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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the aesthetic category of the sublime in Russia from the 18th century through the end of the 20th. In doing so, it follows two major trajectories: the development of the sublime in Russia in philosophical writings on aesthetics, and three case studies of the sublime in Russian literature. The first chapter examines the origins of the Russian sublime, beginning with Lomonosov’s reception of Boileau as the beginning of the Russian sublime tradition. After addressing works by Muraviev, Martynov, Galich, and Nadezhdin, the argument is made for a general development of the sublime from a rhetorically-structured category to one of experience. The second chapter centers on Pushkin’s novel-in-verse, *Eugene Onegin*, as an example of a “Pushkinian sublime”, which incorporates both the rhetorical and aesthetic dimensions of previous thinkers in order to express the freedom that derives from the power of the poetic imagination.

The third chapter traces the development of what is called “the chiasmic sublime” of the 19th century. Drawing on readings of Chernyshevsky, Kierkegaard, Plekhanov, Nietzsche, Ivanov, and Lunacharsky, I argue that the central function of the sublime is to attempt to reconcile idealist notions of spirit with a rising importance of the material as an object of philosophical consideration. As a result, a dual understanding of the sublime occurs, in which each component of the chiasmus participates fully. This serves as the background for the case study of chapter four, in which I identify occurrences of the “chiasmic sublime” in the works of Andrei Platonov, in particular his 1930s novel, *Dzhan*. 

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The final chapter examines Pelevin’s novel, *Generation P*, as an example of the Russian postmodern sublime. Beginning with an examination of Marx’s notes on the sublime published in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, I trace their development in Lyotard, Zizek, and Sloterdijk, centering on two ideas present in the culture of late capitalism: money as a sublime commodity, and cynicism as a sublime psychic state. In Pelevin’s novel, I argue that both inform the central challenges that are encountered and eventually overcome by its protagonist, Vavilen Tatarsky.
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Introduction

From its inception, indeterminacy has been the sublime’s greatest source of rhetorical and aesthetic strength, and the most obstinate of stumbling blocks for those who would study it. The origin of the sublime owes its existence to the Greek language treatise *Peri Hypsous* (“On Height”). Allegedly composed between the first and third centuries AD, the single extant copy dates to approximately the 10th century, i.e. at least a half-millennium later. Attribution of this document is similarly elusive. For most of the 1000 years following its rediscovery, the treatise’s author was referred to as “Dionysus Longinus”. This changed in the 19th century, when an Italian scholar named Amati re-examined the manuscript and discovered an error of medieval transcription, in which the scribe copied “Dionysus or Longinus” as “Dionysus Longinus.” The compound name thus bifurcates into two options: Dionysus of Halicarnassus and Cassius Longinus. The general scholarly inclination has been towards the latter, a figure from the 3rd century whose entire oeuvre has otherwise been lost, but who is referenced in other texts in late antiquity.

Anonymous or unknown authorship, of course, does not deny a text of value. It can be identified and survive by other means, such as its title, the cohesiveness of its exposition, or a recognized, established historical pedigree. Unfortunately, none of these is possible in this case, at least as far as the aforementioned qualities are commonly understood. To begin in reverse order: the reception of the 10th century manuscript—having been created at least 500 years after the moment of composition—is met with another 500 years of sublime silence, and only

reappears with new editions in the original in 1554 (Basel), and 1555 (Venice) and 1569 (Geneva). A Latin translation followed in 1566 (Naples), and an Italian version soon followed (1575). Like the original, all of these new editions were of an incomplete, fragmentary work. In translation, the title of the treatise varied. The most common relied on the Latin *sublimis*, but addition terms such as “the majestic”, “the grand”, and “height” would continue to be used up until an uneasy consensus emerges in the mid-19th century. Writing in the early 18th century, for example, British philosophers often used words such as “grand” and “great” in addition to “sublime,” occasionally—but not always—making distinctions between them.

Despite such terminological disorder, there are certain watershed moments in the history of the sublime from the 17th century onwards that have been typically used as points of orientation. The first of these is Boileau’s translation of Longinus in 1674. Despite his later standing as the legislator of Parnassus, Boileau’s sublime moment can and should be understood in a variety of ways, as Eva Madeleine Martin convincingly argues in her study of the sublime 16th and 17th century France. Classically viewed as a solitary origin point, Boileau was one voice among many, and can be read just as easily as a culmination of those who preceded him than as a starting point for the more thoroughly-studied writers who followed. It is equally risky to take Boileau’s position at court as a sign of political or intellectual submission to or creation of a “normative model for the culture of French absolutism.” Boileau was certainly capable of

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5 For a more comprehensive account of translations before Boileau, see: Weinberg, “Translations and Commentaries of Longinus, ‘On the Sublime’, to 1600.”
6 This discrepancy was to be found in all European traditions. Harsha Ram provides a cogent overview of these terms in the Russian history of the sublime, though his characterization of “the absence of a single Russian word corresponding to the English sublime” is anachronistic. In the 17th century, there was no single word for the sublime in English either. For Ram’s overview see: Ram, *The Imperial Sublime*, 2003, xxx; Costelloe, “Imagination and Internal Sense The Sublime in Shaftesbury, Reid, Addison, and Reynolds.”
8 Martin, “The ‘Prehistory’ of the Sublime in Early Modern France An Interdisciplinary Perspective.”
dissent, as can be seen in his expressions of support for the Jansenist movement. In her survey, Martin makes an intriguing argument in her observation that many of the early translators of the Longinus treatise “had either been accused of Calvinism or had reputations for heresy.”

This is not to say that the sublime is inimical to political authority, but rather to assert that the sublime, even in the early modern period, was capable of housing other authorities just as easily and just as often. Its intensity—variously understood and expressed, but perhaps one of the sublime’s few constants—provided an excellent dueling ground for opposing ideas, whether between contemporaries or generations.

The second watershed moment in the history of the sublime is usually associated with Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), the only contribution the Irish statesman ever made to the field of aesthetics. The calling cards of Burke’s treatise are considered to be the following: a thoroughly secular and empiricist philosophical framework, a heightened focus on the emotional affects of aesthetic experience, and an understanding of a relationship between the sublime and the beautiful that was oppositional, instead of complementary. Burke is still interested in the sublime in language and art—though his catalogue differs little from those around him—but his central concern is the experience of the sublime, one that could be conceived via observation, thus obviating the sublime’s dependency on artistic language found in Boileau’s account.

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10 Martin, “The ‘Prehistory’ of the Sublime in Early Modern France An Interdisciplinary Perspective,” 79; There is, however, continued debate on this matter. See Cronk for a dissenting opinion Cronk, *The Classical Sublime*, 127–143.

11 For a wonderful example of such a debate, see Martin’s comparison of Boileau and an anonymous translation of Longinus published in response: Martin, “The ‘Prehistory’ of the Sublime in Early Modern France An Interdisciplinary Perspective,” 92.

12 Ashfield and Bolla’s anthology of texts from this period remains extremely useful. The classic study of the 18th British sublime can be found in Monk, and Axelsson’s most recent study provides an excellent bridge from the 17th century to the 18th. Ashfield and Bolla, *The Sublime*; Monk, *The Sublime*; Axelsson, *The Sublime*. 
The intensity of the sublime, which in most preceding theories had been attached to either language or the soul’s ability to ascend to the divine, came to be radically reoriented in Burke’s version. As both the beautiful and the sublime were dependent on “passions”, and as the strongest passion was “self-preservation,” according to Burke, the sublime had to be inaugurated by experiences that would “excite” or stimulate it. Accordingly, Burke’s sublime is founded on the notion of violence directed against the subject which fails to transpire:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. I say the strongest emotion, because I am satisfied the ideas of pain are much more powerful than those which enter on the part of pleasure. Without all doubt, the torments which we may be made to suffer are much greater in their effect on the body and mind, than any pleasure which the most learned voluptuary could suggest, or than the liveliest imagination, and the most sound and exquisitely sensible body, could enjoy.\(^\text{13}\)

It is not, however, terror by itself which allows for the sublime, Burke continues, but rather that the actual violence does not take place. As a result, the energy aroused in the human body—which is preparing itself for pain—can be expended in its inversion, which Burke calls “delight.” Delight is not pleasure proper, but more like what comes to be known as a “negative pleasure.”\(^\text{14}\)

Burke’s model of the sublime enjoyed a great deal of popularity, but not nearly as much as the one that would build upon it and re-orient it. Immanuel Kant’s writing on the sublime begins with the pre-critical *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, which are


\(^{14}\) In the interests of illustration: Imagine you could look at a flower for ten minutes, and get ten units of pleasure. The sublime equivalent to this (if we assume one Mount Blanc per 10 flowers) you could achieve the same amount of psychic energy by looking at Mount Blanc for one minute. The sublime can thus also be said to indirectly compress energy into a more compact form, but is usually incapable of prolonged duration.
an account of Kant’s own “subjective observations.” The sublime also makes an appearance in the first two of his critiques, but its most extensive treatment is contained in the *Critique of Judgement* (1790), which was intended to close the gap between practical and pure reason left open by the previous two works. Whether it was successful or not continues to be a point of contention, but what is clear is that from this point forward, Kant’s model of the sublime would serve as the starting point for the vast majority of philosophical works on the sublime up until the present day.

A detailed examination of Kant’s text is beyond the scope of this introduction, but a few general categories are worth illuminating. The first is that the beautiful and the sublime share some qualities in common, and mirror each other in others. Both the beautiful and the sublime are aesthetic judgments, both are “subjectively universal,” and both are disinterested, i.e. there is no direct tangible advantage for the subject. However, they have an opposing relationship in regards to form: beauty is connected with the presence of form, and it could be argued that it is more connected to it than in preceding conceptions, if only by virtue of its opposition to the sublime, which Kant describes in connection with a “formless object.” The beautiful and the sublime are also vectored differently, i.e. they are pointed in different directions. Both originate in the faculty of imagination, but the beautiful is related to understanding (that is, “downwards” towards form), while the sublime is related to reason (“upwards,” according to the neo-Platonic allegory).

15 Kant’s text (as is Burke’s) is a wonderful example of the 18th century’s particular obsession with taxonomy. Among other topics, Kant addresses the sexes, national identity, the theory of the four temperaments, using the beautiful and the sublime as metrics. Kant’s copy also included several remarks he made throughout the work, which have also been of interest. Kant, *Kant*, 7–37, 115–252.
The second is that there is a kind of movement implied in the judgment of the sublime through Kant’s topography of thought. The sublime originates in the faculty of imagination, whose powers of apprehension and comprehension are engaged to subsume the object into the framework of a concept. This process, according to Kant, is doomed to fail; the intensity of the sublime exceeds comprehension which is unable to find a suitable model, and forces apprehension to engage in a futile chase to measure it, which, in the deterioration of concepts of measure, it is incapable of doing. But then (and it is never quite clear what happens during that “then”) the imagination refers to the principle of reason. Through this, the imagination is able to recover, finding in reason an infinite measure. The attested result: the sublime resolves in an awareness of the subject’s own subjective relationship to the principle of reason, and the subject experiences pleasure of a particular flavor: awe, respect, astonishment.

This makes for a gripping (and ancient) dramatic plot, capable of engendering a limitless number of iterations. Part of what makes Kant’s sublime so compelling are the particulars of the production: for Lyotard, Kant’s sublime is a “family history,” the product of an “unhappy marriage” between an abject imagination and authoritarian reason.16 This is not the only possibility, to be sure. Other narratives of the sublime view it as the relationship between master and slave, sin and grace, or any number of pairs of actors or plots, triumphant or tragic, both, neither.

This study is one such history. Its first chapter examines the history of the sublime in Russian thought from its origins in Lomonosov through the idealist aesthetics of Nikolai Nadezhdin. I hold that this history echoes the general European trend from rhetorics to aesthetics, but it never fully loses sight of the former. In addition (or perhaps because of this),

there is considerably less emphasis on Burkean terror or anxiety in the thinkers under investigation, as can be seen in the aesthetics of Galich and Nadezhdin. For both, a more conducive affective state for the sublime was found in melancholy. The second chapter explores the relationship between these aspects of the Russian sublime and Pushkin’s novel-in-verse, *Eugene Onegin*.

The third chapter traces the development of what I provisionally term the “chiasmic sublime” of the 19th century that follows the peak of idealism. Three of the writers investigated here (Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Viacheslav Ivanov) are intuitively compatible with the sublime, the other three, less so. It is precisely because of this potential incompatibility, however, that makes examining the aesthetics of three shining lights of the Soviet cultural canon (Chernyshevsky, Plekhanov, and Lunacharsky) worthwhile. All of the above writers attempt to expand the sublime beyond the strictures of idealist reason. The reasons for doing so vary between these two groups, but their attempts reveal a striking isomorphism, in which the sublime can be seen as the intersection between a reason and a co-participating material force commensurate to it. In the fourth chapter, I will present three case studies of the chiasmic sublime in the works of Andrei Platonov who belongs to both of these camps: the early texts “On Love” and “Thirst of a Beggar”, and the 1930s novel, *Dzhan*.

The move to the late 20th century and post-Soviet Russia requires a step back. Fittingly, that step is towards Marx. Beginning with Marx’s notes taken in preparation for two articles on aesthetics that were either lost or never completed, I turn to two post-structuralist thinkers influenced by them, Jean-François Lyotard and Slavoj Zizek, who both understand the late capitalist sublime as being connected with the negative mathematical infinity of the commodity. I then proceed to an overview of Peter’s Sloterdijk’s conception of modern cynicism, before
returning to the Russian context. Starting with Bulatov’s Horizon and Erofeev’s Moscow to the End of the Line as examples of the sublime in late Soviet culture, I conclude with a close reading of Pelevin’s post-Soviet, postmodern Generation P as a continuation and culmination of the themes and ideas presented in the preceding chapters.

Chapter 1: Origins of the Russian Sublime

1.1 Introduction

The notion that organization, systematization, and discipline do not inhibit freedom, but rather serve as the conditions for freedom’s realization, is the defining feature of 18th century Russian aesthetics. The popularization of the sublime provides the most compelling illustration of this core value in the Russian cultural context of the period, and serves as the central concern of this chapter. For Lomonosov, who learned of the sublime via Boileau’s translation of Longinus’ Peri Hypsous, the sublime was first and foremost a question of knowledge as technique. Like scientific knowledge, Lomonosov’s rhetorical figures of the sublime were intended for dissemination, imitation, and reproduction, serving as a means to capture poetically the infinite intensity and majesty of a universe made intelligible.

The departures from Lomonosov’s model at the turn of the 19th century, treated here via a discussion of the writings of Mikhail Muraviev and Ivan Martynov, are both measured and significant. Both recognize the preeminence of Lomonosov’s rhetorical model, but advocate for its expansion. For Muraviev, this can be seen in an understanding of the sublime that is still governed by the rhetorics of proper expression, but one that is also capable of portraying a more personal dimension. Such “shapes of thought”—to use Muraviev’s term—do not replace the
universal with the personal, but rather allow for its inclusion as the personal to take place. Ivan Martynov’s Russian translation and commentary to the Longinus treatise also attempts to find a space for the particular within the universal, as one of the first attempts to catalogue examples of the sublime from Russian culture and to include them among the pantheon of sublime objects and utterances of antiquity and contemporary Europe.

The final group of writers examined—Ludwig Von Jakob, Aleksandr Galich, and Nikolai Nadezhdin—mark a definitive shift from the rhetorical to the aesthetic, from creation to representation. The sublime, while still being subject to certain rhetorical figures and questions of form, is now related to a series of affective states most appropriate it to it. Some of these (veneration, awe, respect) are familiar from the works of German idealism that inspired all three of these authors. What is striking, however, is the decentering of Burkean anxiety, which many have taken to be the central component of the early 19th century sublime. For Nadezhdin, as we shall see, it is melancholy—equally intense as anxiety, but more durable and sustainable—that is the primary emotional state conducive to the sublime.

1.2 Lomonosov and Sublime Rhetoric in Краткое руководство к красноречию (1743)

In 1738, the polymath Mikhail Lomonosov was in the middle of a three-year stay in Germany paid for by the Russian state in recognition of his academic accomplishments. In addition to studying a number of scientific fields, Lomonosov found time to devote to another of his myriad interests: the theory and practice of poetry. Among the surviving materials from this period in Lomonosov’s life is a collection of notes from Boileau’s idiosyncratic 1674 translation of Longinus’ treatise Peri Hypsous. Although Boileau had certainly figured in the history of Russian literature prior to this—in the works of Trediakovskii and Kantemir, for example—
Lomonosov’s reading of Boileau’s translation is significant in that it can be read as the first dedicated study of the sublime in Russian letters.

For those familiar with the accepted image of Lomonosov as the legislator of Russian poetry—an image that took shape well after Lomonosov’s own life and work—the passages Lomonosov decides to write out for future reference hardly come as a surprise. In fact, in examining Lomonosov’s outline, one quickly arrives at the conclusion that Lomonosov is utterly uninterested in Boileau’s interpretation of Longinus, and is nearly equally indifferent to Longinus’ own reflections. Far more important to him are the rhetorical sources of the sublime mentioned in the sixth chapter of *Peri Hypsous*. In methodical fashion, Lomonosov lists them in his outline:

Il y a [pour ainsi dire] cinq sources principales du Sublime < > 1 Une certaine Elévation d’esprit, qui nous fait penser heureusement les choses < > 2 Pathétique < > 3 Les Figures tournées d’une certaine manière 4 La noblesse de l’expression qui a deux parties, le choix des mots, et la diction élégante et figurée < > 5 La Composition et l’arrangement des paroles dans toute leur magnificence et leur dignité. 17

This passage is exemplary of the typological, schematic thinking that predominates in Lomonosov’s later work on rhetoric. A small number of additional passages concern certain rhetorical figures such as periphrasis and amplification, the feigned immediacy of the lyrical poet, and—on numerous occasions—the incompatibility of the sublime for dealing with “base” subject matter. 18

18 Ibid., 335–336.
Preferential treatment of specific examples from antiquity and the mechanical dimensions of rhetoric is consistent throughout Lomonosov’s notes with the exception of an extended citation from the second section of the treatise:

quoique la Nature [ne se montre] jamais plus libre que dans les discours sublimes et pathétiques, il est pourtant aise de reconnaître qu'elle n'est pas absolument ennemie de l'art et des règles. J'avoue, que, dans toutes nos productions, il la faut toujours supposer comme la base, le principe et le premier fondement. Mais aussi il est certain que notre esprit a besoin d'une méthode pour lui enseigner à ne dire que ce qu'il faut et à le dire en son lieu, et que cette méthode peut beaucoup contribuer à nous acquérir la parfaite habitude du Sublime. Car comme les vaisseaux sont en danger de périr, lorsqu'on les abonde à leur seule légèreté, et qu'on ne sait pas leur donner la charge et le poids qu'ils doivent avoir il en est ainsi du Sublime, si on l'abandonne à la seule impétuosité d'une nature ignorant et téméraire Nôtre esprit assez souvent n'a pas moins besoin de bride que d'éperon < >

By far the most extensive passage from Boileau to attract Lomonosov’s attention, the relationship between art and nature described above can also be seen as a concise summary of Lomonosov’s own poetics. Vital here is the notion that the organizational structures of poetry create the possibility of perceiving freedom in nature. In this sense, poetry is akin to the cosmogony of the first chapter of Genesis; indeed, the so-called fiat lux of Genesis 1:3 is present in both the Longinus treatise and Lomonosov’s notes. Importantly, however, the biblical citation does not function as sacred writ. Rather, according to Longinus, it demonstrates “all of the dignity [of God] in the opening words of his [i.e. Moses’] laws.” The underlying assessment of the Genesis passage, then, is not that the sublime God engenders an equally sublime set of laws, but rather precisely the opposite: the laws themselves open up the very possibility of a sublime deity.

19 Ibid., 334.
20 Ibid., 336.
21 Ibid.
This Enlightenment principle of organization as the creative source of freedom can be detected throughout Lomonosov’s artistic (and scientific) output. In both editions of his *Rhetoric* (1743, 1759) Lomonosov approaches his subject matter empirically, drawing extensively from the writings of antiquity as well as his own. In light of Lomonosov’s study of the sublime, one particular example stands out. In a section of the *Rhetoric* dedicated to syllogism, Lomonosov provides an example based on the following logical argument:

Ежели что из таких частей состоит, из которых одна для другой бытие свое имеет, оное от разумного существо устроено. Но видимый мир из таких частей состоит, из которых одна для другой бытие свое имеет. Следовательно, видимый мир от разумного существо устроен.22

Lomonosov’s rhetorical reworking of this argument, most clearly in his conclusion, is a veritable tour de force of his understanding of the sublime:

Сего ради нет никакого сомнения, что видимый сей мир устроен от существо разумного и что, кроме сей пречудной и превеликой громады, есть некоторая сила, которая оную соградила, которая есть неизмеримо велика, что произвела толь неизмеримое здание, непостижимо премудра, что толь стройно, толь согласно, толь великолепно оное устроила, несказанно щедра, что между всеми творениями положила и утвердила взаимную пользу. Сия неизмеримо великая, непостижимо премудрая, несказанно щедрая сила не тое ли есть, что мы богом называем и почитаем неизмеримо великим и всемогущим, непостижимо премудрым и несказанно щедрым?23

Lomonosov achieves the rhetorical intensity of his conclusion by building upon a series of negated adverbs modifying superlative adjectives (immeasurably great, inconceivably wise, ineffably generous) in separate clauses that he then repeats in the opening clause of his final

22 Ломоносов, “Краткое Руководство К Красноречию. Книга Первая, В Которой Содержится Риторика, Показующая Общие Правила Обоего Красноречия, То Есть Оратории И Поэзии, Сочиненная В Пользу Любящих Словесные Науки,” 319.

23 Ibid., 324–325.
sentence, which takes the form of a rhetorical question. These same adjectives, in the final clause, are attributed to God. In addition to this movement towards cohesion, the adverb/adjective pairs add an additional intensity, alternating between a apophatic and cataphatic approach to its subject, implying that God—to the extent that he can be attributed any qualities at all—can only be attributed those qualities whose measure is at the absolute limit of human perception.

This definition of the divine is then followed by a series of imperatives addressed to humans engaged in variety of activities, each of which can be seen as an advancement in human civilization. Lomonosov commands that each give thanks for the gifts bestowed upon them by the divine:

Того ради, живущие по вселенной, поклоняйтесь со благоговением изливающему реки от источников своих к напоению и омытию вашему. Делающие землю и ожидающие плодов от труда своего, припадайте пред посылающим дождь на нивы ваши и согревающим те солнечною теплотою. Плавающие по водам, восклицайте со усердием к открывшему вам пространный и скорый путь в отдаленные страны для пользы вашей и к устремляющему дохновением своим корабли ваши. Пасущие стада, преклоняйте колена и сердца пред растящим траву на пажитях ваших и пред украшающим поля цветами для умножения радости в безмолвном житии вашем.24

In each successive imperative in the series, the phrases Lomonosov employs become progressively longer, and in each transition Lomonosov finds a way to further intensify the addressee’s indebtedness to God. In the first, humanity is viewed as merely being alive and should give thanks for the gift of water, which provides a source for ablutions and relief of thirst. In the second, those who till the soil should give thanks for the greater gifts of “he who sends

24 Ibid., 325–326.
rain to your fields” and “warms them with the heat of the sun,” while those at sea should give thanks to “he who has opened and a wide and quick path for you to distant lands for your benefit and for he who directs his breath to your ships.” The increasing length and syntactic complexity of the predicate of each imperative serve to further highlight the insurmountable difference between the human and the divine; even as the human activities increase in sophistication (living, agriculture, sailing, maintaining livestock), the activities of God increase at an exponential rate that far outstrips them.

The growing complexity of Lomonosov’s climax peaks when he turns to the activity of science, addressing “those who are worthy of gazing into the book of invariable natural laws”:

Following the pattern described above, Lomonosov’s instruction to the scientist is not only the most complex in the series; it also demands the most difficult manner of giving thanks. Whereas others only had to “bow,” “fall before,” “sincerely exclaim,” or “bend their knees and hearts,” the student of science must “elevate [their] mind.” Moreover, inasmuch as rhetoric itself would

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25 Ibid., 325.
fall under the category of science for Lomonosov, it is here that he reveals his own rhetorical device: the further humanity advances in knowledge, the more exalted must be their thanks to God.

A veritable symphony of rhetorical tropes and figures, Lomonosov’s syllogism on the existence of God from the interconnectivity of the elements of nature is entirely Longinian in its use of the sublime. The direct reference to the Longinus treatise can be detected in what seems like an otherwise unmotivated apostrophe to Epicurus. The necessary context needed to understand the reference is the second book of Cicero’s *On the Nature of the Gods* in which he takes issue with Epicurean agnosticism. While Lomonosov draws upon Cicero’s line of argument in his own syllogism, he also ornaments it in accordance to Longinus’ evaluation of Cicero’s oratorical talents, which are mentioned in the tenth chapter of the treatise, “On Amplification,” and which Lomonosov included in his notes:

L'Amplification <...> «est un accroissement de paroles que l'on peut tirer de toutes les circonstances particulières des choses et de tous les lieux de l'oraison, qui remplit le discours, et le fortifie, en l'appuyant sur ce qu'on a déjà dit»

La même différence, à mon avis, est entre Démosthène et Cicéron pour le grand et le Sublime, autant que nous autres Grecs pouvons juger des ouvrages d'un Auteur Latin. En effet, Démosthène est grand en ce qui est serré et concis ; et Cicéron, au contraire, en ce qui est diffus et étendu. On peut comparer ce premier, à cause de la violence, de la rapidité, de la force et de la véhémence avec laquelle il ravage, pour ainsi dire, et emporte tout, à une tempeste et à un foudre. Pour Cicéron, on peut dire, à mon avis, que, comme un grand embrasement il dévore et consume tout ce qu'il rencontre, avec un feu qui ne s'éteint point, qu'il répand diversement dans ses ouvrages, et qui, à mesure qu'il s'avance, prend toujours de nouvelles forces.  

The missing link between Lomonosov’s outline and his syllogism in his *Rhetoric* is a passage from the Longinus treatise Lomonosov does not copy, but clearly draws upon:

> We must employ the diffusive style, on the other hand, when we wish to overpower them with a flood of language. It is suitable, for example, to familiar topics, and to *perorations in most cases*, and to digressions, *and to all descriptive and declamatory passages, and in dealing with history or natural science*, and in numerous other cases.\(^{27}\)

Here we can see that—far from being a minor moment—Boileau’s translation of Longinus played a vital role in Lomonosov’s development as a writer. In addition to drawing on the diffusive style of Cicero in the passages examined above, Lomonosov also emulates the concise style of Demosthenes in his final statement: “He who wields thunder, is. Nonbelievers, tremble.”

In his revised edition, Lomonosov diligently reworked the final sentences of this section, seeking to maximize emotional impact via the clarity and conciseness of the *fiant lux*.\(^{28}\)

A close reading of one of Lomonosov’s most well-known and earliest poems, “Evening Reflections on Divine Majesty on The Occasion of the Great Northern Lights” (1743), reveals a similar rhetorical structure. Lomonosov’s “spiritual ode” was cited in his *Rhetoric* as an example of amplification, and the poetic nature of the text lends itself to an even more sophisticated framework. The opening stanza builds upon a series of binary oppositions (day/night, ascent/descent) that alternate and shift throughout the stanza:

> Лицо свое скрывает день:
> Поля покрыла мрачна ночь;


\(^{28}\) The changes were as follows: Рит. рук. 1747 гады вместо зачеркнутого животные ; Рит. рук. 1747 в ад вместо зачеркнутого в расселины ; Рит. рук. 1747 зачеркнуто покрыть горами создавший землю ; Рит. рук. 1747 зачеркнуто поразить молнией, пополнить. Ломоносов, “Краткое Руководство К Красноречию. Книга Первая, В Которой Содержится Риторика, Показующая Общие Правила Обоего Красноречия, То Есть Оратории И Поэзии, Сочиненная В Пользу Любящих Словесные Науки,” 325.
Взошла на горы чорна тень;
Лучи от нас склонились прочь;
Открылась бездна, звезд полна;
Звездам числа нет, бездне дна.\(^{29}\)

While there are numerous figures and tropes that could be analyzed in these six lines alone, the most important for our purposes is the parallel development of day and night. In the first two lines both are viewed via motifs of descent (the setting sun, the covering of the fields). In the two following lines, both are considered via the opposing motif of ascent; paradoxically, the shadow “ascends the mountain”, while the “bending/bowing of the sun’s rays” indicates that the reader is situated in an elevated position.

However, it is precisely when the reader would expect a continuation of this alternating pattern that the structure shifts. The “opening of an abyss” would seem to herald a return to the downwards trajectory of descent, but the arrival of the stars quickly shifts the implied gaze to the sky. If in the first four lines the alternation between ascent and descent takes place over the course of the entire line, in the concluding couplet Lomonosov has doubled the tempo: ascent and descent alternate at the rate of half a line.

A similar increase in rhetorical force can be seen in the figures of the opening stanza, particularly in the arrangement of subjects and predicates. The first two lines share an inverted structure in which predicate precedes subject. The third line continues this pattern, but the fourth line: “Лучи от нас склонились прочь” is an inversion of this inversion, a fact that seems to be highlighted both by its use of metonymy and its passive syntax in relation to the poet and reader.

To reiterate, in the first two lines of the poem the syntax remains the same (parallelism), but in the third and fourth a reversal takes place (chiasmus).

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 315.
The shift in syntax that takes place over the first four lines of Lomonosov’s poem accelerates in the final two lines of the stanza. The chiasmus of lines three and four, which takes place over the course of two lines (line 3: predicate/subject, line 4: subject/predicate) is compressed into line five: “Открылась бездна [predicate/subject], звезд полна [subject predicate]”; the parallelism of lines one and two (line 1: predicate/subject, line 2: predicate/subject) is likewise compressed into line 6, but with the elements inverted: “Звездам числа нет [subject/predicate], бездне дна [subject predicate].”

The overall effect of Lomonosov’s amplification in the final two lines of the first stanza, then, is based on an intensification of speed on both the thematic and syntactic levels. United by a common rhyme, these lines do not propose a resolution to the tension of the binaries that serve as their constituents, i.e. there is no cathartic release to the energy of the system, each element is suspended in its ionized form. This increase of complexity is a reiteration of the growing complexity of human activity in the syllogism examined earlier; through his mastery of thematic and rhetorical juxtaposition, Lomonosov forces the reader to elevate their own mind via an ever-increasing complexity of thought.

The chemical character of this complex structure is highlighted in the extended simile of the second stanza, which features the similar alternations in syntax, but an increase in the number of constituent elements, on the one hand, and a substitution of the motifs of ascent and descent, on the other:

Песчинка как в морских волнах,
Как мала искра в вечном льде,
Как в сильном вихре тонкой прах,
В свирепом как перо огне,
Так я, в сей бездне углублен,
Теряюсь, мысльми утомлен!30

Here the opposition of internal/external replaces the motifs of ascent and descent, while the four elements replace the opposition of day and night. Amplification of scale is now incorporated on the thematic level, as the constituent elements are opposed to each other via disparity of size: earth within water, fire within water, earth within air, air within fire, and, finally, poet within the abyss. A final syllogism is implied at the conclusion of this stanza, which if stripped of its ornamentation, can be seen as the following: A. the number of stars exceed the powers of the mind. B. My thoughts similarly exceed the powers of the mind. C. Stars are the same as thoughts.

There are, then, three paradoxical equivalencies introduced by Lomonosov in the opening two stanzas of his poem: day is night, disparate elements are the same, and the interiority of the mind is the same as the exteriority of nature. The series of various explanations offered in the rhetorical questions of the stanzas that follow—all of which refer to contemporary scientific explanations of the time—fail to comprehend the phenomenon as a whole. The final explanation proffered by Lomonosov at the end of the seventh stanza—one that he himself ascribed to—is significant in its inclusion of a new, mediating element, ether, that is not mentioned earlier:

Там спорит жирна мгла с водой;
Иль солнечны лучи блестят,
Склонясь сквозь воздух к нам густой;
Иль тучных гор верхи горят;
Иль в море дуть престал зефир,
И гладки волны бьют в эфир.31

30 Ibid., 316.
31 Ibid., 317.
While Lomonosov casts his own theory in hypothetical fashion, the possible resolution of the problem posed for the natural phenomenon allows for the introduction of the divine in the final stanza:

Сомнений полон ваш ответ
О том, что окрест ближних мест.
Скажите ж, коль пространен свет?
И что малейших дале звезд?
Несведом тварей вам конец?
Скажите ж, коль велик Творец?32

The first two stanzas of Lomonosov’s ode proposed an equivalency between the external experience of nature and the internal experience of thought. The same figure repeats here, as Lomonsov leads his reader to think there is a shared quality between God and the element of ether, portraying both as existing beyond the known laws of nature.

Given the above, it is difficult to agree with Harsha Ram’s assertions that “the Russian sublime was more overtly politicized and less concerned than its western equivalents with a dialectic of mind and nature,” or that “Kant’s resolution of the sublime into a celebration of the mind’s ability to conceive the infinite seems not to have been widely applied” in the Russian poetic tradition, or that what Ram perceives as “lyric disorder” mirrors “the basically random nature of autocratic power.”33 In this text, composed long before Kant’s theories of the sublime but surprisingly compatible with them, Lomonosov implies an essentially ordered (if complex) understanding of the universe, in which the divine serves as a term for the source of the relationship between phenomena, as the invisible yet present middle term of the poetic syllogism of the universe.

