Print.

nightmares, it is his emergence from this state that strikes a chord of doubt in the reader. Upon his release from the grip of his sudden illness, he goes to meet with Rudolfi (the character who agreed to publish his novel) only to find the facets of the buildings outside to be different and Rudolfi to have unexpectedly departed for America with no word about his novel's publication or distribution. While this would ordinarily be evocative of a more Kafkaesque bureaucratic surrealism, one cannot help but notice that upon rejecting a figurative new world, Maksudov's actual world suddenly takes on new characteristics. There is no explanation offered, and the attendant who informs Maksudov of Rudolfi's departure simply carries on with business as usual. Yet this juxtaposition of hallucinatory elements and a symbolic new world with Maksudov's own perceptions is what calls into doubt either his ability to properly convey the story, or the objectivity of the reality which he inhabits. It is the uncertainty on the part of the reader and Maksudov (who freely admits that he is unsure of which changes were actually changes or simply mis-recollections) that leaves one unsure as to what in this world can be relied upon as constant or secure.

Maksudov's fugues consist not only of moments of uncanny fear and uncertainty but also moments of sublime transcendence. As he takes it upon himself to write in the wake of his novel's tepid, unnoticed release, he is struck with inspiration in conjunction with the arrival of a blizzard. Yet his creative act does not begin with the actual act of writing, but rather with the sudden appearance of characters "born in dreams":

> Родились эти люди в снах, вышли из снов и прочнейшим образом обосновались в моей келье. Ясно

было, что с ними так не разойтись. Но что же делать с ними?[9]

*These people were born in dreams, they emerged from the dreams and settled in the most solid manner possible in my cell. It was clear that I could not just part with them. But what was I to do with them?*[10]

As he continues to wonder what to do with these entities from his novel who have been imbued with life through his dreams, he begins to see pictures forming as he struggles in his attempts to write. In describing this picture he declares that "картинка эта не плоская, а трехмерная. Как бы коробочка" (*This picture was not flat, but three dimensional, like a little box*[11]); in short, a stage (utilizing the above referenced primitive vocabulary cited by Smeliansky). Maksudov's visions become more and more elaborate as characters autonomously take on personalities, music is added, and the play performs and writes itself before his very eyes. It is important to note that Maksudov makes no mention of his writing until he has very intricately and poetically laid out the scene that he sees in his "little box". He snaps from his reveries after three days, informing the reader that "к концу этой ночи я понял, что сочиняю пьесу"[12] (*At the end of that night, I understood that I was composing a play*). Once again, Bulgakov is able to cause

[9]Bulgakov, Mikhail A. *Teatral'nij Roman: Zapiski Pokojnika*. Moscow: Hudoz□estvennaa□ Literatura, 1966. *Библиотека Максима Мошкова*. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://lib.ru/BULGAKOW/teatral.txt>.

[10] Bulgakov, Mikhail. *A Dead Man's Memoir: A Theatrical Novel*. Trans. Andrew Bromfield. London: Penguin, 2007. P.40. Print.

[11] IBID, p. 40

[12] Bulgakov, Mikhail A. *Teatral'nij Roman: Zapiski Pokojnika*. Moscow: Hudoz□estvennaa□ Literatura, 1966. *Библиотека Максима Мошкова*. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://lib.ru/BULGAKOW/teatral.txt>.

cognitive dissonance in the reader by having Maksudov declare with certitude that the play he is writing in essence, creates itself before his very eyes, with him doing nothing more than writing down what he sees. At the same time, the reader is left to question Maksudov's ability and perception when he admits to working on a project for three nights without even fully understanding what he was hoping to achieve. Bulgakov simultaneously paints Maksudov as a god-like creator and a more contemporary version of an "Иван Дурак" figure, stumbling in to an achievement wherein the significance thereof is impossible for him to fully grasp.

Maksudov's inability to realize what he is producing creates another repeated narrative trope in that settings described are chiefly defined in his eyes by the furniture and other "set-pieces" present, as well as the source and level of all lighting. In short, Maksudov's retelling of events at the theater reads very much like a play's script converted to prose. On his first encounter with the theatre's assets manager, Gavril Stepanovich, Maksudov describes the office in which they meet:

> В глаза мне бросились разные огни. Зеленый с письменного стола, то есть, вернее, не стола, а бюро, то есть не бюро, а какого-то очень сложного сооружения с десятками ящиков, с вертикальными отделениями для писем, с другою лампою на гнущейся серебристой ноге[13]

[13] Bulgakov, Mikhail A. *Teatral'nij Roman: Zapiski Pokojnika*. Moscow: Hudoz□estvennaa□ Literatura, 1966. *Библиотека Максима Мошкова*. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://lib.ru/BULGAKOW/teatral.txt>.

> *My eyes were dazzled by different lights. Green from the writing desk, that is, not a desk., but a bureau, that is, not a bureau, but some kind of very complicated construction with dozens of drawers, a compartment for letters, with another lamp on a flexible silvery leg.*[14]

While this particular description is somewhat disjointed, it is also shortly after his entry to the theater, prior to signing his contract allowing them to stage his play. He fumbles with the descriptions at first, but he always seems to hit on three major points: any writing surfaces or file cabinets, any sources of light and their intensity, and the general coloration of the room (which, more often than not, is some kind of green). It is only after establishing the scene's setting that he begins to relate what transpires in his given locale.

Upon entering the world of the theater, Maksudov comes more and more in contact with a sort of performative reality that seems to permeate the theater. Lighting and accoutrements always seem to mirror Maksudov's mental state in any given meeting. In the above excerpt, the lighting is bright to the point of dazzling, but he cannot help but notice an "адский красный огонь" (*diabolical red light*) from beneath the desk as Gavril Stepanovich tries to rush him through signing a contract peppered with restrictions and limitations, which essentially remove all direct control over the final product from Maksudov. The lights are bright and dazzling just as Gavril Stepanovich attempts to dazzle Maksudov into signing away his play and the majority of his creative control.

[14] Bulgakov, Mikhail. *A Dead Man's Memoir: A Theatrical Novel*. Trans. Andrew Bromfield. London: Penguin, 2007. P.54. Print.

When Maksudov brings up a qualm regarding the agreed upon price, Gavril Stepanovich simply sidesteps the issue, remarking "Эх, деньги, деньги! Сколько зла из-за них в мире! Все мы только и думаем о деньгах, а вот о душе подумал ли кто?"[15] (*Ah, money, money. How much evil there is in the world because of it. We all only think about money, but how many of us have ever given a thought to our soul?*[16]). This immediately flusters Maksudov, and after a somewhat laborious back and forth of high-minded artistic rhetoric, he is ultimately convinced to sign the contract. Between the diabolical light and discussion of the soul in conflation with currency, this sequence is rife with Faustian oeuvres, and from the signing of the nebulous and restrictive contract, the majority of whose text contains repetitions of the phrase "Автор не имеет права…" (*the author does not have the right.*…), Maksudov's sense of glamour and bedazzlement disappears. From that moment onward, scenes are sparsely lit, often with only a single light source which never fully illuminates all parties present. Whether he is being blinded by the shining lights of the false promises of show business, or being kept literally in the dark in communications with important theatre authorities, Maksudov's tales of the theatre are inextricable from its most basic elements of concealment and illumination.

The set dressing and deliberate lighting are not the only aspects of Maksudov's experience that mirror being involved in a play in real time. Once he moves on to the actual meat of his established scenes, the mannerisms of the characters he describe all feel performed and artificial, as if they are acting in a play for which he was never given

[15] Bulgakov, Mikhail A. *Teatral'nij Roman: Zapiski Pokojnika*. Moscow: Hudoz□estvennaa□ Literatura, 1966. *Библиотека Максима Мошкова*. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://lib.ru/BULGAKOW/teatral.txt>.

[16] Bulgakov, Mikhail. *A Dead Man's Memoir: A Theatrical Novel*. Trans. Andrew Bromfield. London: Penguin, 2007. P.57. Print.

the script. When he is arguing over his compensation in the contract with Gavril Stepanovich, his tone deliberately alternates depending on who he is addressing and to what the subject matter pertains. However, his tone with Maksudov is always "интимно" (*intimate*) when discussing his contract, while he is more agitated when discussing theater business with the interlopers continually passing through. It is not simply the duplicitous nature of Gavril Stepanovich, but the fact that each time he addresses Maksudov, his tone is "intimate" and nothing else, almost as if he were following precisely scripted stage directions. An even more literal instance of this occurs when the haughty prima donna of the Independent Theatre barges in on a meeting between Maksudov and the theatre director, Ivan Vasilievich (modeled heavily after Konstantin Stanislavsky[17]), the two perform an impromptu scene from a past unnamed play. Maksudov, however, mistakes this for an actual fight between a washed up starlet and her disenchanted mentor. Given Ivan Vasilievich's proclivity towards projecting himself into the past (his office has portraits of him alongside Napoleon, Gogol, Nero, and others), his reliving of past moments in shows demonstrates Bulgakov's disgust for Stanislavsky's outdated and literal methodology.[18]

As Maksudov is drawn further and further into the theatre's world, even he begins to succumb to the performative way of life exhibited by those around him. Immediately prior to the above-mentioned meeting with Ivan Vasilievich, wherein Maksudov reads his script to him to get the director's seal of approval, he receives explicit instructions from

[17] Smeljanskij, Anatolij Mironovič., and Arch Tait. *Is Comrade Bulgakov Dead?: Mikhail Bulgakov and the Moscow Art Theatre*. London: Methuen, 1993. P. 328 Print.

[18] Curtis, J. A. E. *Manuscripts Don't Burn: Mikhail Bulgakov, a Life in Letters and Diaries*. Woodstock, NY: Overlook, 1992. P. 74 Print.

the actor Peter Bombardov on how to comport himself before the great master. The sequence is related to him in minute detail, as Bombardov warns him to lie about his paternal origins, agree with Ivan Vasilievich's opinions regarding homeopathy, deny that he has a cold (it is unclear whether he actually does, but this is largely irrelevant), and most of all, to not read a plot-crucial gunshot in the third act. Bombardov gives him further instructions to simply respond to all inquiries regarding his presence with "Назначено" (*appointment*). Maksudov marvels at the word's "magical power" as he makes his way to Ivan Vasilievich, but upon meeting the man face to face, he quickly loses his composure and deviates from the dialogue fed to him by Bombardov, most notably failing to omit the shot in the third act. Upon his "actor" going off of the approved "script", Ivan Vasilievich begins to demand all kinds of compromising changes, including aging the main characters by several decades, and replacing all instances of guns with period-asynchronous daggers. This scene mirrors the actual falling out between Stanislavsky and Bulgakov, after the former declared the latter's plays to be impossible to produce.[19] After this botched "rehearsal", Maksudov develops intense anxiety towards any encounters with Ivan Vasilievich. As he sees his play become more and more removed from its original form, he begins to deteriorate and falls even deeper into the mode of an actor playing a role rather than a genuine creator:

> Тогда я стал производить репетиции по ночам. Я брал маленькое зеркало, садился перед ним, отражался в нем и начинал говорить: "Иван Васильевич! Видите ли, в

[19] Curtis, J. A. E. *Manuscripts Don't Burn: Mikhail Bulgakov, a Life in Letters and Diaries*. Woodstock, NY: Overlook, 1992. pp. 152-153. Print.

чем дело: кинжал, по моему мнению, применен быть не может...”[20]

*Then I began rehearsing at night. I took a little mirror, sat in front of it so that I was reflected in it and began saying: “Ivan Vasilievich! You see what the problem is: In my opinion it is not possible to use a dagger…”*[21]

Unlike his snap rehearsal from his initial meeting, Maksudov prepares more and more diligently, completely unaware of his physical deterioration until one of his rehearsals in front of his little mirror. He is so caught up in playing his part that he completely eschews care of his actual self.

The surreal performance reaches a head when Maksudov attends a dress rehearsal wherein Ivan Vasilievich drills the cast in method acting exercises that expand to the point that even non-actors are dragged into them. Maksudov is despondent when he learns that Ivan Vasilievich is conducting these exercises so that the actors would be able to perform independently of the text (very much indicative of Stanislavsky’s philosophy):

текст на репетициях не играет никакой роли и … нужно создавать характеры в пьесе, играя на своем собственном тексте.[22]

[20] Bulgakov, Mikhail A. *Teatral'nij Roman: Zapiski Pokojnika*. Moscow: Hudoz□estvennaa□ Literatura, 1966. *Библиотека Максима Мошкова*. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://lib.ru/BULGAKOW/teatral.txt>.

[21] Bulgakov, Mikhail. *A Dead Man's Memoir: A Theatrical Novel*. Trans. Andrew Bromfield. London: Penguin, 2007. P. 157. Print.

[22] Bulgakov, Mikhail A. *Teatral'nij Roman: Zapiski Pokojnika*. Moscow: Hudoz□estvennaa□ Literatura, 1966. *Библиотека Максима Мошкова*. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://lib.ru/BULGAKOW/teatral.txt>.

> *The text [of a play] does not play any kind of role in rehearsals, and… the characters in a play should be created by playing to one's own text.*[23]

Maksudov finally begins to put the pieces together and reasons that, given the Moscow Theatre schedule, his play will never be produced, and even if it were, it would be unrecognizable as compared to what he submitted. Unfortunately, Bulgakov died prior to the completion of *A Dead Man's Memoir*, and the narrative ends with Maksudov's cold acceptance that "every actor should induce an absolute illusion in the viewer. And act so that the viewer would forget that he was watching a stage…"[24]. It is uncertain how long he intended the narrative to extend from that poignant observation. While he mentions his "Театральный Роман" in passing in his journals, along with his wife and sister in theirs, he does not make explicit mention of any intentions he may have had for the overall narrative arc[25]. The text we are left with, however, provides enough evidence that it may be reasonable to extrapolate where Maksudov's trajectory had already taken him before his play even came to fruition.

The reality put forth by Maksudov, while surreal and semi-fantastic, does not quite cut to the quick of the legitimate ambiguity of the overall narrative structure. This performative reality meets the criteria for what Todorov refers to as "generalized fantastic", most succinctly summed up as when aspects "in the first world that are the

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[23] Bulgakov, Mikhail. *A Dead Man's Memoir: A Theatrical Novel*. Trans. Andrew Bromfield. London: Penguin, 2007. P.164. Print.

[24] IBID, 167

[25] Curtis, J. A. E. *Manuscripts Don't Burn: Mikhail Bulgakov, a Life in Letters and Diaries*. Woodstock, NY: Overlook, 1992. pp. 246, 247, 50, 65. Print.

exception… become the rule."[26] Performance does not coincide with the art itself, but rather is a masturbatory ode to itself. People are not genuine entities, but always performing so as to mask their true intentions. The theatre itself is often portrayed as a poorly lit catacomb or prison of sorts, with heavy iron gates and dark corridors ever present. The foreword of the novel, however, questions whether or not any of this was ever experienced by Maksudov in the first place.

The novel's foreword takes the form of a letter penned by Maksudov's attorney, wherein he makes the following declaration:

> Я, хорошо знающий театральную жизнь Москвы, принимаю на себя ручательство в том, что ни таких театров, ни таких людей, какие выведены в произведении покойного, нигде нет и не было.[27]
>
> *As someone well acquainted with the theatrical life of Moscow, I am prepared to guarantee that nowhere do such theatres and such people as are depicted in the deceased's works exist, nor have they ever existed.*[28]

At first glance, this could appear to be Bulgakov's attempt to shield himself from potential fallout, given how many real people actually are represented in the novel in a very unabashed way. However, these kinds of outright "official" denials of actual events

[26] Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic; a Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973. P. 174. Print.

[27] Bulgakov, Mikhail A. *Teatral'nij Roman: Zapiski Pokojnika*. Moscow: Hudoz□estvennaa□ Literatura, 1966. *Библиотека Максима Мошкова*. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://lib.ru/BULGAKOW/teatral.txt>.

[28] Bulgakov, Mikhail. *A Dead Man's Memoir: A Theatrical Novel*. Trans. Andrew Bromfield. London: Penguin, 2007. P. 2. Print.

were common practice in the Soviet body at the time[29], so it could also be construed as Bulgakov taking a swipe at the establishment's crude means of information suppression. This explanation appears somewhat overly simplistic for my tastes, as a simple denunciation of the government procedures themselves does not keep particularly well in the rest of the novel's thematic context, which is much more focused on the arts administration in particular.