32 Ibid., 318.
33 Ram, The Imperial Sublime, 2006, xxxiv.
1.3 The Sublime and “Shapes of Thought” in M. N. Muraviev’s Рассуждение о различии слогов: высокого, великолепного, величественного, громкого, надутого (1783, written 1777)

Muraviev’s 1783 dissertation begins with a brief recapitulation of Lomonosov’s theory of three styles.34 Yet in the lines that follow, Muraviev clearly departs from the normative strictures associated with the high, middle, and low styles, raising the objection that to the extent discourse explicates thought, there should be as many kinds of “discourse” (слог) as there are ways of contemplation: “И как выражения суть истолкователи наших мыслей, то и должно, чтобы столько существовало разных родов выражений, сколько есть разных родов размышления.”35 Muraviev makes an important shift in his analysis of rhetoric as it is commonly understood at this time—as normative rules prescribed for successful, effective transmission—to something much closer to an aesthetics, in which language is to serve as an expression of the experience of thought. Drawing on Virgil and Horace as examples, Muraviev focuses on the specific, individual characteristics of the text, implying a kind of self-sufficiency for the individualized word that runs counter to a poetics of imitation. For Muraviev, it is not the genre or object that predetermines the appropriate register of the written word, but rather the “shape of thinking” (образ размышления) of the writer in question. Moreover, each individual writer is radically individual, possessing a language entirely unto themselves:

34 “Нет ничего известнее преподаваемого Риторами учения о степенях слога. Есть слог простой, есть высокой, есть и такой, которой шествуя между ими, составляется, такъ сказать, из соразмернаго обоих сочетания и называется средний. Под сим-то разделением замыкаются все главныя образования слога; однако ж не все возможныя качества онаго.” А Н Пащенков, М. Н. Муравьев: Вопросы Поэтики Мировоззрения И Творчества: Учебно-Методическое Пособие, 92.
35 Ibid.
Muraviev hesitates to identify precisely the source of this personal dimension of language, but mentions two possibilities: the empiricist concept of habit as a formative force, and nature as potential source for pre-Romantic genius. While both of these are well within the frame of contemporary debates on the sublime—Muraviev’s thought here echoes Boileau’s and can even be said to be in accord with British writings on the sublime in the 18th century—it is clear that in this text we are presented with an understanding of the sublime which highlights the irreducible nature of the individualized word.37

This individualized dimension of language leads Muraviev to understand the sublime in terms of the emotional content an object invokes in the subject instead of prescriptive linguistic features:

Muraviev speaks of the sublime using vocabulary that is familiar from European debates; the proper response to the sublime—as it is for Kant among others—is a question of universal

36 Ibid., 93.
37 Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, 186–189.
38 А Н Пашкуров, М. Н. Муравьев: Вопросы Поэтики Мировоззрения И Творчества: Учебно-Методическое Пособие, 93.
aesthetic judgment: experienced as something of importance that shocks the subject, the sublime announces the presence of the divine.

As Muraviev explains somewhat later, he has no interest in defining the sublime purely in terms of rhetorical figures—though he does this as well—but in terms of “certain concepts, certain paths” that are capable of leading one to the sublime. Among these are the so-called “sublime proper”, which distinguishes itself from related discourses in its “groundedness” (основательность), its simplicity and force in expression, and the “majestic style” (величественный слог) which explicates the same thought, but in a manner which engages the imaginations and charms one’s reason. While both of these manners of exposition differ little from traditional understandings of the sublime, Muraviev’s third example, which focuses on mellifluousness and harmony, strikes an original note in Russian theories of the sublime of the period:

Иной, представляя ее же, того только смотрит, под какими бы чертами могла она соединить более прелестей для согласия. К высокости мысли присоединяет он такия выражения, такия слова, которыя удачным звуком своим находят некую потаенную стезю нам нравиться и возбуждают новыя воображения.39

Here Muraviev provides a definition of the sublime that is much closer to the poetics of later Romantic poets such as Zhukovsky than the “violent rapture” most commonly associated with Lomonosov. If the latter poetic mode is insistent on a quasi-agonistic relationship between poet and object characterized by performed humility and submission, here the “sublime landscape” is more horizontal than vertical. Muraviev suggests the possibility of the sublime as revelation, here conceptualized as the communal and mutual discovery of the power of imagination. In such

39 Ibid.
an act of communication, the appropriate role of reader to poet is not one of submission, but of co-authorship, in which both are capable of discerning the sublime truths hidden in the silences of restrained expression.

Later in his discussion, Muraviev emphasizes the distinct experience of this possible path to the sublime, explicitly favoring its simplicity over the “clever knots and distant conquests” of grandiloquence:

А сему причиною, ежели не обмануся, есть наше тайное влечение к истине. Между тем как мы наиболее кажемся заняты, душа наша, уединенной наблюдатель, замечает в молчании все вне ея происходящее, и из собранных понятий составляет себе как бы картину целаго Мира. Она жадно устремляется и похваляет все те черты, которыя почерпнуты в природе. Простое движение страсти, вопль печали, и хотя не чудесное, но непринужденное приключение, более стоят в глазах ея, нежели хитрой узол, или далеко выисканные витийства.40

Certain motifs from Lomonosov’s sublime are maintained in Muraviev’s account of the soul’s lyric transport. This moment is not, however, experienced as disorder but as the liberation from the constraints of limited perspective. Correspondingly, the fragmentation of the poet present in the earlier model is replaced here by the comprehensive unification of the infinite series of the traits of Nature. Instead of the abstractly rational charms of neo-classical rhetoric, proper emotional affect is highlighted, taking on characteristics of a muted elegance made possible in part by a recasting of rhetoric from a compelled imperative to an invitation.

Muraviev’s advocacy for a broader understanding of the sublime can be found throughout his poetic work. Of particular interest is a passage from his programmatic “Опыт о стихотворстве” (1775, 1780):

40 Ibid., 95.
Любите здравый смысл; пленяйтесь простотою,
Она должна стихов быть ваших красотою.
Бегите ложного искусства и ума:
Природа красоты исполнена сама.
Вкус должен избирать, но всё отверстно дару:
Он может по всему парить свободно шару,
Промчаться видимой вселенныя за край,
Низринуться во ад и вознестися в рай.
Любимец чистых муз всё вымыслить свободен,
Однако вымысл сей быть должен с правдой сходен,
И в своенравиях мгновенныя мечты
Явите истины великия черты.\textsuperscript{41}

Muraviev’s poetic recapitulation of the positions advanced in his dissertation employs a similar vocabulary and contains a subtle but powerful deployment of the rhetorics of the sublime. The metaphorical depiction of the flight of genius is limited here to a brief moment of syntactic instability (Он может […] промчаться видимой вселенныя за край) succeeded by an immediate resolution in the organized harmony of liberated movement (Низринуться во ад и вознестися в рай).

There are clear affinities to both Boileau and Longinus in Muraviev’s poem. The imperative of the first line clearly mimics Boileau’s Art of Poetry, and even includes the Russian calque of a concept central to Boileau’s thought: \textit{bon sens}. The reference to Longinus is more apparent in connection with the ideas expressed therein; in advocating for the supremacy of genius, Muraviev clearly echoes Longinus’ reworking of Demosthenes’ maxim into a commentary on the relationship between rules of expression and the gifts of nature:

Demosthenes expresses the view, with regard to human life in general, that good fortune is the greatest of blessings, while good counsel, which occupies the second place, is hardly inferior in importance, since its absence contributes inevitably to the ruin of the former. This we may apply to diction, nature

\textsuperscript{41} Муравьев, Стихотворения, 131–136.
occupying the position of good fortune, art that of good counsel. Most important of all, we must remember that the very fact that there are some elements of expression which are in the hands of nature alone, can be learnt from no other source than art.\footnote{Longinus, \textit{Longinus On the Sublime}, 4.}

By repeating the rhetorical figure in his poem (taste must choose / but all turns on talent), Muraviev follows Longinus in claiming that nature and genius are of the highest importance, but that they must be tempered by good sense.

The direct importance of Longinus in Muraviev’s understanding of the sublime is even more pronounced in the poem “Vision” (Видение, 1770s) in which Longinus not only serves as an inspiration, but as a central character as well. “Vision” is composed in heroic couplets (iambic hexameter) a common metrical form when dealing with ancient epics or figures from antiquity. Set at the moment when summer turns to autumn (В тот день, как солнцева горяща колесница, / Оставив область Льва, к тебе, небесна Жница, / Стремится перейти в прохладнейший предел), the poem recounts a vision in which the poet is transported to a “beautiful land” where spring reigns eternal. In this idyllic space, the poet encounters an old man (later revealed to be Longinus himself) who urges him to ascend Parnassus by following in his footsteps:

«На сей священный холм взведи свой жадный взор, —
Сказал он. — Здесь живут тобою чтимы музы.
Доколе сон свои с тебя не снимет узы,
Ты можешь в тайнное жилище их войти.
Пойдем, мои следы потщи себя соблюсти».\footnote{Муравьев, \textit{Стихотворения}, 189–192.}
While explaining to the poet that he sees only a shadow of this true paradise because he is still among the living, Longinus introduces the poet to the inhabitants of Parnassus, which include figures from antiquity and contemporary writers and poets:

«Здесь, — вождь мой говорил, — пииты всех народов.
Все современники верховные умы,
И новых с древними не знаем распри мы.
Расинов образ здесь зришь возле Еврипida,
С Эсхилом — Шекспир неправильного вида,
Истолкователь мой со мною Буало,
И Попа к нам в союз бессмертые привел.
Те, кои в жизнь свою внушались Аполлоном,
Все удостоены сим общим Пантеоном,44

In addition to showing a keen awareness of Boileau’s role as an interpreter of Longinus, Muraviev’s depiction of Parnassus is decidedly cosmopolitan, including figures from both the British and French traditions. At the conclusion of the poem—just before the vision ceases—Muraviev introduces the sole Russian inhabitant of this paradise, who appears opposite Pindar:

Противу Пиндара являлся Пиндар россов,
Краса отечества, бессмертный Ломоносов.
Превыше облаков, скорей летящих стрел,
Со молнией в когтях взывался с ним орел,
И лился глас рекой с верхов Рифейских снежных.
В щите представлен Петр среди стрельцов мятежных,
В полях, морях герой и первый из царей.45

While it is perhaps unsurprising that Muraviev would include Lomonosov as the one Russian poet worthy of Parnassus—Muraviev clearly thought highly of him—it is interesting that Muraviev situates himself as a successor to Lomonosov’s legacy. The setting here is more idyllic than odic, and what is sublime is not the political legacy of Peter the Great, but rather its

44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
depiction via Lomonosov. Lomonosov’s own individual voice is shown as worthy of honor in its own right, and the poetic act itself becomes a sublime object worthy of veneration in Muraviev’s poem.

For all of Muraviev’s admiration for Lomonosov, he nonetheless realized that Lomonosov’s theories on poetry in general and the sublime in particular should not be understood as authoritative, and could themselves be reimagined and expanded. This can be seen in their different readings of Longinus; coincidentally, the passage from Longinus in reference to Demosthenes takes place immediately after the passage Lomonosov had copied so assiduously in his notes. Both as a reader and a poet, then, Muraviev follows in Lomonosov’s footsteps.\textsuperscript{46} In terms of poetry, and in particular in relationship to the ode, Muraviev maintains those aspects of Lomonosov that existed independently of the compulsory militarism of court odes. While Muraviev did compose a small number of odes proclaiming Russian military might, far more common are poems that employ a variety of meters and rhyme schemes (including the odic stanza used by Lomonosov) on topics distant from imperial concerns. Particularly striking is an ode composed in 1776 (Тревожится кипяща младость / И рушится мой сладкий сон…), in which the odic poet fails to sing of the martial victories of the Russian Empire over Ottoman Turkey, and ultimately concludes with two stanzas portraying the tragedy of war. Instead, Muraviev focuses on the pleasures of peace, considering it humanity’s natural state:

\begin{verbatim}
И вдруг из дому теней, жадна,
Взвиваясь, мчит свой серный гром,
Любимица хаоса смрадна,
Богиня с медяным челом.
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{46} Of particular interest in this regard is Muraviev’s 1774 panegyric to Lomonosov, in which he praises the polymath as one of the greatest minds of Russia. А.Н. Пашкуров, М. Н. Муравьев: Вопросы Поэтики Мировоззрения И Творчества: Учебно-Методическое Пособие, 88–92.
Но что за звуки раздаются?
Там два героя в гневе бьются,
Уже из них падет один;
С главы полн крови шлем валится,
И победитель веселится.
Бежит и зрит: его то сын.

Умчись, умчись, война ужасна!
Нам днесь любезна тишина.
Она мила, она прекрасна,
Она нам матерью дана.
Далече прежде бранных строев
Мы были люди без героев,
Героя прежде человек;
Для похищения тленна злата,
Когда не ведали булата,
Тогда златой был в мире век. 47

With the imperial theme muted to one mention of the empire’s “mother” (Catherine II), Muraviev concludes his ode extolling the mythological “golden age” of antiquity.

Muraviev’s aesthetics of the sublime, in both his theoretical writings and his own verse, serve as an example of a secondary odic tradition occurring in parallel with Derzhavin’s modifications to the ode then taking place at court. Like Derzhavin, Muraviev advocated for an independent lyrical self, but goes much further in his willingness to experiment with the odic form. In another ode from the 1770s, Muraviev uses the classic ten-line stanza of the ceremonial ode to explain his unwillingness to address traditional topics of the genre:

Я, Майков! в лиру ударю,
Котору мне настроил ты,
Звенящи гласы повторяю,
Поя весенню красоты.
Я прежде пел сраженья звучны,
А днесь гласил растенья тучны,
В полях биющие ключи;

47 Муравьев, Стихотворения, 151–152.
Derzhavin, writing retrospectively in his “Рассуждение о лирической поэзии, или об оде” in 1811, incorporates this \textit{sentimental} dimension of the sublime towards the end of his discussion. Alongside two quotes from Lomonosov (a description of Peter III and the \textit{fiat lux} from Lomonosov’s ode to Elizabeth) Derzhavin includes an example of the sublime in “tender discourse” (нежном слове): “О души моей веселье, / Для кого мне жизнь мила! / Я последне ожерелье / За тебя бы отдала.”

Muraviev’s aesthetic and philosophical positions, namely simplicity and clarity in poetry, which are in turn crafted by the tempered genius of a poet willfully constrained by good sense, virtue, and morality, became an alternative to institutionalized poetics for future generations to emulate. Clearly, Muraviev’s understanding of the sublime at the turn of the 19th century—while undoubtedly giving a central role to the “organized chaos” of the ceremonial ode—had expanded to include a varied and more personalized vocabulary, as well as a nuanced, aesthetic understanding of poetic selfhood. In doing so, it opened up new possibilities for the sublime beyond the epic or religious mode.

1.4 \textbf{Translating Longinus: Martynov’s \textit{О высоком или величественном. Творение Дионисия Лонгина} (1803).}

Like Muraviev’s “Vision,” Ivan Martynov’s 1803 translation of Longinus’ \textit{Peri Hypsous} holds a double significance in the history of the Russian sublime. As the first Russian translation of Longinus, Martynov’s work can be understood as part of a general tendency to advocate for

\textbf{Footnotes:}

\footnotetext{48} Ibid., 49–150.
\footnotetext{49} Державин, Сочинения Державина, 7:539.
the Russian language as being worthy of artistic, scientific, and philosophical thought during this period. Moreover, Martynov’s translation is significant for its familiarity with both classical and contemporary Western thinkers of the sublime. In “Vision,” Muraviev had included Lomonosov on Mount Parnassus as an example of the Russia’s successful Europeanization; in Martynov’s commentary to Longinus, one can find a similar process at work in his inclusion of Russian writers into the sublime pantheon.

Martynov first touches upon European debates on the sublime at the end of his commentary to the first chapter of Longinus’ treatise, when he paraphrases La Harpe’s discussion of Longinus in his marginal commentary. Noting that La Harpe makes a distinction between the sublime proper and language about the sublime (i.e. sublime diction, высокий слог), Martynov partially concurs that the Longinus treatise is primarily a work of rhetoric. At the same time, however, Martynov also acknowledges Boileau’s stance that Longinus may also be read as a kind of predecessor to sublime aesthetics:

Что жь такое сделал Лонгин в своем разсуждении о высоком, продолжает Ла Гарп, естли не можно ни определить онаго, ни раздробишь? Он хотел, говорит он, рассуждать не о высоком, но о том, что у Риторов называется высоким слогом, в противоположении слогу простому и посредственному или умеренному. Так говорит Ла Гарп; и мнение его, кажется, мне основательно; хотя весьма многие примеры в сочинении Лонгина убеждают верить г-ну Боало.

It should be emphasized here that Martynov—a diligent scholar and translator—is primarily concerned with determining Longinus’ own definition, and was not making a claim in favor of

50 In all likelihood, Martynov is drawing upon La Harpe’s discussion in his popular Lycee series. de La Harpe, Lycee, ou Cours de litterature ancienne et moderne; par J.F. Laharpe. Tome premier -seizieme, 2. partie, 1:83.
51 Мартынов, О высоком или величественном, 6–7.
the rhetorical or aesthetic position *in toto*.\(^{52}\) Moreover, Martynov’s reasons for agreeing with Longinus’ connection between the sublime and the sublime style are articulated via a critical vocabulary (гений, вкус) that echoes that of Muraviev, and belongs to the realm of aesthetics more than rhetorics:

Искусство не может создать Гения; но может управлять имм естъли кто им одарен. Правила не могут наградить скудости в дарованиях; но могут удержать в границах излишество в оных...могут даровать вкус. Гений без вкуса будет наделать весьма много и при том самых важных ошибок, и что хуже всего, не будет их чувствовать; но против Гений со вкусом никогда их не сделает.\(^{53}\)

Martynov’s familiarity with European theories of the sublime can be detected in the list of European writers to whom he attributes genius, many of whom can be found in aesthetic treatises of English, French, and German writers.

At a later point in the commentary, Martynov follows La Harpe in his distinction between the sublime of feeling (высокое в чувствованиях) and the sublime of thought (высокое в мыслях), which he attributes to the “most recent Rhetoricians” (новейшие Риторы).\(^{54}\) The former, Martynov, claims, is based in true virtue (истинная добродетель), which indicates the divine (божественное) and majestic (величественное) nature of the mortal individual (or

\(^{52}\) Unfortunately, in recent criticism this point has been lost in translation. Harsha Ram’s paraphrase of Martynov’s commentary, which spans four pages in a mere four lines, contains an unfortunate error. Ram renders, “Из сего наиболее видно, что Лонгин собственно так называемое высокое сливает высоким слогом,” as “Longinus *properly* conflates the so-called sublime with *high diction*” (xxxiv). However, the word собственно, particularly in the early 19th century, should probably be read here as: “Longinus himself [i.e. contra Boileau] conflates...” In addition, elsewhere Ram translates “высокое слог” as “*high diction*” (21). Such a translation, to me at least, seems inaccurate given the context, although there might be something in the Greek that would lead him to reach such a conclusion. A better option, then, would be “sublime diction”, which would encompass Lomonosov’s “high style” (as opposed to “middle” or “low”) without necessarily equating the two, which seems to be Ram's intent.


\(^{54}\) Martynov parenthetically includes the French terms (le sublime des sentiments/le sublime des pensees), in all likelihood another reference to the *Lycee*. (cf. “Pour ce-qui regarde les deux premières source du sublime, l'elevation des pensees et l'energie des sentimens et des passions.” 94) de La Harpe, *Lycee, ou Cours de litterature ancienne et moderne; par J.F. Laharpe. Tome premier -seizieme, 2. partie*, 94.
conversely, the absolute degree of human depravity). The latter: “есть то, которое живо представляя воображению какой-нибудь великой физической либо отвлеченной предмете, производит в нас смешенное с изумление к нему уважение.”55

In sum, Martynov’s commentary to Longinus shows a clear knowledge of European aesthetics and a distinction between “the sublime” and “the sublime style.” If anything, his discussion of this distinction is intended to guide his readers lest they erroneously conflate the two. This becomes all the more clear in Martynov’s commentary to the eighth chapter, entitled “The Sources of the Sublime”:

Лонгин здесь хочет преподать правила, к усовершенствованию сей способности, а не правила собственно так называемо высокаго. Ибо кому не известно, что в самом худом сочинении может встретиться самая высокая черта; и напротив, самое красноречивое сочинение может не иметь ни одной высокой черты?56

Even if one accepts the somewhat tenuous claim that the sublime was “essentially a rhetorical practice” in the 18th century, it is clear from the above that Martynov expects his readers to already be aware of a distinction between rhetorics and aesthetics and that there exists a variety of approaches to both. Martynov even provides a reference for those interested in further study: “La Harpe includes several definitions of the sublime by the newest authors in chapter II of the Lycée, but finds them all lacking. Should one want to, they can be read [there].”57

Martynov’s examples of the sublime in Russian art and culture draw on a variety of sources. His first example occurs in the commentary to the seventh chapter, in which he introduces the inscription to the Bronze Horseman (cited in Russian as “ПЕТРУ первому

55 Мартынов, О высоком или величественном, 46.
56 Ibid., 40. Note here a similar use of the word собственно as in the passage regarding the “sublime proper” and “sublime style”.
57 Ibid., 35.
ЕКАТЕРИНА вторая”) as evidence that the sublime is an unconditional absolute category, as opposed to “the great” (великое) which is tempered by a “degree of perfection”. Martynov claims that when reading the inscription for the first time, one:

вдруг чувствует в себе все, что желательно было сказать сими словами. Постарайтесь представить себе что-нибудь такое, что можно было сказать вместо сего, вы всегда останетесь ниже. — Вот высокое.58

Here Martynov, like Boileau, indicates that absolute sublimity is to be found in simplicity of expression and the suddenness of revelation. Turning to drama, Martynov finds a similar example in the concluding line of Sumarokov’s Дмитрий Самозванец (1774), in which the pretender to the throne proclaims: “Ах, ест’ ли бы со мной погибла вся вселенна!”59 According to Martynov, the sublimity of the pretender’s statement is not one of thought, but rather “from the passion, i.e. the desperation [отчаяние] with which he desires the world to perish with him.”60

Martynov also draws upon Russian poetry, citing Lomonosov’s spiritual ode from Job as containing examples of both the sublimity of feeling (specifically, the opening stanza in which the fury of God is represented metaphorically by a raging storm) and the sublimity of thought (the fourth stanza, in which a series of rhetorical question lead the reader to contemplate the divine). More recent Russian poets are included as well, such as Derzhavin, whose “На переход Альпийских гор" (1799) is offered as an example of Boileau’s concept of “beautiful disorder” in its striking use of parallelism and enjambment in its description of an Alpine peak: (Ведет —

58 Ibid., 36.
59 Ibid., 43.
60 Ibid.
Martynov’s commentary demonstrates the extent to which Russian aesthetics had attuned itself to European developments by the turn of the 19th century. Incorporating both contemporary writers from other European countries as well as examples from Russia, it maintains an interest in the writers of antiquity even as it departs from their rhetorical stylistics and those of their neoclassical successors. Along with Muraviev, Martynov’s work demonstrates that at this point the sublime in the Russian context was on the verge of becoming a category of experience first, and a mechanics of writing second.

1.5 Ludwig Heinrich von Jakob’s Курс философии для гимназий Российской империи (1813) and Kant’s Critique of Judgment.

The first decades of the 19th century witnessed a veritable explosion in aesthetic treatises in Russia, nearly all of which discussed the sublime in some fashion. By this period, the sublime had largely ceased to be considered primarily a rhetorical category, and Russian philosophers continued to expand the “sublime canon” of their own national tradition, drawing upon recent philosophical trends in German thought and elsewhere in Europe in pursuit of their new theories. The Russian reception of German idealist aesthetics (Kant, Hegel, and particularly Schelling) took place through various means of intercultural communication. These included translations from European languages into Russian (Kant’s pre-critical Observations on

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61 Ibid., 60.
62 For a representative sample, see: Каменский, Русские эстетические трактаты первой трети XIX века.
63 This shift in thought can also be seen in university course offerings. One of the first courses in Russia on aesthetics as a philosophical discipline, for example, was taught by Galich in 1819 at St. Petersburg University.
the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime were translated into Russian in 1804), but a much more common mode of transmission occurred via German scholars who taught in Russian universities or worked for the Russian government.64

A peculiar case in point is the life and work of Ludwig Heinrich von Jakob, whose academic career saw him leave the University of Halle after its closing by Napoleon for Russia in 1807, eventually landing a teaching position at the university in Kharkov.65 By 1810, he was appointed head of the imperial commission for the revision of criminal law as part of Speransky’s reforms, and returned to Halle in 1816. During his time in St. Petersburg, von Jakob published an entire course on philosophy intended for instruction at Russian gymnasias. Published in eight parts under the title Курс философии для гимназий Российской империи, the course was printed in two editions from 1811-1817 in St. Petersburg. The fifth part of the course, entitled “An Outline of Aesthetics” (Начертание эстетики), was published in St. Petersburg in 1813. While it is difficult to ascertain how widespread the use of Von Jakob’s course was, the mere fact that it was published—especially given later scandals surrounding Kant’s philosophy at St. Petersburg and Moscow University—is rather remarkable.

Von Jakob’s “Outline” begins with a series of definitions of the aesthetic as well as a short bibliography of “the most outstanding” studies of aesthetic written in Western Europe. Perhaps the most striking of these is a mention of Kant’s Critique of Judgment (Kritik der Urteilskraft) which had been published some twenty years earlier in Berlin. Although there would not be a full Russian-language translation of Kant’s critique until much later in the 19th

64 For a number of examples, see: Круглов, Философия Канта в России в конце XVIII--первой половине XIX веков, 144–332.
65 For a detailed history of Kantianism at Kharkov University see: Александровна, Профессиональная философия в России первой половины - середины XIX века, 49–108.
century, Jakob’s outline provides a clear and concise summary of Kantian aesthetics, including the aesthetics of the sublime.

In fact, if one were to take away the Kantian elements of Von Jakob’s “Outline”, little would remain. This is clear from the very first two statements of Von Jakob’s text, which are clearly lifted from Kant:

§ 1. Эстетика есть наука, содержащая в себе начала чувствований и суждений касательно изящного и высокого.
§ 2. Способность эстетических суждений называется вкусом. Эстетика раздробляет сию способность и исследует свойства предмета оной.  

This perplexity about a principle (whether it is subjective or objective) presents itself mainly in those judgments that we call aesthetical, which concern the Beautiful and the Sublime of Nature or of Art.

Hence the aesthetical judgment is not only related as a judgment of taste to the beautiful, but also as springing from a spiritual feeling is related to the sublime; and thus the Critique of the aesthetical Judgment must be divided into two corresponding sections.

Throughout the first three chapters of his work, Von Jakob repeatedly employs Kantian terms such as satisfaction (благорасположение, the contemporary translation of Kant’s wohlgfallen, among other terms) in his remarks on the beautiful. When he turns to his discussion of the sublime, he continues to use Russian equivalents of Kantian terminology. The fourth chapter—entitled “Подробнейший разбор благорасположения к высокому,” “A most detailed analytic of the satisfaction of the sublime”—opens with the following definitions:

§ 8. Высокое сходствует с изящным в том, что оно, равно как и сие:
1) Совсем различно от чувственно приятного, изящного и нравственно добро;

66 Якоб, Курс Философии Для Гимназий Российской Империи, 5:1.
67 Kant, Critique of Judgment, 22.
2) Что оно не предполагает никакого уразумения содержания или цели предмета;
3) Что суждения о высоком равно носят на себе вид всеобще годных суждений;
4) Что высокое, равно как изящное, состоит в одном только отношении к познавательным нашим силам.⁶⁸

The above is essentially a point-by-point recapitulation of Kant’s analytic, with the small exception that Von Jakob neglects to differentiate between understanding and reason, as can be seen via a comparison to Kant’s text:

The Beautiful and the Sublime agree in this, that both please in themselves. Further, neither presupposes a judgment of sense nor a judgment logically determined, but a judgment of reflection. Consequently the satisfaction [belonging to them] does not depend on a sensation, as in the case of the Pleasant, nor on a definite concept, as in the case of the Good; but it is nevertheless referred to concepts although indeterminate ones. And so the satisfaction is connected with the mere presentation [of the object] or with the faculty of presentation; so that in the case of a given intuition this faculty or the Imagination is considered as in agreement with the faculty of concepts of Understanding or Reason (in its furtherance of these latter). Hence both kinds of judgments are singular, and yet announce themselves as universally valid for every subject; although they lay claim merely to the feeling of pleasure and not to any knowledge of the object.⁶⁹

Following Kant, Von Jakob writes that the experience of the sublime is often accompanied by fear or dread, that one experiences the sublime as delimited, that neither sensation nor imagination prove capable of comprehending the sublime object as a whole, that the sublime is a “mixed sensation” of pleasure and displeasure, and that the experience of the sublime “somehow” (некоторым образом) refers the individual to a supersensible concept (сверхчувственное понятие). Moreover, just as in Kant, the ability to perceive the sublime is

⁶⁸ Якоб, Курс Философии Для Гимназий Российской Империи, 5:34.
⁶⁹ Kant, Critique of Judgment, 61.
dependent on one’s cultural education: “для сего требуется высшая степень образованности…принимание в том участия предполагает высокую степень внутреннего нравственного образования.”

Von Jakob’s course seems to have drawn relatively little attention at the time of publication, but later caused a small scandal during the reactionary period that took place towards the end of Aleksandr I’s reign. Mikhail Leontievich Magnitsky (1778-1844), who in 1819 carried out a scathing review of Kazan University, claimed that Von Jakob’s course was oriented “entirely against religion.” Fortunately for Von Jakob, he had already returned home to Germany at this point. For other philosophers working in the Russian academy at this time, the situation was less fortunate; attacks on similar grounds were soon leveled against professors at the universities in both Moscow and St. Petersburg. Among the targets was Aleksandr Ivanovich Galich (1783-1848), who, in addition to having served as an instructor at the Lycée in Tsarskoe Selo for a brief period, was the first professor of philosophy at St. Petersburg University after its reformation in 1819.

1.6 The Russian Idealist Sublime: Galich’s Опыт науки изящного (1825)

The publication of Galich’s theory of aesthetics, entitled Опыт науки изящного (1825), drew considerable—and largely favorable—attention from contemporary readers. One anonymous critic, while paying relatively little attention to the contents of the work in their review, concluded: “Честь и слава русским! Пора не подражать другим, а идти сами далее.

70 Якоб, Курс Философии Для Гимназий Российской Империи, 5:121.
71 Круглов, Философия Канта в России в конце XVIII--первой половине XIX веков, 248.
72 Каменский, Русские эстетические трактаты первой трети XIX века, 2:612–615.
Перед нами все сокровища прежних опытов: остается пользоваться и более себя совершествовать.”73 While such a statement can certainly be read as a feigned outburst of Romantic nationalism mandated by the official culture of nationalism in the mid-1820s, it was probably warmly received by the author in light of the scandal a few years prior. Such an opinion, however, was not limited to Galich’s contemporaries. Writing almost a hundred years later, Ernest Radlov writes about Galich’s work in much the same vein. In addition to being “the most complete account of the idealist system of aesthetics…that predominated in Russia up until…Chernyshevsky,” Radlov highlights a certain originality to Galich’s thought, claiming that while he “used German models, an independence of thought can also be discerned, as well as the ability to systematize.”74

An example of such an inclination to systematize can be found in the opening statements of Galich’s work, in which he proposes an idiosyncratic periodization of the history of aesthetics that is both historical and cyclical. In the first, which Galich calls “the period of simple sensuous observations” (период простых чувственных наблюдений) he includes both modern philosophers (Charles Batteux, Alexander Pope, Hume, and Edmund Burke) and ancient ones (Aristotle and Horace). In the second, defined as the “period of thought and its logical considerations” (период смысла и логических его соображений) he includes Baumgarten, Diderot, and Kant. In the third and final period, characterized as “the period of the total dominion of reason” (период полного владычества разума) he includes Plato from among ancient thinkers, and Winckelmann, Lessing, Herder, and the Schlegels from the moderns.

73 Ibid., 2:288.
74 Радлов, Очерки истории русской философии, 70–71.
Given his own background and the general trajectory of his work, it is safe to assume that Galich would count himself among those found in the third category. While the first two are limited to an understanding of beauty (the first understood beauty only as a natural phenomenon, while the second understand beauty only in its knowable relationship to form), the third manages a kind of synthesis, capable of incorporating the previous two with an added Romantic emphasis on the work of art as reflection or revelation of the Absolute:

Здесь слышим о творческой фантазии, о жизни, предполагаемой во всяком изящном произведении, об идеях и об их согласии с формами, о соединении всех потребностей человеческой природы, о красоте как об откровении или отблеске совершеннейшего бытия и проч.  

Such a periodization of the beautiful in the history of aesthetics can likewise be applied to a history of the sublime, which, to recall Martynov, could be bifurcated into “a sublimity of feeling” and a “sublimity of thought.” It is precisely in such a spirit that Galich discusses the sublime later in his work, in a section entitled “On the Differences of the Beautiful in Regard to its Constituent Parts” (О разностях прекрасного касательно составных его частей).

Employing the same syncretic approach outlined above, Galich departs from both Burke and Kant’s insistence on the separation of the beautiful and the sublime. Instead, the more Kantian aspects of the sublime become a constituent of the beautiful that Galich defines as “speculative beauty” (красоту умозрительную), which “predominantly satisfies the interest of reason, seeking the originary, divine essence of things, from the perspective of their eternal and delimited existence.” This “high beauty” (высокая красота) announces the “powerlessness of sensuous perception” (бессилие чувственного созерцания) and the triumph of reason, taking

75 Каменский, Русские эстетические трактаты первой трети XIX века, 2:211.
one beyond the mechanistic veil of nature into the “anticipation of the proximity of the divine”. Galich’s definition of “high beauty,” follows the central narrative of Kant’s account of the sublime in *The Critique of Judgment*, in which Kant describes the sublime in terms of an intercession of the faculty of reason after the defeat of the faculty of imagination. What is surprisingly absent, however, are the emotional connotations of fear or anxiety that Burke and Kant had insisted on. Galich’s “high beauty”, in other words, has a decided Platonic tint to it; similar to Muraviev, for Galich the sublime is not a cause for trepidation, but rather a welcome experience of the universal whole.\(^76\)

“Sublime anxiety” does appear, however, in Galich’s second constitutive part of beauty, which he defines as “valorous beauty” (доблестная красота). This is a “moral beauty” (нравственная красота) that is most concerned with the experience of deprivation recounted in Kant et al. According to Galich, it expresses the powerlessness and limitation of sensuous perception, but also “the actual insufficiency of it and suffering.” This kind of beauty depicts the moral force of the soul, striving to save its independence and freedom through overcoming obstacles and temptations. “Valorous beauty,” in other words, is Galich’s own version of the sublime as the nobility of the individual, of which there are three major modes: the terrible (ужасное), the passionate or pathetic (страстное), and the touching or moving (трогательное).\(^77\)

By distributing certain characteristics of the Kantian sublime into two elements of his tripartite model of the beautiful, Galich effects a split between the sublime as a reflection of the absolute, and the sublime as the aesthetic experience of witnessing the human. Although there is a certain implied aesthetic distance between subject and object in both Kant and Burke—as well

\(^76\) Ibid., 2:220–222.
\(^77\) In its combination of emotional affect and interest in the depiction of sublime individuals, here Galich is closest to the aspects of Muraviev’s thought discussed earlier.
as a certain implied distance within the subject itself, which knows to be afraid but not too afraid—Galich seems to intimate here that the preferred medium for “valorous beauty” is the realm of art. Galich does not go quite as far as Schiller’s conclusion at the end of “On the Sublime” (1801), where the latter claims “As all sublimity and beauty consists in the appearance, and not in the value of the object, it follows that art has all the advantages of nature without her shackles,” but he nonetheless holds that human art possesses certain aesthetic advantages over the techniques of nature.78

An additional dimension of Galich’s thought that needs mentioning is that despite the complete independence of his three types of beauty—each forms an antinomy (противоречие) in relation to another—their pure forms can be mixed to create an entire palette of aesthetic effects:

§ 43. Что поименованные три вида прямой, или чистой, красоты выспреннее, доблестное и прелестное не только могут смешиваться между собою, но и выигрывать еще через удачное смещение и что, следственно, высокое, умеряемое игривым, либо последнее, усилиываемое первым, может являть прекрасное в новых, совершеннейших превращениях, например, великолепного, благородного, трогательно-милого и проч., сие понятно из общего стремления вещей к безусловному единству.79

Galich’s principle of a “general desire for an unconditioned whole” emphasizes a Platonic dimension to his aesthetics in general, opening the possibility for artistic experimentation in genres that are typically associated with Romantic and pre-Romantic responses to the strictures of neo-classicism.

78 Schiller, Aesthetical And Philosophical Essays by Frederick Schiller, 192.
79 Каменский, Русские эстетические трактаты первой трети XIX века, 2:222.
The only concrete example of “high beauty” provided by Galich is a footnote referencing Zhukovsky’s 1824 poem “Таинственный посетитель.” The poem attempts to describe a mysterious spirit that visits the poet. The visitor is never positively identified, but is rather first compared to two emotional states, hope and love:

Не Надежда ль ты младая,  
Приходящая порой  
Из неведомого края  
Под волшебной пеленой?  
Как она, неумолимо  
Радость милую на час  
Показал ты, с нею мимо  
Пролетел и бросил нас.

Не Любовь ли нам собою  
Тайно ты изобразил?..  
Дни любви, когда одною  
Мир для нас прекрасен был,  
Ах! тогда сквозь покрывало  
Неземным казался он...  
Снят покров; любви не стало;  
Жизнь пуста, и счастье — сон.  

In both stanzas, the ephemeral nature of the spirit’s visit is emphasized, and the two stanzas have structural features in common, such as the use of a rhetorical question in the opening line. The relationship between these two stanzas can be read as potential (hope) vs. realization (love). These thematic and structural features are then repeated in the next two stanzas of the poem, which associate the visitor with thought and poetry, respectively:

Не волшебница ли Дума  
Здесь в тебе явилась нам?

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80 Жуковский, “Таинственный Посетитель,” 368.
Удаленная от шума
И мечтательно к устам
Приложивши перст, приходит
К нам, как ты, она порой
И в минувшее уводит
Нас безмолвно за собой.

Иль в тебе сама святая
Здесь Поэзия была?...
К нам, как ты, она из рая
Два покрова принесла:
Для небес лазурно-ясный,
Чистый, белый для земли:
С ней все близкое прекрасно;
Все знакомо, что вдали.  

If thought is depicted as the potential to revisit the past, and thus to experience the world as more than the mere sensation of surrounding objects, poetry is its realization, in which the same objects, both heavenly and earthly, are veiled in beauty. As opposed to the passive sensations of the previous two stanzas, thought and poetry emphasize cognitive interaction and transformation of the world.

The final stanza of the poem proposes one final possibility for the visitor, presentiment (предчувствие):

Иль Предчувствие сходило
К нам во образ твоем
И понятно говорило
О небесном, о святом?
Часто в жизни так бывало:
Кто-то светлый к нам летит,
Подымает покрывало
И в далекое манит.

81 Ibid., 368–369.
82 Ibid., 369.
The conclusion of Zhukovsky’s poem can be read as a perfect example of a synthesis of Galich’s “period of simple sensuous observations” and “the period of thought and its considerations.” Presentiment exceeds poetry, i.e. it speaks to us “understandably” and directly of the holy and heavenly. At the same time—and here Zhukovsky’s poem resonated with Lomonosov’s rhetorics in his syllogism—the poem contains all of the preceding constituent elements. Both sentiment and cognition, it is capable of giving knowledge not of the past, or of the poetic possibilities of the human world, but of the transcendent world that lies just beyond the borders of human perception. The “period of the total dominion of reason,” for Zhukovsky, Galich, and—as we shall see in the next section, Nikolai Nadezhdin—is primarily concerned with an aesthetic logic, one that is capable of bringing together and exceeding the sum of human experience.

1.7 Two Modes of the Sublime in Nadezhdin’s “О высоком” (1829)

There is a clear commonality between Galich and Nadezhdin’s understanding of the sublime; for both, the sublime must be defined in contradistinction to the beautiful even as it is inscribed within the latter. Nadezhdin thus characterizes the sublime in “О высоком,” an 1829 essay in Вестник Европы, as “самое торжественное проявление изящного есть высокое. Это—зенит бесконечного мира красоты!” The beautiful, Nadezhdin continues, concerns itself with representing earthly life to its utmost degree, while the sublime allows the reader to anticipate the ineffable beauty of the world beyond. Nadezhdin echoes the thoughts and ideas in the Zhukovsky poem examined above and posits a quasi-religious role for the poet of genius,

83 Надеждин, “О Высоком,” 50.

46
“the first priest of the earthly world” in matters concerning the beautiful, where in the sublime he is “the reverent listener of mysteries of the secrets of the higher world.”84 He concludes his juxtaposition of the sublime and beautiful by stating, “the beautiful is the noon of nature; the sublime – the dawn of eternity.”85

Nadezhdin likewise follows Galich in deemphasizing the importance of fear in the experience of the sublime, explicitly criticizing Burke’s remarks in his Observations:

Не оспоримо, что высокое может иногда иметь в себе нечто грозное и даже ужасное. Но оно ощутимо во всей эстетической чистоте своей только тогда, когда, облаченное спокойным величием, дивным, но не страшилищным, не возлагает, а восторгает дух наш выше самого себя.86

Fear, then, is not the determining characteristic of the sublime. Instead, the sublime concerns elevation, which occurs in a momentary realization that the self is not sufficient, followed by a second realization that there is something else, something ineffable, which the self is a part of but not fully defined by.

Nadezhdin’s alternative to Burkean and Kantian anxiety and fear is унылость, which more accurately describes the feeling of powerlessness mentioned in Galich’s description of “high beauty”:

Ощутительнее должно становиться на нас и сознание собственной немощи. Отсюда происходит, что наслаждение, производимое высокими ощущениями, растворено бывает всегда тайной уныльностью. Но сия уныльность не болезненна: она разрежается в благоговейное умиление, проникающее душу сладким ощущением вышей небесной жизни, на праге коей она тогда сознает себя. Мы теряемся в представлении высокого; но нам приятно теряться в нем…там наше отечество!87

84 Ibid., 51.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid., 53.
Nadezhdin emphasizes that this kind of elegiac melancholy is not pathological. Rather, it is to be understood as a preparatory anticipation for self-recognition in the experience of the absolute, of the homeland that Galich had earlier defined as the all-unity of being.

Nadezhdin also echoes previous thinkers in his division of the sublime between “the sublimity of being” (высокое бытия) and “the sublimity of action” (высокое действия), which roughly correspond to Galich’s “high beauty” and “valiant beauty”, respectively.88 Like others before him, Nadezhdin detects sublimity in the words of the Old Testament, but the verse he chooses is not the fiat lux familiar from the Longinus treatise, but rather the verse prior:

Так и сама вечная истина благоговела начертать для нас образ древней ночи первозданного мира: Земля же бе невидима и неустроена: и тьма верху бездны: и Дух Божий ношашеся верху воды (I Моис. 1.2)89

Such a choice highlights the anticipatory aspect of the sublime in Nadezhdin’s account, emphasizing the vital role унылость plays in the experience of the sublime. In the same section, Nadezhdin cites the work of both Lomonosov and Derzhavin—both already canonical writers of the sublime at this point in Russian aesthetics—but also includes Zhukovsky’s translation of Byron’s *Prisoner of Chillon*. In particular, he focuses on Byron’s apophatic depiction of the emotionally and spiritually empty world of his protagonist:

Без неба, света и светил,  
Без времени, без дней и лет,  
Без промысла, без благ и бед,  
Ни жизнь, ни смерть — как сон гробов,  
Как океан без берегов,

88 Nadezhdin explicitly compares these two modes of the sublime to Kant’s conceptions of the mathematical sublime, and the dynamic sublime.  
89 Надеждин, “О Высоком,” 57.
Задавленный тяжелой мглой,
Недвижный, темный и немой.  

In comparison with the citations of Lomonosov and Derzhavin, the passage from Zhukovsky’s translation of Byron is strongest in its absolute negativity in representation, as opposed to the quasi-cataphatic approach suggested by the rhetorical questions of Zhukovsky’s predecessors. An indeterminacy via negative description—but only in the anticipation of its eventual fulfillment—thus becomes a central characteristic for Nadezhdin’s understanding of the sublime in language.

As examples of “the sublimity of action,” Nadezhdin includes Russian poets (Lomonosov and Derzhavin) alongside European ones. Of particular interest is one of the examples of “sublime genius” which, according to Nadezhdin, “awakens within us all together the majestic idea of humanity.” Such majesty would include even morally questionable historical figures who nonetheless demonstrate the notion of the unlimited potential of human genius. As an example, Nadezhdin chooses Pushkin’s apostrophe to the sea in the 1825 lyric “К морю”, in which Byron’s genius is compared to the sea’s sublimity:

Смело можем также похвалиться мастерским очерком бурного гения Байронова, брошенным не всегда шаловливою кистью нашего Пушкина в известном стихотворении его «К морю»:
Он был, о море, твой певец.
Твой образ был на нем означен,
Он духом создан был твоим:
Как ты, могущ, глубок и мрачен,
Как ты, ничем неукротим!

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90 Ibid., 61.
91 Ibid., 66.
92 Ibid., 68.
Such instances of the sublime, which Nadezhdin almost exclusively locates in works of art—poetry especially—are held by Nadezhdin to be expressions of the universal nature of individual freedom, which allows humanity to transcend the mere material world of nature: “Свобода – самобытная свобода – возвышает человека над всей природой: и сия свобода (...) должна полагать печать истинного величия на все человеческие деяния.”

1.8 Conclusion

In both Galich and Nadezhdin two possibilities modes of the sublime appear. The first, seen in Zhukovsky’s poem and in the biblical passage from Nadezhdin’s article, are marked by a central concern for discerning an idealist absolute that resists concretization at the moment of contemplation. The second, illustrated in the above passage from Pushkin, understands freedom as the capacity to both resist and become like nature. Such an understanding of the sublime, in which individualized human genius and agitated nature can be experienced with equal intensity, demonstrates the extent to which the figure of the poet had become incorporated into writings on the sublime by the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century.

Yet despite these expansions, certain constants are maintained in the evolution of the sublime from Lomonosov to Nadezhdin. The most important of these is a sense of finality, or consistency. Sublime statements, or—in its later, more psychologized variant, sublime experiences—are somehow both instantaneous and eternal. Viewed from the outside, lyrical transport may be perceived at near-infinite speed through the terse simplicity of the sublime statement, but at its apex sublime vision is all-encompassing, timeless, and—essentially—static.

93 Ibid.
There is very little room for growth or development in such a model. A case in point can be found in one of the most often-cited examples of the sublime, Corneille’s 1635 tragedy Médée (cited by Boileau, Martynov, Nadezhdin and others) in which the protagonist, when asked what forces she has left to carry out her vengeance when so many oppose her, replies with a single word: “moi” (’Dans un si grand revers, que vous reste-t-il?’ / ’Moi. / Moi, dis-je et c’est assez.’). The moment of the sublime—that is, the sublime as an event—can be understood here as the collision between two opposed forces that evolve only in relation to the intensity of their mutual antagonism. Change is impossible in this scenario; instead, the very lack of resolution and reconciliation inspires the feeling of awe that such moments are supposed to instill in the audience. The peak moment occurs when both background—the world at large—and the foreground—the tragic hero—are at their strongest, each refusing to give way.

The proper response to such a tragic sublime must necessarily be univocal and universal, as it must be in the case of the Zhukovsky’s lyric cited by Galich. There is a ritualistic aspect to Nadezhdin’s understanding of the sublime, a repeated truth that cannot be in any way integrated into the fuller range of aesthetic experience. Nadezhdin’s essay—which is shot through with references to the sublimity of scripture and repeated mentions of a universal morality—may attribute a sense of freedom to the sublime, but this freedom is bracketed by an imperative of moral necessity: “сия свобода (…) должна полагать печать истинного величия на все человеческие деяния.” In such a model, sublime knowledge is primarily understood as a kind of Platonic idea, however recursive its attendant rhetoric might be. Nadezhdin’s sublime thus demands a sense of cohesion and unity, one that is founded both on a set of artistic techniques,
and in the relationship of the artist to his work. 94 Artistic genius, as Nadezhdin claims near the conclusion of his essay, “possessing an idea that is taken from the higher world and which greatly exceeds [превышающую] the circle of common concepts, is capable of arranging it with all the treasures of language according to his will.”

Nadezhdin’s conception of genius as the ability to partially embody essentially inexpressible eternal ideals is put into practice in a review of Pushkin’s Boris Godunov published some two years after he wrote “О высоком.” Consistently critical of Pushkin’s works in general and always contrarian in his critical approach, Nadezhdin departs from the predominantly negative contemporary consensus of Pushkin’s play, paying particular attention to moments where Pushkin “approaches” the sublime, such as the silence that ensues after the Patriarch’s speech in scene seventeen: “Молчание его [Godunov’s] в Думе, при рассказе патриарха о чудодейственной силе святых остатков Димитрия, блистающем всею прелестю простосердечия, столь убийственного для виновной совести, стоит также молчания Аяксова в полях Елисейских!” Yet such moments of positive evaluation—such as Pimen’s opening monologue in scene five—are almost inevitably followed by criticisms in which the ability of the speaker to achieve the sublime is questioned: “сии высокие мысли—хотя поэт и старался переложить их на древнее русское наречие—обличают в смиренном чудовском отшельнике наследника идей Гердеровых. Прекрасно, да—не на месте!”95

94 At the end of his essay, Nadezhdin repeats three classic qualities of artistic technique associated with the sublime as well as their “excessive” versions: brevity (краткость) / darkness (темнота); simplicity (простота) / baseness or insipidness (низость или вялость); and force (сила) / bluster or bombast (надутость или напыщенность).
95 A similar objection is raised by Nadezhdin regarding the Pretender’s admiration for poetry: “Непосредственно вслед за тем, у князя Вишневецкого -- беглый чудовский монах витийствует пышными фразами о высоком значении поэзии: Я верую в пророчества питьев. Нет, не вожь в их пламенной груди Кипит восторг: благословится подвиг, Его ж они прославили заране! Надеждин, “Beseda Starikh Znakomtsev.”
Although Nadezhdin is careful to couch his comments in the language of technical critique, his remarks reveal a vital difference between his understanding of the sublime and that of Pushkin to be examined in the next chapter. This is shown most clearly in his discussion of the Pushkin’s Pretender:

Существенный недостаток "Бориса" состоит в том, что в нем интерес раздвоен весьма неудачно; и главное лицо -- Годунов -- пожертвовано совершенно другому, которое должно б играть подчиненную роль в этом славном акте нашей истории. Я разумею Самозванца. Как будто по заговору с историей, поэт допустил его в другой раз восстать на Бориса губительным призраком и похитить у него владычество, принадлежавшее ему по всем правам. Лице Лжедмитрия есть богатейшее сокровище для искусства. Оно так создано дивною силой, управляющею судьбами человеческими, что в нем история пересиливает поэзию. Стоит только призвать на него внимание -- и тогда все образы, сколь бы ни были колоссальны и величественны, должны исчезать в фантастическом зареве, им разливаемом, подобно как исполнены гор исчезают для глаз в пурпуре неба, обагренного северным сиянием. А потому тем осторожнее и бережнее надлежало поступать с ним поэту, избравшему для себя героем Бориса. Это дивное лице следовало поставить в должной тени, дабы зрение не отрывалось им от законного средоточия. Но у Пушкина, по несчастию, Самозванец стоит на первом плане; и -- Борис за ним исчезает: он становится посторонним незаметным гостем у себя дома.  

What Nadezhdin deems lacking in Pushkin’s False Dmitri is the intensity and clarity of moral sublimity that had been negatively depicted in the conclusion of Sumarokov’s 18th century tragedy that Martynov had cited in his commentary to Longinus: “Ах, естли бы со мной погибла вся вселенная!”

Nadezhdin’s criticisms are colored by two factors: his own dislike of Pushkin, as well as a potentially sincere desire that Pushkin write in a more suitably sublime fashion (an evaluation that was, coincidentally, shared by Zhukovsky). They are also hampered by certain historical

96 Ibid.
facts; it is highly unlikely that Nadezhdin was aware of the thirteenth stanza of the lyric he had cited in his article of the sublime, in which enlightenment and tyranny are both shown as enemies of the good: “Судьба людей повсюду та же: / Где капля блага, там на страже / Уж просвещенье иль тиран.”97 Similarly, there is no way to know if Nadezhdin’s evaluation of the play would have changed had he been aware of the ending of the 1825 version of Pushkin’s play. What is clear, however, is that Pushkin believed it was necessary to move beyond the normative models contained in Nadezhdin’s understanding of the sublime. In an article written in 1830 that was to remain unpublished, Pushkin bemoans the contemporary state of Russian aesthetics that is still derived from concepts of imitation and utility:

Между тем как эстетика со времен Канта и Лессинга развита с такой ясностью и обширностью, мы всё еще остаемся при понятиях тяжелого педанта Готшеда; мы всё еще повторяем, что прекрасное есть подражание изящной природе и что главное достоинство искусства есть польза.98

Freedom played an equally important role in Pushkin’s understanding of the sublime. However, unlike Nadezhdin’s conception of freedom—in which genius is defined by its ability to imitate the eternal ideas of nature—Pushkin’s conception of freedom would be predicated on the concept of liberation from these very same ideas. As he remarks in his notes taken in preparation to the above article: “Что нужно драматическому писателю? Философию, бесстрашие, государственные мысли историка, догадливость, живость воображения, никакого предрассудка любимой мысли. Свобода.”99

97 Пушкин, “К Морю,” 333.
98 Пушкин, “О Народной Драме И Драме ‘Марфа Посадница’ >,” 146.
Chapter 2: The Pushkinian Sublime

2.1 Introduction: The Case for and Against the Sublime in *Eugene Onegin*

In a review of the final chapter of *Eugene Onegin*, Nadezhdin continued his contrarian stance vis-à-vis the public reception of Pushkin’s work. Yet whereas the positive moments of his earlier review of *Boris Godunov* centered on isolated moments of sublimity, here Nadezhdin praises Pushkin for the complete absence of seriousness and depth in his novel-in-verse:

Начнем с "Последней Главы Онегина". Признаемся откровенно, сия последняя глава показалась нам ничем не хуже первых. Та же прихотливая резвость вольного воображения, порхающего легкокрыльым мотыльком по узорчатому, но бесплодному полю светской бездушной жизни; та же яркая пестрота красок и цветов, мелькающих подвижною калейдоскопической мозаикой; то же беглое, но цепкое остроумие, везде оставляющее следы легкого, юмористического угрызения; та же чистота и гладкость стиха, всюду льющегося тонкой хрустальной струею. Одним словом, мы нашли здесь продолжение той же пародии на жизнь, ветреной и легкомысленной, но вместе затейливой и остроумной, коей мы любовались от души в первых главах "Евгения". ¹⁰⁰

The reading public was wrong, Nadezhdin continues, in hoping for something “miraculous” from Pushkin’s work; citing a few stanzas from the novel, Nadezhdin even goes so far as to say Pushkin himself was well aware of the novel’s failures, and belatedly apologized for them in the novel’s conclusion. ¹⁰¹ First among these, according to Nadezhdin, is the lack of wholeness to the work, a charge that echoes Nadezhdin’s dissatisfaction with the Pretender in *Boris Godunov*. Just as the openness to change and development deprived the false Dmitry of the gravity and

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 107–110.
seriousness to achieve the sublimity Nadezhdin associated with Godunov, here the openness and fluidity of Pushkin’s novel provided a similar formal and stylistic obstacle.

Some fifteen years later, Nadezhdin’s erstwhile student, Vissarion Belinsky, would compose his ninth article on Pushkin, in which he discusses Tatiana’s concluding speech. His commentary reads as the polar opposite of Nadezhdin’s:

...Последние стихи удивительны - подлинно «конец венчает дело»! Этот ответ мог бы ити в пример классического "высокого" (sublime) наравне с ответом Медеи: moi! и старого Горация: qu'il mourut! Вот истинная гордость женской добродетели! Но я другому отдана - именно отдана, а не отдадась! Вечная верность - кому и в чем? Верность таким отношениям, которые составляют профанацию чувства и чистоты женственности, потому что некоторые отношения, не освящаемые любовию, в высшей степени безнравственны... Но у нас как-to все это kleitd вместе: поэзия - и жизнь, любовь - и брак по расчету, жизнь сердцeм - и строгое исполнение внешних обязанностей, внутренне ежекачно нарушаеымых. Жизнь женщины по преимуществу сосредоточена в жизни сердца; любить—значит для нее жить, а жертвовать—значит любить. Для этой роли создала природа Татьяну; но общество пересоздало ее...

Nadezhdin’s detached, impersonal manner of evaluative judgment could hardly be more removed from Belinsky’s enraptured critical voice. Belinsky himself seems to undergo the cognitive dissonance of the sublime moment in a sudden stream of irresolvable binary oppositions. In addition to this inversion of critical voice and potential sublimity in Pushkin’s Onegin, however, there is an additional, vital difference in the two reviews: their manner of reading. Nowhere in Nadezhdin’s discussion of Onegin, for example, do we get the sense that he viewed the work as anything more than a (minor, if not failed) poetic artifact; his disappointment, he insists, is not explicitly directed at Pushkin, but rather at the contemporary

102 Белинский, Собрание сочинений в трех томах, 3:563–564.
state of Russian literature. Belinsky, of course, reads differently, discerning in the characters of Pushkin’s novel representations of real, social “types” that can roughly transferred across the art/life divide as entries in the “encyclopedia of Russian life”.

These contrasting views of Pushkin’s greatest work are valuable, not so much for their insights (few, but present) or oversights (many, as has been endlessly noted) but as guideposts reminding one of the challenges inevitably faced in discussing the sublime in Pushkin’s work. Pushkin did not write in a sustained theoretical fashion on the sublime, but it was certainly a part of his critical and poetic vocabulary, as can be seen in an 1836 letter to Chaadaev, in which he describes the time of the False Dmitry as sublime: “Le réveil de la Russie (…) le drame sublime commencé à Ouglitch et terminé au monastère d’Ipatief — quoi? tout cela ne serait pas de l’histoire, mais un rêve pâle et à demi-oublié?”

Moreover, various modes of the sublime can be found throughout the wide range of genres attempted and mastered over the course of his life: “natural” (Кавказский пленник), “prophetic” («Пророк»), “erotic” («Красавица»), “imperial” (Полтава), “historical” (Борис Годунов), to name but a few.

At the same time, however, there are three dimensions to Pushkin’s genius that regularly resist sublimity, at least as it is commonly understood and had been understood in his time. The first is that the sublime, for all of its suddenness and intensity, is static. This is as true for neoclassical tragedy as it is for idealist aesthetics. To explicate the classic account in Kant’s Critique of Judgement: once the apprehension of the faculty imagination begins to fail, it will fail inevitably; it needs to be saved by the faculty of reason. In this sense, the beginning and

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103 Пушкин, “Письмо Чаадаеву П. Я., 19 Октября 1836 Г. Петербург.”
104 See, for example: Kahn, Pushkin’s Lyric Intelligence; Ram, The Imperial Sublime a Russian Poetics of Empire; Swift M, “The Petersburg Sublime.”

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endpoints of the sublime narrative are known; nothing exists outside of it (nowhere, for example, in idealist aesthetics do we discover what happens after the sublime).

The second is that somehow, despite its essential ineffability, the sublime is universal. Given the proper cultural and intellectual background—a qualification nearly all 18th and 19th century aestheticians insist on—the sublime will be experienced in identical fashion, and is thus normative. For Burke, this ground for the sublime is largely physiological, a reflective moment in which self-preservation is and is not threatened, a framework that Kant will then translate into his philosophy of reason. In the Russian context, as we have seen, this normative context is largely adopted in Nadezhdin’s writings on the sublime. The third is that the sublime, according to nearly all accounts, has to be serious. Its proper affects are reverence, regard, and respect. In other words, there is little room for irreverence, wit, or humor, three concepts that threaten to upset the sublime experience’s univocality.

Pushkin could write in this hermetic mode, but his most daring and original works attempted to exceed it. In Boris Godunov, as we have already seen in Nadezhdin’s review, the sublimity of the Moscow scenes is forced to alternate with the lighter, risk-taking moments of the Pretender’s comic picaresque. Inevitability—at least of the kind espoused in the idealist sublime—was also suspect for Pushkin, as the Belkin Tales, composed at the same time as the concluding chapter to Onegin, attest. Finally, the author of Gavriliada was well aware that there is but one step from the sublime to the ridiculous, and that their proximity is one of the most fundamental truths of human existence. It is telling that one of the first mentions of the sublime in Pushkin’s writings is to be found in a pun made by General Raevsky to his son in around 1820:
O<rlöff> disait en 1820: révolution en Espagne, révolution en Italie, révolution en Portugal, constitution par ci, constitution par-là... Messieurs les souverains, vous avez fait une sottise en détrônant Napoléon. Le général R<aïewsky> disait à N. affligé d'un mal d'aventure: il n'y a qu'un pas du sublime au sublimé.¹⁰⁵

Here a moment of what might tentatively be called “the debauched sublime” resolves into the banality of a medical condition (Sublimé, i.e. mercury chloride, a corrosive sublimate, was commonly used to treat syphilis and other venereal diseases). But what makes the moment memorable for Pushkin, I would argue, is not the banal moral lesson imparted from father to son but rather the proximity between these two states made possible by language.

The goal of this chapter is to make a case for the importance of a particularly Pushkinian understanding of the sublime in Eugene Onegin. In order to do so, however, two pitfalls must be avoided, as seen in Nadezhdin and Belinsky’s limited reviews. Pushkin’s sublime cannot, as it will become in the criticism and prose of the 19th century, be reduced to a momentary episode of psychology in character development, as it is for Andrei Bolkonsky in Tolstoy’s War and Peace, for example. Nor can it be reduced to a poetics of imitation of a static Platonic idea. Instead, it is located somewhere in between (as sublime perspective should be), a “shape of thinking”—to borrow Muraviev’s felicitous phrase—that is open, dynamic, and governed by a disciplined poetic imagination.

2.2 Towards the Pushkinian Sublime

Before turning to Onegin itself, I would like to frame my analysis with a closer reading of “К морю” (1825). A return to such well-traveled territory is warranted; recent critical studies

¹⁰⁵ Пушкин, “Из Записной Книжки, 1820—1823.”
have pointed to the poem as an entryway to understanding the sublime in Pushkin’s work, but the general tendency has been to look for moments of compatibility with other sublimes rather than the originality of Pushkin’s own.\textsuperscript{106}

In most accounts of the sublime, whether in Lomonosov or its later Romantic variant, a metaphoric equivalency is made between the poet and nature. What changes in the shift from neoclassicism to Romanticism is the conceptual framework of freedom that ensues: in the first case, freedom is realized through the poet’s mastery of organization, in the second, freedom is understood as the liberation \textit{from} these very same forces that are now viewed as constraints. They are, however, in both accounts, experienced equally, as exhilaration. The opening stanzas of Pushkin’s poem contain all of the proper ingredients for such a sublime experience, except for the emotional intensity:

Прощай, свободная стихия!
В последний раз передо мной
Ты катишь волны голубые
И блещешь гордою красой.

Как друга ропот заунывный,
Как зов его в прощальный час,
Твой грустный шум, твой шум призывный
Услышал я в последний раз.\textsuperscript{107}

The predominant emotional register here is melancholic, and is further reflected in Pushkin’s relaxed, measured cadence in iambic tetrameter, accomplished through a judicious placement of pyrrhic feet. The poet is shown to be entirely in control, both of himself, and in relationship to


\textsuperscript{107} Пушкин, “К Морю.”
the object of his contemplation: the metaphor of the second stanza frames the sea already as an equal, and is shot through with pairs of comparisons (друга / зов; ропот заунывный / прощальный час; грустный шум / шум призывный) and dual repetitions of metaphors and individual words.

When the intersection of the poet and the sea finally take place, lyric transport does occur, but in a manner that would be impossible to confuse with neoclassical rupture:

Моей души предел желанный!
Как часто по брегам твоим
Бродил я тихий и туманный,
Заветным умыслом томим!

The chiasmus of the first line of the stanza, facilitated by a suddenly regular realization of stress in each foot, is insistent. Yet this insistence is still one of a controlled desire, seen in the poet’s decision to relegate his equivalency to the sea in the past, even as present alternatives (желаний, желания) poetically suggest themselves. This is a disciplined, controlled sublime, one that is marked not by the promise of infinite expansion, but by the prospect of preservation provided by poetic limitation. Within this context, the concluding stanzas of the poem, which treat Napoleon, Byron, and the sea in turn, are all viewed through the prism of memory. In the concluding stanza: “В леса, в пустыни молчаливы / Перенесу, тобою полн / Твои скалы, твои заливы, / И блеск, и тень, и говор волн.” the lyric transport that transpires is not that of the poet, but of the sea itself, which is freed to continue its existence beyond its own physical confines in the poetic imagination.

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108 Ibid.
Such a modification to pre-existing models of the sublime resonates with Pushkin’s description of the creative process in his well-known debate with Küchelbecker on the ceremonial ode:

In criticizing Küchelbecker’s championing of the ode, Pushkin touches upon three qualities—forcefulness of expression, freedom, and inspiration—not in their depiction, but in the actual lived experience of the poet. What he rejects is not the sublime as such, but the sublime as the primary actual, real, physiological process undergone by the artist in the process of creation. For him, as for Boileau, the sublime is limited to an effect of art. It may be an effect experienced by the author himself (as he reads himself), but it can only take place on the background of rigorous artistic control.

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109 Пушкин, “Возражение На Статьи Кюхельбекера В ‘Мнемозине.’”
For Pushkin the weakness of odic восторг is contained in its disabling of aesthetic comprehension: “Восторг не предполагает силы ума, располагающей частей в их отношении к целому.” Left to its own devices, odic rapture can be little more than a cognitive blindness, incapable of seeing or experiencing anything beyond itself. True artistic perfection cannot tolerate this, Pushkin claims, implying that its creation requires both an awareness and a form—however intricate—that will allow it to be experienced again from a different temporal or spatial vantage point. Tragedy, comedy, and satire stand higher in the ranks of poetic genres precisely due to their greater demands on the poet. If poetic organization in Lomonosov could lead to freedom, here freedom itself forces choices of self-generated, self-imposed constraints that make truly great perfection possible, through free organization of the poet’s knowledge of nature.

Pushkin’s programmatic statements here are strikingly similar to Muraviev’s examined in the previous chapter, in which lyric transport, an instinct for truth, the collection of various natural phenomena into a manifold of concepts, and a sense of inner calm and freedom can be found:

А сему причиною, ежели не обману́сь, есть наше тайное влечение к исти́нне. Между́ тем как мы наиболе́е кажемсЯ заня́ты, душа на́ша, уедине́нной наблюдате́ль, замечает в молча́нии все вне е́я происходящее, и из собранных поня́тий составля́ет себe как бы картину целаго Мира. Она жадно устремля́ется и похваля́ет все те черты, которыя почерпнуты́ в природе. Простое движение страсти, вопль печали, и хотя не чудесное, но непринуждённое приключение, более стоя́т в глазах ея, нежели хитрой узол, или далеко выисканныя витийства.110

110 А Н Пашкуров, М. Н. Муравьев: Вопросы Поэтики Мировоззрения И Творчества: Учебно-Методическое Пособие, 95.
Similarities abound in other moments as well; Pushkin’s preference for Homer over Pindar can be read as a Greek iteration of Muraviev’s preference for Virgil over Horace examined earlier. While it remains uncertain the extent to which Pushkin was familiar with Muraviev’s work, these connections are a useful reminder that the Pushkin-Küchelbecker debate was not a new one, and that the compatibility of Pushkin’s ideas with Muraviev shows that Pushkin was not breaking away into radically new territory, but rather was situating himself within an already-established aesthetic tradition.

2.3 Eugene Onegin: Melancholy, Negation, Sublimity

In Pushkin’s dedication to Pletnev—first included during the publication of chapters four and five in 1828 and later used as a dedication for the work to a whole—the author coyly disavows any connection between *Eugene Onegin* and the sublime:

Ne мысля гордый свет забавить,  
Вниманье дружбы возлюбя,  
Хотел бы я тебе представить  
Залог достойнее тебя,  
Достойнее души прекрасной,  
Святой исполненной мечты,  
Поэзии живой и ясной,  
Высоких дум и простоты;  
Но так и быть — рукой пристрастной  
Прими собранье пестрых глав,  
Полусмешных, полупечальных,  
Простонародных, идеальных,  
Небрежный плод моих забав,  
Бессонниц, легких вдохновений,  
Незрелых и увядших лет,  
Ума холодных наблюдений  
И сердца горестных замет.111

111 Пушкин, “Евгений Онегин,” 7.
Yet this disavowal clearly cannot be taken at face value. Subject to the rhetorical rules of the humility topos, in which the poet denigrates his own talents in relation to the object of his veneration, it has to be read as its opposite. Moreover, the author is entirely aware that this is how the dedication will be read. Incorporating this rhetorical strategy into the structure and semantics of the second half of the stanza from line eleven until its conclusion (in which a series of diametrical oppositions appear in phrases of growing length), Pushkin announces the meta-literary dimension of his work, revealing a vital characteristic required to understand the novel.