Chapter 4 of the novel, entitled "Мое Самоубийство" (*My Suicide)*, lends a much darker interpretation to the concluding three quarters. The action takes place after Maksudov has had his novel rejected by the censors twice. Unable to bear his mundane life, he steals a revolver from an acquaintance, goes home, and readies himself to end it all. As he is preparing to take his life, he hears strains of the opera of *Faust* coming from a room below him. Upon realizing that this is the moment right before Mephistopheles makes his appearance, he resolves to listen to that part (as it is his favorite) one last time before he goes. As the music reaches a dramatic crescendo, Maksudov's account transpires thus:

> Тенор крикнул отчаянно, затем грохнул оркестр.
>
> Дрожащий палец лег на собачку, и в это мгновение
> грохот оглушил меня, сердце куда-то провалилось, мне
> показалось, что пламя вылетело из керосинки
> в потолок, я уронил револьвер.

[29] Vatulescu, Cristina. *Police Aesthetics: Literature, Film, and the Secret Police in Soviet times*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2010. P. 56 Print.

Тут грохот повторился. Снизу донесся тяжелый басовый голос: "Вот и я!"[30]

*The tenor cried out despairingly and the orchestra thundered.*

*My trembling finger was lowered on the trigger and at that instant a fearsome rumbling deafened me, my heart was thrown into a bottomless pit, and it seemed to me that the flame from the kerosene stove shot up to the ceiling and I dropped the revolver.*

*Immediately, the rumbling was repeated. From below I heard a terrible bass voice: "Here I am!"*[31]

Bulgakov's fascination with *Faust* is very well documented[32], so the fact that it figures so prominently into this sequence can hardly be called a coincidence. As his heart is "thrown into a pit" and flames shoot upward, he hears a terrible bass voice *from below*, at the same time that Mephistopheles is to make his entrance in the recording to which he is listening. When he sees his interloper (who we later learn is Rudolfi, the publisher), he describes his dark, angular features and concludes by summarizing, "Короче говоря,

[30] Bulgakov, Mikhail A. *Teatral'nij Roman: Zapiski Pokojnika*. Moscow: Hudoz□estvennaa□ Literatura, 1966. *Библиотека Максима Мошкова*. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://lib.ru/BULGAKOW/teatral.txt>.

[31] Bulgakov, Mikhail. *A Dead Man's Memoir: A Theatrical Novel*. Trans. Andrew Bromfield. London: Penguin, 2007. pp. 14-15. Print.

[32] Smeljanskij, Anatolij Mironovič., and Arch Tait. *Is Comrade Bulgakov Dead?: Mikhail Bulgakov and the Moscow Art Theatre*. London: Methuen, 1993. P.348. Print.

передо мною стоял Мефистофель"[33] (*in short, before me stood Mephistopheles*).[34] After replacing a light bulb that conspicuously extinguished as Maksudov dropped the revolver, he reads Maksudov's novel and tells him to go with him to GlavLit to sign a publishing contract (which, much like his theatre contract, he is bullied into signing). While this may appear to simply fit more into the motif of performative reality on which I have elaborated thus far, there is a complicating factor. Bulgakov's lawyer notes in the foreword that he killed himself by jumping off of the Tsepnoi Bridge, not by gunshot, yet so much of Maksudov's theatrical grief is tied up in Ivan Vasilievich's steadfast desire to remove the gunshot (which transpires *on* a bridge) from his play as an element that he finds too unpleasant. Returning to the middle paragraph of the above quote, it is impossible to say that everything Maksudov describes is in fact him shooting himself in the head, but artfully omitting the shot itself: there is a percussive crash, the revolver is dropped to the floor, and a character first identified by Maksudov himself as an incarnation of the devil appears and asks him to sign a contract (without which, he never would have made it to the world of the stage in the first place). In short, Maksudov kills himself and surrenders his soul for the chance to bring his visions to the world at large, and the theatre itself is his personalized branch of hell.

There are several factors that can support such a theory. Maksudov delineates three worlds which he inhabited/inhabits throughout the course of the novel: his banal life at the *Shipping Herald*, his brief foray into the world of writers, and the world of the

[33] Bulgakov, Mikhail A. *Teatral'nij Roman: Zapiski Pokojnika*. Moscow: Hudoz□estvennaa□ Literatura, 1966. *Библиотека Максима Мошкова*. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://lib.ru/BULGAKOW/teatral.txt>.

[34] Bulgakov, Mikhail. *A Dead Man's Memoir: A Theatrical Novel*. Trans. Andrew Bromfield. London: Penguin, 2007. P. 15 Print.

stage.[35] The first two worlds, both encountered before the chapter, "My Suicide", he makes a conscious decision to leave, does so, and never comes back, even being denied by the *Shipping Herald* when he tries to return after his play is put on hold. Even after he leaves the world of writing, he only does so by signing a more comprehensively restrictive contract than the last. The world of the theatre appears to be one that he is completely unable to escape. Twice he attempts to storm out and leave it all behind, and each time a "miracle" occurs ("произошло чудо") that drags him back in to the theatre world, filling him with the sad hope that maybe *this* time his vision may come to fruition.

The theatre itself provides further evidence that this may be the case. I mentioned earlier that the theatre has the feel of a gloomy and labyrinthine prison, but Bulgakov has been known to conflate prison imagery with the diabolical (most notably with regard to the sanitarium in *Master and Margarita*[36]), so this can hardly be said to be a stretch. During a reprieve from having his script typed, Maksudov describes a scene from the theatre's main office involving Filya Tulumbasov. In it, he notes that Filya acts as a gatekeeper to the theatre, handling ticket disbursement and accommodations for the theatre's patrons. On Filya's duties, Maksudov remarks,

> "А главное, он знал их права. Он знал, кто и когда должен прийти в Театр, кто имел право сидеть в

[35] Smeljanskij, Anatolij Mironovič., and Arch Tait. *Is Comrade Bulgakov Dead?: Mikhail Bulgakov and the Moscow Art Theatre*. London: Methuen, 1993. P.334. Print.

[36] Vatulescu, Cristina. *Police Aesthetics: Literature, Film, and the Secret Police in Soviet times*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2010. P. 55. Print.

четвертом ряду, а кто должен был томиться в ярусе…”[37]

*Most importantly, he knew their rights. He knew who should come to the theatre and when, who had the right to sit in the fourth row, and who had to suffer in the upper circles.*[38]

He goes on to list the dozens of occupations with which Filya deals every day, and remarks with surprise that certain poor customers seemed to receive free handouts, while other well-to-do patrons were sharply turned away. Smeliansky draws the rather apt comparison that “Filya sorts them all instantly, allocating each his place in the gallery… that would do credit to St. Peter himself.”[39] In this way, Bulgakov further obfuscates the line between the diabolical and divine: Maksudov’s personal hell is his involvement in the theatre, but to the masses, it is a place of rapturous joy (on the other side of the curtain), bringing to mind the phrase, “one man’s heaven is another man’s hell”. Much like Hell and Heaven, there is no surface prerequisite for entry, but rather the inscrutable knowledge of the (seemingly in Filya’s case) omnipotent gatekeepers.

It is genuinely unfortunate that Bulgakov never got to see this novel through to completion, as it leaves much of what is discussed above rooted in the hypothetical. This in no way changes the fact that he has crafted a reality in which neither the protagonist,

[37] Bulgakov, Mikhail A. *Teatral'nij Roman: Zapiski Pokojnika*. Moscow: Hudoz□estvennaa□ Literatura, 1966. *Библиотека Максима Мошкова*. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://lib.ru/BULGAKOW/teatral.txt>.

[38] Bulgakov, Mikhail. *A Dead Man's Memoir: A Theatrical Novel*. Trans. Andrew Bromfield. London: Penguin, 2007. P.87. Print.

[39] Smeljanskij, Anatolij Mironovič., and Arch Tait. *Is Comrade Bulgakov Dead?: Mikhail Bulgakov and the Moscow Art Theatre*. London: Methuen, 1993. P. 339 Print.

nor the reader, are ever fully able to grasp the complete scope of what is occurring, nor does it ultimately make a difference whether the theatre is a literal hell, or more psychological. By describing the theatre with dark, smoky, and unnerving terminology, Bulgakov shows the undeniable degradation of the state of artistic production in the Stalinist days, be it the work of the Devil himself, or merely a diabolical and oppressive regime.