Throughout the work to follow, the narrator’s perspective and position is marked by excess and self-awareness. At the same time, it is also marked by restraint. Though capable of anticipating readers’ responses and shifting the text to defer symmetry and resolution, the narrator only does so in such a way as is suggested by generic and rhetorical rules of the text itself.

The argument of this chapter is founded on a reading that takes Pushkin’s disavowal of sublimity not as a prohibition but as an invitation. In doing so, I will focus on three “shapes of thought” present throughout the novel. While each of these shapes will be most commonly associated with or expressed by certain characters, they also appear external to them in the narrator’s voice zone, informing methods of description and, on occasion, motivating the development of both narrator and narrative.

The first chapter of *Eugene Onegin* primarily occupies itself with the introduction of Onegin, descriptions of Petersburg society, two major authorial digressions, and the history of the narrator's acquaintance with the novel's protagonist. What is striking about Eugene's brief biography, as has been noted several times in Pushkin scholarship, is the marked absence of
concrete defining characteristics attributed to the novel's eponymous hero. Everything concerning Eugene is heavily mediated; his childhood, marked by the absence of a maternal figure and presented only through the presence of his caregivers, is treated in one short stanza. Onegin is a glamorous—to use a more contemporary term—figure; we know how he is dressed, but not what he looks like. We know the opinion that society has of him, but nothing of his own opinion about himself. The one aspect of Onegin's psychology (if we can even use such a term in this context) is his ability to take on a variety of appearances. The endless list of details would at first appear to serve as minute pieces of a puzzle that will eventually come together as a whole. However, it is precisely these metonymically oriented details that are rejected as being indicative of Onegin's personality in stanzas thirty-seven and thirty-eight. The dominating motif is one of negation:

XXXVII
Нет: рано чувства в нем остыли;
Ему наскучил света шум;
Красавицы не долго были
Предмет его привычных дум;
Измены утомить успели;
Друзья и дружба надоели,
Затем, что не всегда же мог
   Beef-steaks и страсбургский пирог
Шампанской обливать бутылкой
И сыпать острые слова,
   Когда болела голова;
И хоть он был повеса пылкой,
   Но разлюбил он наконец
И брань, и саблю, и свинец.

XXXVIII
Недуг, которого причину
Давно бы отыскать пора,
Подобный английскому сплину,
Короче: русская хандра
Им овладела понемногу;
Он застрелиться, слава богу,
Попробовать не захотел,
Но к жизни вовсе охладел.
Как Child-Harold, угрюмый, томный
В гостинных появлялся он;
Ни сплетни света, ни бостон,
Ни милый взгляд, ни вздох нескромный,
Ничто не трогало его,
Не замечал он ничего.\textsuperscript{112}

The latter stanza is striking not only in its repeated use of negation in the final four lines, but also for its statement that Eugene is incapable of sensation and of new experience in general (Ничто не трогало его). But this does not necessarily entail a diminishing of appetite; these rejections—all of superficial urban commodities that, in excess, can lead to vice—can best be read as an \textit{increase} of desire, of a general dissatisfaction with the superficial charms of society.

This rejection of everyday pleasures is then amplified following the three unwritten stanzas that follow the passage above, as the narrator turns to describe Onegin’s rejection of erotic pleasure. The form of the narration, however, changes here, taking the form of an apostrophe to the very women Onegin is no longer compelled by:

Причудницы большого света!
Всех прежде вас оставил он;
И правда то, что в наши лета
Довольно скучен высший тон;
Хоть, может быть, иная дама
Толкует Сея и Бентама,
Но вообще их разговор
Несносный, хоть невинный вздор;
К тому ж они так непорочны,
Так величавы, так умны,
Так благочестия полны,
Так осмотрительны, так точны,

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 21–22.
Так неприступны для мужчин,  
Что вид их уж рождает сплин.\textsuperscript{113}

The evaluation here is the narrator’s, aside from a fleeting appearance in the second line, Onegin is nowhere to be found. Although negation is present at various moments in the stanza, the dominating figure is anaphora, which is accompanied rhythmically by four lines that, taken together, run from the final quatrain of the Onegin stanza into the first line of the concluding couplet. This transgression against the order of the rhyme scheme is complemented by an awkward rhythmical shift, effected by a repeated use of tilts in these lines, whereas all preceding lines follow a regular rhythms for iambic tetrameter. The awkwardness is then emphasized further in the concluding line in which extra attention is drawn to the realized stress in the first foot, “the sight of them engenders spleen”.

This description is the inversion of the conclusion of the preceding written stanza in terms of poetic technique. It is also its opposite in terms of sincerity; whereas the previous stanza described Onegin’s loss of sensation via apophatic negation, here cataphasis leads to irony. The narrator’s hyperbolic apostrophe to the women of high society is clearly a false humility topos. In case there were any lingering questions in the reader’s mind, the point is amplified even further in a footnote first added to the 1833 edition:

Вся сия ироническая строфа не что иное, как тонкая похвала прекрасным нашим соотечественницам. Так Буало, под видом укоризны, хвалит Лудовика XIV. Наши дамы соединяют просвещение с любезностью и строгую чистоту нравов с этой восточною прелестю, столь пленившей г-жу Сталь.\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 22–23.  
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 166.  

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This clever move, of course, is a double one. While Boileau undoubtedly did praise Louis XIV in *Art Poétique* and other works, his tenth satire specifically attacked women, whom he viewed as unqualified arbiters of taste in the debate between the ancients and moderns.\(^{115}\) The implication made is that De Staël's judgment of Russian women is equally misleading. By mentioning Boileau—rumored to be a eunuch, as Pushkin was well aware—attention is drawn both to the rhetoric of the stanza and its comic effect. The narrator’s stance regarding women, if one is to believe the lines from stanza thirty-four, is purportedly as negative as Onegin’s: “Они не стоят ни страстей, / Ни песен, ими вдохновенных: / Слова и взор волшебниц сих / Обманчивы... как ножки их.”\(^{116}\)

The comic release of the previous stanza glosses over the fact that the reader does not hear the reason for Onegin’s disaffection with women. Instead, an implied affinity of judgment between him and the narrator is alleged. A similar silencing takes place in the ensuing stanza, in which the rejections of the pleasures of habit and of erotic love lead to a rejection of the “higher pleasure” of reading and literature. For reasons that will become readily apparent later, the narrator-as-creator does not allow Onegin to become a poet:

Онегин дома заперся,  
Зевая, за перо взялся,  
Хотел писать — но труд упорный  
Ему был тошен; ничего  
Не вышло из пера его,  
И не попал он в цех задорный  
Людей, о коих не сужу,  
Затем, что к ним принадлежу.\(^{117}\)

\(^{115}\) Boileau Despréaux and Collinet, *Satires, Épitres, Art poétique*.  
\(^{116}\) Пушкин, “Евгений Онегин,” 20.  
\(^{117}\) Ibid., 23.
The reintroduction of negation, already established as mode of sincerity in stanza thirty-seven, is intended to add legitimacy to the narrator’s claim. Yet the narrator’s professed and humble restraint in judgment can also be read as a subtle sleight of hand. He may not deign to judge other writers, but he takes no issue with judging Onegin’s literary abilities, as he stands to gain from the comparison.

This subtle—yet important—criticism aside, the next stanza reaffirms the affinity between narrator and protagonist, in which Onegin rejects literature:

И снова, преданный безделю,
Томясь душевной пустотой,
Уселися он — с похвальной целью
Себе присвоить ум чужой;
Отрядом книг уставил полку,
Читал, читал, а всё без толку:
Там скука, там обман иль бред;
В том совести, в том смысла нет;
На всех различные вериги;
И устарела старина,
И старым бредит новизна.
Как женщин, он оставил книги,
И полку, с пыльной их семьей,
Задернул траурной тафтой.“

Nabokov notes in his commentary that it is the narrator “rather than Onegin, [who] criticizes contemporaneous literature in [stanza] XLIV.” While it is difficult to take issue with the observation, it is equally difficult to dismiss how easy a misattribution could take place, or that Onegin would disagree with the narrator’s thoughts. The narrator declines to announce himself at this moment, a subterfuge made all the more convincing by the fact that he clearly makes his

118 Ibid.
119 Пушкин и Набоков, Eugene Onegin, 2:167.
present felt in the concluding couplet of the previous stanza, and appears within Onegin’s chronotope as a character in the stanza to follow.

Mutual dissatisfaction and disillusionment with society unite Onegin with the narrator in friendship, and it is the introduction of that friendship that provides the reader with one of the only passages in the novel to give insight into Onegin’s character beyond the shallow evaluations of Petersburg society. Four qualities are listed by the narrator in stanza forty-five:

Условий света свергнув бремя,
Как он, отстав от суеты,
С ним подружился я в то время.
Мне нравились его черты,
Мечтам невольная преданность,
Неподражательная странность
И резкий, охлажденный ум.
Я был озлоблен, он угрюм;
Стастей игру мы знали оба:
Томила жизнь обоих нас;
В обоих сердца жар угас;
Обоих ожидала злоба
Слепой Фортуны и людей 120
На самом утре наших дней.

The narrator’s claim that Onegin displays an “involuntary dedication to dreams,” is one of the most difficult to accept for a reader familiar with Pushkin’s text. Nowhere in the surrounding text is there an indication of what these dreams might consist of, nor are there any hints that would invite speculation. Equally puzzling—particularly in light of Tatiana’s later visit to his library and his Byronesque pedigree—is the narrator’s insistence that Onegin possesses an original strangeness to him that is apparently not connected to the numerous masks he is capable of adopting. What cannot be doubted, however, is that the narrator finds him compelling, so

120 Пушкин, “Евгений Онегин,” 24.
much so that he transfers an epithet previously used to describe Onegin (in stanza XXXVIII, discussed above) to himself, leaving his protagonist with the colder, crueler “озлоблен”.

The narrator’s characterization of Onegin’s “keen, cooled mind,” runs counter to society’s evaluation of Onegin from the beginning of the chapter. It also allows for a decided ambiguity in identifying the speaker in the opening of the next stanza, which could be attributed to either the narrator or Onegin:

Кто жил и мыслил, тот не может
В душе не презирать людей;
Кто чувствовал, того тревожит
Призрак невозвратимых дней:
Тому уж нет очарований,
Того змия воспоминаний,
Того раскаянье грызет.
Все это часто придает
Большую прелесть разговору.
Сперва Онегина язык
Меня смущал; но я привык
К его язвительному спору,
И к шутке, с желчью пополам,
И злости мрачных эпиграмм.121

Onegin and the narrator’s judgments have been come entirely intertwined. If earlier the narrator could be alleged to be ventriloquizing Onegin, here the opposite would be true, as the reader is led to consider the first nine lines as direct reported speech.

The recognition of a peer—if not an equal—opens up the possibility for an unfeigned experience of the sublime in which Onegin’s (and perhaps the narrator’s) lost capacity for emotion and sentiment is restored:

121 Ibid.
Как часто летнею порою,  
Когда прозрачно и светло  
Ночное небо над Невою  
И вод веселое стекло  
Не отражает лик Дианы,  
Воспомня прежних лет романы,  
Воспомня прежнюю любовь,  
Чувствительны, беспечны вновь,  
Дыханьем ночи благосклонной  
Безмолвно упивались мы!  
Как в лес зеленый из тюрьмы  
Перенесен колодник сонный,  
Так уносились мы мечтой  
К началу жизни молодой.  

The stanza relating Onegin and the narrator’s time together contains an elegiac sublimity to it that is contained in the structure of the stanza as well as the content. The use of inverted syntax allows for a build from temporal to spatial markers to the content of the sublime vision before finally revealing both the narrator and Onegin as the subjects who are carried away by their memories of past love. The metaphor that concludes the stanza emphasizes the sensation of release, as well as anticipating the later discussion of Pushkin’s plans for escape. The four lines of the ensuing stanza are a reworking of the concluding four lines of Mikhail Muraviev’s “Богине Невы,” which Pushkin cites in full in a footnote:

Въявь богиню благосклонну  
Зрит восторженный пьет,  
Что проводит ночь бессонну,  
Опершися на гранит.  
(Муравьев. Богине Невы)  

———

122 Ibid.  
123 Ibid., 166.
Pushkin’s recasting of Muraviev’s poem replaces the восторг of Muraviev’s enraptured poet with a description of an introspective Onegin experiencing sorrow while contemplating his past:

С душею, полной сожалений,
И опершись на гранит,
Стоял задумчиво Евгений,
Как описал себя Пиит.¹²⁴

This impulse to reflection is taken up by the narrator at the conclusion of the chapter, where he examines the evolution of his own creative process. The narrator recounts his usual approach to love poetry (Мне снылись, и душа моя/ Их образ тайный сохранила; /Их после муза ожила), and juxtaposes it with his current creative state which declares the absence of direct inspiration from a single figure taken from life (Кого твой стих боготворил?" / И, други, никого, ей-богу!/ Любви безумную тревогу/ Я безотрадно испытал.) Just as Onegin has been placed under negation, so too has the narrator’s previously existing artistic model. Both stages of maturation have come at the expense of the solely erotic:

Прошла любовь, явилась муза,
И прояснился темный ум.
Свободен, вновь ищу союза
Волшебных звуков, чувств и дум;
Пишу, и сердце не тоскует,
Перо, забывшись, не рисует,
Близ неоконченных стихов,
Ни женских ножек, ни голов;
Погасший пепел уж не вспыхнет,
Я все грущу; но слез уж нет,
И скоро, скоро бури след
В душе моей совсем утихнет:
Тогда-то я начну писать
Поэму песен в двадцать пять.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Ibid., 24.
¹²⁵ Ibid., 29.
Line eight of the stanza reveals a connection between the rejection of distractions (most often presented as metonymies) as a necessary step for achieving artistic clarity and control. Reading retroactively, it is thus possible to view Onegin’s rejections of social life, women, and learning—which are presented in parallel with those of the narrator in the same shape of thought—as an equally necessary purgative. The radical negation of Onegin’s desires, then, is not of one weakness, but of strength.

This combination of sentiment and rhetoric was lost on most contemporary readers, who were accustomed to more traditional understandings of the sublime. An example can be found in an 1825 letter sent to Pushkin by Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, who criticizes the beginning of Onegin specifically in its lack of sublimity:

Чем выше предмет, тем более надобно силы, чтобы объять его — его постичь, его одушевить. Иначе ты покажешься мошкою на пирамиде — муравьем, который силится поднять яйцо орла. — Одним словом как бы ни был велик и богат предмет стихотворения — он станет таким только в руках гения. Сладок сок кокоса, но для того, чтоб извлечь его, потребна не ребяческая сила. В доказательство тому приведу и пример: что может быть поэтичнее Петра? И кто написал его сносно? Нет, Пушкин, нет, никогда не соглашусь, что поэма заключается в предмете, а не в исполнении! — Что свет можно описывать в поэтических формах — это несомненно, но дал ли ты Онегину поэтические формы, кроме стихов?126

Later in the same letter, Bestuzhev recommends that Pushkin return to Byron, who, in Bestuzhev’s opinion at least, was capable of endowing “idle talk” (пустословие) with “philosophical observations”:

Прочти Бейрона; он, не знаяши нашего Петербурга, описал его схоже — там, где касалось до глубокого познания людей. У него даже притворное пустословие скрывает в себе замечания философские, а про сатири и

126 Bestuzhev, “Pis’mo Pushkinu A. S., 9 Marta 1825 G. Peterburg,” 148.
говорить нечего. Я не знаю человека, который бы лучше его, портретнее его очеркивал характеры, схватывал в них новые проблески страстей и страстишек. И как зла, и как свежа его сатира! Не думай однакож, что мне не нравится твой Онегин, напротив. (…) Впрочем мое мнение не аксиома, но я невольно отдаю преимущество тому, что колеблет душу, что ее возвышает, что трогает русское сердце; а мало ли таких предметов — и они ждут тебя! 127

The irony of recommending that Pushkin return to the very same poet he is seeking to surpass aside, Bestuzhev’s advice demonstrates the degree to which he associated the sublime—which is present everywhere in his own criticism and prose—with philosophy, i.e. with the thoughts that words signify, rather than the words themselves. In addition, Bestuzhev implies in his letter that the main value and primary role of negation in the first chapter of Onegin is satire.

Bestuzhev’s remarks were perhaps inspired by the original preface that accompanied the publication of the first chapter of the novel:

Дальновидные критики заметят, конечно, недостаток плана. Всякий волен судить о плане целого романа, прочитав первую главу оного. Станут осуждать и антипоэтический характер главного лица сбивающегося на Кавказского Пленника, также некоторые строфы, писанные в утомительном роде новейших элегий, в коих чувство уныния поглотило все прочие. Но да будет нам позволено обратить внимание читателей на достоинства, редкие в сатирическом писателе: отсутствие оскорбительной личности и наблюдение строгой благопристойности в шуточном описании нравов. 128

In a written reply to Bestuzhev, however, Pushkin denies the presence of satire in the first chapter at all, and that if there had been, it would have been just as—if not more—cutting and cruel as Bestuzhev considers Byron’s to be:

127 Ibid., 149.
Твое письмо очень умно, но все-таки ты не прав, все-таки ты смотришь на "Онегина" не с той точки, все-таки он лучшее произведение мое. (...)Ты говоришь о сатире англичанина Байрона и сравниваешь ее с моей, и требуешь от меня таковой же! Нет, моя душа, много хочешь. Где у меня сатира? о ней и помину нет в "Евгении Онегине". У меня бы затрещала набережная, если б коснулся я сатире. Самое слово сатирический не должно бы находиться в предисловии. Дождись других песен...  

Pushkin’s disavowal of satire, whether motivated by the specific concerns of his letter to Bestuzhev, an expression of annoyance at an editorial addition, or simply a case of changed perspective, is nonetheless intriguing. A possible explanation is that Pushkin felt the satirical mode was incompatible with a vital dimension of his “best work”.

Satire makes use of a kind of negation, but in its neoclassical iteration its function is essentially didactic. By donning a satirical mask, the writer is allowed to make negative judgments of society, provided they can be read properly and are ultimately intended to improve morality, which is in turn dictated (often imperially) by social norms from above. A number of Derzhavin’s odes are exemplary in this regard: by criticizing the moral failings of others, the poet is able to piggyback onto the sublime authority of the sovereign.

Pushkin is not this kind of poet. The satirical mask precludes two values that are essential to his poetry in general and Onegin in particular. The first is the poet’s complete independence in artistic matters, which includes the right to both agree or to disagree with any normative social position. The second is the responsibility entailed by the first: that honor, decency, and respect are sacred values (hinted at in the “absence of insulting personal attacks and observation of strict decency” above). It is only through these that artistic sincerity (in Pushkin’s 

sense of the term) and artistic truth can be achieved. For Pushkin, уныние can allow for this in ways that choleric satire cannot.

Although Pushkin disagreed with Küchelbecker and his view on the ode, he did agree with him (partially) regarding the elegy, but only inasmuch as the genre itself was being cut and pasted into locales and onto personalities without a discriminating eye. Highlighting the elegiac dimension of the first chapter of Onegin by quoting Küchelbecker’s essay (“чувство уныния поглотило все прочие”), Pushkin both invites criticism (much as his narrator does at the conclusion of chapter one) and suggests that these “certain stanzas” are central to understanding his work.

Such an understanding of the poetic advantages of melancholy, i.e. that it is an emotional state and a rhetorical figure particularly conducive to the sublime has a firm philosophical foundation. As mentioned earlier, it is a necessary condition for the experience of the sublime in Nadezhdin’s framework. It can also be found, among other places, in Kant’s pre-critical Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime:

He whose feeling tends towards the melancholic is so called not because, robbed of the joys of life, he worries himself into blackest dejection, but because his sentiments, if they were to be increased above a certain degree or to take a false direction through some causes, would more readily result in that than in some other condition. He has above all a feeling for the sublime. (…) The enjoyment of gratification is in his case more serious, but not on that account any lesser. All emotions of the sublime are more enchanting than the deceptive charms of the beautiful. His well-being will be contentment rather than jollity. He is steadfast. For that reason he subordinates his sentiments to principles. (…) The person of a melancholic frame of mind troubles himself little about how others judge, what they hold to be good or true, and in that regard he relies solely on his own insight. Since his motivations take on the nature of principles, he is not easily brought to other conceptions; his steadfastness thus sometimes degenerates into obstinacy. He looks on changes in fashion with indifference and on their luster with contempt. Friendship is sublime and hence he has a feeling for it. He can perhaps lose an inconstant friend, but the latter does not lose him equally quickly. Even the memory of an
extinguished friendship is still worthy of honor for him. Talkativeness is beautiful, thoughtful taciturnity sublime.\textsuperscript{130}

While it is highly unlikely that Pushkin had read the above passage—although Kant’s *Observations* had been translated into Russian before Pushkin wrote *Eugene Onegin*—the similarities between Kant’s description of melancholy and the artistic vision of the first chapter of *Eugene Onegin* are striking. The subordination of sentiment to artistic principles, an indifference to fashion and reluctance to judge the discrimination of others, the importance of friendship, and thoughtful taciturnity (in the appropriate moment), are all qualities contained within the shared field of Onegin and the narrator.

### 2.4 Lensky (The Static Sublime), Olga (The Beautiful), and Tatiana (The Sublime Suspended)

Conveyed to the reader via negation, the urban melancholy attributed to Onegin and Pushkin’s narrator in the first chapter served to open up both characters temporally: both were capable of measuring their distance from their past selves, and both were in a state of anticipation of a newly disclosed future. The complete opposite of this cluster is to be found in Onegin’s neighbor, Vladimir Lensky. Confined to the dull idyllic chronotope of the Russian village, he is described through a series of clearly demarcated physical and philosophical characteristics, which define him as a cultural and poetic disciple of German idealism in its Russian reception. Chief among these is a naïve belief in infinity as the realization of a static Platonic idea, as seen in the following passages from stanzas seven and eight:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{130} Kant, *Kant*, 27–28.
\end{quote}
Цель жизни нашей для него
Была заманчивой загадкой,
Над ней он голову ломал
И чудеса подозревал.

VIII

Что есть избранные судьбами,
Людей священные друзья;
Что их бессмертная семья
Неотразимыми лучами
Когда-нибудь нас озарит
И мир блаженством одарит.  

Several intertextual references and possible historical prototypes have been discerned in
Lensky’s introductory stanzas, including Küchelbecker among others.  
While partially true, of
far greater importance is the appearance in the opening stanzas of Küchelbecker’s position in the
“rapture/inspiration” debate discussed earlier.  From stanzas VI-X the narrator recapitulates
Pushkin’s response to this debate, but attributes all of the negative criticisms—i.e. both his and
Küchelbecker—to Lensky, in a mocking (but never cold or disrespectful) tone.  Thus
Küchelbecker’s central criticism of the elegiac school—that уныние was merely an assumed
“rhetorical figure”—can be found in a description of Lensky awaiting the arrival of his soulmate:
“Он верил, что душа родная / Соеединиться с ним должна, / Что, безотрадно изнывая, / Его
вседневно ждет она.”  
The theatrical nature of this pose, of course, will strike the reader even
more strongly later on, when Olga is revealed as the constant object of Lensky’s affections.

In his essay on восторг, Küchelbecker’s critique of elegy touched upon the “misty
mysticism” such an approach to poetry evinced:

132 Лотман, Пушкин, 590–595.
133 Пушкин, “Евгений Онегин,” 34.
У нас все мечта и призрак, все мнимается, и кажется, веет только будто бы, как бы, нечто (...). В особенности же - туман: туманы над водами, туманы над бором, туманы над полями, туман в голове сочинителя.\footnote{Кюхельбекер, “О Направлении Нашей Поэзии, Особенно Лирической, В Последнее Десятилетие,” 236.}

These complaints are quoted by the narrator in stanza ten even as he ventriloquizes the poetics of Lensky’s school: “В пустынях неба безмятежных, / Богиня тайн и вздохов нежных. / Он пел разлуку и печаль, / И нечто, и туманну дальнь…”\footnote{Пушкин, “Евгений Онегин,” 35.} But perhaps the most biting moments of Lensky’s depiction by the narrator—who is clearly engaged in his own negation of poetics here—is saved for Küchelbecker’s championing of \textit{vostorg} as the primary principle of poetry. Throughout the introductory stanzas, the word “always” and its variants are repeatedly attached to Lensky’s ideals. His speech is “\textit{always} rapturous,” his soulmate “waits for him \textit{everyday},” “he \textit{always} preserved sublime sentiments in his songs.” This repetition has a deadening effect, which is amplified in the last example just mentioned, as the word “sublime” had also just been repeated two lines before.\footnote{И муз возвышенных искусства, / Счастливец, он не постыдил; / Он в песнях гордо сохранил / Всегда возвышенные чувства, / Порывы девственной мечты / И прелесть важной простоты.” Ibid., 34.} The vocabulary of such poetry, the narrator suggests, is as impoverished as its emotional affect. By realigning all of the negative aesthetic judgments into one character—who happens to resemble Küchelbecker—the narrator subtly shifts the argument into Pushkin’s favor. In doing so, he also brings Onegin (and the perceptive reader) into alignment, as they all share the same perspective on Lensky’s poetic gifts.

As if reminding the reader of the poetic alternative, the narrator shifts back to repeated negation as he returns to discussing Onegin:

В пустыне, где один Евгений
Мог оценить его дары,
Господ соседственных селений
Ему не нравились пиры;
Бежал он их беседы шумной.
Их разговор благоразумный
О сенокосе, о вине,
О псарне, о своей родне,
Конечно, не блистал ни чувством,
Ни поэтическим огнem,
Ни остротою, ни умом,
Ни общежития искусством;
Но разговор их милых жен
Гораздо меньше был умен.137

Here the negative judgment of Lensky’s poetic credo is transferred into the material of language and redirected at the tedious society he lives in. In doing so, however, the foundation for building empathy for Lensky’s position is subtly built.

In the famous thirteenth stanza, Lensky and Onegin, “fire and ice”, become friends out of “nothing to do” (“Так люди (первый каюсь я) / От делать нечего друзья.”)138 The final citation associated with Küchelbecker in this section of the chapter, the concluding couplet requires a careful reading.139 Two aspects are of particular importance: that here the narrator provides a final refutation of the institution of “sacred friendship” (as seen in stanza eight above), and that he does so while implicating himself into the criticism that he makes. In the stanza that

137 Ibid., 35.
138 Ibid., 36.
follows, the narrator extends this moment of self-criticism to include the reader in a sudden apostrophe:

Но дружбы нет и той меж нами.
Все предрассудки истребя,
Мы почитаем всех нулями,
А единицами — себя.
Мы все глядим в Наполеоны;
Двуногих тварей миллионы
Для нас орудие одно;
Нам чувство дико и смешно.  

This change in poetic mode from description to direct address—it is only by the end of the first quatrain that who the “we” in this stanza refers to, a repetition of the delay device used in chapter one’s sublime moment—effects a brief moment of disorientation in the reader, who is now placed under the same evaluative microscope that Lensky was previously subject to. As if sensing the narrative and the reader’s position were veering too close to impoverished satire (the same limit that was approached in the first chapter in the apostrophe to the women of Petersburg society) the narrator swiftly reverses course, shifting to a kind of humility topos, albeit one in which the narrator and reader’s moral judgment—rather than the narrator’s poetic gifts, which are impeccable as always—is shown to be unworthy and base.

The rhetorical function of the opening of the stanza breaks the static position of superiority previously occupied by the narrator and the reader. It also serves to elevate Onegin, not through sudden rapture but rather a sober recognition of his personal merits:

Сноснее многих был Евгений;
Хоть он людей, конечно, знал
И вообще их презирал, —

140 Пушкин, “Евгений Онегин,” 36.
No (правил нет без исключений)
Иных он очень отличал
И вчуже чувство уважал.\footnote{Ibid.}

In these lines the repetition of the word “sentiment” from earlier in the stanza fulfills the opposite function the repetition of the word “always” did previously; instead of highlighting sameness, repetition is used to emphasize difference. The narrator here takes on a position of almost Kantian disinterestedness; while he repeats Onegin’s negative evaluation of people in general, he also admits Onegin’s capacity for the sublime sentiment of respect for the other, something the narrator knows from his own lived experience with him. Onegin’s ability to respect, in turn, is made via paradox “he (Onegin) despises people and respects them”. This is the strength of the kind of negation advanced in chapter one over the “static sublime” associated with Lensky. It leads to openness; by rejecting everything, even one’s own rejection can be rejected. Such a rhetorical strategy does not guarantee a return to permanent acceptance—or any acceptance at all for that matter—but it does allow for its possibility.

At this moment in the novel, it also allows for a true friendship between Onegin and Lensky, and a growing tolerance on the part of narrator and reader. In the passages that follow, the narrator repositions Lensky in relation to all three witnesses, associating him with memory and valuing his sincerity. By the end of stanza nineteen, narrator, reader, and Onegin are once more aligned in tolerance and respect. This moment of unification allows for the incorporation of a sincere elegiac moment in the final stanza of Lensky’s introduction, which starts with what is easily the most well-worn interjection of Russian sentimentalism:
Ах, он любил, как в наши лета
Уже не любят; как одна
Безумная душа поэта
Еще любить осуждена:
Всегда, везде одно мечтанье,
Одно привычное желанье,
Одна привычная печаль.
Ни охлаждающая даль,
Ни долгие лета разлуки,
Ни музам данные часы,
Ни чужеземные красы,
Ни шум веселий, ни науки
Души не изменили в нем,
Согретой девственным огнем. 142

By incorporating Lensky into themselves, much as the sublime subject incorporates the apparent excess of nature or Pushkin incorporates the sea as discussed earlier, the creation of a true elegy. As such it resists the degeneration of poetic potential; the rhythmic shift to tilts from the ironic humility topos deployed in chapter one are now used to amplify melancholy distance, the distinct rhetorics of Lensky’s static sublime eternity are preserved “always,” “everywhere one dream,” “one common wish,” “one common sadness” as an equal partner to the ensuing series of negations, allowing for the retroactive regeneration of the opening poetic cliché. The narrator brings the introduction of Lensky from parody to a reinvigorated, sublime conclusion of melancholy understanding of the other, not as narrative description, but as his own independent poetic text.

Of course, the sublime cannot last forever. The next stanza introduces Olga, whose superficiality serves to bring down the sublime register of the previous stanza into a more playful key. Exhausted and sated from the preceding sublime moment, the narrator throws out her name in the very first line of her first stanza and can only sustain negation in order to poke fun at her

142 Ibid., 38–39.
limited erotic potential in the concluding couplet: “Незнаемый в траве глухой/ Ни мотыльками, ни пчелой.” First and foremost, she is a metonym of Lensky—“Всегда скромна, всегда послушна, / Всегда как утро весела,” but a poor one, containing none of the former’s intensity of emotion, and like the metonyms of the first chapter, she is to be rejected by the narrator and the reader as pleasant, banal, and utterly harmless, an embodiment of the aesthetics of beautiful.143

While such a derivative character and poetic expression are easily dismissed by Onegin and the narrator, the combination of her presence and Onegin’s is dangerous for Lensky, whose insistence on static eternity cannot tolerate difference the way that Onegin’s negativity can. Lensky can only recognize his own projections. When Onegin speaks of Olga after meeting her for the first time in chapter three, his refusal to talk of her in anything less than a sublime key causes Lensky to take offence:

«Я выбрал бы другую, 
Когда б я был, как ты, поэт. 
В чертах у Ольги жизни нет. 
Точь-в-точь в Вандиковой Мадоне: 
Кругла, красна лицом она, 
Как эта глупая луна 
На этом глупом небосклоне». 
Владимир сухо отвечал 
И после во весь путь молчал.144

Onegin’s choice of words here is revealing, inviting the reader to compare this moment with Onegin’s previous experience with the narrator during the White Nights in St. Petersburg. The metaphor of Olga as the inconstant moon is thus juxtaposed with the absent moon from that

143 Ibid., 39. 
144 Ibid., 50.
summer evening, a marker both of the absence of love, but also of a generally dynamic life trajectory, however embittered. They are also revealing in another sense: Onegin expects and assumes the kind of mutual understanding he shared with the narrator from Lensky as well, but such a return of respect proves tragically impossible. Whatever their overlap, there is still a blind spot in their poetics and their characters. Onegin sees no issue with criticizing the aesthetics of the beautiful (one might imagine that Olga wouldn’t take offence for long either), but Lensky is incapable of seeing Olga as anything but a sublime object. Moreover, Lensky is—in all likelihood—incapable of noticing when Onegin is indulging him, or of the kind of self-criticism the narrator invoked at the beginning of Lensky’s poetic incorporation.

The sudden arrival of Tatiana is completely opposed to the slow, plodding introduction of Olga. The first mention of her name is opposed to the subject/object relationship of Lensky and Olga: “Ее сестра звалась Татьяна... / Впервые именем таким / Страницы нежные романа / Мы своевольно освятим.” Unlike the positive description of Lensky’s static sublime and Olga as mere extension, Tatiana's negatively described attributes are real, but hidden, defined in opposition to her sister’s superficial beauty:

Итак, она звалась Татьяной.
Ни красотой сестры своей,
Ни свежестью ее румяной
Не привлекла б она очей.
Дика, печальна, молчалива,
Как лань лесная боязлива,
Она в семье своей родной
Казалась девочкой чужой.
Она ласкаться не умела
К отцу, ни к матери своей;
Дитя сама, в толпе детей
Играть и прыгать не хотела
И часто целый день одна
Сидела молча у окна.\textsuperscript{145}

Tatiana is described throughout the next three stanzas only by what she is not, or what she does not do. Her dislike of playing with dolls, mentioned slightly later, underscores her independence from social expectations, echoing Onegin’s rejection of social pleasures in the first chapter. Unlike Onegin's total negation, however, Tatiana is unrealized potential, a barely delimited figure who invites the reader to ponder what lies behind the mediating veil of the narrator's description.

With the exception of the narrator, Tatiana is also the most literary of the novel's characters. In contradistinction to Lensky's static, idyllic (and thus doomed) nature, Tatiana is open to change, if only because she has not yet found a suitable partner:

Татьяна слушала с досадой
Такие сплетни; но тайком
С неизъяснимою отрадой
Невольно думала о том;
И в сердце дума заронилась;
Пора пришла, она влюбилась.
Так в землю падшее зерно
Весны огнем оживлено.
Давно ее воображенье,
Сгорая негой и тоской,
Алкало пищи роковой;
Давно сердечное томленье
Теснило ей младую грудь;
Душа ждала... кого-нибудь.\textsuperscript{146}

The concluding couplet of the stanza, which so often serves as the site for ironic observations, intimates the relatively abstract nature of Tatiana's love that will come to be directed at Onegin.

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 40.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 51.
Unlike Lensky, whose erotic life is already determined, Tatiana has to take risks, and as such she expects more of her beloved than Lensky does of Olga.

This is most clearly seen in her letter to Onegin, and the extraordinary measures adopted by the narrator to ensure that the reader perceives Tatiana's letter as original and aesthetically powerful. The letter is first mentioned in stanza twenty one of the third chapter where it is presented as a spontaneous outburst: “И в необдуманном письме / Любовь невинной девы дышит. / Письмо готово, сложено... / Татьяна! для кого ж оно?” Yet it is not until a full ten stanzas later that the reader actually receives the text of the letter. What occurs in the interlude is a series of attempts on the part of the narrator to establish the innocence and purity of Tatiana's emotional state, as well as its literary worth. Several of the techniques used in doing this are reminiscent of the humility topos, as was seen in earlier moments in anticipation of the narrator’s sublime. Much like Boileau would often denigrate his fellow poets as being incapable of encompassing the glory of Louis XIV, the narrator here praises Tatiana by portraying her as more sincere and pure than her high society counterparts:

Я знал красавиц недоступных,  
Холодных, чистых, как зима,  
Неумолимых, неподкупных,  
Непостижимых для ума;  
Дивился я их спеси модной,  
Их добродетели природной,  
И, признаюсь, от них бежал,  
И, мнится, с ужасом читал  
Над их бровями надпись ада:  
Оставь надежду навсегда.  
Внушать любовь для них беда,  
Пугать людей для них отрада.  
Быть может, на брегах Невы  
Подобных дам видали вы.147

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147 Ibid., 57.
Much like the mock panegyric in the first chapter, here too the narrator attributes a false sublimity to the women of Petersburg whose moral purity consists of the same constancy as Olga’s superficial beauty. The brief apostrophe to the reader at the end of the stanza invites an alignment with the narrator’s position of judgment, and given the even-handedness of preceding discussions, they are inclined to do so.

By increasing Tatiana's stature through juxtaposition with other women (thus keeping Tatiana herself safely out of view) the narrator denigrates his own translation talents as being unworthy of capturing the full force of Tatiana's letter, at one point even calling upon Baratynsky to replace him. He refers to the translation as incomplete and weak (Но вот / Неполный, слабый перевод), giving Tatiana's original letter the air of the ineffable classically associated with the sublime. Thus protected from criticism by the narrator's ability to encapsulate it, Tatiana’s letter is perceived by the reader as genuine, sophisticated in its literary sources, and sincere. One moment from the letter deserves particular mention:

Другой!.. Нет, никому на свете
Не отдала бы сердца я!
То в вышнем суждено совете...
То воля неба: я твоя.

This is the moment in the letter where Tatiana switches from vous to tu in keeping with the French tradition (specifically Rousseau's Julie). At the same time, here Tatiana attributes her love for Eugene as being invoked by higher, sublime powers external to her. Although there is a kinship here with Lensky’s idealism, there is also a vital difference. The image of Onegin in

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148 Ibid., 61.
149 Пушкин and Набоков, Eugene Onegin, 2:392.
Tatiana’s letter is not distinct, i.e. Tatiana makes no pretense as to knowing who Onegin is, only that her emotions for him are genuine: “Незримый, ты мне был уж мил.” Tatiana’s mode of writing requires co-participation and a response, whereas Lensky’s poetry leaves no room for a second voice.

As a result of the narrator’s elevation of Tatiana’s letter, two asymmetries take place for the reader, both of which are marked by excess. The reader knows Onegin better than Tatiana, and what the reader knows—that Onegin is incapable of positive emotion—adds to the potential of risk already present in the letter. The second asymmetry is between the reader and Onegin, who have read different versions of Tatiana’s letter. Both of these will come into play in Onegin’s “lecture” to Tatiana in the beginning of chapter four.

The published version of chapter four omits the first seven stanzas by the narrator, preventing the kind of parallelism between narrator and Onegin that was established in the first chapter. Whatever the motivation for the omission, it has important poetic consequences. The text of chapter four now formally echoes the first stanza of chapter one, which likewise begins with Onegin’s direct speech. The reader is thus lured into reading the eighth stanza through the prism of Onegin’s previous candid admission that he desires another’s death. The strength of the opening four lines of the stanza seem to confirm this:

Чем меньше женщину мы любим,
Тем легче нравимся мы ей
И тем ее вернее губим
Средь обольстительных сетей.
Разврат, бывало, хладнокровный
Наукой славился любовной,
Сам о себе везде трубя
И наслаждаясь не любя.
Но эта важная забава
Достойна старых обезьян
Хваленных дедовских времен:
By the end, however, what began as a treatise on seduction is revealed to be a rejection of eroticism that is devoid of true sentiment. The parallel with Tatiana’s letter, which is rife with references to the literary works that were written and popularized in this period, demonstrate Onegin’s rejection of moral hypocrisy as well as his own exhaustion with pointless affairs. It is precisely this negation, however, that is challenged when Onegin receives Tatiana’s letter:

Onegin’s emotional reaction to Tatiana’s letter is also a glance back to chapter one and the moment of the melancholy sublime he shared with the narrator. That too was a moment of sincere emotion, and it is hardly a coincidence that it is Tatiana’s sincerity that is cited in his opening words in the garden, rhymed with same word used to describe Onegin in her letter:

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150 Pushkin, “Евгений Онегин,” 68.
151 Ibid., 70.
Freely admitting to the effectiveness of her letter—which he had read without the protective intercession of the narrator—Onegin is willing to reveal himself to Tatiana, something he has only been willing to do with the narrator up until this point. That his admission to her is “without art” deserves a careful reading, as it is all too easy to discern in this a poor judgment of an ornamented text he has never read. Drawing on his monologue from the opening of the chapter however, one can infer that it is the “art of love”, i.e. the exhausted rhetorically-based erotics of the preceding generation that is eschewed by Onegin here, just as he rhetorically rejects the praise required by the 18th century humility topos: “Но вас хвалить я не хочу”.

The rhetorical clumsiness of Onegin’s “sermon” that follows cannot be ignored, any more than his honorable and sincere intentions should be. Yet one caveat should be made; in the garden Onegin speaks in an idiom that is new for him—and one that is strewn with negations—but directed at himself. This shift from negation of the surrounding world to the deprecation of the self is clumsy and fitful, as it should be; the former mode is largely predicated on the assumption of one’s self-worth, the latter seeks to undermine the same.

One final potential reading of the “artlessness” of Onegin’s admission—one that will return in the final chapter of the novel—concerns the distance between Onegin on the one side, and the narrator and the reader on the other. While the narrator recognizes the Onegin’s nobility following the conclusion of the garden scene, he does so perfunctorily, tersely, and reluctantly.

152 Ibid.
There is little artistic value in Onegin’s speech. This puts him at odds with the both narrator and reader, who are both inevitably disenchanted with the aborted expenditure of erotic possibility. But this is precisely the difference between Onegin—who read neither the narrator’s sublime elegy marking the friendship of Onegin and Lensky nor the carefully crafted translation of Tatiana’s letter—and his creator. Onegin is able to both tolerate Lensky and respect his emotions without the trappings of art, just as he is capable of being moved by Tatiana’s letter without the careful curation of the narrator. However clumsy and cruel Onegin’s rejection of Tatiana may be, he does force her to change, and in doing so authors her in a way the narrator cannot.

2.5 Pushkin’s Sublime

The notion of foreground and background, of the sublime tragic hero and an antagonistic world, are suggested in the opening stanzas of the final chapter of *Eugene Onegin*. The chapter opens with the narrator recounting the journey of his muse, who finds herself at a St. Petersburg ball, admiring both the young hostess and the “dark frame of men / surrounding the ladies like they would a picture.” Yet this frozen moment of frame and picture, to be sure, is only temporary. Whereas previous models of the sublime relied on an unrelenting, static opposition, the sublime of Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin* is first and foremost one of movement, of reconfigurations and transformations that can only be understood through time.

Chief among these is Onegin’s sentimental recuperation and potential rejuvenation, which mirror the trajectory of the narrator’s journey in the opening stanzas, but are all the more vital in overcoming the consequences (both in Onegin’s mind and in the mind of the reader) of the fateful duel with Lensky. The question asked after Onegin’s arrival, “Но это кто в толпе
избранной / Стоит безмолвный и туманный?” nestled neatly between the voice zone of the narrator and the muse, leads to an evaluation from without similar to those early in the first chapter, i.e. that Onegin’s character is merely superficial, and lacks any real emotional depth. This approach, however, is quickly rebuked in the very next stanza, echoing the very same unfair treatment Tatiana received upon her arrival in Moscow, as well as the narrator’s criticism of the same:¹⁵³

- Зачем же так неблагосклонно  
  Вы отзываетесь о нем?  
  За то ль, что мы неутомно  
  Хлопочем, судим обо всем,  
  Что пылких душ неосторожность  
  Самолюбивую ничтожность  
  Иль оскорбляет, иль смешит,  
  Что ум, любя простор, теснит,  
  Что слишком часто разговоры  
  Принять мы рады за дела,  
  Что глупость ветрена и зла,  
  Что важным людям важны вздоры  
  И что посредственность одна  
  Нам по плечу и не странна?¹⁵⁴

Onegin earns social censure (and thus, perhaps, the approval of the narrator) because of his refusal to conform to functional categories that would easily be understood by society as a whole: ““Дожив без цели, без трудов / До двадцати шести годов,/ Томясь в бездействии досуга / Без службы, без жены, без дел, / Ничем заняться не умел.” Yet what is framed here in the negative depiction of Onegin in regards to society’s evaluation is simultaneously the possibility of potential and a personal understanding of freedom and self-determination. Unlike the previous chapters, moreover, Onegin is now shown as having the emotional capacity of

¹⁵³ Chapter VII Stanza XLIX: “Архивны юноши толпою / На Таню чопорно глядят, / И про нее между собою / Неблагосклонно говорят.” Ibid., 138.  
¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 145.
desire and sentiment, a dimension of his character that is muted in the final version of the novel, where it is limited to the lines, “И начал странствия без цели, / Доступный чувству одному” and the parallelism with the narrator’s own journey to the Caucasus in the opening stanzas of the eighth chapter.\textsuperscript{155}

This transformation is more explicitly stated in the drafts for “Onegin’s Travels”:

От видит: Терек разъяренный
Трясет и точит берега,
Над ним с чела скалы нагбенной
Висит олень, склонив рога;
Обвалы сыплются и блещут;
Вдоль скал прямых потоки хлещут.
Меж гор, меж двух высоких стен
Идет ущелие; стеснен
Опасный путь все уже, уже;
Вверху чуть видны небеса;
Природы мрачная краса
Везде являет дикость ту же.
Хвала тебе, седой Кавказ,
Онегин тронут в первый раз.\textsuperscript{156}

Here the natural sublime serves as a marker for Onegin’s discovery of a capacity to feel, preparing him for Tatiana’s entrance, which, like his own, is relayed to the reader via negative description:

Она была нетороплива,  
Не холодна, не говорлива,  
Без взора наглого для всех,  
Без притязаний на успех,  
Без этих маленьких ужимок,  
Без подражательных затей...  
Все тихо, просто было в ней,  
Никто б не мог ее прекрасной  
Назвать; но с головы до ног

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 146–147.
\textsuperscript{156} Пушкин, “Из Ранних Редакций,” 469.
The narrator’s description echoes both Tatiana’s earlier introduction in chapter two and the description of Onegin a few stanzas prior. In this passage, however, what Tatiana “lacks” are those negative social characteristics that are consequences of time spent in Petersburg society. Thus, although both protagonists are described here via negation, the modes of negation are qualitatively different: Onegin’s inner self is a vacuum, whereas Tatiana’s negativity suggests a hidden presence as well as the capacity to resist the very same aspects of culture Onegin had rejected in chapter one.

The lack of the name “Tatiana” in the description above is telling; it is by name that she is first introduced to the reader. The negative description, sublime simplicity, and independence from the limiting category of the beautiful gives enough information to recognize her. However, with the exception of this moment of recognition, the reader, who has grown accustomed to knowing Tatiana’s inner psychological state, is given just as little insight into her character as Onegin is. Denied the ability to enter Tatiana’s mind, the reader is led to contemplate two possible conclusions: either Tatiana has completely changed and she has become her new social role, or the role is just a mask, hiding her “true” previous self.

Of course, neither of these conclusions is true. Tatiana has not become a blank slate, nor is she hiding behind a mask. Instead, she is veiled. The narrator describes her as a challenge to be overcome, much as Segner intended the Isis inscription as a challenge to his students in his

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158 There is a marked similarity with Pushkin’s lyric “Красавица” here. See: Kahn, *Pushkin’s Lyric Intelligence*, 71–74.
Natural Philosophy ("Кто б смел искать девчонки нежной / В сей величавой, в сей небрежной / Законодательнице зал?")159 The apparent ease with which Tatiana acquires her newfound social role strikingly corresponds with Nadezhdin’s description of the sublime object discussed in the previous chapter, and Onegin’s emotional response likewise corresponds to Nadezhdin’s description of the sublime experience:

Но оно [высокое] ощутимо во всей эстетической чистоте своей только тогда, когда, облечённое спокойным величием, дивным, но не страшливым, не возлагает, а восторгает дух наш выше самого себе.160

Ощутительнее должно становиться на нас и сознание собственной немощи. Отсюда происходит, что наслаждение, производимое высокими ощущениями, растворено бывает всегда тайной унылостью. Но сия унылость не болезненна: она разрешается в благоговейное умиление, проникающее душу сладким ощущением вышей небесной жизни, на праге коей она тогда сознает себя.161

After rediscovering Tatiana, Onegin finds himself unable to employ the gifts of conversation and seduction that had defined him previously. At the same time, he is relentless in pursuit—at several points being described as stubborn—but his pursuit is one that is motivated by a depth of desire, self-reflection and a willingness to take action and risk that departs from his previous reluctance to engage another and to make himself vulnerable.

This threat of exposure is highlighted in the very different way in which the narrator frames Onegin’s letter to Tatiana. As opposed to the extravagant and excessive praise the narrator heaps upon Tatiana's letter writing, here the narrator is mostly silent, eschewing the veil of translation that was to magnify the power of Tatiana's literary ability. Onegin's letter is

159 Пушкин, “Евгений Онегин,” 153.
160 Надеждин, “О Высоком,” 51.
161 Ibid., 53.
presented exactly as it is (Вот вам письмо его точь-в-точь), stripped of all ceremony and trappings, just as Onegin himself is. Lotman's commentary on the ways in which Onegin's letter differs from Tatiana's is very much pertinent here. We know that Onegin is a skilled seducer; in fact it is one of the few social qualities that was attributed to him in positive terms in the first chapter. The fact that even this fails him in contemplating his love for Tatiana is indicative of the anticipation of the sublime experience, in which the individual's abilities are rendered impotent in the face of overwhelming sentiment and emotion. Onegin's letter, then, is presented to the reader as an “artless” simple letter, and therefore a worthy tribute to Tatiana, who loves in “simplicity” and “without art.”

The narrator, who previously felt compelled to intercede in order to vouchsafe the aesthetic force of Tatiana’s writing, maintains a deferential, respectful silence in his introduction to Onegin’s letter, creating a clearing in which Onegin’s words stand on their own. After the inclusion of the letter’s text, the narrator likewise maintains this silence, refusing to pass moral or aesthetic judgement. Onegin's letter, though it will eventually win Tatiana over, does not immediately meet with success; she still appears as indifferent to him as before. But in the final meeting, it is clear that Onegin's letter has obviously affected Tatiana deeply; no other compelling reason is given for her tears during their final encounter in the novel. Despite the emotional intensity betrayed by a brief shudder in response to Onegin’s sudden appearance, Tatiana manages to look at Onegin dispassionately, a perfect example of Pushkinian discipline. Neither passion nor anxiety drive Tatiana’s final speech, it is instead marked by a moment of complete clarity:

162 Лотман, Пушкин, 721–723.
О, кто б немых ее страданий
В сей быстрый миг не прочитал!
Кто прежней Тани, бедной Тани
Теперь в княгине б не узнал!
В тоске безумных сожалений
К ее ногам упал Евгений;
Она вздрогнула и молчит;
И на Онегина глядит
Без удивления, без гнева...
Его больной, угащий взор,
Молящий вид, немой укор,
Ей внятно все. Простая дева,
С мечтами, сердцем прежних дней,
Теперь опять воскресла в ней.  

Onegin's arrival has shaken Tatiana to the core. Saying nothing, Onegin's silent submission, a combination of entreaty and reproach, allows for the full regeneration of Tatiana's poetic potential, which had remained hidden to the reader, and potentially, to her herself. Transported beyond physical sensation, she begins her final speech:

Она его не подымает
И, не сводя с него очей,
От жадных уст не отымает
Бесчувственной руки своей...
О чем теперь ее мечтанье?
Проходит долгое молчанье,
И тихо наконец она.  

The speech is one by an equal for an equal. She begins by connecting her final statement to Onegin's speech to her in the garden. The goal is twofold: it is both a promise of imminent judgment and a reminder that Onegin always carried within him the potential to be loved independently of his Petersburg masks. Her judgment, like Onegin's in the garden, is severe but even, containing gratitude for his pity and respect:

163 Пушкин, “Евгений Онегин,” 160.
164 Ibid.
Я плачу... если вашей Тани
Вы не забыли до сих пор,
То знайте: колкость вашей брани,
Холодный, строгий разговор,
Когда б в моей лишь было власти,
Я предпочла б обидной страсти
И этим письмам и слезам.
К моим младенческим мечтам
Тогда имели вы хоть жалость,
Хоть уважение к летам...
А нынче! - что к моим ногам
Вас привело? какая малость!
Как с вашим сердцем и умом
Быть чувства мелкого рабом? 165

It is possible to discern in these lines a reluctance on Tatiana's part to come to terms with her feelings for Onegin. Tatiana knows all too well the empty aspect of Petersburg life, even if it is the highest position in society open to her. Her memories of the past lead her to the present, and to the conclusion of her speech:

А счастье было так возможно,
Так близко!.. Но судьба моя
Уж решена. Неосторожно,
Быть может, поступила я:
Меня с слезами заклинаний
Молила мать; для бедной Тани
Все были жребии равны...
Я вышла замуж. Вы должны,
Я вас прошу, меня оставить;
Я знаю: в вашем сердце есть
И гордость и прямая честь.
Я вас люблю (к чему лукавить?),
Но я другому отдана;
Я буду век ему верна" 166

165 Ibid., 161.
166 Ibid., 162.
Marked by a growing intensification of her sense of self (the second half of the stanza are all self-defining statements), Tatiana admits to her present love of Eugene even as she seemingly declares her refusal to be with him. Eugene's love is the catalyst by which she can come to this realization, a love that is not the figment of her (decidedly powerful) poetic imagination, but instead founded in the emotions of a real individual. This does not limit her; Tatiana will never ascribe to the aesthetics of mere beauty, she will always be sublime excess, she is neither mere wife, nor mere lover, but a whole that is more than the sum of her parts.

Tatiana rewards Onegin’s efforts with a paradox. The results: Eugene is dumbstruck as if by thunder, a sublime cliché to be sure, but one that has now been reinvigorated with recovered meaning through the artistic act. Tatiana is the sublime for Eugene, both in the awe she inspires and for the revelation that she imparts to Eugene, namely, that he himself is capable of coparticipating in her transformation. Eugene's role as a catalyst or clearing takes nothing away from Tatiana's glory. In returning his love, she becomes both more than he can comprehend, while simultaneously remaining part of his self.

2.6 Conclusion

In her final words, Tatiana utters the truth of a change that has already taken place within her. It is, I believe, the one free choice present in the novel. The reasons for this change are unknowable to the reader, to Onegin, and perhaps even to Tatiana herself. Her concluding couplet speaks the truth of free will, and as free will it refuses to reveal the object of its intention (we never find out precisely what or whom she is dedicated to).
In its valorization of free will, the conclusion of *Eugene Onegin* resonates with Schiller’s description of the sublime in his 1793 treatise, “On the Sublime.” In it, he attributes two central qualities of the so-called “pathetic sublime”:

Firstly an animated conceptualization of suffering, in order to arouse the compassionate affective state in the proper strength. Secondly a conceptualization of resistance to the suffering, in order to call the inner freedom of the heart to consciousness. Only through the first does the subject matter become pathetic, only through the second does the pathetic become at the same time sublime.\(^{167}\)

If the first quality of Schiller’s definition—“an animated conceptualization of suffering”—can be found in nearly all readings of *Eugene Onegin* (Belinsky’s included), a clear conception of “the calling of the inner freedom of heart to consciousness” is more elusive.

Traces of this idea, however, can be detected in three critical readings of *Eugene Onegin*, all of which demonstrate an inclination towards sublime terminology. The first of these Caryl Emerson’s 1995 article, “Tatiana,” which attempts a departure from the occasionally hagiographic tendencies of the “Tatiana cult”. Noting the impenetrability of Tatiana due to the narrator’s intervention—at one point remarking that “like the veil draped over the face of a harem favorite, they [foreign words] conceal from passers-by the essential positive thing” of Tatiana’s character—she pursues a dual reading of the novel’s conclusion, in which the events therein both transpire in the novel’s “reality”, and—paradoxically—strictly within the confines of Onegin’s own consciousness. In this second role, Emerson views Tatiana as “a tension-filled, painstakingly balanced, stable and harrowingly lucid synaesthetic poem.”\(^{168}\)

\(^{167}\) Schiller, “Of the Sublime ~ Toward the Further Elaboration of Some Kantian Ideas.”

\(^{168}\) Emerson, *All the Same the Words Don’t Go Away*, 140–141.
One of the results of Emerson’s reading is a recuperation of some of the poetic energy of the novel’s conclusion for its eponymous protagonist, as well as a recognition of the change that had taken place within him. Following Shaw's idea of “mature re-enchantment,” Emerson paints Eugene's authoring of Tatiana's final (and vital) word as a “self-revelation,” belonging to “his own better self.”\textsuperscript{169} What is in danger of being lost in such a reading, however, is the possibility that there is a revelatory dimension to Tatiana’s final act for herself, and by extension, of the true contribution Onegin makes to it, one that has been subtly foreshadowed in Onegin’s experiences of the melancholy sublime in the first half of the novel.

Olga Peters Hasty's seminal 1999 study, \textit{Pushkin's Tatiana}, proceeds from the opposite direction. Dedicated to a “Tatiana-centric” reading of Pushkin's novel, Hasty steadily builds a convincing case for considering Tatiana the only character of the novel who “successfully eludes determination,” much like the image of Isis of Kant's \textit{Critique}.\textsuperscript{170} Hasty consistently emphasizes the poetic potential (or sublime excess) present from Tatiana's very first appearance in the novel, and reads her negative attributes as a site for a potential construction of selfhood: “to see her as merely antithetical to her sister is to curtail her development and to overlook the complexity that gives rise to her genuine, far-reaching uniqueness.”\textsuperscript{171} Throughout her study, Hasty elucidates the rich poetic fabric out of which Tatiana is created and through which Tatiana authors herself with remarkable clarity. At the same time, Hasty does so at the expense of Eugene, who for her is constantly failing to live up to Tatiana's expectations, no matter how extreme (or unfair) they might be.

\begin{footnotes}
171\, Ibid., 19.
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Monika Greenleaf, in her 1994 study, *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion: Fragment, Elegy, Orient, Irony*, also seems to advocate for the futility of attempting to pierce the veil of Isis, noting that in Pushkin's novel, “stripping away the veils of illusion does not result in the revelation of a final, absolute truth in the way of Wordsworth.” Yet at the same time the very act of Greenleaf’s reading contains its own absolute truth, that it is impossible to take any spoken utterance as more authoritative than any other. The central concept of this reading, irony (in which the author, following Wayne Booth, claims is any statement that means something other than what it says) is, in a surprising sense, compatible with the Isis inscription, with the exception that the inscription means something in addition to what it says. Greenleaf, by placing Pushkin's use of irony in the context of Jena Romanticism, is keenly aware of the device's role in creating models of the self. At the same time, Greenleaf attempts to demonstrate that Pushkin is beyond such “normative” (i.e. static) models, much as I have argued here, namely that Pushkin attempts to formulate a sublime that is more dynamic (and perhaps just) than the power-hungry models of the ceremonial ode and Romantic elegy.

Greenleaf is at her best when she describes the “double move” apparent in the narrator's depiction of Onegin:

We manage to glimpse Eugene only when he is doubly disguised, as Venus dressed for a masquerade, in turn disguised as a man; in effect each mask cancels the other. If we recognize Pushkin's literary simile as a borrowing from Parny's *Disguises of Venus*, then even Eugene's physical appearance dissolves.

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174 Ibid., 229.
Greenleaf's description of the conclusion of the Onegin-Lensky both employs sublime imagery (here the natural sublime) and touches upon the impossibility of depicting what lies beyond:

...when it [the duel] is unleashed, it breaks all human structures (including the boundary of the stanza); it is an avalanche that obliterates every human trace...most noticeable is the dead face's lack of human expression, its inability to “portray” (izobrazhat’) anything but what it is—death.\footnote{Ibid., 279.}

Greenleaf's reading of the novel ends on a rather pessimistic, sober note. For her the Tatiana of the conclusion becomes Onegin's double, “a being structured like himself, like language.”\footnote{Ibid., 268.} For Greenleaf, this would appear to be a language that fails to communicate (she calls the novel itself “a tragic allegory of language's origins”) and that is ultimately moribund. The Tatiana of her reading becomes a walking zombie, apparently magically transported to the all too familiar necropolis of Gogol and Dostoevsky's St. Petersburg.

The deconstructionist bent in Greenleaf's argument that equates the inability to absolutely privilege a linguistic self with death may seem unnecessarily limiting. Yet this line of reasoning contains the kernel of a very powerful idea that is pertinent to Pushkin's novel. That idea is one of respect. The insistence that no claim be made to absolute truth or authority could be better understood as an ethical imperative rather than an ontological fact. Instead of a monological critical utterance (necessarily privileging the reader over all others), the prohibition on absolutism would shift to a creative framework in which certain aspects of others' selves are either left untouched, or are known to be untouchable. Such a shift would seem to bracket the newfound sense of selfhood created in the novel, providing it with an ethics that would include a prohibition of violence (and by extension, murder).
What unites these three readings (which may seem completely irreconcilable), both with each other and with the one proposed here? One possible response is that all of them, in varying ways, have to do with dignity. Emerson's reading exaggerates Onegin's accomplishments in order to demonstrate that he, despite certain tendencies in critical reception, is wholly deserving of the novel that bears his name. Hasty's reading goes to great lengths to show that Tatiana is capable of carrying the novel entirely by herself, on the strength of her poetic gifts. Finally, Greenleaf enacts a deconstructionist reading of the novel that places her own reading in question, opening the possibility for a potentially infinite number of “valid” readings. Such an act is, in its own way, a postmodernist version of the humility topos.

The experience of the sublime is necessarily temporary and temporal. If one loses aesthetic distance, the sublime becomes terror. If aesthetic distance becomes too great, the sublime ceases to be perceived as excess. It is for this reason, perhaps, that Pushkin insists on continuing his novel beyond the final dramatic moment when the curtain is supposed to fall. Greenleaf's reading of the conclusion is perceptive, but only half the truth:

On the last page of the novel, Pushkin has his characters enact, as in a tableau vivant, the classic elegiac triangle—the lover kneeling before the goddess, as the husband—time, death—approaches to eject him into language.¹⁷⁷

Yet as Greenleaf herself alludes to with her “double lorgnette of irony”, the process does not end there. Nor does the novel. Instead, the narrator intimates a return to the aesthetics of the beautiful (the famous “magic crystal”) and bids a fond farewell to “Onegin” both as a novel and as a character. Both have already taken on their finalized form of indeterminacy. As the character Onegin serves as the “clearing” by which Tatiana can embody the sublime glory of

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 286.
Hasty's reading, so too does Onegin the novel serve as the clearing by which both author and reader are ejected into life. In this sense the novel's title is fully fitting.

The sublime of Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*, situated between the idealist aesthetics of Nadezhdin and the “social sublime” of Belinsky, exceeds both the limitations of prescriptive abstract reason and the circumscribed possibilities of empirical understanding. “Poetry is morality” for Pushkin, but it is capable of becoming so by providing perspectives and modes of experience that are the sole province of the poetic imagination. One way this is achieved, as the preceding chapter has shown, is that sustained poetic discipline and resistance can open up the infinity of the sublime. It does so not as a compulsory flight enforced upon one’s limited capacities—in which the same measure is monotonously deployed until an *a priori* destination is reached through a kind aesthetic ellipsis—but as an invitation to contemplate an irreducible complexity whose path is traced through memory. This is achieved through the movement of a number of rhetorical and poetic techniques that are redeployed across voice zones and novelistic chronotopes. Keeping in mind Pushkin’s claim that “inspiration is needed in geometry as much as in poetry,” one is tempted to consider his novel-in-verse as a kind of poetic fractal: infinite, complex, and incapable of being reduced via differentiation.

This poetic complexity, in turn, can be read as a limited moral imperative. But any kind of morality drawn from it would have to be similarly irreducible. Certain values—openness to change, sincere respect, discriminating taste and artistic intelligence—are championed but are not guarantees for happiness, as Pushkin knew only too well. That this melancholy truth is simultaneously capable of “calling the inner freedom of the heart to consciousness” is the essence of Pushkin’s sublime.

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Chapter 3: The 19th century and the Chiasmic Sublime

3.1 Introduction

In his 1990 study of the history of aesthetics, Terry Eagleton touches upon a change in 19th century Western thought that is fundamental for understanding the history of the sublime in Russia at the turn of the 20th century. Starting from the premise that the material sensuousness of the aesthetic in early 19th century thought served as a kind of stumbling block for idealist philosophy, he turns to the writings of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud as potential guides in articulating what he will later call “the Marxist sublime.” All three, according to Eagleton, were united in creating ways of approaching the world in which the human body served as a point of origin. For Eagleton, in Marx this point can be understood as “the laboring body,” in Nietzsche it is “the body as power,” and in Freud “the body of desire.”

By focusing on the human body, these thinkers can be said to avoid the trap of idealism—in which a disembodied reason finds itself incapable of accounting for sensuous material—and the danger of “vulgar empiricism,” in which human dignity can no longer be seen as a central value.

In his reading of Marx, Eagleton discovers two “kinds” of the sublime at work in Marx's writings. The first is a “bad sublime,” which Eagleton ties to Marx's conception of the capitalist commodity as an “unstoppable metonymic chain” akin to Kant's mathematical sublime, and a “good sublime,” which can allegedly be found in socialist revolution: “the content of socialist

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revolution, by contrast, is excessive of all form [...] it is unrepresentable by anything but itself, signified only in its 'absolute moment of becoming', and thus a kind of sublimity.”

Although Eagleton does not explicitly state so, this “kind of sublimity” invites a comparison to Kant's *dynamic* sublime, which in the *Critique* is associated with overwhelming force or energy in its active or potential form. In his discussion of this “good” variant of the sublime present in socialist revolution, Eagleton invokes Benjamin's *angelus novus*, as a way of conceiving how revolutions necessitate “summoning the dead to the aid of the present, drawing from them something of their dangerous power.” For Eagleton, then, the socialist revolution necessitates a kind of “spiritualization of matter,” in which inert material remains are infused with a new energy in order to perform a new historical task, communism.

In his reading of Marx, Eagleton somewhat enigmatically defines Marx's condition of communism as something that could only by envisaged “by a process which has all of the sublime's potentially infinite expansiveness, but which nevertheless carries the law within itself.” Such a recasting of the sublime—in which the law is no longer hidden within the depths of the Kantian subject but rather in action, in the *process* of effecting the material—strives to challenge the very notion of the distinct roles of body and spirit in the idealist tradition. Instead of the descent of an interceding transcendental reason—as Kant articulates in the *Critique of Judgment*—a new model is proposed in which the sublime experience is capable of expanding “upwards” from the material.

In this chapter, I will argue that Eagleton’s characterization of two sublimes—one the product of thought (an unstoppable metonymic chain) and one the product of feeling (the

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180 Ibid., 212–213.
181 Ibid., 213.
182 Ibid., 217.
unthinkable content of revolution)—are emblematic of the trajectory of 19th century thought on the sublime. Earlier theories of the sublime accounted for a difference between the sublimity of feeling and the sublimity of thought, but this difference was always understood as one of technique or mode, subsumed under a shared typology, a common purpose, and unified vision. The 19th century sublime, I propose, can primarily be understood as an act, or as a performance of thought. The two protagonists of this act are the ideas of feeling and thought, whose paths are no longer parallel—as was the case previously—but intertwined. The relationship between feeling and thought, in other words, is similar to the rhetorical figure of the antithem, i.e. a chiasmic relationship in which both feeling and thought are interdependent and—importantly—cognizant of each other. In this model of the sublime, unitary vision becomes stereoscopic, the divine utterance—dialogic. The emotional affects of anxiety and exhilaration familiar from Kant and Burke’s theories of the sublime are often present in this version of the sublime, but they are invoked not to announce the triumph of thought over feeling, but rather their mutual reconciliation.

In this chapter, I will trace the development of the chiasmic sublime along two lines, both of which will prove vital in discussing their intersection in the works of Platonov in the next chapter. The first is a revisiting of figures central to the Soviet aesthetic canon. Beginning with the aesthetics of Chernyshevsky, I will trace their development through Plekhanov’s re-evaluation of the late 19th century and their idiosyncratic reformulation in the “positive aesthetics” of Anatoly Lunacharsky. The second is a more speculative genealogy that examines Kierkegaard’s Fear and Trembling, Nietzsche’s dualist sublime in The Birth of Tragedy and Thus Spoke Zarathustra, and Viacheslav Ivanov’s “Symbolics of Aesthetic Principles.” Such a
pairing is intentionally provocative, and is attempted with the goal of demonstrating how the shape of one’s thought can be just as revealing as ideological inclination.