## CHAPTER III

## NABOKOV'S QUEST FOR OBJECTIVITY IN A SUBJECTIVE WORLD

Vladimir Nabokov escaped from Russia during the 1917 revolution along with his family and spent his writing career (prior to coming to America) in exile throughout Western Europe. It is no surprise, then, that a prominent theme in his works is the circuitously frustrating nature of understanding and being understood, both with regard to the self and to others. His novel, *Соглядатай*, ponders the significance of the influence one's actions have on their surroundings and acquaintances and the effect their perceptions of these actions in turn have on one's own character. *The Eye* explores this nebulous with the presentation of a character (Smurov) who is defined almost exclusively by the perceptions of those around him, all while under the scrutiny of an ominous, ever-gazing eye that is attempting to discover Smurov's "true" self. At the end of the novel, in a masterful display of literary estrangement, it is revealed that this narrating Eye and Smurov are one and the same. While Nabokov states in his foreword that "the author disclaims all intention to trick, puzzle, fool, or otherwise deceive the reader," and while events in the novel itself play out in a relatively straightforward manner, he deliberately leaves many aspects of the characters themselves ill-defined or reveals our former perceptions to be the exact opposite. In short, the novel plays out as a meta-textual puzzle, wherein the reader and the narrator's goals of discovery begin to coincide all the more as more pieces slide in to place.

*The Eye* is often referred to as a piece of detective fiction, and while Nabokov states in the foreword that, "the author disclaims all intention to trick, puzzle, fool, or

otherwise deceive the reader," he does go on to define the work as "the pursuit of an investigation" wherein "the stress is not on the mystery, but the pattern."[40] While it may not fit the literal definition of a detective novel, there are certainly many ways in which *The Eye* is evocative of one from a stylistic perspective. In *The Poetics of Prose*, Tsvetan Todorov elaborates on George Burton's explanation:

> All detective fiction is based on two murders of which the first, committed by the murderer, is merely the occasion for the second, in which he is the victim of the pure and unpunishable murderer, the detective.[41]

*The Eye* does not begin with a murder as such, but rather with a suicide. The narrator (Smurov, though he is not yet officially named as such) is brutally beaten by the cuckolded husband of his mistress (Matilda), and feeling emasculated and completely alienated as an émigré in Berlin, he decides to go home and end it all. He contemplates getting his affairs in order, but the macabre gravity of his decision outweighs even the most basic of preparations and he shoots himself through the heart. While not a literal murder, the novel does begin with an event that is given very little context that sets the stage for the investigation and subsequent symbolic murder after The Eye realizes that it is Smurov and the two merge into one. This schism and subsequent rejoining will be covered in greater detail later on, but for the purposes of demonstrating the detective novel undercurrent, the knowledge of these events transpiring should prove sufficient for the time being. While Smurov may not be considered "pure and unpunishable", his

[40] Nabokov, Vladimir V. *The Eye*. New York, NY: Penguin, 1992. P. iv. Print.

[41] Todorov, Tzvetan, and Jonathan D. Culler. *The Poetics of Prose*. Trans. Richard Howard. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987. P. 44. Print.

projected observer (The Eye) spends the majority of the narrative on the outskirts, absorbing and interpreting as much as he can. Nabokov capitulates that the investigation is indeed centered on Smurov (though this is obvious from the text), so in that sense he is the criminal. Smurov even admits his crime in his closing lamentations, accepting that he has "committed a crime by the mere fact of living."[42] The Eye, then, can be said to play the role of the detective, as it strives for objective investigation into what constitutes Smurov's character. Nabokov may be quick to cast off the allegations that his novel is a detective novel, but versions of the necessary stylistic elements are present in enough of a capacity that their influence over how the reader processes the information, intentional or not, is undeniable.

Let us return to the opening portion of the novel, prior to Smurov's suicide and subsequent schism. His ultimate humiliation is not having simply having been beaten, but the fact that the two boys he was tutoring watched with (what seemed to him) indifference to his plight:

> мне кажется, что один из них стоял, сложив руки крестом, прислонившись к стене, а другой сидел на ручке кресла, и оба невозмутимо наблюдали за расправой, совершавшейся надо мной.[43]
>
> *It seemed to me that one of was standing with folded arms against the wall, while the other sat on the arm of the chair,*

[42] Nabokov, Vladimir V. *The Eye*. New York, NY: Penguin, 1992. P. 103 Print.

[43] Nabokov, Vladimir Vladimirovich. *Sogli□a□datai□*. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1978. *Библиотека Максима Мошкова*. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://lib.ru/NABOKOW/thespy.txt>.

*both imperturbably watching the punishment being administered to me*.[44]

Prior to adopting his dual status as participant and observer, Smurov is only clearly defined by how others around him react to him. To his pupils, he is almost a non-entity; to Matilda, he is a lover, though their relationship is purely physical in Smurov's eyes, and given her proclivity towards talking to him about her husband, this is likely the case with her; to Matilda's husband (Kashmarin), he is a good for nothing scoundrel, coward, and home wrecker. Due to the sudden occurrence of Smurov's suicide, the reader is only given a glimpse at each of these masks before he moves on to his next world, but the one fact that is clearly established is his awareness of being watched. Even in the midst of a savage beating, he is able to take note of the children looking on at his disgrace, and even complains of lack of sleep from feeling "всегда обнаженный, всегда зрячий" (*always exposed, always wide-eyed*[45]). Upon arriving at his old address (where his former apartment still lies vacant), his panicked delirium takes hold so strongly that he is at first unable to recognize himself in the mirror:

> Пошлый, несчастный, дрожащий маленький человек в котелке стоял посреди комнаты, почему-то потирая руки.[46]

[44] Nabokov, Vladimir V. *The Eye*. New York, NY: Penguin, 1992. P. 14 Print.

[45] IBID, p. 7

[46] Nabokov, Vladimir Vladimirovich. *Sogli□a□datai□*. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1978. *Библиотека Максима Мошкова*. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://lib.ru/NABOKOW/thespy.txt>.

> *A vulgar, unhappy, shivering little man in a bowler hat stood in the middle of the room, for some reason rubbing his hands*[47]

As he ponders writing a suicide note, he finds an "убогий карандашик" (*miserable pencil stub*) in his pocket which he takes as a sign that it is a pointless endeavor to do so. His despair and apathy have not only affected his ability to assign value to his life, but even the tool with which he would write has reached the end of its rope. He cannot tell his story because he has only "drained" objects, devoid of utility and significance.

After shooting himself in the chest, Smurov notes that "после наступления смерти человеческая мысль продолжает жить по инерции" (*After the onset of death, the human mind lives on by momentum*[48]). At first, he simply floats in a veil of blackness, perfectly recalling his past, but unable to make sense of his current surroundings. Very little time passes before Smurov's incorporeal mind begins to construct familiar surroundings.

> я с озорной беспечностью вывел представление о госпитале, то сразу, послушно моей воле, выросла вокруг меня призрачная больничная палата, и были у меня соседи, -- такие же мумии, как я, -- по три мумии с каждой стороны[49]

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[47] Nabokov, Vladimir V. *The Eye*. New York, NY: Penguin, 1992. P. 17 Print.

[48] IBID, p. 20.

[49] Nabokov, Vladimir Vladimirovich. *Sogli□a□datai□*. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1978. *Библиотека Максима Мошкова*. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://lib.ru/NABOKOW/thespy.txt>.

*With mischievous and carefree logic, I summoned the impression of a hospital and at once, obedient to my will, a spectral hospital ward materialized around me, and I had neighbors – mummies, like me—three on either side.*[50]

It is important to note that Smurov, at this point in the narrative, has still neither been granted a name or much of a personality. Since we are to assume that his imagination is the driving force behind creating this world, it is appropriate that, despite his wound having been in his chest rather than his head, he is at first only able to summon bandaged "mummies" who, for all intents and purposes, are simply copies of himself. He gradually learns to take control of his surroundings, imagining his way to recovery and eventually creating a facsimile of the area of Berlin in which he lived, complete with the Russian émigré bookstore he used to frequent and its owner, Weinstock. Weinstock is the first truly dynamic character (as opposed to generic doctors and nurses) to be created by Smurov, who realizes upon seeing him that he has remembered him inaccurately and left out his familiar mustache. This small error represents the first limit to Smurov's (until now) seemingly omnipotent ability: the creation of fully realized human beings is not as simple a matter as conjuring forth inanimate items or static locations. Weinstock is characterized as a conspiracy fanatic, who regularly warns Smurov about "агенты" (*agents*) who he is convinced are communist spies tracking the movements of former Soviets. Shortly after this conversation, Smurov's schism occurs:

Этот разговор с Вайнштоком оказался началом для

[50] Nabokov, Vladimir V. *The Eye*. New York, NY: Penguin, 1992. P. 21 Print.