3.2 Chernyshevsky’s Critique of the Idealist Sublime: Split Perspective

Given Chernyshevsky’s influence among social critics such as Dobroliubov and Pisarev, Chernyshevsky’s interest in the sublime comes as a surprise. Yet both in his infamous dissertation, “The Aesthetic Relations of Art to Reality”—a work which laid the foundation for 19th century social criticism—and an unpublished article entitled “The Sublime and the Comic,” the sublime is an important topic of discussion. Moreover, Chernyshevsky’s theoretical writings reveal a strong desire to rehabilitate—and not eliminate—sublime aesthetics. His critique of preceding models of the sublime was limited (i.e. focused mainly on the idealist model of the sublime dominant in early 19th century aesthetic thought), and intended to achieve a reconciliation that would allow a conception of the sublime that was comprehensive, self-sufficient, and compatible with the “material turn” of the 19th century.

Chernyshevsky opens his critique with a brief recapitulation of the Hegelian approach to the sublime as presented in The Lectures on Fine Art and its further elaboration in Theodor Vischer’s Aesthetics. Chernyshevsky claims that the sublime is there defined as both “that which awakens within us the idea of the infinite” and “the excess of an idea over form.”

Beginning with the latter claim, Chernyshevsky notes that “excess of an idea” is not a property

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183 Coincidentally, Vischer’s work has also been connected to Marx’s interest in sublime aesthetics as well. See: Ibid., 208.
184 Chernyshevsky language here also clearly echoes Nadezhдин’s lectures on aesthetics from the 1830s see: Надеждин, Сочинения [Надеждин, Николай Иванович], 398–410; Chernyshevsky, Полное собрание сочинений, 2:15–16.
exclusive to the sublime; drawing on Vischer’s own writings, he notes that excess can likewise be attributed to the “ugly” (безобразное, das Hässliche) or the “undefined” (неопределенное). Chernyshevsky then proceeds to turn Vischer’s imprecision into an objection made on ontological, materialist grounds:

"Перевес идеи над формою," говоря строго, относится к тому роду событий в мире нравственном и явлений в мире материальном, когда предмет разрушается от избытка собственных сил; неоспоримо, что эти явления часто имеют характер чрезвычайно возвышенный; но только тогда, когда сила, разрушающая сосуд, ее заключающий, уже имеет характер возвышенности или предмет, ею разрушаемый, уже кажется нам возвышенным, независимо от своей погибели собственною силою. Иначе о возвышенном не будет и речи.185

Chernyshevsky's objection posits that the characteristic or potential of sublimity necessarily precedes the moment of the aesthetic experience of the sublime. Excess is only a catalyst, one that is felt most clearly in “negative” representations of the sublime, but it is no way “the source of the [sublime] effect.”186 The universe of objects underpinning Chernyshevsky’s rebuke is one in which physical bodies and human actions have static (i.e. predetermined) characteristics.

Chernyshevsky then turns to the definition of the sublime as “that which awakens within us the idea of the infinite,” which he equates with the idealist Absolute. While his first objection to this definition—that any notion of a metaphysical Absolute is inherently flawed—comes as no surprise, his framing of his second objection is more note-worthy:

Строго и беспристрастно наблюдая за тем, что происходит в нас, когда мы созерцаем возвышенное, мы убедимся, что 1) возвышенным представляется нам самый предмет, а не какие-нибудь вызываемые этим предметом myśli; так, например, величествен сам по себе Казбек, величественна само по себе море, величественна сама по себе личность

185 Chernyshevsky, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, 2:16.
186 Ibid.
Here Chernyshevsky attacks the claim—familiar from earlier theories of the sublime including Burke and Kant—that the sublime is a necessary, “automatic,” and universal aesthetic experience. This is possible via an appeal to a certain privileged position, one that is capable of “strict and possible observation” of material facts. In order to arrive at the truth of the sublime, Chernyshevsky argues, one has to perform an act in which individual consciousness could be said to be split in two. One of the actors in this new sublime drama is a hopeless Romantic, caught up in what must be an authentic experience of the sublime; the other is a strict, dispassionate scientific observer, capable of simultaneously and accurately recording the event of the sublime from a perspective that is somehow external to the first.

Such a framework is certainly foreign to the all-encompassing sublime experience of Romanticism, which is predicated precisely on the inability to reproduce the sublime experience in its entirety. But perhaps more important here is the manner in which Chernyshevsky new configuration of the sublime has an underlying, isometric affinity with Kant’s model in the third critique. In Kant, the truth of the sublime can only be revealed when reason intercedes on the behalf of the imagination. Chernyshevsky stages a similar intervention in his account, but the spatial vectors are, in a sense, inverted: instead of the descent of abstract transcendental reason, Chernyshevsky makes a case for the intervention of practical (i.e. empirical) reason, a way of

\[187\] Ibid., 2:17.
thinking that emerges from within the subject itself. Moreover, it is through this intercession that Chernyshevsky can arrive at the conclusion that it is “the object itself which is sublime, and not any thoughts that are called forth by it.” For Chernyshevsky, “Mont Blanc or Kazbek are sublime, majestic objects, but none of us thinks, contrary to one’s own eyes, to see in them the infinite or immeasurably great.”

In this sense the claim that Chernyshevsky “denied the ontological possibility of the sublime” is somewhat inaccurate. Instead, Chernyshevsky attempts to establish a materialist sublime that is both part of “factual reality” and—vitaly—more human:

Denying the notion of actual infinitude and limiting his definition of the sublime to a question of degree, Chernyshevsky centers his understanding of the sublime on the agency of an embodied, acting individual. If in idealist thought the sublime had been understood as that which exceeds

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188 Ibid., 2:18.
190 Chernyshevsky, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, 2:21.
the human, for Chernyshevsky the sublime is transformed into an experience of the human, who carries out the act of comparison and scale that engenders the sensation of the infinite.

3.3 Kierkegaard’s Sublime Paradox

Attempts to rewrite and rehabilitate the sublime are not only to be found among materialist-oriented thinkers such as Chernyshevsky. A similar rhetorical strategy can be seen in the writings of Soren Kierkegaard, who, though similarly dissatisfied with the idealist notion of the sublime, could hardly be said to have espoused materialist views. In a journal entry from 1837, Kierkegaard expresses his distaste for the “secularized sublime” that formalized and diminished true religious transcendence.\(^\text{191}\) However, the very title *Fear and Trembling*, as well as Kierkegaard’s deep interest in anxiety, invites a comparison with the Kantian sublime. The narrative at the center of *Fear and Trembling*—the sacrifice of Isaac—can be read as Kierkegaard’s own reiteration of a biblical sublimity that traditionally takes the form of the Old Testament prohibition on graven images.\(^\text{192}\)

Unlike the commandment from Exodus, however, Kierkegaard’s sublime, as read through the lens of Abraham and Isaac, is less about the apophatic excess of the divine as such than it is about the consequences of this excess for human action. Intriguingly, one of the few direct mentions of the word “sublime” in *Fear and Trembling* occurs precisely when the narrator juxtaposes the “leaps” of the knight of infinite resignation and the knight of faith:

Most people live dejectedly in worldly sorrow and joy; they are the ones who sit along the wall and do not join in the dance. The knights of infinity are

\(^{191}\) Milbank, “The Sublime in Kierkegaard.”
\(^{192}\) Exodus 20:4-6
dancers and possess elevation. They make the movements upward, and fall down again; and this too is no mean pastime, nor ungraceful to behold. But whenever they fall down they are not able at once to assume the posture, they vacillate an instant, and this vacillation shows that after all they are strangers in the world. This is more or less strikingly evident in proportion to the art they possess, but even the most artistic knights cannot altogether conceal this vacillation. One need not look at them when they are up in the air, but only the instant they touch or have touched the ground—then one recognizes them. But to be able to fall down in such a way that the same second it looks as if one were standing and walking, to transform the leap of life into a walk, absolutely to express the sublime in the pedestrian—that only these knights [the knights of faith –TP] can do—and this is the one and only prodigy.  

Here Kierkegaard describes the knights of infinity as capable of the lyrical transport classically associated with the sublime, but the grace of their ascent is marred by their inability to reconcile with the material. For them, contact with the earth produces a stumble—however brief—that indicates a certain incompatibility between thought and material fact. Later in Fear and Trembling, in the parable of the young lover and the princess, the knight of infinity responds to the impossibility of his own love by sublimating his desire into the abstract, into “an eternal love…a love for an Eternal Being” that has lost all of the individualized features of the embodied individual he originally desired. For this knight, the beloved turns into the figure of Isis, familiar from Kant and Hegel’s writings on the sublime: “I am all that is, was, and shall be, and no mortal has lifted my veil.” The knight of faith, by contrast, does not abandon the material for the abstract realms of idealism; he remains capable of expressing the entirety of the sublime in the pedestrian reality of the world around him. Lyrical transport still occurs, but it is perceived as a horizontal, uninterrupted motion, one that proceeds temporally and repetitively. The knight of faith follows the knight of resignation in the latter’s recognition of the impossibility of his

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193 Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, 74.
194 Ibid., 76.
love, but believes that the material transfiguration of the impossible into the possible will occur: "I believe nevertheless that I shall get her, in virtue, that is, of the absurd, in virtue of the fact that with God all things are possible."\footnote{195}{ibid., 79.}

In his description of the sublime “leap” of the knight of faith, Kierkegaard shifts the motif of impenetrability from the divine (earlier attributed to the God of the Old Testament and Isis) to the individualized knight’s act itself; the leap becomes undetectable to the human eye. The inscription to this act, which Kierkegaard’s narrator describes as “a foreign language” that is neither an “untruth” nor “anything at all,” is Abraham’s response to Isaac: “God himself will provide a lamb for the burnt offering.” Kierkegaard insists that such an utterance is “incomprehensible,” that there “is no one who understands him [Abraham]”: “So either there is a paradox, that the individual stands in an absolute relation to the absolute, or Abraham is lost.”\footnote{196}{ibid., 147–150.}

In this sense—despite their seeming incompatibility—there is a formal, rhetorical coincidence in Kierkegaard’s and Chernyshevsky’s critiques of idealism. Both are extremely hostile to any notion of speculative reason, but their objections entail a preference for paradox. In the case of Chernyshevsky, this split occurs in consciousness, specifically the perspective of consciousness in which the strict, dispassionate observer exists side-by-side with the subject that undergoes the experience of the sublime. For Kierkegaard, the split occurs in the paradox we see in Abraham’s action itself: namely, that his raising of the knife is simultaneously a gesture of resignation and faith. Despite the differing modes of presentation, both Kierkegaard and Chernyshevsky rely on a dualist understanding of the sublime in which neither the subjective nor
the objective sides of the sublime is subordinated to the other. Instead, both sides, paradoxically, provide the vantage point from which the other can be seen.

### 3.4 An Orthodox Marxist Sublime: Plekhanov’s critique of Chernyshevsky

There can be little doubt that Plekhanov’s 1897 article “The Aesthetic Theory of N. G. Chernyshevsky” was intended as a tribute to a thinker that had profoundly influenced the author’s life. At the same time, however, Plekhanov’s writings on Chernyshevsky demonstrate a repeated desire to assign to Chernyshevsky’s thought an appropriate role within the context of Marxist theory. Thus, in Plekhanov’s essay, Chernyshevsky appears as “the most outstanding of our enlighteners,” a characterization that must be understood both as a sincere compliment and as an implied, if mild, rebuke. For Plekhanov—whose dedication to strict Marxist orthodoxy became a repeated epithet during the revolutionary period—Chernyshevsky’s aesthetics, and, in particular, its critique of the idealist sublime, had to be seen as a step in the correct direction. However, it also had to be seen as one that did not go quite far enough, and was therefore destined to be a mere “forerunner” of a more disciplined (i.e. Marxist) approach to art.

In the opening passages of his essay, Plekhanov ensures Chernyshevsky’s supremacy among Russian social critics by arguing that Chernyshevsky—despite Pisarev’s contestations to the contrary—fully recognized and believed in the importance of aesthetics as a science (наука), and held that the rejection of aesthetics (such as the one advanced by Pisarev) were the result of...
an incomplete understanding (недоразумение) of the importance of the theory of art and theoretical science in general.\textsuperscript{198} In Plekhanov’s reading, Chernyshevsky essentially adopts a Hegelian approach to aesthetics in two important aspects: Chernyshevsky takes from Hegel a teleological/historical model of the progression of art, while also insisting on continued importance of artistic form as well as content. Chernyshevsky’s contribution, from Plekhanov’s point of view, is to take issue with the idealist notion of the absolute, a criticism that Plekhanov also finds in the writings of Feuerbach:

> Но если сущность человека -- "чувственность," действительность, а не вымысел и не абстракция, то всякое превознесение вымысла и абстракции над действительностью не только ошибочно, а прямо вредно. И если задача науки вообще заключается в реабилитации действительности, то в этой же реабилитации заключается и задача эстетики, как отдельной научной отрасли. Этот вывод, неизбежно следующий из философского учения Фейербаха, целиком лег в основу всех рассуждений Чернышевского об искусстве.\textsuperscript{199}

By eliminating the absolute, Plekhanov argues, Chernyshevsky rightfully embarks on a redefinition of the sublime, one that is not dependent on the idealist lynchpin. However, Chernyshevsky’s solution—namely that the sublime is first and foremost an aesthetic (i.e. material) phenomenon untied to reflective thought—is recast by Plekhanov as making the case for an “objective sublime”:

> Чернышевский решительно отвергал идеалистическое определение возвышенного, как выражения идеи бесконечного […] Но он ошибался, говоря, что хотя содержание возвышенного и может наводить нас на различные мысли, усиливающие то впечатление, которое мы от него получаем, но что сам по себе предмет, производящий такое впечатление, остается возвышенным, независимо от этих мыслей. Отсюда логически следует тот вывод, что возвышенное существует само по себе, независимо от наших о нем мыслей. По мнению Чернышевского,

\textsuperscript{198} Ibid., 5:238–239.
\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., 5:258.
возвышенным нам представляется самый предмет, а не вызываемое им настроение. Но его опровергают им самим приводимые примеры. Он говорит, что Монблан и Казбек величественные горы, но никто не скажет, что они бесконечно велики. Это так; но никто не скажет также, что они величественны сами по себе, независимо от производимого ими на нас впечатления.200

By reversing the constituents of Chernyshevsky’s objection, Plekhanov reveals that the human experience of sensation is as necessary a component of the sublime as proper (i.e. dual) perspective is.

At a slightly later point in the same essay, Plekhanov takes issue with Chernyshevsky’s definition of the beautiful in art as “an attempt to reproduce the beauty in reality.” Specifically, he objects to the underlying universality of Chernyshevsky’s claims, noting that the “thoughts, feelings, and impressions” of what is beautiful are not human universals—as Chernyshevsky seems to imply—but are constructed according to one’s social identity:

[...] ведь новый класс только еще стремится к своему освобождению; -- она в значительной степени сама остается еще идеалом. Поэтому и искусство, созданное представителями нового класса, будет представлять собою "своеобразную смесь реализма с идеализмом." А об искусстве, представляющем собою такую смесь, нельзя сказать, что оно стремится к воспроизведению прекрасного, существующего в действительности. Нет, художники такого рода не удовлетворяются и не могут удовлетворяться действительностью; им, как и всему представляемому ими классу, хочется частью переделать, а частью дополнить ее сообразно своему идеалу. По отношению к таким художникам и к такому искусству мысль Чернышевского была ошибочна. Но замечательно, что само русское искусство времени Чернышевского представляло собою своеобразную, --очень привлекательную, --смесь реализма с идеализмом.201

Here Plekhanov almost seems to be making a juxtaposition between Chernyshevsky the aesthetician and Chernyshevsky the artist. Surely Chernyshevsky’s own What is to be Done—

200 Ibid., 5:264.
201 Ibid., 5:279.
especially in Vera Pavlovna’s fourth dream—is the most exemplary case of the “mixture of realism with idealism” that Plekhanov defines here. In other words, what Chernyshevsky the critic lacked—i.e. Marx’s materialist dialectic and the “sociological approach” to literature Plekhanov would develop out of it—is already present, however vaguely, Chernyshevsky’s art. For Plekhanov, then, any conception of aesthetic categories such as the beautiful of the sublime are contingent upon their historical and social context. In advancing such a claim in his critique of Chernyshevsky, Plekhanov seems to reject the universality of human experience. The result is a “relativized” sublime, one that gains in historical and material specificity, but also one that is now incapable of transcending these very same strictures.

3.5 Fear and Trembling without God: Thoughts on the Sublime in Early Nietzsche

Nietzsche’s writings on the sublime in The Birth of Tragedy and Thus Spoke Zarathustra can be read as a similar “relativization” of the sublime. Like Chernyshevsky and Kierkegaard, Nietzsche claims to approach art not from the position of speculative reason, but from “the perspective of life.” Aesthetics, Nietzsche argues, should not amount to “mere perception via logical inference” but rather “the immediate certainty of vision” that is capable of recognizing the Apollonian-Dionysian duality in the development of art “just as procreation depends on the duality of the sexes, involving perpetual strife with only periodically intervening reconciliations.” This duality, as Nietzsche claims elsewhere, consists of “artistic energies” flowing from nature itself, and it is perhaps this that allows him to connect both of them to the sublime, albeit in differing ways. The Apollonian illusion may be sublime as an expression, as

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202 Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner, 31.
203 Ibid., 45.
“the unshaken faith in [the principium individuationis] and the calm repose of the man wrapped up in it,” even among the chaotic forces of raging nature. The Dionysian counterpart to Apollonian sublimity can be found when the “broken gaze” of the Dionysian man experiences “sublime satisfaction” while witnessing “the unconcealed and vigorously magnificent characters of nature” of the satyr chorus, the epitome of the “sublime as the artistic taming of the horrible” knowledge that the ordinary bounds and limits of existence are only illusory.

Vital here is that Nietzsche understands the sublime as a kind of overlapping of and intersection between the Apollonian and Dionysian principles. Following the rejection of abstract logic in aesthetics espoused by the writers examined so far, Nietzsche nonetheless occupies a particular position that cannot be fully reconciled with either the empiricist critique of Chernyshevsky or the essentially religious critique of Kierkegaard. There is no Chernyshevskian “ideal spectator” that is capable of remaining absolutely remote in Nietzsche’s understanding of sublimity. Claiming that “the birth of tragedy is [not] to be explained by the concept of a spectator without the spectacle,” Nietzsche insists on the full embodied participation of the entire individual as the only possible way of experiencing the sublime. Nor would Nietzsche agree with Kierkegaard’s characterization of the sublimity of Abraham as being “incomprehensible”; it is only incomprehensible from the perspective of logic, from “mere appearance.”

There are two interconnected moments regarding the sublime in Birth of Tragedy that can further illustrate Nietzsche’s position. The first occurs in a discussion of the sublime in Schopenhauer’s World and Will as Representation, in which the image of a calm individual in a

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204 Ibid., 48.
205 Ibid., 72.
206 Ibid., 69.
207 Ibid., 46.
“frail ship” being tossed by the “mountainous waves” of a stormy sea is presented. Nietzsche partially concurs with Schopenhauer here, claiming that the principium individuationus—the “veil of Maya” or Apollonian “joy and ‘wisdom’ of illusion”—is a “sublime expression.” This version of the sublime—reminiscent of the “egotistical sublime” of the early 19th century—involves the process of the elimination of difference between the individual and nature. The existence of the latter, in this case, is co-opted by the sublime subject, who re-inscribes external phenomena as nothing more than a subordinated extension of his own self.

Nietzsche departs from Schopenhauer, however, in his discussion of the breaking of this “sublime illusion.” Recalling Schopenhauer’s depiction of a man “who is dumbfounded by the cognitive form of phenomena because the principle of sufficient reason (…) seems to suffer an exception” Nietzsche agrees that the subject experiences “terror,” but adds an additional emotional affect, “the blissful ecstasy that dwells within the depths of man, indeed of nature” that is a “glimpse of the Dionysian.” What Nietzsche intimates here is a second mode of the sublime experience, the origins of which can be traced to Schopenhauer and Kant’s theories of the sublime, but which up until this point had never been posited as distinct from the Apollonian variant described above. Like the Apollonian sublime, Nietzsche’s Dionysian sublime also deals with the elimination of difference, but in the opposite direction: instead of the subordination of nature to the subject, here the subject itself is subordinated to the un-individuated material whole of nature. The resolution of this subordination, like the Apollonian variant, is pleasure, but an intensified immediate pleasure of a kind that seems to bypass consciousness itself.

208 Ibid., 48.
209 Ibid.
210 Ibid.
Previous modern studies of Greek tragedy, Nietzsche argues, have failed to take this second mode of the sublime experience into account. The result of this was an only partial understanding of tragedy, in which actual antiquity came to be replaced by the “cheerful Greeks” of 18th-century Neoclassicism and a preference for “naïve art.” Following tradition, Nietzsche includes Homer under this category of the naïve, and traces its reappearance in Christian symbolic art in his reading of Raphael’s Transfiguration. Nietzsche reads the work as a presentation, “in the most sublime artistic symbolism,” of the “necessary interdependence” of “that Apollonian realm of beauty and its substratum, the terrible wisdom of Silenus,” i.e. the Dionysian. Yet at the same time this is only a partial presentation of the Dionysian sublime, the existence of the world of suffering (shown in the lower half of the painting in which the apostles fail to cure a child of demonic possession) only exists in order to show the “necessity” of the Apollonian illusion, illustrated here in the image of a transcendent Christ, that appears as utterly detached from the lower, material world. In its subordination of the Dionysian to the Apollonian—in its portrayal of the Dionysian as mere background to the Christian promise of the alleviation of suffering—Raphael’s Transfiguration is as dominated by the Apollonian as the earlier cited passage from Schopenhauer.

This is not to say that Nietzsche saw no value in Raphael’s masterpiece. As he repeatedly stresses in his “Attempt at Self-Criticism,” Nietzsche had a healthy respect and admiration for the Apollonian, the naïve artist, and even the figure of Socrates, who was

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211 Ibid., 57.
212 “With his sublime gestures, he shows us how necessary is the entire world of suffering, that by means of it the individual may be impelled to realize the redeeming vision, and then, sunk in contemplation of it, sit quietly in his tossing barque, amid the waves. If we conceive of it at all as imperative and mandatory, this apotheosis of individuation knows only one law—the individual, i.e. the delimiting of the boundaries of the individual, measure in the Hellenic sense.” Ibid.
allegedly responsible for the fall of tragedy in Greek culture. The problem of such unbalanced art, however, is that it foregoes the possibility of the Dionysian sublime, which can be seen in Nietzsche’s discussion of the origin of drama: “to see oneself transformed before one’s very eyes and begin to act as if one had actually entered into another body, into another character.”\textsuperscript{213}

The Dionysian dithyramb features a kind of lyrical transport similar to the classical or Apollonian sublime, but its destination is not the “supreme solitude” in which the world becomes an extension of individuality, but rather a liberation from the body to another body, allowing the sublime to become a truly intersubjective experience: “The Dionysian reveler sees himself as a satyr, and as a satyr, in turn, sees the god, which means in his metamorphosis he beholds another vision outside of himself, as the Apollonian complement to his own state. With this new drama the vision is complete.”\textsuperscript{214}

There is a certain chiasmic relationship implied between the Apollonian and Dionysian here; elsewhere Nietzsche speaks of this relationship as a “fraternal union”: “Dionysus speaks the language of Apollo; and Apollo, finally the language of Dionysus; and so the highest goal of tragedy and all art is attained.”\textsuperscript{215} The “certainty of vision” mentioned in the opening of \textit{Birth of Tragedy}, then, allows for a kind of stereopsis, in which two perspectives complement each other, allowing for an integrated whole and the perception of depth.

This can be seen clearly in a section of \textit{Thus Spoke Zarathustra} entitled “The Sublime Ones.” Nietzsche makes a direct connection between Zarathustra and the Dionysian in the “Attempt at Self-Criticism” when he calls Zarathustra “that Dionysian fiend.” Yet this appellation is clearly intended by Nietzsche not to instill terror but rather to tempt those who

\textsuperscript{213} Ibid., 76.
\textsuperscript{214} Ibid., 75.
\textsuperscript{215} Ibid., 142.
remain entrapped in their desire for “metaphysical consolation” to seek consolation in “this life.” In “The Sublime Ones,” Zarathustra’s words are intended to communicate a similar thought, yet he does so via a performance that is clearly informed by *Birth of Tragedy*. The opening lines of “The Sublime Ones” clearly evokes the image of the sailor entrusting in his “frail ship” amidst a stormy sea:

Calm is the bottom of my sea: who would guess that it hideth droll monsters! Unmoved is my depth: but it sparkleth with swimming enigmas and laughers. A sublime one saw I today, a solemn one, a penitent of the spirit: Oh, how my soul laughed at his ugliness! With upraised breast, and like those who draw in their breath: thus did he stand, the sublime one, and in silence: O'erhung with ugly truths, the spoil of his hunting, and rich in torn raiment; many thorns also hung on him—but I saw no rose. Not yet had he learned laughing and beauty. Gloomy did this hunter return from the forest of knowledge.²¹⁶

Importantly, however, Zarathustra speaks as if he is located fully within the veil of Apollonian illusion. The principle of individuation allows him to understand the sea as “his own,” and his mental state of calm repose is transferred to it via metonymy. This is followed by a series of oxymora—a trope common to sublime discourse—whose incompatible qualities continually increase in logical tension: “droll monsters,” “sparkling depth,” and the conclusive “sublime ugliness.” This tension itself is then attributed to “the sublime one,” and is related metaphorically to one who has “drawn in their breath.” Here the image must be read as a double; “the sublime one” holds their breath both because they are located at the bottom of the sea, and because they have yet to speak the relaxing words of laughter and beauty.

The duality of the poetic tropes employed by Zarathustra can also be understood as duality of perspective. The opening of “The Sublime Ones” clearly indicates that Zarathustra is

looking at himself; he is, after all, the “Dionysian fiend” he sees within his own depths. His ability to do this can likewise be traced back to *The Birth of Tragedy* in a passage discussing the “comedy of art”:

> Only insofar as the genius in the act of artistic creation coalesces with this primordial artist of the world, does he know anything of the eternal essence of art; for in this state he is, in a marvelous manner, like the weird image of the fairy tale which can turn its eyes at will and behold itself; he is at once subject and object, at once poet, actor, and spectator.\(^{217}\)

Yet this coalescence of genius and the “primordial material” should not be limited to self-reflection. Certainly, the words spoken by Zarathustra can, from one perspective, be understood as introspection, but from another they are clearly addressed to an audience. It is they whom Zarathustra desires to make the transformation from the predatory tiger to the domesticated ox, i.e. to turn from an art of suffering to an art that affirms life, and in so doing to allow the rose to bloom.

In a certain sense, then, the stereopsis afforded by Nietzsche’s new “certainty of vision,” while undoubtedly allowing for the perception of unseen depths, also contains within it a kind of parallax. One particular frozen, privileged perspective (Apollonian, Dionysian) gives one picture (foreground and background), while another might view the same objects in opposite order. The chiasmic logic underlying Nietzsche’s new understanding of the sublime, in this sense, can best be understood via motion, through a preference of becoming over being. It is not enough, for Nietzsche, to merely marvel in “fear and trembling” at the sublimity of objects, as Kierkegaard seems to imply in his discussion of Abraham, one must master them both as lived experienced and as (one’s own) works of art. Nietzsche, like Plekhanov, insists on temporal contingency in

\(^{217}\) *Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, 64.
his new iteration of the sublime, albeit one that is not measured on a teleological historical scale. This “relativization” of the sublime, with its preference for lived genealogy over abstract history and the artistic over the empirical, found fertile ground in the works of Russian Symbolists, whose interest in the “prophetic vision” of the Russian poetic tradition made them particular receptive to Nietzsche’s thought.

3.6 Viacheslav Ivanov’s “Symbolics of Aesthetic Principles”

Viacheslav Ivanov’s “Symbolics of Aesthetic Principles,” first published in 1905, echoes much of Nietzsche’s thoughts on aesthetics in The Birth of Tragedy and “The Sublime Ones” in both form and content. In particular, Ivanov focuses on the interrelatedness of the sublime, the beautiful, and what he defines as “the chaotic,” from within a synthetic framework of the Christian and classical traditions, while drawing largely on romantic poetry in support of his arguments. This amalgamation of Nietzschean and Christian thought—both here, in Ivanov’s oeuvre as a whole, and in Symbolism in general—might seem contradictory. However, the impetus for Ivanov’s incorporation of Christianity can readily be found in Nietzsche’s “Attempt at Self-Criticism,” where the latter argues against the “art of metaphysical consolation” as the necessary resolution to Romantic pessimism and melancholy:

No, three times no! you young Romantics: it should not be necessary! But it is very likely that things will end up—that you will end up—being consoled, as is written, in spite of all the self-training for what is serious and frightening, "metaphysically consoled," as Romantics tend to finish up, as Christians. No! You should for the time being learn the art of consolation in this life: you should learn to laugh, my young friends, even if you wish to remain thoroughly pessimistic.218

218 Ibid., 37.
Ivanov’s essay is a response to Nietzsche’s assertion, but unlike Plekhanov’s evaluation of Chernyshevsky, it goes beyond the boundaries of critique and evaluation. Instead, Ivanov’s essay reads as its own kind of Dionysian response to Nietzsche’s Apollonian judgement and its implication of causality. In doing so, it takes a differing perspective, namely: Romantics may tend to “finish up” as Christians, but in so doing, they do not necessarily arrive at a metaphysics of consolation. More dialogue than polemic, Ivanov’s essay is a poetic text which demonstrates a possible complementarity between the Nietzschean understanding of Dionysus in antiquity and an understanding of Christianity that is inspired by Russian Orthodoxy and the thought of Vladimir Soloviev.

Ivanov’s essay is structured in three sections, each of which is dedicated to a particular version of the “most beautiful” (прекрасного): “the sublime,” “the beautiful,” and “the chaotic.” One of the challenges in understanding Ivanov’s essay as a whole lies in determining the organizational principle that unites these three aspects. Before doing so however, it is worth examining Ivanov’s characterization of each in turn.

The strongest departure from Nietzsche in Ivanov’s essay is his definition of the sublime. Whereas Nietzsche defines the sublimity of the Apollonian as “relaxed repose” of the individual projecting his own will within the veil of illusion, Ivanov’s definition of the sublime is agonistic, and consists of the antinomy of theomachic rebellion and self-sacrifice:

«Возвышенное» в эстетике, поскольку оно представлено восхождением, по существу своему выходит за пределы эстетики, как феномен религиозный. В нем скрыта символика теургической тайны и мистической антиномии, чья священная формула и таинственный иероглиф: «богоносец — богоборец.” Не все благодатные дары нисходят к душе при одном условии ее светлой боговосприимчивости; другие требуют богоборческого почина; предлагая их, Божество шепчет душе: «приди и возьми!» Правое богоборство Израиля исторгает
Ivanov’s definition of the sublime can be read as a response to Kierkegaard’s thoughts on Abraham and Nietzsche’s solipsistic Apollonian sublime. Unlike Abraham, whose submission and receptiveness to God allowed for divine intercession, Jacob (Israel) received his blessing through action (his daring theft of Esau’s birthright) and resistance (by struggling with God’s angel), securing the Abrahamic covenant in perpetuity for his descendants, who would bear his name. Ivanov’s selection of Jacob as representative of the sublime can, in all likelihood, be traced to his interest in prophecy in the Russian Orthodox tradition. Jacob’s prophetic vision, the *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, is also the title of a central Hesychast text written by John Climacus. 

One of the goals of Hesychasm can be understood as achieving the experiential knowledge of God through asceticism and isolation, ideas that for Ivanov are thoroughly compatible with the principle of individuation: “В этом подвиге — любовь к страданию, свободное самоутверждение страдания. Страдание же может быть вообще определено как оскудение и изнеможение чрез обособление. И само искупительное страдание за мир не что иное, как обособление жертвоприносимого, взявшего на себя одного грехи всего мира.”

Ivanov’s definition of the sublime can thus be understood as a re-inscription of Nietzsche’s Apollonian-Dionysian chiasmus into the frame of Orthodox *theosis*. Moreover, Ivanov repeats the same chiasmic figure in his comparison between Christian culture and the culture of antiquity, as can be seen by his inclusion of the Dionysian into his discussion of the

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219 Иванов, Собрание сочинений, 1:824.
220 Coincidentally, Kierkegaard used the pseudonym “Johannes Climacus” for his works *The Sickness unto Death* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.
221 Иванов, Собрание сочинений, 1:825.
sublime: “Восхождение — символ того трагического, которое начинается, когда один из участвующих в хороводе Дионисовом выделяется из дифирамбического сонма.” Just as Jacob’s perseverance in his struggle against God can, for Ivanov, be understood in the words of the sublime, tragic figure of Leonidas at Thermopylae (приди, возьми, molon labe), so too can the Orthodox understanding of the transfiguration of the material be understood in Apollonian and Dionysian terms:

Как начало существенно трагическое, восхождение по преимуществу человечно. Его одушевляют воля и алчба невозможного. Из избытка своей безграничности Божественное пожелало невозможного. И невозможное совершилось: Божественное забыло себя и опозналось раздельным в мире граней. Кто выведет его из граней? Тот же извечный Эрос Невозможного, божественнейшее наследие и печать человеческого духа.

Here we find terms familiar from previous discourses on the sublime: “delimitation,” “excess,” and Apollonian “will.” Recalling the cosmogonies of antiquity that posited desire (Eros) as the primordial deity (i.e. material), the sublime is depicted by Ivanov as an exercise in ritual purification, one which is only tempered through a melancholic desire (tоска) to return the earth.

At the end of his essay, Ivanov describes his aesthetic understanding of the material in the absence of the divine principle as “the chaotic” of the material world. For Ivanov, the material is endowed with its own independence, authority, and creative energy. This independence of the material from the spiritual is described in Ivanov's understanding of “chaotic descent.” Ivanov defines this mode of descent as “rupture” (разрыв), a quality it shares in common with “sublime ascent.” For Ivanov, “chaotic descent” is best understood as the aesthetic experience of

222 Ibid.
223 Ibid.
contemplating the abyss: “упоение на краю мрачной бездны.”

Echoing Zarathustra, Ivanov describes the chaotic as a kind of “further” descent beyond the beautiful, which delves deeper into the “monstrous mysteries of underground and underwater depths.” Here the power of the material world exceeds that of the will of the individual, who becomes dismembered in the ritual of Dionysian sacrifice.

However, this dismembering is not so much an undoing of the self as it is a rejoining with the material. Citing Nietzsche, Ivanov describes “the chaotic” as being pregnant with creative possibilities, and should not be confused with the Christian understanding of the opposite of the divine: “Она демонична демонизмом стихий, но не зла. Это — плодотворное лоно, а не дьявольское окостенение.”

The “chaotic” then, is the daemon of Nature, an independent creative force that exists alongside divinity, and that commands its own perspective. As such, it also contains within it its own kind of sublimity. Ivanov describes the emotional state of one undergoing “chaotic descent” as terror at the prospect at losing one's sense of self, but is nonetheless a necessary one:

Тогда только человек, утративший свою личную волю, себя потерявший, находит свое предвечное истинное воление и делается страдательным орудием живущего в нем бога (…) Нужен и свят первый миг дионисийских очищений: соединение с низшим, глубинным богом, говорящим Да Природе, как она есть.

Much like Zarathustra's sublimity in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Ivanov's “chaotic descent” is a necessary relaxing of the will of embracing one's own materiality to the point of the utter obliteration of the self, of realizing one's own material, historical contingency. The “chaotic” in

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224 Ibid., 1:828.  
225 Ibid., 1:829.  
226 Ibid., 1:830.
Ivanov’s view is the sublimity of the material, one that might recall, in the pre-Christian Russian context, the concept of мать сыра-земля. In other words, it is the (dis)embodiment that occurs in and precedes any possibility of individual sublimity.

Situated between the respective passages on the sublime and the chaotic, Ivanov’s discussion of the beautiful is the centerpiece of his essay. Following Nietzsche’s discussion of tragedy, Ivanov’s definition of the “impression of the beautiful” can also be read as the intersection of Apollonian and Dionysian principles, but one in which their shared commonality exists simultaneously with their essential difference: “Здесь впечатление красоты достигнуто столь же примирением, сколь противоположением, небесного и дольнего, улыбчивым сорадованием и содружеством разделенного родного.” Like Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, who Ivanov quotes twice in this section, here Ivanov’s language approaches contradiction (“разделенного родного”) but he does so in a way that speaks of the Orthodox conception of соборность. For Ivanov, the chiasmic relationship of the sublime and the chaotic is expressed via three modes of duality: duality of meaning in language, the duality of depictions of being and becoming in the arts, and the duality of the masculine and the feminine in procreation.

Ivanov describes the beautiful as a kind of middle ground, as the threshold between the material and the divine. Ivanov considers the harmony of the tympanum (тимпан) of ancient architecture, which can be understood to mark the separation of the material and the divine in space in both the classical and Christian worlds, beautiful. At the same time, the word tympanum can be understood as movement, as one of the musical instruments played in the procession of Dionysus. The theme of music is further developed by Ivanov by a discussion of Beethoven’s music, which he describes in chiasmic terms: “Алегретто Седьмой Симфонии

\[227\] Ibid., 1:825–826.
Бетховена и из детских глаз исторгнет слезы. Но что это allegretto? Плач либо Бога над миром? Или — человека над Богом?”228 The chiasmic figure is repeated in Ivanov’s return to the theme of Jacob, not as an image of ascetic sublimity, but rather as the prophetic witness of the interconnection of the divine and the material: “Эти восхождение и нисхождение — лестница, приснившаяся Иакову, и то взаимное тайнодеяние встречных духов, двигателей и живителей земной и горной сферы, обменивающихся водоносами мировой влаги.”229

The complementarity of ascent and descent mentioned here can be seen in Orthodox iconography, which, like the tympanum of the temple, marks an intersection of the material and the divine. In Orthodox icons of Jacob’s vision, there are traditionally two intersecting lines of vision. In one, ascending from the left lower corner to the upper right, a ladder is depicted, on which a series of monks ascend, their heads raised upwards to Christ, who is usually depicted in the upper right corner. Depictions of the second line, descending from the upper left corner to the lower right, vary, but most typically involve a choir of angels gazing down upon the material world, represented either by members of the earthly church or, in some cases, depictions of Hell. In both lines gazes are directed towards each other in dialogue. The descending line, much like Raphael’s Transfiguration, seems to emphasize the disparity between the divine and the material, while the ascending line would emphasize their compatibility. Taken together the intersecting lines form an X, the symbol of Christ.

The Christian context of this section rests upon an understanding of Christ’s covenant, the fulfillment of which has been traditionally described as the marriage between Christ and the church: “Так Красота, всякий раз снова нисходя на землю с дарами Неба, знаменует вечное

228 Ibid., 1:827.
229 Ibid., 1:828.
For Ivanov, the beautiful is the consummation of a dialogic, mutual desire that takes place on a universal, mythic scale. Yet its source, as has been demonstrated earlier, is the resolution of two types of sublimity that were articulated in regards to the individual. This inter-changeability between the individual and the universal—of the microcosm as a model for the macrocosm and vice versa—takes the sublime beyond the boundaries of personal lived experience. No longer the exclusive privilege of an isolated Romantic genius or Nietzschean hero, Ivanov’s understanding of the sublime as a communal event restores the universality of the sublime, and in doing so implicates not the necessity of the appearance of a transcendent sphere, but rather the possibility of the creation of one in the material world.

3.7 Bioaesthetics: Lunacharsky’s The Foundations of Positive Aesthetics

Lunacharsky’s The Foundations of Positive Aesthetics was first published in 1904 in a collection entitled: Essays of the Realistic Worldview. Despite the relatively early date of its composition, the work and the aesthetics propagated within were to have a lasting effect. As a former otzovist, member of Vpered and a Bogdanov ally, Lunacharsky’s Marxist credentials were (quite correctly) called into question by more orthodox Marxist thinkers, including Plekhanov, and, in 1908, Lenin himself. Nonetheless, when Lunacharsky was appointed the People’s Commissar for Enlightenment (Narkompros) and the Proletkult organizations were

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230 Ibid., 1:827.
231 Очерки реалистического мировоззрения.
232 See: Lenin, Materializm i empiriokritizm.
established it provided a means for the propagation of Lunacharsky’s ideas, despite their discrepancy with party orthodoxy.

Lunacharsky’s model of the aesthetic subject radically departs from those of the other thinkers discussed in this chapter. Lunacharsky’s subject is a biological organism. Unlike Chernyshevsky and Plekhanov, whose materialist subjects were little more than a disembodied—albeit spatially and historically located—consciousness, or Nietzsche and Ivanov, who only discuss the body as a counterpart to consciousness, Lunacharsky viewed the human subject as necessarily caught up in the processes of biological evolution and interaction with its physical environment.

Key to this understanding is the individual’s capacity for “life energy”, a vague term Lunacharsky employs in describing the consequences of aesthetic experiences. The base condition, according to such a model, is one of equilibrium, where the material resources consumed by an organism are equal to the expended energy necessary to ensure survival. When an organism leaves a state of equilibrium, it can either experience a surplus of energy (which Lunacharsky terms a “positive affectional”) or a deficit of energy (a negative affectional). Evolutionary progress occurs when an organism is presented with an environmental task that is beyond its abilities, forcing a negative expenditure of energy. As new techniques and technologies are employed in solving these tasks, however, the degree of this negative affectional decreases. Eventually, the organism’s mastery of its environment leads to a positive affectional, a surplus of life energy.233

At first glance, such an evolutionary model may seem to have little to do with aesthetics as it is commonly understood. Nonetheless, Lunacharsky, in a definition that clearly echoes

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Burke and Kant, defines aesthetics as “the science of evaluations,” and sees it as the foundation of human experience, claiming, “aesthetics creates out of itself ethics and the theory of knowledge.” In other words, it is only through sensory data that evaluations of the true, the good and the beautiful can be made.

These evaluations take place as a result of the negotiation of two forces: instincts (which seek immediate pleasure) and reason (разум). In Lunacharsky’s model, the latter acts as a kind of legislating force which denies instincts in the pursuit of a greater delayed pleasure yet to come. Pleasure, the experience of excess life force, serves as the central value of Lunacharsky's aesthetics, and it is the economy of pleasure that, in turn, drives human progress. Lunacharsky believes that this conflict will eventually resolve itself in what he unabashedly calls the ideal state of the individual, one that bears remarkable similarity to the center of Ivanov’s chiasmus discussed earlier:

Сомневаться в том, что такая прекрасная гармония души и тела достижима, – невозможно: к ней естественно стремится человек в своем развитии, в ней естественный конец борьбы благоразумия и страсти; страсти становятся разумными, разум – терпимым и находчивым исполнителем желаний. Человека, достигшего такой ступени, мы вправе назвать прекрасным: гармония его желаний и богатство средств для их удовлетворения неминуемым дополнением имеют крепкий, здоровый организм, человек становится χαλος χάγαθός.235

In this “ideal state of the individual”, desire is to become rational, and reason is to learn desire. Although Lunacharsky is certainly using a different vocabulary, he is describing a marriage of sorts, one that is quite similar to Ivanov’s “eternal betrothal of the Spirit [logos, reason] to the World Soul [Eros, desire]”.

234 Ibid., 131.
235 Ibid., 134.
Moreover, for Lunacharsky this intersection of mind and body is necessarily communal in scope. For Lunacharsky, the “aesthetic ideal” would be one in which an equilibrium between human desire and its environment could be established, which would turn human strife into aestheticized “competition”:

Идеал личности прекрасной и гармонической в своих желаниях, творческой и жаждущей все растущей жизни для человечества, идеал общества таких людей, в котором борьба между людьми принимает характер соревнования в достижении разными путями одной цели, -- это эстетический идеал в широком смысле... В этом эстетическом идеале примиряются добро и красота, или, лучше, отпавшее в силу неустройства добро возвращается на лоно красоты, которая есть могучая и свободная жизнь.  

However, even as Lunacharsky develops his theory of the ideal, he recognizes the difficulty in giving pleasure the sole criterion for the evaluation of human progress. The problem, for Lunacharsky, is the problem of the sublime:

Но разве страдание не бывает часто в высокой степени возвышенно? Конечно, но только тогда, когда оно растит силы в индивидууме или виде... Бывают полезные предметы, значение которых не в том, что они доставляют наслаждение, а в том, что они устраняют страдание: в этом случае связь их с аффекциональной или, в широком смысле, эстетической оценкой еще менее непосредственно, но тут, и она очевидна.

Lunacharsky thus makes two exceptions to his central principle of pleasure. In the first, suffering related to the sublime can be viewed positively, but only to the extent that, as a whole, it results in the “relative pleasure” of suffering’s elimination, (i.e. similar to the negative pleasure of the sublime in Kant’s Critique). Broadening his definition of the aesthetic, Lunacharsky is forced to admit that the beautiful (красота) is but one concept within the sphere of the most

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236 Ibid., 138.  
237 Ibid., 142.
beautiful (прекрасного). In addition, there are also “non-aesthetic” phenomena “whose perception is accompanied by a negative affectional”, and which “demand an excessive and unnecessary waste of energy, which makes the organ work incorrectly.” This would be the realm of the formally ugly (bezobrazie), which Lunacharsky defines as the polar opposite of the beautiful. This category would include “everything that is connected with suffering, disease, weakness, and so on”, and serves as the foundation for the aesthetics of the weak, which Lunacharsky most clearly associates with bourgeois decadent art.  

However, Lunacharsky also finds that even “well-developed” (i.e. healthy) people may experience phenomena that exceed their own power, leading him to advance a theory of the sublime:

In a surprisingly Tolstoyan turn, Lunacharsky here understands the sublime as the ability of nature or art to infect us with the energies displayed therein. The witness of this spectacle, it could be said, serves as a receptacle for the excess energy of its environment and whatever minimal energy might be expended at the inception of the sublime experience, it is repaid at its conclusion with interest.

238 Ibid., 154–155.
239 Ibid., 156.
For Lunacharsky, such powerful phenomena are most readily found in a particular kind of art, art which “depicts a roaring lion, impossible furious monstrosities and so on which undoubtedly allow us to experience the terrible without it threatening us.”\(^{240}\) Specifically, Lunacharsky singles out Pushkin’s description of Peter the Great in *Poltava* as a “beautiful explanation of the so-called dynamic sublime,” in which we are “sympathetically infected by a feeling of strength and scope.”\(^{241}\) The sudden appearance of Kantian terminology may come as somewhat of a surprise to the reader, but it is precisely the idealist sublime that Lunacharsky aims to discredit later on. This becomes clear in an ensuing discussion of what he terms “the static sublime”:

Почему человек наслаждается, видя перед собой море, небо, охватывая взором непривычно широкие горизонты? Выдвигалась теория, согласно которой человек, чувствуя себя ничтожным перед бесконечностью, в то же время наслаждением понимает, что вся это необъятность лежит в его сознании. Но вряд ли можно путем самонаблюдения найти в чувстве любования величественным, с одной стороны, чувстве уничтожения, с другой стороны, интеллектуальную гордость.\(^{242}\)

Attacking the paradox that lies at the heart of the classic Kantian account of the sublime, Lunacharsky echoes Chernyshevsky’s critique examined earlier. Like Chernyshevsky, Lunacharsky proposes “self-observation” as the valid method for determining the essence of the sublime. At the same time, Lunacharsky also aims to avoid any sense of abjection in the sublime experience, insisting that the proper affect is a calm feeling of veneration:

Прежде всего, если вам удастся наблюдать на себе восторженное чувство, возбужденное статически величественным, вы заметите, что это тихое

\(^{240}\) Ibid., 157.
\(^{241}\) “... из шатра/ Выходит Петр. Его глаза/ Сияют. Лик его ужасен./ Движенья быстры. Он прекрасен./ Он весь как божия гроза.” *Poltava* is one of the most quoted poems for examples of the sublime.
This sense of veneration, as opposed to a rush of anxiety giving way to a surge of pleasure, is particularly in keeping with Russian theories of the sublime examined in the first chapter of this study, which have favored more sustainable emotions in their descriptions of the sublime.

Lunacharsky’s passages on the “static sublime” also contain clear traces of rhetorical exposition. There is a clear rhythmic dimension, for example, in Lunacharsky’s parallel description of the sea and the sky as an example of the “static sublime”:

Необъятный простор моря однообразен в своем равномерном ритме волн, небо огромно и просто, все равно, наблюдаем ли мы его днем или ночью: неправильные очертания облаков, неправильные группы звезд очень мало нарушают общее единство этого колоссального купола.

This overture of poetic language is then expanded upon, in two sudden apostrophes to the reader. The first is an amplification of the description of the calm sea landscape above as the static sublime:

Вы полусонно, не двигаясь ни одним членом, любуетесь еле вздымающейся лазурной гладью моря, лазурным шатром неба; все перед вами плавно, широко, глаз описывает большие дуги, свободно озирая горизонт, небольшое пятно паруса тонет в общем впечатлении однообразия, но это однообразие не вызывает скуки, душа взволнована; правильная, свободная работа, совершаемая нервною системой, в общем, огромна, она может у чувствительного человека вызвать слезы счастья на глаза...

243 Ibid.
244 Ibid.
245 Ibid., 157–158.
Here Lunacharsky rejects traditional philosophical language for the more powerful rhetorical effect of a poetic apostrophe. Replete with repetitions and intentional manipulation of lengths of phrase, there is little doubt that Lunacharsky is attempting to actually effect the “nervous system” of his reader, the work of which, it could be said, serves as the true sublime object. This is repeated in his description of the dynamic sublime, which depicts a storm coming over the previously calm sea of the preceding passage:

Небо давно покрылось тучами; все потемнело, закипело. Шум усиливается, море встает, негодует, вопит, взметается на берег, небо словно содрогается страшными громами, и языки молний падают в волны, взрывающиеся к небу в хаотическом движении... В вашей груди все дрожит, сердце бьется, мускулы сжаты, глаза блестят, с новым и новым восхищением приветствуете вы бурю при каждом ударе грома и чувствуете, что в вас растет радость борьбы и силы, как и в этих птицах, которые с резким криком, веселые и возбужденные, носятся между небом и землею. Громадность порыва и схватки сил поднимает вас, заражая свою мощью, потому что вы невольно воспринимаете ее как борьбу живых негодующих сил.246

The sensation of transport commonly associated with the sublime takes place via a metaphor linking the reader to the birds riding the storm.247 The poetic language employed by Lunacharsky in the previous description is likewise present. What is absent, however, is the intervention of reason to save an overly extended imagination, as one might expect from a typically idealist account. Instead, the surge of energy of the sublime “infects” the reader who is subjected to an involuntary experience. The aesthetic distance necessary for the sublime—and a proper perspective does seem as necessary here as it is in similar accounts—allows this infection to take place without fear. Instead, when viewed disinterestedly, the intensity of the storm can

246 Ibid., 158.
247 This passage was probably inspired by Gorky’s 1901 “Песня о буревестнике,” written in response to suppressed student demonstrations in St. Petersburg.
be seen as a harbinger of that “ideal aesthetic state” where violence is transformed into play. As Lunacharsky notes, this can only transpire if one overcomes any sense of personal risk: “трусам недоступна красота величественного и грозного.”

For Lunacharsky, there also exists the possibility that the beautiful can “approach” the sublime, and the means by which it can do so is through intensity. An example can be found following another discussion of the aesthetic ideal, and of the human drive to understand the beautiful as a “fragment” of the absolute: “all beauty presents itself like a ray from that kingdom.” The appearance of such “fragments,” Lunacharsky argues, might lead one to believe that the “ideal” exists “external to us, [and its] rays pierce our dark prison [темница] from without.” The motif of descending light from above towards the dark prison of earthly existence below is reminiscent of Ivanov’s “beautiful descent.” Lunacharsky, however, explicitly rejects such a theological model:

На деле не то. Случайные совпадения требований организма с действительностью должны все учащаться, сначала ввиду того, что организм приспосабляется к среде, затем потому, что организм приспособляет среду к себе.

Although Lunacharsky rejects the divine principle of an external absolute ideal, he retains the rhetorical figure of the chiasmus in his explanation of the forces behind the possible historical advent of the aesthetic ideal made possible through scientific study and labor. For pre-utopian humanity, however, such an ideal state can only be imagined through sublime works of art.

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249 Ibid., 171.  
250 Ibid., 172.
Lunacharsky’s example of this comes from monumental architecture, and takes the familiar rhetorical form of an apostrophe to the reader:

Я позволю себе на примере выяснить, что такое эстетическая эмоция в ее полном объеме. Вы стоите среди готического собора. Стройный мир высоких колонн, стрельчатых сводов, уходящих вдаль длинным коридором, окружает вас; все линии, устремляясь вверх, преломляются правильно; глаз легко и свободно следует за ними, охватывает пространство, измеряет глубины и высоты, и вы чувствуете в то же время, что храм вырос из земли и в каком-то стремительном порыве, словно его привлек вверх неизмеримо могучий магнит. И весь этот гармонично вздымающийся мир полон разноцветных теней...Постепенно приятное и могучее возбуждение зрителевых органов и центров, в связи с ассоциациями свободного и величавого порыва к небу, проникает всю вашу нервную систему: новый ритм, ритм каменной молитвы, ритм этих сияющих узорных окон словно вливается в вас...он стремится, по крайней мере, к тому, чтобы дисгармонию вашей обычной душевой жизни заменить одним аккордом.251

Lunacharsky notes that a religious individual, when faced with the sublime force of Notre Dame, experiences a “longing for happiness” (“тоска по счастью”), a melancholic emotional state not unlike Nadezhdin’s уныние discussed in chapter one. A “non-religious person”, however, “refuses to personify this strength of beauty” and experiences a longing for the fleeting moment of unity they just experienced:

вы ниоткуда не станете ждать сверхъестественной помощи, однако вы все же ощутите тоску по законченному счастью. Чего хочет теперь замирающее от грустного счастья сердце? Может быть, любви, то есть всего того счастья, которое способен дать нам другой человек? Может быть, любимое вами существо стоит рядом с вами такое же умилленное, такое же грустное перед лицом открывающегося идеала всесовершенной гармонии. Вы крепко пожмете ему руку и, взглянув на него, поймете, как заброшены люди, как страшно вам за него, сколько опасностей подстерегают нас всех, сколько грязи готово осквернить нас. Обычная

251 Ibid., 172–173.
наша судьба так противоположна тому, чего желал бы организм: он желал бы всегда прекрасных и гармоничных далей, ласкающих, вечно сменяющихся тонов, целого мира благоуханий, мерных, плавных движений, хотел бы петь и танцевать, любить всю душою, мало того, он хотел бы расти, чувствовать вечно новый прилив сил в себе, хотел бы значительных событий, глубоких эмоций, пусть опасностей, но великих, пусть борьбы, но героической, красоты в окружающем, красоты в себе, торжественного или страстного подъема духа.

The sublimity of the divine is replaced by a human desire to protect one’s self and others from the dangers posed by the natural world. “You shake his hand firmly and look at him, understanding how abandoned people are, how scared you are for him, how many dangers threaten all of us, an how much filth is ready to befoul you.” The primary affect of this “beautiful sublime” is an intense desire for self-preservation (both of the individual and the species), of the continuation of human life in the face of a hostile environment in the absence of any divine protector. So intense is this longing for a perfected future that the individual leaves the sublime moment with dissatisfaction for the imperfections of the world: “and if the thirst for beauty is still alive in you, it will turn into a hatred for reality, and when the fever of hatred quiets down, you will once more go to the corners of beauty in thirst, or in thirst you will beautify reality, harmonize it, create.”

Lunacharsky concludes his aesthetics with a long quotation from Goethe’s Prometheus, in which the titan mocks the gods of Olympus. Lunacharsky believes that the goal of aesthetics, and thus of both art and life in general, is the perfection of life in the here and now:

Дело не в том только, чтобы порождать жизнь рядом собою, но творить ее выше себя. Если сущность всякой жизни есть самосохранение, то

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253 Ibid., 174.  
254 Ibid.
For Lunacharsky, the “goal” of the sublime is not a reconciliation between the divine and the earthly—as it is in Ivanov—but the literal transformation of the physical world into a paradise on earth, one that is built to express the utmost possibilities of the human species.

There are also marked similarities in the form the sublime takes for both thinkers. In each, the sublime can manifest itself in three ways, which differ according to the nature of the relationship between the aesthetic individual and nature. In the first, the relationship between the individual and nature is seen as intensified difference. For Ivanov, this is seen in his understanding of “sublime ascent,” in which the individual breaks away from the throng and asserts his divine nature. In Lunacharsky, this is the “dynamic sublime,” a similarly solitary act in which the individual feels the limits of his physiological being, but is infected with the overwhelming might of tempestuous nature. In the second, the relationship between the individual and nature is seen as a dissolution of difference in the natural. This is seen in Ivanov as the sublimity of the “chaotic,” in which the individual self is dismembered by the earth in Dionysian frenzy. Lunacharsky maintains this dissolution of the self in the “static sublime” but anaesthetizes the violence, depicting it as a half-hypnotic state. That Lunacharsky’s “static sublime” is understood more along the lines of Nietzsche’s Apollonian illusion than the Dionysian is significant. Whereas in Nietzsche such an aesthetic mode was understood as a projection of the individuating principle, in Lunacharsky it is better understood as the confirmation of a communal principle, i.e. of the subject’s material kinship with nature.

255 Ibid., 182.
Finally, Ivanov and Lunacharsky both discuss versions of “the beautiful sublime” as a moment of equilibrium, a kind of harmonious middle that lies at the intersection of the chiasmus of self and non-self. For Ivanov, this is the location of the “divine gift,” the ephemeral moment that occurs when God’s divine love is realized on earth, and it becomes impossible to tell whose tears of joy are being spilled, man’s or God’s. For Lunacharsky, the “beautiful sublime” manifests itself in the experience of Notre Dame, which serves as a material testament to a moment in humanity’s evolution where humankind and its environment were in balance. For both Lunacharsky and Ivanov, the individual ceases to feel time in the “beautiful sublime”; Ivanov claims that it “signifies the eternal betrothal of the Spirit to the World Soul”, while Lunacharsky describes it as a rhythm that unifies the human body, an intimation of a utopia that is yet to come. This difference in their conceptions of utopia place Ivanov and Lunacharsky on opposing sides of what is perhaps the central chiasmus of Russian thought at the turn of the 20th century, the opposition between divine humanity (бог-человек) and human divinity (человек-бог). Their intersection takes place in their common centering of the aesthetic as the source for all knowledge, and the sublime as its most powerful expression.

3.8 Conclusion: The Soviet Sublime

The importance of the sublime was to persist throughout Lunacharsky’s life and political career. “An intelligent among the Bolsheviks, and a Bolshevik among the intelligentsia”—as he described himself—Lunacharsky’s dual historical role often came as a burden.\textsuperscript{256} While he understood revolutionary Petrograd as a sublime event—“colossal in everything, tragic and
significant”—Lunacharsky also insisted on moments of Apollonian restraint in response to the Dionysian “chaotic”.

Having learned of the potential destruction of the Moscow Kremlin in November of 1917, Lunacharsky impulsively resigned from his position as People’s Commissar, writing:

Вынести этого я не могу. Моя мера переполнена. Остановить этот ужас я бессилен. Работать под гнетом этих мыслей, сводящих с ума, нельзя. Вот почему я выхожу в отставку из Совета Нар<одных> Комиссаров. Я сознаю всю тяжесть этого решения. Но я не могу больше.

Later, it became clear that the rumors of the Kremlin’s destruction had been greatly exaggerated, and Lunacharsky acquiesced to the Sovnarkom’s refusal to accept his resignation. Looking back at the event while writing an entry on Lenin in the Soviet Literary Encyclopedia in 1932, Lunacharsky credits Lenin with assuaging his anxiety and fears:

Я позволю себе привести здесь личное воспоминание, к-рое особенно ярко запало в мое сознание и к-рое прекрасно характеризует широту и торжественность той борьбы за социалистич. культуру, к-рую вел Л.

Πишуший эти строки был испуган разрушениями ценных художественных зданий, имевшими место во время боев революционного пролетарната Москвы с войсками Временного правительства, и подвергся по этому поводу весьма серьезной «обработке» со стороны великого вождя. Между прочим, ему были сказаны тогда такие слова: «Как вы можете придавать такое значение тому или другому старому зданию, как бы оно ни было хорошо, когда дело идет об открытии дверей перед таким общественным строем, который способен создать красоту, безмерно превосходящую все, о чем могли только мечтать в прошлом?»

Л. прямо говорил о том, что коммунист, не способный к полетам реальной мечты, т. е. к широким перспективам, к широким картинам будущего, — плохой коммунист. Но революционный романтизм органически сочетался в Л. с крепчайшей практической хваткой.

257 Ibid., 11.
258 В.И. Ленин и А.В. Луначарский, 28.
259 Луначарский, “Ленин и литературоведение,” 212.
While it is probably impossible to ascertain whether this anecdote was based on historical reality, or if Lunacharsky is simply invoking the dead as a sublime authority to lend weight to his own realization, it is clear that at this point Lunacharsky agreed with the sacrifice of the more distant past for the possibility of a sublime utopia.

That this utopia could only be accomplished via a “revolutionary romanticism” grounded in practicality, demonstrates the extent to which the sublime was to persist and thrive during the Stalinist period.\footnote{Clark, \textit{Moscow, The Fourth Rome}, 276–306.} Even after having fallen out of official favor during Stalin’s consolidation of power in the late 1920s, Lunacharsky continues to adhere to revolutionary aesthetics. The year after the above entry was published—the last year of Lunacharsky’s life—the former People’s Commissar of Enlightenment gives one of his final speeches of importance at the second plenary meeting of the Organizing Committee of the Union of Soviet Writers. The topic under discussion is the definition of Socialist Realism. Halfway through his report, Lunacharsky invokes sublime architecture—as he did in his aesthetics—as an analogy for evaluating the equilibrium of a culture. This time, however, his analysis takes the form of an invective against “bourgeois realism”:

\[\ldots \text{это для буржуазного реалиста благодарный момент. Он возьмет все это статически — «как оно есть». Представьте себе, что строится дом, и когда он будет выстроен, это будет великолепный дворец. Но он еще не достроен, и вы нарисуете его в этом виде и скажете: «Вот ваш социализм, — а крыши—то и нет». Вы будете, конечно, реалистом — вы скажете правду: но сразу бросается в глаза, что эта правда в самом деле неправда. Социалистическую правду может сказать только тот, кто понимает, какой строится дом, как строится, и кто понимает, что у него будет крыша. Человек, который не понимает развития, никогда правды не увидит, потому что правда — она не похожа на себя самое, она не сидит на месте, правда летит, правда есть развитие, правда есть конфликт, правда есть борьба, правда — это завтрашний день, и нужно ее}\]
Lunacharsky depicts the tasks the socialist realist writer with the development of a prophetic vision oriented not at Platonic ideal, but of a historically necessary future. Such “socialist romanticism”, Lunacharsky continues, will be capable of quickening the developmental processes of history:

The ability of art to function as kind of sublime technology through which the material of historical time could be compressed and accelerated can be realized in a number of genres, but Lunacharsky pays particular attention to the necessity of “socialist tragedy,” which should instill in its audience “an ardent compassion, colossal respect, as well as instilling a new vigor.” The classic example Lunacharsky draws upon in his discussion is Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound*:

Очень характерно то высокое уважение, которое к Эсхилу питал Маркс, а Эсхил был как раз этого типа романтиком — правда, не во всех произведениях. Эсхил в «Прометее» хотел показать, что даже самые великие противники аристократии, ее общественной морали должны в конце концов перед ней преклоняться. Но ему хотелось показать, что враг аристократии — это не какой-нибудь первый попавшийся жалкий враг, а великий враг с колоссальной духовной мощью. Наступающая демократия казалась ему опасной, ему хотелось вникнуть в психологию этих людей, он старался написать во весь рост своего Прометея, который противопоставляет старым устоям новые понятия разума.

добра и даже техники. (...) Не существовал в действительности такой герой, который был и великим техником, изобретателем огня, и человеком огромной любви к своему классу, и неуклонным бунтарем—мучеником, но все черты, которые Эсхил мог встретить у крупных людей своего времени, он соединил в грандиозном образе, в Промете — фигуре не иллюзорной. (...) Потом Прометей написал Гёте, и это произведение является самым революционным его произведением.  

Dressed properly in the ornamentation of party orthodoxy, Lunacharsky seems to be advancing a theory of the “Marxist sublime” in which Prometheus is read as a composite figure of the most daring opponents of the established order. As has already been seen in the previous section, however, Lunacharsky’s fascination with the figure of Prometheus had begun long earlier, when a quotation from Goethe’s poem marked the conclusion of his Foundations of Positive Aesthetics. This “Marxist sublime”, however, is simultaneously a “Nietzschean sublime”, as can be found in the following passage of Birth of Tragedy:

Let me now contrast the glory of activity, which illuminates Aeschylus’ Prometheus, with the glory of passivity. What the thinker Aeschylus had to say to us here, but what as a poet he only allows us to sense in his symbolic image, the youthful Goethe was able to reveal to us in his audacious words (...) In himself the Titanic artist found the defiant faith that he had the ability to create men and at least destroy Olympian gods, by means of his superior wisdom which, to be sure, he had to atone for with eternal suffering. The splendid “ability” of the great genius for which even eternal suffering is a slight price, the stern pride of the artist —that is the content and soul of Aeschylus’ poem (...) In this respect, the Prometheus of Aeschylus is a Dionysian mask, while in the aforementioned profound demand for justice Aeschylus reveals to the thoughtful his paternal descent from Apollo, the god of individuation and of just boundaries. So the dual nature of Aeschylus’ Prometheus, his nature which is at the same time Dionysian and Apollonian, might be expressed thus in a conceptual formula: “All that exists is just and unjust and equally justified in both.” That is your world! A world indeed!—

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263 Ibid.
264 Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner, 85.
Lunacharsky concludes his argument for the possibility of a “socialist romanticism” by making a case against what is often considered a central tenet of socialist realism, verisimilitude. For Lunacharsky, realism, paradoxically, is defined not by its ability to reflect material reality, but by its ability to reveal an inner truth “Это не реализм? Да, здесь есть элементы романтики, потому что скомбинированы элементы неправдоподобно. Но они правдиво изображают правду.”265 Such a belief, tempered by a greater artistic talent and discipline than that expressed in Lunacharsky’s hyperbolic oratory, would be shared by Andrei Platonov and will be the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Platonov and the Sublime

4.1 Introduction

From the very beginning of his literary career, Andrei Platonov demonstrates a clear debt—if not always in precise terminology, then in the shape of his reasoning—to the marked chiasmic dualism of the thinkers examined in the previous chapter. The first entry of Platonov’s earliest extant notebook (1921) is a quote from Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra:

«Бог умер, теперь хотим мы, — чтобы жил сверхчеловек». т.е.: Бог приблизься ко мне, стань мною, но самым лучшим, самым высшим мною — сверхмною, сверхчеловеком. Это просто «реализация Бога», как и все учение о сверхчеловеке.266

265 Lunacharsky, Sobranie Sochinenii; Literaturovedenie, Kritika, Estetika, 524–621.
266 Платонов, Записные книжки, 17.
The passage of the event of “death of God” into “the living superman” passes through the middle space of communal human desire. The creation of the “sublime individual” thus bears the social concerns of Ivanov’s соборность examined in the previous chapter, and which likewise made use of Nietzsche’s chiasmic understanding of the sublime. There is also a clear compatibility with Lunacharsky’s *Foundations of Positive Aesthetics*, which were to be republished in book form in 1923, but which also lay at the foundation of the Proletkult movement in which Platonov began his literary career.