> меня новой жизни. Я был теперь по отношению к самому себе посторонним.[51]
>
> *This conversation with Weinstock turned out to be the beginning of a new life for me. With respect to myself, I was now an onlooker.*[52]

Thus, The Eye emerges as the narrator for the majority of the story onward. The appearance of The Eye causes a shift in the narrative tone to one entirely more clinical. The other inhabitants of Smurov's world are introduced, including Mariana Nikolaevna and her two female charges (she is never explicitly referred to as a mother) Evgenia and Vanya (who prefers the male diminutive nickname to her full name, Varvara), their respective husbands and significant others, Khrushchov and Mukhin, the jovial Roman Bogdanovich (whose origin is never entirely explained), and finally, we are introduced to Smurov as a character proper. The Eye immediately hones in on Smurov, going into the most detail and the making the most speculations regarding him. This has an interesting effect on the relationship between the reader and The Eye. By ever so subtly shifting its tone from clinical analysis to speculative inquiry, the reader has entered into a kind of voyeuristic collusion with The Eye. Karen Jacobs elaborates on this phenomenon:

> "Just as the reader of detective fiction attempts to mimic the detective's gaze, however ineptly, the detective tries, as his most valued epistemological technique, to identify with

[51] Nabokov, Vladimir Vladimirovich. *Sogli□a□datai□*. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1978. *Библиотека Максима Мошкова*. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://lib.ru/NABOKOW/thespy.txt>.

[52] Nabokov, Vladimir V. *The Eye*. New York, NY: Penguin, 1992. P. 24 Print.

> the gaze of the criminal, to see what he sees, so that he may solve the crime."[53]

We see this almost immediately as Smurov sits in the company of his acquaintances in the middle of a discussion about war. As Smurov tries to participate in the conversation, he is repeatedly talked over by the others present. The Eye goes on to speculate that he must be so humble because "очевидно, он бывший офицер, смельчак, партнер смерти, и только из скромности ничего не говорит о своих приключениях"[54] (*he must be a former officer, a daredevil who flirted with death, and it is only out of modesty that he says nothing of his adventures*[55]). Because Smurov seems to be the only character in whom The Eye takes an interest beyond clinical observation, so too is the reader naturally drawn to him, given The Eye's status as the sole guide through this world of Smurov's imagination.

Smurov's world is not the only one encountered in the narrative. Weinstock has set up a microcosm of his own within his book shop, where he regularly holds séances and practices mysticism. These are not the swindler's brand of séances, however, as Smurov describes a typical iteration of Weinstock's nightly ritual:

> Он клал руки, как застывший пианист на легонький столик о трех ножках: столик начинал нежно трещать, цыкать кузнечиком и затем, набравшись

[53] Jacobs, Karen. *The Eye's Mind: Literary Modernism and Visual Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2001. P. 50 Print.

[54] Nabokov, Vladimir Vladimirovich. *Sogli□a□datai□*. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1978. *Библиотека Максима Мошкова*. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://lib.ru/NABOKOW/thespy.txt>.

[55] Nabokov, Vladimir V. *The Eye*. New York, NY: Penguin, 1992. P. 35. Print.

сил, медленно поднимался одним краем и неуклюже, но сильно ударял ножкой об пол.[56]

*He would place his hands , like a petrified pianist, upon a small, light, three-legged table. It would begin to creak softly, emitting cricket-like chirps, and, having gathered strength, would rise up on one side, and awkwardly but forcefully tap a leg against the floor*.[57]

Weinstock would recite the alphabet and the table leg would pound when he reached the corresponding letter, in a manner akin to a Ouija board. Given that this world is either a hallucinatory product of Smurov's dying brain, or the a genuine afterlife of sorts, but the ultimate nature is inherently meaningless. Immediately after his schism, The Eye declares, "Глупо искать закона, еще глупее его найти"[58] (*It is foolish to seek out a basic law, even more foolish to find it*[59]). He simply accepts the bizarre nature of the occurrences around him as a fact of this new reality, describing truly fantastic scenes such as Weinstock's table floating and chasing him around the room as if he were describing him tidying the shop, or reading quietly. It is this precise lack of acknowledgement towards the genuinely fantastic that unsettles the reader, as they can no longer coexist on the same subjective level as The Eye or any of the world's other

[56] Nabokov, Vladimir Vladimirovich. *Sogli□a□datai□*. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1978. *Библиотека Максима Мошкова*. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://lib.ru/NABOKOW/thespy.txt>.

[57] Nabokov, Vladimir V. *The Eye*. New York, NY: Penguin, 1992. P. 38 Print.

[58] Nabokov, Vladimir Vladimirovich. *Sogli□a□datai□*. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1978. *Библиотека Максима Мошкова*. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://lib.ru/NABOKOW/thespy.txt>.

[59] Nabokov, Vladimir V. *The Eye*. New York, NY: Penguin, 1992. P. 27 Print.

inhabitants. In a later séance, the spirit with whom Weinstock communes warns of a spy in their midst who means to enact great harm to their idyllic lives. When he inquires as to the name of this spy, all the reader is informed of is that the person has six letters in their name (Smurov is the only character in the novel with a six letter name, but at this point, the reader has little reason to suspect the entangled nature of him and The Eye). Weinstock laughs off the spirit's postulation and apologizes to his gathering, claiming that, "Это иногда не исключено на сеансах, что носят чушь" (*It happens quite often at séances that spirits spout nonsense*[60]).

Throughout all of this, The Eye's interest in Smurov has been piqued all the more. He goes only where Smurov goes and makes careful observations about his acquaintances, while synthesizing this information to postulate theories about Smurov's "true" self. From the outset of his internal schism, Smurov's godlike powers of creation seem to disappear. The world around him becomes more fully realized and vibrant and the characters become more dynamic, yet Smurov seems to fragment more and more as a result. We see Smurov, the knowledgeable literature connoisseur, as The Eye watches him working at Weinstock's. Then there is Smurov, the sinister spy, extrapolated from Weinstock's séance. The third Smurov is even more troubling: At a dinner at Mariana's, Smurov (likely bolstered by The Eye's earlier assumption that he is a former-officer-daredevil) tells a wild tale of his service in the White Army, wherein he narrowly escapes execution by the Reds at a train station in Yalta, culminating in an over the top account of setting off to see alone and being rescued by a Greek sloop. As the story concludes and the women take their leave, Mukhin calmly informs Smurov that he knows Yalta has no

[60] Nabokov, Vladimir V. *The Eye*. New York, NY: Penguin, 1992. P. 53 Print.

train station. Smurov folds almost immediately, and The Eye watches his breakdown with great embarrassment:

> Но Смуров не только не нашелся -- он сделал худшее, что мог сделать. Понизив голос, он хрипло проговорил: "Я вас очень прошу... пусть это останется между нами."[61]
>
> *Not only did Smurov lose his composure, but he did the worst thing he could do. Lowering his voice, he said hoarsely: "Please, I beg of you… let this remain between us."*[62]

And so the third Smurov comes to light: Smurov the lying, cowardly braggart.

The Eye then becomes fixated on divining the true Smurov all the more, yet the more it strives, the more versions of Smurov appear to it. It begins to pester Smurov's circle of friends for their thoughts regarding him, but soon finds it to be a futile endeavor, as even The Eye is aware of the perspectival and experiential biases that inform their views, and to which it cannot objectively relate.

> "чтобы точно определить этот образ, мне нужно было знать всю жизнь Марианны Николаевны, все то

[61] Nabokov, Vladimir Vladimirovich. *Sogli□a□datai□*. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1978. *Библиотека Максима Мошкова*. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://lib.ru/NABOKOW/thespy.txt>.

[62] Nabokov, Vladimir V. *The Eye*. New York, NY: Penguin, 1992. P. 51 Print.

побочное, что оживало в ее душе, когда она смотрела на Смурова…"[63]

*To define this image accurately, I would have had to be familiar with Marianna's entire life, with all the secondary associations that came alive inside her when she looked at Smurov.*[64]

At this point, The Eye begins to take matters into its own hands, becoming increasingly more brazen in his search for any information about the true Smurov. Knowing that Smurov is in love with Vanya, The Eye breaks in to her apartment when she and her family are out, hoping to find out if she kept any of the trinkets that Smurov had passed her way. He finds no trinkets, and the only picture of the two of them together has him cropped out, save his elbow. Upon the return of the occupants, The Eye is then forced to skulk in the dark and wait to make its escape, fully assimilating its role as a spy. As he desperately clamors for all of the information about Smurov he can find, the novel itself begins to read more and more like a secret police file. This is actually a logical progression of the novel's tone, as Vatulescu notes that, "just like the Soviet files, Soviet [detective novels] disregarded the particulars of any one crime in order to focus on the overall character of the suspect."[65] We are still being led through the novel like a detective's trusting sidekick, but the detective is getting more and more relentless and haphazard. When The Eye learns of a journal being kept by Roman Bogdanovich in

[63] Nabokov, Vladimir Vladimirovich. *Sogli□a□datai□*. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1978. *Библиотека Максима Мошкова*. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://lib.ru/NABOKOW/thespy.txt>.
[64] Nabokov, Vladimir V. *The Eye*. New York, NY: Penguin, 1992. P. 55 Print.

[65] Vatulescu, Cristina. *Police Aesthetics: Literature, Film, and the Secret Police in Soviet times*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2010. P. 32. Print.

which he records his thoughts about everyone each day, he becomes intensely interested in its contents. Roman Bogdanovich, however, views writing his diaries as a way to preserve his entire life and has a rather unorthodox method to prevent tampering with his life record:

> Мой ревельский приятель складывает у себя рукописи по мере их получения, и копий я нарочно не оставляю, чтобы не было соблазна постфактум подправлять, вычеркивать и так далее.[66]
>
> *My friend in Tallin stores up my weekly contributions as they arrive, and I deliberately keep no copies so there will be no temptation to make changes ex post facto – to cross things out and so on.*[67]

This can even be supported from a meta-textual perspective. Todorov explains that, in the broadest sense, "narrating equals living" and "absence of narrative [is] death".[68] Roman Bogdanovich is essentially playing narrator to his own life, in the hopes that his future self will appreciate the record. The Eye decides that it must intercept this communiqué, making it even less detective-like and more like a secret police agent. He spots Roman Bogdanovich on his way to put his letter in the mail and, after promising to drop it in the mailbox for him, palms it and makes his escape. In the journal, Roman

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[66] Nabokov, Vladimir Vladimirovich. *Sogli□a□datai□*. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1978. *Библиотека Максима Мошкова*. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://lib.ru/NABOKOW/thespy.txt>.

[67] Nabokov, Vladimir V. *The Eye*. New York, NY: Penguin, 1992. P. 77 Print.

[68] Todorov, Tzvetan, and Jonathan D. Culler. *The Poetics of Prose*. Trans. Richard Howard. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987. P. 73, 74. Print.

describes him as a "сексуальный левший" (*sexual left-hander*), citing Smurov's unrequited love for Vanya (more on this below) as a convenient excuse, as well as theorizing that he may be a kleptomaniac because of a snuff box that went missing. Roman says all of this in a piteous tone, concluding with the statement, "я искренно его сожалею, как это ни кажется парадоксально" (*I am sincerely sorry for him, paradoxical as it may seem*[69]). This particular version of Smurov as a deceptive and pathetic wretch is so low that he is not even worth resenting in Roman Bogdanovich's eyes.

Prior to this incident, however, an event transpires that, from a narrative perspective, bears significantly heavier weight. When The Eye overhears Vanya's senile Uncle Pasha talking about her love for a man named "Smurov", he is elated. Almost immediately upon returning to the apartments, he is crushed to learn that Pasha simply confused Smurov with Mukhin. After Smurov excuses himself out of embarrassment, The Eye takes the following digression:

> "Далее следует короткая пора, когда я перестал
> наблюдать за Смуровым: отяжелел, оделся прежней
> плотью, словно действительно вся эта жизнь вокруг
> меня была не игрой моего воображения, а сам я в ней
> участвовал телом и душой"[70]

[69] Nabokov, Vladimir V. *The Eye*. New York, NY: Penguin, 1992. Pp. 84-85. Print.

[70] Nabokov, Vladimir Vladimirovich. *Sogli□a□datai□*. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1978. *Библиотека Максима Мошкова*. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://lib.ru/NABOKOW/thespy.txt>.

*There follows a brief period when I stopped watching*

*Smurov: I grew heavy, donned anew my former flesh, as if*

*all this life around me was not the play of my imagination,*

*but was real, and that I participated in it body and soul.*[71]

This, in my opinion, is the first genuinely concrete clue given to the reader of The Eye's real nature as Smurov's projected self. Following his "re-donning of flesh", the narrator mourns and wails over the minute details of Vanya that will not be his, and after several pages of ardent lamentation, the reader begins to question whether this is not, in fact, Smurov's inner dialogue as he resolves his inner turmoil. After reading Roman Bogdanovich's letter, The Eye has a series of increasingly bizarre dreams about Smurov as he attempts to make amends, though no one seems to take him particularly seriously. Upon fully awakening from this haze, however, all mention of Smurov disappears from the novel, with the style once again reverting to first person. This time, though, we are definitively in Smurov's head, as he goes to confess his love to Vanya only to be repeatedly rejected, despite his needy insistence. Smurov and The Eye do not achieve full synthesis until after he leaves Vanya's apartment and buys a bouquet of flowers. Upon leaving, he has the following experience:

Взявшись за дверную скобку, я увидел, как сбоку в

зеркале поспешило ко мне мое отражение: молодой

[71] Nabokov, Vladimir V. *The Eye*. New York, NY: Penguin, 1992. P. 69. Print.

человек в котелке, с букетом. Отражение со мной слилось, я вышел на улицу.[72]

*As I pushed on the door, I saw the reflection in the side mirror hurrying toward me: a young man in a derby hat, carrying a bouquet. The reflection and I merged into one, and I walked out onto the street.*[73]

This reflection, while not necessarily the true Smurov, is the first instance in which we watch him observe himself and accept it. He concludes the narrative marveling at how happy he is that he can "gaze upon himself", thus rendering him invulnerable to the world.

Nabokov masterfully utilizes the motifs of detective novels, the methodology of secret police agents, and even a detached narrative observer in this quest for objective truth. What is ultimately demonstrated, however, is that subjective biases are a force that is nearly impossible to overcome as "with every acquaintance [one] makes, the number of specters resembling [him] increases". [74] By juxtaposing these subjective accounts with an attempt at a bias free narrative framework, the reader is constantly in a state of flux as to whether it is ever truly possible to understand the forces that drive those around them.

[72] Nabokov, Vladimir Vladimirovich. *Sogli□a□datai□*. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1978. *Библиотека Максима Мошкова*. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://lib.ru/NABOKOW/thespy.txt>.

[73] Nabokov, Vladimir V. *The Eye*. New York, NY: Penguin, 1992. P. 97 Print.

[74] IBID, p. 103

## CHAPTER IV

## ABRAM TERTZ AND THE CONFLATED SELF

While Bulgakov and Nabokov were both active in the earlier portions of the 20th century (with respect to the works examined herein), by the 1960's, the publication of Soviet authors abroad was keeping a steady momentum. Edward Brown notes that while there was a healthy flow of literature making its way out of the USSR, "such work [was] uneven, and often not very good."[75] An author who is denoted as a particular standout was Abram Tertz, whose work first appeared on the literary scene in 1959. He wrote fantastic and surreal tales, all serving to lambast the artistic notion of Socialist Realism, which had been the state sanctioned artistic production method for nearly 30 years (though it was certainly around prior to the 2nd Writer's Conference, simply not as a direct organ of the state.[76] Obviously, this caused the Soviet establishment significant grief, yet it was not until 6 years after his emergence into the literary world that the authorities caught up with him, only to discover that Abram Tertz never existed in the literal sense. Tertz was the pseudonym employed by Andrey Sinyavsky, a renowned literary critic and scholar of the time. Sinyavsky was convicted of crimes against the Soviet state and sent to a hard labor camp. He served his time and made it out of the Soviet Union, but his literary career never got quite back on track.

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[75] Brown, Edward J. *Russian Literature since the Revolution*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1982. P. 307 Print.

[76] Vickery, Walter N. *The Cult of Optimism; Political and Ideological Problems of Recent Soviet Literature*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1963. Pp. 105-106. Print.

While Tertz's most infamous work is his dual coupling of *Суд Идет* (*The Trial Begins*) and his satirical essay series, *Что Такое Социалистический Реализм* (*On Socialst Realism*), it is his somewhat overlooked short story, "Ты и Я" ("You and I") that bears more relevance to the subject of narrative reliability, in that it is almost completely devoid thereof. While the novels examined thus far have all had consistent narrators, be it in the form of Maksudov's journal or Smurov/The Eye's alternating subjective and objective views, Tertz goes out of his way to ensure that the two central characters of the story remain as hazy and unclear as possible.

The action of the story follows a paranoiac by the name of Nikolai Vasilievich, and the actions of an unnamed observer who is carefully recording everything the former does, until the two begin to get psychically entangled and the question of who is observing whom for what reason becomes all the murkier. While this may seem to mirror the structure of *The Eye* from this simple summary, the two stories could not possibly be more different. The most striking feature of "You and I" is the fact that, while portions of the narrative are fairly typical first-person fare (and here, a comparison to *The Eye* is more apt), whenever the observer is documenting Nikolai Vasilievich's actions, he conveys them to the reader in the *second* person. Take this excerpt from the story's introductory chapter, in which Nikolai Vasilievich arrives at a dinner party hosted by his colleague, Genrikh Ivanovich Graube:

> Действительно: едва ты вошел — гости повскакали со стульев, на которых они притаились в ожидании твоего появления.

*Sure enough, as soon as you came in, the guests leaped from their chairs to which they had been rooted while waiting for you to appear.*[77]

The obfuscation inherent in this narrative technique can be quite unsettling at times: not only does the reader have almost no familiarity with the source of this information about Nikolai Vasilievich, but for over half of the story, the observer presents the reader with *his own* interpretations of the reasoning behind Nikolai Vasilievich's increasingly strange and self-destructive actions. Add to this the fact that the reader is practically being dragged into the story itself by this observer to fill the shoes of its eccentric protagonist, and it makes for a very surreal experience.

But let us return to the dinner party at the novel's outset. To attempt to make the narrative sources clearer, all instances of second person narration will be attributed to Nikolai Vasilievich, in spite of the fact that technically, the observer From the very start, the observer conveys Nikolai Vasilievich's perceptions as incredibly solipsistic. When reflecting on his decision to accept Graube's invitation, it is noted that Graube's insistence gave the impression, "как будто твое присутствие было главной заботой сборища"[78] (*as if your presence was the main object of the get-together*[79]). At first, he seems to have simply a general sense of unease, but as the scene is described in greater detail, things get very strange, very fast. When remarking on the women present, the following bizarre hypothesis is posited:

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[77] Tertz, Abram. *Fantastic Stories.* Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1987. P. 4. Print.

[78] Tertz, Abram. *Ты и я*. 1959. *Электронная библиотека Александра Белоусенко*. The Library of Aleksander Belousenko, 10 Sept. 2002. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://www.belousenko.com/wr_Tertz.htm>.

[79] Tertz, Abram. *Fantastic Stories.* Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1987. P. 3. Print.

> в этой компании жена и хозяйка дома была ни тем и ни другим, а подставной фигурой. Скорее всего это был переодетый мужчина.[80]
>
> *The wife and hostess at this gathering was neither one nor the other, but an imposter. As likely as not, it was a man in disguise*.[81]

Bear in mind that this takes place before the reader has even become acquainted with the characters present, yet from the outset, the narrative perspective is skewed towards the surreal. He goes on to conjecture that the rest of the women are also likely men in drag, and factoring in the cost of high end women's clothing and makeup to his tally of what the party itself likely cost, he arrives at the conclusion that 15,000 rubles were spent "ради тебя одного" (*all because of you*).

It is quickly made evident that Nikolai Vasilievich believes himself to be at the root of some conspiracy centered on him, yet its nature is never explored. The only elements of interest to Nikolai Vasilievich are the possible signifiers that would validate this theory, but even his certitude towards these vague signifiers is enough to give one pause. As the guests begin to eat, he swears that the tapping noises their silverware is making is a secret means of communication, like Morse code. When a guest takes a bite out of a leg of duck, Nikolai immediately assumes that this is a threatening act: "намекая своим поступком, что аналогичный конец в иносказательном смысле постигнет и

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[80] Tertz, Abram. *Ты и я*. 1959. *Электронная библиотека Александра Белоусенко*. The Library of Aleksander Belousenko, 10 Sept. 2002. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://www.belousenko.com/wr_Tertz.htm>.

[81] Tertz, Abram. *Fantastic Stories*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1987. P. 4. Print.

тебя”[82] (*Indicating that, metaphorically speaking, a similar fate was in store for you*[83]). At the end of the dinner, this same guest “hisses” through a broken tooth, which Nikolai Vasilievich interprets as a “знак к отступлению” (*A signal to retreat*). Every interaction he has at this dinner has some element that convinces him of a deeper subtext towards an ineffable conspiracy.

When the perspective shifts to the first person account of the observer himself, the tone becomes less paranoia tinged, with more emphasis on the observation of minute details. He begins by noting the snow, but his perspective quickly expands to near omniscient as he describes banal daily activities of largely nameless Soviets. He leaps from non-sequitur to non-sequitur (going from death, to childbirth, to putting on pants, to playing the piano, to preparing food etc.) until they collide in a frenzied, nonsensical haze of overlapping elements:

> “В тазу перед встречей бежал рысцой с чемоданом.
> Отвинчивал щеки из ружья, смеясь рожал старуху:
> «Вот те на! Приехали!»”[84]
> *Racing with a suitcase in a basin in readiness for the*
> *meeting. Unscrewing cheeks from a gun, giving birth to an*

[82] Tertz, Abram. *Ты и я*. 1959. *Электронная библиотека Александра Белоусенко*. The Library of Aleksander Belousenko, 10 Sept. 2002. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://www.belousenko.com/wr_Tertz.htm>.

[83] Tertz, Abram. *Fantastic Stories*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1987. P. 6. Print.

[84] Tertz, Abram. *Ты и я*. 1959. *Электронная библиотека Александра Белоусенко*. The Library of Aleksander Belousenko, 10 Sept. 2002. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://www.belousenko.com/wr_Tertz.htm>.

*old woman and laughing: "Here they are! They've come!"*[85]

He goes on to note the synchronicity of these actions as the element of primary importance, as they are unaware that, "каждый шаг их фиксируется и подлежит в любую минуту тщательному изучению"[86] (*Their every move was under observation, and liable to careful investigation at any moment*[87]). The observer is snapped from his reverie as he sees Nikolai Vasilievich make his way in to the dinner party, where the reader is treated to a more realistic interpretation of the events of that night. The observer notes his shifty and conspicuous mannerisms and remarks, "он держал себя словно преступник, которого вот-вот схватят и уличат" (*he behaved like a criminal who might be caught and unmasked at any moment*[88]). This behavior both puzzles and amuses the observer as he almost smugly proclaims:"Ему казалось, что за ним кто-то персонально следит, и это был - я, а он думал - они, и это меня рассмешило"[89] (*It seemed to him that he was being watched by someone, and I* was *watching him, but he thought it was* they. *I found this very funny*[90]). While the observer puts forth a much more reasonable scenario than Ivan Nikolaevich, his seeming omniscience and omnipresence, combined with lack of any particular character definition conveys a sense

[85] Tertz, Abram. *Fantastic Stories*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1987. P. 8. Print.

[86] Tertz, Abram. *Ты и я*. 1959. *Электронная библиотека Александра Белоусенко*. The Library of Aleksander Belousenko, 10 Sept. 2002. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://www.belousenko.com/wr_Tertz.htm>.

[87] Tertz, Abram. *Fantastic Stories*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1987. P. 10. Print.

[88] Tertz, Abram. *Fantastic Stories*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1987. P. 11. Print.

[89] Tertz, Abram. *Ты и я*. 1959. *Электронная библиотека Александра Белоусенко*. The Library of Aleksander Belousenko, 10 Sept. 2002. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://www.belousenko.com/wr_Tertz.htm>.

[90] Tertz, Abram. *Fantastic Stories*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1987. P. 12. Print.

of the foreboding and unknown. Even in the most benign interpretation, the observer is at least in synchronization with secret police methodology (detailed in the previous chapter), and this is assuming we are taking it as a given that he is an ordinary human being.

Back at the dinner party, Nikolai Vasilievich causes a scene by professing his love to Lida, one of the women present (and apparently the only one he does not suspect of being a man in disguise), followed by throwing out wild accusations at all in attendance that "[he] can see right through them." While he and Lida make their way back to his apartment, he puts on airs and plays the role of a drunk buffoon, having suddenly been gripped with another wave of paranoia that Graube (who he believes to be the orchestrator of this great conspiracy) has sent agents to pursue him to ensure that he really *was* involved in a "whirlwind romace" or if he was going to commit more unspecified misdeeds. Nikolai Vasilievich cares nothing for Lida in any real sense of the word, but by the end of the chapter, he concludes that she could provide him with a suitable alibi against his enemies:

> Но хотя ты не мог как следует уловить выражение глаз,
> отовсюду на тебя устремленных, тебе хотелось гордо
> сказать перед всем миром: "Что ж, смотрите, я - не
> боюсь! Вы же видите - я занят делом, я люблю свою
> Лиду и с меня взятки гладки..."[91]

[91] Tertz, Abram. *Ты и я*. 1959. *Электронная библиотека Александра Белоусенко*. The Library of Aleksander Belousenko, 10 Sept. 2002. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://www.belousenko.com/wr_Tertz.htm>.

> *Although you could not quite make out the expression in the eyes fixed on you from all sides, you were tempted to shout proudly to the whole world: "Look, I'm not afraid! You can see that I am busy making love to my Lida, and you've got nothing on me…*[92]

Upon returning to the observer's perspective, he informs the reader that he has been watching Nikolai Vasilievich for four days, and even though the observer finds his baseless paranoia to be garbage, he admits to a certain inextricability between the two of them: "Мы оба попали в плен, не в силах оторвать друг от друга застекленевшие взгляды"[93] (*We are both prisoners; we are unable to take our glazed eyes off of each other*[94]). As he continues to watch Nikolai, he makes particular note of his habits in the bathroom, wherein he would strain and groan to no excretory avail out of the crippling fear of his being observed. The observer sees this as pathetic, but cannot help but state, "я мучился вместе с ним из-за его бестактности" (*I suffered with him for all of his clumsiness*[95]). Even the observer is becoming wary of his quarry as he begins to recognize a psychic and/or physical bond forming between them. Shortly following his scatological espionage, the observer finds himself in a crowd, and the reader is once again treated to a flurry of images and dialogue devoid of context. The difference between this occurrence and its predecessor in the second chapter, however, is that upon

[92] Tertz, Abram. *Fantastic Stories*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1987. P. 18. Print.

[93] Tertz, Abram. *Ты и я*. 1959. *Электронная библиотека Александра Белоусенко*. The Library of Aleksander Belousenko, 10 Sept. 2002. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://www.belousenko.com/wr_Tertz.htm>.

[94] Tertz, Abram. *Fantastic Stories*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1987. P. 19. Print.

[95] IBID, p. 20

emerging, the perspective of the narrative has changed from the observer's more traditional view to the second person delusional insanity as Nikolai Vasilievich works his way through the streets. This is a noteworthy occurrence, as the perspective shifts had only been happening at chapter breaks until this point.

As he continues through the street, Nikolai Vasilievich encounters Graube, who tries to pass off the events at the dinner party as a hilarious drunken joke, and even gets down on his knees to demonstrate his sincerity. Looking at Graube's expression of what seems to be genuine remorse, he has a brief "wild" thought: "На одну секунду тебе в голову пришла дикая мысль, быть может, Генрих Иванович сам тебя опасается..."[96] (*For a second, a wild idea came in to your head that* he *might be frightened of* you…[97]). This "wild" thought could well be the influence of the observer, demonstrating the reciprocal nature of the bond being formed between the watcher and the watched. The bond has not taken full hold at this point, so Nikolai regains his usual paranoid and manic demeanor and promptly punches in the face the man kneeling before him in apology.

The final chapter of the story reads like a fever dream. The established perspective shifts now begin to happen from paragraph, and even sometimes from sentence to sentence. The chapter begins with Nikolai Vasilievich refusing to allow Lida in to his apartment following his encounter with Graube, who he now believes sent her as an agent to watch him all along. She gives up outside his apartment, but waits diligently by the building entrance as Nikolai paces back and forth in increasing agitation. The observer begins to notice that he is changing physically, adopting his target's red hair (for

[96] Tertz, Abram. *Ты и я*. 1959. *Электронная библиотека Александра Белоусенко*. The Library of Aleksander Belousenko, 10 Sept. 2002. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://www.belousenko.com/wr_Tertz.htm>.

[97] Tertz, Abram. *Fantastic Stories*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1987. P. 22. Print.

which he expressed extreme distaste earlier in the novel) and freckles. He eventually decides to lure Lida away from the building essentially to use her for his own amusement. Given that he has observed her a fair amount, he feels he knows her ins and outs, but gets flustered and angry when she continually compares him to Nikolai Vasilievich (based largely on the red hair that he keeps insisting he does not have). Soon, the observer's consciousness and Nikolai Vasilievich's have merged completely, and the action shifts very rapidly back and forth between the observer's carnal mission, and Nikolai Vasilievich singing off nursery rhymes as he contemplates killing himself. At the moment of climax between the observer and Lida (wherein she repeatedly calls out "Kolya, Kolya!" much to the observer's chagrin) Nikolai slashes his throat with a razor and their connection is severed.

As he concludes the tale, the observer once again examines the tableau of banal tasks which he had mentioned in chapter two, laconically remarking, "Все было по-старому" (*everything was as it had been*). Yet it is his final statement that truly cuts to the core of this story: "Ты ушел, а я остался. Я не жалею о твоей смерти. Мне жаль, что я не могу тебя забыть"[98] (*You have gone and I am left. I do not regret your death. I am sorry that I cannot forget you*[99]). He speaks this out deliberately with simple words, and unlike virtually any other point in the novel, there is no level of subjective interpretation applied to the subject in question. He states his feelings towards the matter and reiterates the reality, demonstrating that it is in our attempts to interpret one another

[98] Tertz, Abram. *Ты и я*. 1959. *Электронная библиотека Александра Белоусенко*. The Library of Aleksander Belousenko, 10 Sept. 2002. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <http://www.belousenko.com/wr_Tertz.htm>.

[99] Tertz, Abram. *Fantastic Stories*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1987. P. 28. Print.

at all, be it with manic paranoia or mild and detached disdain, that we not only run the risk of losing sight of who those around us are, but even ourselves.

# CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSION: WHAT IS TO BE GAINED?

The methodologies employed by Bulgakov, Nabokov, and Tertz likely have more differences than similarities when examined on a surface level. Bulgakov keeps his entire world shrouded in a mire of the diabolical and the disingenuous, ensuring that no matter which reality Maksudov or the reader encounters, there will always be an unknowable or inexplicable variable keeping the reality from coinciding with one to which the reader would be accustomed to or familiar with. Nabokov removes the rules of the physical world entirely, yet the only result seems to be that there are now that many more ways in which the characters can misunderstand one another. Tertz infuses his real world with a tinge of the magical and the uncanny, in addition to frequently employing an unorthodox second person narration so that for the majority of the story, the protagonist is simply referred to as "you", making it all the harder to extricate oneself from one's own biases when the time comes to make interpretations regarding character motivations or their often bizarre actions.

What these three works all drive at with arguably equal mastery is the idea of the incommunicability, not only of art, but of the self (for which art is arguably an extension anyway). Maksudov cannot make the alleged greats of his day understand how they are destroying his vision before his very eyes. Smurov uses The Eye in an attempt to find his true, prototypical self, only to come away with more confusion than that with which he began as the number of (per)versions of himself multiply out of control in the minds of those around him, thus affecting his own reality. Nikolai Vasilievich and his observer

both attempt to remain at the far end of their respective spectrums of mania and detachment, yet in doing so, get their psychic and physical selves conflated until finally Nikolai cannot bear his perceived persecution and severs their tie, removing his tarnishing influence from his now grateful observer. This is certainly not to say that art cannot contain objective truths, but rather to encourage the reader to delve past the banal, the inexplicable, and the terrifying, and by doing so, come out the other side with a broader sense of enlightened perspective, taking into account as little of their own experience as possible, so as to approach the true form as close as one can. As Tertz put it in the conclusion of *On Socialist Realism*: "Right now I put my hope in the phantasmagoric art, with hypotheses instead of a Purpose, an art in which the grotesque will replace realistic descriptions of ordinary life. Such an art would correspond best to the spirit of our time."[100]

[100] Tertz, Abram. "On Socialist Realism." The Trial Begins and On Socialist Realism. Berkeley: University of California, 1982. 131-219. P. 219. Print

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