As the commentary makes clear, here Platonov is not seeking the elimination of the divine principle, but rather its necessary transformation in a new historical era into the new man (новый человек). Ignoring the bombastic proclamation of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra regarding the death of God, Platonov translates Nietzsche’s thoughts into a religious entreaty, recasting the death of God into desire for theosis. Such a transformation requires both theoria and praxis, the ability to contemplate and reflect outside of one’s self, and to effect change. Later in the same notebook, Platonov states this dual status of the individualized self in a single concise line: “Я и творец, и сотворенный!” and his understanding of the ethical import of this dualist view of the self can be found in a revealing anecdote:

[Мне приснился голос]
На суд Божий явились два человека: один еле живой, умирающий, другой цветущий и радостный.
— Что ты делал? — спросил Бог первого.
— Всю жизнь умирал во имя Твое, — отвечал тот.
— Для чего?
— Чтобы не умереть.
— А ты? — спросил Бог второго.
— Всю жизнь боялся смерти и заботился только о теле своем, [ибо в нем вся жизнь / чтобы не угасла в нем жизнь], источнике жизни. 
— Для чего?
— Чтобы не погасла в нем жизнь.
Тогда сказал Бог обоим:
Оба вы хотели одного — жизни и ушли от нея, один — в неживой дух, [другой] ибо умертвил тело, другой — в мертвое тело, [ибо] ибо забыл все, кроме тела. И оба вы мертвы. Но вот, если бы вы постигли, что дух и плоть одно, — оба были бы вечно живы и радостны радостью Моей. Не много дорог в мире, а одна, не многие [сразу попадают] идут по ней.
— Что же теперь делать нам? — спросили согрешившие. [— Воскреснуть]
— Понять себя и [начать] жить сначала.267

Cast in the prophetic mode of a dream, Platonov insists on the proper balance of the material and the spiritual as the expression of the true nature of the human self. The two perspectives presented here are depicted as blind to the each other, and even though the expression of this blindness varies—a blind spirit mortifies the flesh, while blind material forgets the existence of the spirit—the result is the same: a repetition of life that is simultaneously marked as a failure of the past, but tempered by hope for the future.

A similar juxtaposition serves as the organizing principle in one of the earliest extant texts of Platonov’s journalism, “On Art” (1918). Composed almost entirely in a sublime register, the elements of comparison in this early text are life, described as “moved by reason forward and forward in a triumphant striving, [it] is an ocean seized by a hurricane” and art:

tа же жизнь, тот же океан, но океан утихший, предвечерний, когда вся грязь осела на дно, и, пронизанный солнцем, он开阔ключ каждый ищущему взору глубины свои с миллиардами живых существ, недвижными кораллами и сказками непостижимых тайн (…) Искусство — это дивный сон разума, будто он уже постиг все, восседая над всем — и гармония, совершенство, истина — есть все… Искусство — это идеал моего я, осуществленный в безграничном хаосе того, что называют миром.268

267 Ibid., 19–21.
Though distinct in the mode of their expression—in a way that recalls, among others, the difference between Kant’s dynamic and mathematical sublimes—Platonov insists on complementary relationship between these two methods of experiencing the world. Earlier in the same article, life moved by reason and art are compared to night and day, and Platonov claims that life “in its higher sense, at its highest points, in the fervent, grasping labor of reason similar periods of tension and repose also take place.” Moreover, Platonov clearly associates these “higher moments” with a concept similar to Apollonian illusion, when spirit “recognizes only itself, its own perfection, its own ideal harmony”, i.e. when the individual ego recognizes itself as reflected in all that surrounds it. This “hymn of exaltation” (“гимн восторга”), to use Platonov’s formulation, is accompanied by the silencing of the chaotic elements of nature into a silent harmonious whole.

While it is easy to recognize traces of a number of number of thinkers in Platonov’s description what is vital to note here are two aspects of Platonov’s understanding of the sublime. The first is that the experience of art results in the recognition of the self in nature. Unlike the Romantic sublime of the 19th century, however, this does not resolve into an alliance of the poetic genius and nature against civilization. Instead, Platonov views the sublimity of art as a communal experience marked by the possibility of realizing universal kinship: “Мы роднимся со всем, что казалось нам хаосом; мы убеждаемся, что вокруг нас лишь братья, любящие и ждущие нашего привета и ласки, нашего внимания.” In this, Platonov’s depiction of art departs from the “purely Dionysian” seen in Nietzsche and Ivanov, in which all sense of self is temporarily obliterated. The self is maintained here despite illusory chaos; what is eventually

269 Ibid.
270 Ibid.
realized is a common humanity that transcends the obstacles—both material and spiritual—of normal cognition.

The focus of this chapter is to trace the presence of this interdependent understanding of the sublime in three texts of Platonov. Two of them—largely ignored in Platonov criticism—are from the 1920s: “On Love” and “A Beggar’s Thirst”. Belonging to different genres of writing (essay and short story, respectively) they are united by a common interest in the chiasmic sublime, the rhetoric of which serve as their fundamental structural feature. The third text, Platonov’s 1930s masterpiece, Dzhan, has been the subject of a small but growing number of critical studies. The chronological distance between these texts is intentional, serving two purposes. The first is an argument for the importance of the sublime throughout Platonov’s literary output. The second, related to the first, is the hope that such a reading will serve as a potential corrective to an overly deterministic tendency in recent historical criticism of Platonov’s works by advocating a model of reading that favors consistency over change.²⁷¹

4.2 “On Love”

The opening sentence of Platonov’s unpublished essay “О любви” (1921) describes two kinds of knowledge, distinguished by the affective response they engender in the individual who

²⁷¹ Perhaps more so than any other canonical writer active through the first decades of the Soviet Union, Platonov has been used in criticism as an example of various trends in Soviet culture. One of the unfortunate side effects of this has been a tendency to carry out the converse of this operation, i.e. Soviet culture determines the evolution of Platonov’s thoughts and ideas. Thus while Eric Naiman’s overarching thesis in Sex and Public retains a great deal of explanatory power, the biographical trajectories implied by Borenstein and Bullock are in need of some refinement. Livers otherwise excellent study likewise falls susceptible to the conflation of the anorexic/biophilic progression of Soviet culture with Platonov’s own personal development. Again, such an approach can and has been productive, but it can also be misleading. See: Naiman, Sex in Public, 155–156, 206–207, 291–291; Borenstein, Men Without Women, 191–217; Bullock, The Feminine in the Prose of Andrey Platonov, 1–21; Livers, Constructing the Stalinist Body, 27–72.
experiences them: “Есть в мире два знания: одно только удивляет, а другое очаровывает.”

At a slightly later point, Platonov makes the connection between the first knowledge and scientific theory clear by repeating the motif of surprise in intensified form: “Такие области знания, как физика эфира, теория электричества— таят в себе такие глубокие тайны, что их открытие будет долго ослеплять и поражать человечество.”

The aesthetic of scientific knowledge is shown to be a dynamic sublime, contained in the difference between ignorance and revelation, it is—to recall the sublime metaphor from “On Art”— reason, moving life “forward and forward in a triumphant striving” as an ocean is seized by a hurricane.

In a lyrical passage that follows, Platonov shifts to describing the scientific mode of knowledge via a series of metaphors:

Наука—красавица, но только своими одеждами. Она—свет, чистый и до конца прозрачный, но не теплый, не холодный. Этот неморгающий глаза человечества смотрит, но не любуется, а думает, и, как глаз, наука нужна, чтобы только видеть и освещать.

In doing so, Platonov marks the boundaries to the use of science, which is limited to the act of “seeing and illumination.” Each attribute of science is followed immediately by a constraint; it is a beauty, but only by virtues of its ornamentation; it is light, but not heat, it perceives but feels no joy. The triumphalism cited in “On Art” and in various other moments of Platonov’s works is felt here, but each empowering metaphor is accompanied by delimitation, circumscribing the aesthetic force attributed to science even as it is amplified.

This general rhetorical structure is then repeated in modulated form in the ensuing description of the second form of knowledge, which “enchants and is revered”, but is not

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272 Платонов, Государственный житель, 648.
273 Ibid.
274 Ibid.
“entirely knowledge in the full sense”. In the ensuing description, amplification is achieved via anaphora and paradox:

И есть другое знание, которое очаровывает и перед которым благоговеют. Назвать знанием его в полном смысле нельзя. Это другое, и вы сами увидите что. Я вам расскажу о силе, которая настолько сильна, что может обессилить себя и перестать быть сильной, о красоте, которая может стать безобразием и чудовищем, если захочет, о свободе, для которой сладка и желанна бывает неволя, и об истине, которая одевается ложью и все-таки бывает истиной, на столько она всемогуща. Жизнь смеется и из гробов.275

Whereas Platonov's description of science is accompanied by a series of limiting factors, this second category of knowledge is characterized by transmutability. In addition, the four qualities attributed here (a weak force, a terrifying beauty, a free submission, a truth dressed as a lie that is nonetheless truth) form the basic traits of the sublime, from Kant onwards. Just as it resists the author’s description, so too would its protean nature seem capable of resisting the optical mode attributed to science. Unlike science, this force cannot be used as a prism to understand other objects, or at least it cannot be employed in the same manner. It remains unknown, resistant to comprehension.

Understanding these two differing modes of knowledge is vital in deciphering what may at first appear as two unnecessary digressions by Platonov a few sentences earlier in the essay. Viewed within the context of the extended descriptions of the two knowledges, however, they are shown to be illustrative. In the first, Platonov mentions two scientific discoveries:

Ученые нашли, что скорость световых и электрических волн в эфире равна 300 000 километров в секунду; что человек в конце концов только

275 Ibid., 649.
животное, сумевшее передразнить своими действиями мир и тем 
приспособившееся к нему и отчасти победившее его.276

These two scientific discoveries, respectively belonging to the fields of physics and evolutionary 
biology, describe scientific knowledge as a double-edged sword. While science may astound 
with its ability to decipher the speed of light, it simultaneously threatens the very foundation of 
previous models of human dignity, namely the notion of human exceptionalism in the world.
The second digression takes a more artistic form; Platonov purposefully marks it as a “mere 
conjecture, and not historical fact”. The story relates the development of technology— 
specifically, the human ability to create and use fire—in prehistoric humanity:

Повторение, в течение веков и веков, скажем, такого процесса, как 
зажигание вулканической лавой или молнией лесов, самовозгорание 
торфа, степей и т. д., — повторение этих явлений родило в животных — 
pредтече человека — чувство как бы вечной необходимости в огне. 
Раньше ведь земля жила более лихорадочной, более юной, свирепой 
жизнью. Огонь, естественный огонь чаще видели животные. Если сейчас 
явление огня в природе пугает даже человека, то когда-то могло быть и 
наоборот — исчезнувшие лесные и болотные пожары могли ужаснуть 
животных, привыкших в течение веков к неугасимому огню на горизонте. 
И изобретателем огня было то животное, которое приволокло 
потухающее дерево из сгоревшего леса и зажгло им другой лес, чтобы 
успокоить этим себя и свою самку, т. к. они 
привыкли к пламени и 
отсутствие его для них ужасно и неестественно.277

This counter-history of the discovery of fire is founded on the possibility of a historical inversion 
of emotional responses (i.e. what might now be a terrifying experience could have previously 
been a comforting one). Whereas the discovery of fire is usually viewed as one possible origin 
of the beginning of humanity—whether in this evolutionary context or in the myth of

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276 Ibid., 648.
277 Ibid.
Prometheus from antiquity—and thus a marking point of a willed separation from nature and/or
the divine, Platonov presents this discovery as a reaction to a change that takes place in nature
itself. When viewed from this perspective, the discovery of fire is not seen as an attempt to
separate from nature, but rather to re-create it. It is, in other words, an act of mimetic art that
aims to compensate for the withdrawal of nature.

Following his definition of these two types of knowledge, science and art, and their
corresponding sensations, light and warmth, Platonov attributes both as components of a primal
force in which humanity is described as a co-participant:

Скажу все до конца. До сих пор человечество только и хотело ясного
понимания, горячего ощущения той вольной пламенной силы, которая
творит и творит и разрушает вселенные. Человек — соучастник этой
силы, и его душа есть тот же огонь, каким зажжено солнце, и в душе
человека такие и еще большие пространства, какиележатв межзвездных
пустынях. 278

The object of desire, the “free fiery force”, is desired dually as the clear understanding of science
and the warming sensation of art as consolation. Platonov seems to imply that the connection of
the human soul with this force lies precisely in its creative capacity of desire, which, in
hyperbolic terms, he claims is capable of exceeding the physical universe in scale. Here there is a
compatibility between Platonov’s exultant description and the Kantian sublime, in which the
intervention of a transcendent reason vouchsafes the superiority and safety of the individuated
subject, albeit with one important departure: will has come to replace reason. Importantly, this is
a will unconstrained by morality, one that is perfectly aware of its own potential for creative and
destructive violence.

278 Ibid., 650.
The interrelationship between science and the second, unnamed force in “On Love” shares many similarities to Nietzsche’s conception of the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Platonov’s explanation of the failure of the full realization of the potential of the second knowledge described above, meanwhile, invites comparison to the biologically informed aesthetics of Lunacharsky. Embarking on a comparison of the different evolutionary stages of sensation (чувство) and thought (мысль), Platonov employs Lunacharsky’s economy of pleasure and pain as a model of a completed evolutionary process. Sensation, Platonov claims, is capable of achieving a natural equilibrium via pleasure, i.e. the scale of pleasure makes it possible to evaluate the experience of sensation:

...чувства, которые гораздо древнее мысли, уже нашли общую, уравновешивающую их в мире точку в форме наслаждения...чувство расцветает в миге наслаждения — и чувство нашло себе пищу, уравновесилось, усиливается, и служит целям человека.  

Thought, by comparison, does not have a corresponding measure through which it can be gain expression and take material form, a fact that is highlighted when Platonov notes that sensation has a “name” for the sublime elemental force of the universe: “Ту трепетную силу, творящую вселенные, чувство назвало бы именем блага и наслаждения... Мысль назвала бы эту силу истиной.”

Platonov indicates that it is the absence of truth that results in the sense of deprivation associated with the sublime and with the inherent suffering of humanity: “мысль еще не твердо стоит в мире, мысль, так сказать, не сбалансирована с природой, и от этого происходит всякая мука, отрава и порча жизни.”

279 Ibid., 651.
280 Ibid.
281 Ibid.
Both religion and science, Platonov claims, are similarly deficient modes of thought, two branches of a tree whose roots have yet to be discovered. Yet there is something in religion that is lacking in science that prevents it from becoming the final stage of thought. Platonov pointedly takes issue with the idea that science can replace religion, claiming, “народу надо дать вместо религии не меньше, а больше, чем религии.” If science fails to respect and elevate its counterpart, it will only result in violence, as Platonov knew very well: “вынь только из нее веру, она вся опрокинется и народ выйдет из пространств с вилами и топорами и уничтожит, истребит пустые города, отнявшие у народа его утешение, бессмысленное и ложное, но единственное утешение.”

In the final paragraphs of this essay, Platonov presents three ways how this sublime force might be characterized. The first is the response of a little boy, who when asked to name “that tender force which beats in us and leads us to happiness and strength,” responds “my mama.” The second definition take place on a more abstract level, in the form of the maternal principle of Russian Orthodoxy:

Над народом не надо смеяться, даже когда он по-язычески верит в свою богородицу. Сознание, что на небе есть благая богородица — роднее и ласковей матери, дае сердцу мужика любовь и силу, и он веками ходит за сохой и работает и живет как мученик.

The final description of Platonov's essay is the least distinct, and, it could be said, the most sublime:

Людям нужно другое, более высшее, более универсальное понятие, чем религия и наука. Люди хотят понять ту первичную силу, ту веселую

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282 Ibid., 649.
283 Ibid., 651.
284 Ibid., 649.
A perfect example of the Lomonosovian rhetorics of amplification, the language of the conclusion expands as the emotional intensity of the passage increases, while the object depicted likewise increases in physical scale and universal accessibility from the personal to the universal, before resolving into the classic Burkean image of the beautiful: a flower.

The rhetorics of “On Love” testify to Platonov’s conviction of the inherent interdependency of two ways of knowing. Their sublime intersection is characterized as a future utopian equilibrium. In order for this to be achieved, however, the limits of each mode of knowledge must be respected, or both will stand to lose, as Platonov warns in his conclusion: “Жизнь пока еще мудрее и глубже всякой мысли, стихия неимоверно сильнее сознания, и все попытки замещения религии наукой не приведут к полной победе науки.”

4.3 “Thirst of a Beggar”

Even among Platonov’s decidedly bizarre and fantastic early prose, “Thirst of a Beggar” («Жажда нищего») is remarkable, both in its cosmic sweep and in the ambiguity of its message. First published in 1921 in a Voronezh newspaper, the story bears the subtitle “Visions of History”, and was signed by Platonov under the pseudonym “A Beggar”. The use of the word “visions” (plural) is significant, highlighting both the structure of the story, in which a number of

285 Ibid., 650.
286 Ibid., 651.
287 Prophet, Beatitudes
narrative levels are presented—each contained within the previous one—as well as the dualistic tensions of Platonov’s imagined future.

The frame narrative of “Thirst of a Beggar” immediately situates the reader in the distant future, at the very limits of history and art. Yet this is only revealed to the reader gradually. The opening lines of the story are more reminiscent of an idyll or a folktale than an account of the end of history:

Был какой-то очень дальний ясный, прозрачный век. В нем было спокойствие и тишина, будто вся жизнь изумленно застыла сама перед собой.
Был тихий век познания и света сияющей науки.
Тысячелетние царства инстинкта, страсти, чувства миновали давно.
Теперь царствовал в мире самый юный царь — сознание, которое победило прошлое и пошло на завоевание грядущего.
Это был самый тихий век во вселенной: мысль ходила всюду неслышными волнами, она была первою силой, которая не гремела и не имела никакого вида.288

Narrated in the past tense, this description of the future clearly draws upon conceptions of the Golden Age of antiquity, and the personification of “consciousness” as the “youngest tsar” to rule likewise inclines the reader towards an allegorical reading. There is also something of the sublime that attends to the narrator’s description here: the power of “thought” is not only all-powerful and omnipresent, but is itself “unheard” and “unseen”. Apophatic description can likewise be found in the description of the “Большой Один”, the distant future heir of communist society:

На земле, в том тихом веке сознания, жил кто-то Один, Большой Один, чьим отцом было коммунистическое человечество.

What is negated in the description above is precisely anything that could associate the Big One with the human. Lacking a face, particular organs and a definite shape, this post-future of communist society can only be perceived in terms of energy, unencumbered by the confines of mass and physical space.

The third-person depiction of this imperial and near-incomprehensible sublimity then suddenly gives way to a first-person narrative, in the form of Perezhitok, a name that suggests survival, on the one hand, and historical obsolescence or “remnant,” on the other. The shift in narrative pose is vital. Whereas before the reader might have considered this eerie utopia an “objective” description, it now becomes entirely contingent on the perspective of a being who describes itself as “the final speck on the round, enclosed circles of perfection and the end of the world,” and “a shadow on the shining visage [лик] of consciousness, on the shape [образ] of the Big One.” Leaving the obvious allusion to the “obsolescence” of pre-revolutionary Russian culture to the side, what is particularly striking is that it is only after the introduction of Perezhitok that the Big One suddenly acquires both a “visage” and a “shape”, two things that had been specifically mentioned as lacking in the description mentioned above.

The relationship between Perezhitok and the Big One is thus transformed via a perspective of difference and the liminal aesthetics of the sublime. Perezhitok experiences its coming end as the familiar mix of anxiety and amazement familiar to us from the 19th century

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289 Ibid.
290 Ibid.
sublime: “On the Big One’s path to peace there remained only I—and it was terrifying and beautiful [страшно и прекрасно]... I was terrified of the silence, I knew that I know nothing and live within that which knew all.”291 Throughout the frame narrative, a number of binaries contrast Perezhitok and the Big One (small/large, silence/sound, feeling/consciousness, beauty/truth) that neatly mirror the differing roles of sublime subject and sublime object, and the connection is further solidified when Perezhitok claims it would rather have “thunder, waterfalls, and life threatened by death” to the “silence and clarity, silence and the final stubborn thought” of the Big One.292

However, the most important difference between Perezhitok and the Big One concerns language. For the latter, language no longer seems to be desired or necessary; “thought” alone silently washes over the world of the frame narrative. But the reader’s experience of this world is heavily mediated, filtered through Perezhitok’s rhythmical, poetic description. This is a language that readily encompasses contradictions: the Big One has neither face nor shape, but it does; Perezhitok’s appropriation of the Socratic “I know that I know nothing” to take but two examples. This, perhaps, is what allows Perezhitok to ask the necessary question of the central paradox of this universe: “Why am I, a dark, unnamed force, a crooked finger of howling passion, why am I still whole and not destroyed by thought?”293 Here too Perezhitok behaves more or less like a classic Kantian subject, whose imagination is strained to the utmost during the sublime moment, eagerly anticipating the arrival of the faculty of reason. Yet as a material, temporal body—a vital difference between Perezhitok and abstract Kantian faculties—Perezhitok not only experiences its defeat as the beginning of physical death, but also welcomes

291 Ibid., I–1:167.
292 Ibid.
293 Ibid.
and desires it, as if its own elimination is the only possible way to fully restore logical causality, to make the world transparent, to make it make sense.

The willingness to undergo physical transformation, even unto the point of death, is a classic prophetic trope. When Perezhitok feels its death approaching, it begins to see visions, not of a distant future (i.e. not a utopia that would somehow explain or justify its death), but of the past: “And I saw one vision of the past, and became different from joy [стал другим от радости]. I saw a battle between a still-early and weak consciousness with mystery [с тайной].”\(^{294}\) This content of the vision, then, is perceived by Perezhitok as containing the solution to the question of its own continued existence.

On the structural level, it is worth noting that as the embedded text begins the reader’s perspective has grown narrower and more compressed: whereas before the reader could observe the entire universe, they are now limited to the events transpiring within Perezhitok’s consciousness. The world of Perezhitok’s vision bears the clear traces of the “cult of the machine” of the early Soviet avant-garde. Set somewhere after the communist revolution but before the events of the frame, the human society of Perzhitok’s vision is a “collective of engineers”, whose continual evolution in thought and consciousness is accompanied by the death of physical sensation and traditional notions of harmonious beauty: “Nothing was destroyed by these people: [everything] simply went into consciousness from down to up…the scientists along with the engineer Electron [the head of the scientific collective] worked around the clock. Electron himself was blind and mute—he only thought. From his thought he became hideous [urodom].”\(^{295}\) The interdependence of the spiritual (thought) and the material (sensation) is

\(^{294}\) Ibid.  
\(^{295}\) Ibid., I–I:168.
represented as a kind of closed system, in which growth of one aspect necessitates the decrease of the other. Here the increasing scientific advances of post-communist society towards truth (истина) is accompanied by the decrease of both the capacity for physical sensation and physical beauty; interpersonal communication has also transcended the material, and is carried out through “waves of nerve energy”. At the same time, the interdependent relationship in this envisioned world is marked by appropriation and inversion: “The thunder and movement of the universe had ceased, but the machines had begun to roar for her.” Such a shift in an understanding of the sublime, in many ways typical for industrialized, 20th century society, re-envisions sublime force as a property of technology directed against nature in order to pacify and transfigure it.

Given Platonov’s fascination with the maternal body in his journalistic articles composed around the same period, it is hardly surprising that the category of gender plays an important descriptive role in the society of Perezhitok’s version. In the frame narrative of “Thirst of a Beggar”, Perezhitok repeatedly expresses sensual desire. As opposed to the austere presence it finds itself surrounded by, Perezhitok desires, “something warm, hot, and unknown, I wanted the sensations of something familiar [родного], something like me […] I wanted thunder, waterfalls, and life threatened by death.” This contradictory desire for difference and familiarity, followed by an evocation of the natural sublime, draws a connection between Perezhitok and the Dionysian mode of the sublime, and, by extension, against the technologically-driven human society of its vision. Just as Perezhitok fears for its continued survival in the frame narrative, so too is sexual desire under assault in the world of the vision, which Perezhitok describes as a

296 Ibid., I–1:169.
297 Ibid., I–1:167.
culture “love between the sexes was almost non-existent.” As is all too often the case in Platonov’s early work, this “evolutionary” decrease of sexual desire is represented by the steady disappearance of women, whom “immortality did not touch”, and who “seemed to everyone to be a joke.”

Yet whereas the members of this society seem unable to comprehend any purpose in the continued existence of women, Perezhitok makes a clear connection between the growing physical changes transpiring in the human form and feminine beauty: “The head grew, the body lessened, and the women were all the more beautiful in their closeness to death.”

As disturbing as the portrayal of women in this vision is, it is important to notice that a distinction is drawn between its physically hideous, technology-obsessed members and the witness of this terrifying vision, Perezhitok. Whereas the latter is capable of recognizing a growing intensity of beauty in the female part of the society, the inhabitants are completely blind to this dimension of experience. This difference is highlighted when the engineer Electron discovers one of the final secrets of material existence, a new form of energy that defies all previously known laws of physics. In order to solve this new challenge, Electron orders the mass murder of all of the women in the society, “Within the hour all women must be discharged in short order. It is impossible to bear this burden up such a mountain. We will fall before our victory.’ The world fell into thought. And the silence was more terrible than a battle, and the roar of the machines was like an ancient waterfall.”

Here Platonov employs two of the most canonized images of the classic 19th century sublime—the inaccessible mountain and the roaring waterfall—in order to sharpen the distinction between Perezhitok and the Big One. In Electron’s command for mass murder, the

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298 Ibid., I–1:169.
299 Ibid.
300 Ibid., I–1:170.
defeat of the faculty of imagination in the classic Kantian account is transformed: we are no longer faced with the defeat of the imagination, but rather its sacrifice, in a particularly gruesome and materialized form. The members of the society seem largely indifferent to their act of murder; it is only from Perezhitok’s perspective that the violence of the dynamic sublime—the paradoxical combination of the terrifying silence of the world and the roaring of the waterfall—can be perceived. Yet, given this, it is difficult to understand why such a vision—in which the “women-remnants” (“женщины-пережитки”), i.e. Perezhitok itself, might cause Perezhitok joy.

The only possible explanation seems to be contained within a narrative embedded in the vision itself, i.e. in the story of the solving of the “mystery” discovered by Electron, which is framed as a paradox between material and energy:

«При нагрузке молекул материи однозначными электронами сверх предела, когда объем электронов становится больше объема молекулы, у нас завращался двигатель на Напоре 101. Двигатель от большого количества получаемой энергии сгорел при работе. Конструкцию его помним. Ни каких электромагнитных потоков между исследуемой матерней и двигателем не было. Есть новая поэтому форма энергии, неизвестная нам. Надо начать наступление на эту тайну»

The solution to this mystery is eventually revealed to lie in a concept of dynamic equilibrium that bears clear traces of Lunacharsky’s aesthetics and Platonov’s thought in “On Love”:

«Кончено. Материя стремится к уравнению разнородности своего химического состава, к общему виду, единому веществу — к созданию материи одного простого химического знака. Уравнивающие силы пронизывают пространства от вещества большей химической напряженности к меньшей. Это было скрыто. При перегрузке молекул током создаются особо выгодные условия для такой взаимной уравнивающей передачи сил: их течет тогда особенно много. И за работавшая

301 Ibid.
машина на Напоре 101 превратила эти химические силы в движение, чтобы освободиться от их избытка.”

The embedded narrative of scientific discovery is significant in two aspects. Firstly, it demonstrates Platonov’s very real preoccupation with the possibility of discovering an unlimited source of free energy, a quest that was to remain a central concern throughout the early period of his scientific and literary work. While the actual details of the scientific theories in Platonov’s writings remain obscure, two general ideas stand out: the possibility of the interchangeability of matter and energy through an unknown medium (as can be found in the concept of “aether” throughout the turn of the 20th century), and the insistence on models of dynamic equilibrium in order to explain the evolution of closed systems that conserve their components, yet increase in potential energy.

Secondly, this is the very same model upon which Platonov structures his text. The chemical reaction that takes place on the micro-level (the scientific discovery) is, of course, being replicated on the social level (i.e. a similar intensification of difference is achieved through the elimination of the society’s women). This is what gives Perezhitok cause for joy at the end of “Thirst of a Beggar”, Perezhitok knows that it has not—and will not—be destroyed, that it has only increased in intensity. This echoing of the scientific discovery on the social level echoes both Nietzschean perspectivism and the implication of allegedly “objective” observers as actors in the processes under their observation. At the conclusion of the vision, Perezhitok finds itself once more surrounded by the Big One, but is assured in its success in its struggle against it:

302 Ibid.
Я понял, что я больше Большого Одного; он уже все узнал, дошел до конца, до покоя, он полон, а я нищий в этом мире нищих, самый тихий и простой.
Я настолько ничтожен и пуст, что мне мало вселенной и даже полного сознания всей истины, чтобы наполниться до краев и окончиться. Нет ничего такого большого, что бы уменьшило мое ничтожество, и я оттого больше всех. Во мне все человечество со всем своим грядущим и вся вселенная с своими тайнами, с Большим Одним.
И все это капля для моей жажды.  

The plot of “Thirst of a Beggar,” then, is essentially an allegorical tale of the sublimity of desire against reason and consciousness. The story opens with a depiction of a fearful and anxiety-laden subject (Perezhitok) faced with an insurmountable object (the Big One). Through the external intervention of a vision of past scientific discovery, Perezhitok is made aware of its own unlimited power, which it expresses through the rhetorics of paradoxical negative description (“I am so small I am larger than anything”, “there is nothing big enough capable of lessening my nothingness”), followed by a statement of sublime triumph: “all this is but a drop for my thirst”.

On the structural level, Platonov intensifies the aesthetic force of this trajectory through a constant repositioning of the reader. The reader begins the story as a cosmic witness to a bizarre universe, but their perspective is repeatedly constricted over the course of the narrative (Perezhitok’s consciousness, Electron’s consciousness within that vision, to the subatomic particles of Electron’s experiment), a build-up of pressure up that is only released at its explosive conclusion.

Platonov’s short story can thus be read not only as a clear continuation of the aesthetics of the sublime advanced at the turn of the century, but as a particularly intriguing moment in his early work. While Platonov criticism has noted the common binary opposition between

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303 Ibid., I–1:171.
consciousness and material in Platonov’s work from this period, as well as the categories of sensuality and vision as means to articulate them, “Thirst of a Beggar” provides perhaps the most concise explication of both themes. Particularly striking in this regard is the detached perspective of the author himself. Perezhitok’s laconic sublime statement at the conclusion is reminiscent of the sublime utterances of 18th century neoclassical tragedy. The tragedy in this case, however, is a dual one. The failure of this distant future of communist society is not only a result of the sublime resistance of its protagonist. It is also due to its own failure to accommodate difference, as can be detected in the absence of love in the society of Perezhitok’s vision. The attempt to eliminate—and not accommodate—the elemental sublime, i.e. the second mode of knowledge from “On Love”, prevents the “complete victory” of science. The consequences—as can be inferred from the anecdote from Platonov’s 1921 notebook discussed earlier—are clear: begin again, and do so in accordance with the Apollonian injunction of Delphi: know thyself (“понять себя”).

4.4 Dzhan

In a 1935 letter to his wife Maria, Platonov recalls how a section of Dzhan moved an acquaintance to tears:

Вчера часа в четыре зашел Келлер, затем почему-то Божинский. Келлер просил почитать из новой вещи. Я прочел один кусок, Келлер заплакал, и я сам увидел, что пишу правильно. Было странно видеть, как у него молча из-под очков шли слезы. Я не видел никогда, чтоб он плакал, не помню.\textsuperscript{304}

\textsuperscript{304} Платонов, Архив А.П. Платонова, 524.
Judging from another letter, written approximately eight days after the first, Maria took Platonov's anecdote to mean that *Dzhan* (which she probably had not read in full), was a “dark work” (мрачная вещь). Somewhat indignantly, Platonov explains to her not only that she had misunderstood his anecdote, but his understanding of art as well:

Ты спрашиваешь, что делают мои герои – «Лида и пр.». Лиды у меня нет. Ты путаешь. Есть Вера, которая умерла от родов, когда Н.И. Чагатаев был в Сары-Камыше. Вещь не мрачная. Келлер плакал не от этого, а оттого, что вещь — человечная, что в ней совершается, действия и страсти, присущие настоящим мужественным и чистым людям. Плачут не всегда от того, что печально, а оттого, что прекрасно, — искусство как раз в этом. Слезы может вызвать и халтурщик, а волнение, содрогание — только художник.305

While hacks might be capable of bringing tears to the eyes of their readers, Platonov argues, only true artists are capable of shaking their readers to their very core.306 This insistence on the physiological response of the reader, that the aesthetic act leave its (material) trace on the physical body might at first seem to tie Platonov's understanding of art with that of Shklovsky's Formalist conception of ostranenie. However, Platonov's description of his work exceeds the boundaries of Shklovsky's formulation. Platonov emphasizes the shared sense of humanity (вещь – человечная) that catalyzes the physical response of the reader. The actions and passions of Platonov's narrative are to be held as exemplary (действия и страсти, присущие настоящим мужественным и чистым людям), as refined moral qualities, whose aesthetic force seizes the reader. It is precisely this moral dimension of Platonov’s *Dzhan*, its ability to force its readers (and, as we shall see, its characters) to feel and contemplate the Human that marks it as sublime.

305 Ibid., 529.
306 This understanding of the aesthetic act also find its place in Platonov’s notebooks from his first trip to Turkmenistan (No. 10, 1934): “The art of the past used to give pain to society (Shakespeare). Then time passed, the pain lessened (lit. dried up засыхала), and the art was recognized as a classical.
Like “Thirst of a Beggar,” Platonov’s Dzhan employs a frame narrative. Set in the imperial center of Soviet power, Moscow, the reader is first introduced to the main male protagonist, Nazar Chagataev, who is described as mentally transcending his physical location to survey the land around him:

Во двор Московского экономического института вышел молодой нерусский человек Назар Чагатаев. Он с удивлением осмотрелся кругом и опомнился от минувшего долгого времени. Здесь, по этому двору, он ходил несколько лет, и здесь прошла его юность, но он не жалеет о ней — он взошел теперь высоко, на гору своего ума, откуда виднее весь этот летний мир, нагретый вечерним отшумевшим солнцем.307

This evocation of the “mountain sublime” that takes place in the first paragraph of the novella speaks to Chagataev’s ability to visually penetrate his natural surroundings.308 The fact that Chagataev can achieve such a sublime position without external motivation also speaks to his potential to mature. Having completed his Soviet education, Chagataev is about to make the transition from spontaneity to consciousness that marks his new status as a Soviet subject; later in the same passage this new status is referred to as an awakening. The completion of this process is emphasized by the liminal temporal marker of the passage; the description takes place at the threshold of day and night, repeating the binary between life and art from his early article “On Art”.

For Platonov, night is a time for reflection, a time when labor ceases and the power of the mind exceeds that of the body, which is in need of physical rest. It is therefore a time that attests to the sublimity of the mind, and the sense of the mind’s dissatisfaction with the world, with the

307 Платонов, Собрание, 113.
308 Of additional importance is the fact that Nazar’s name means “vision,” linking him with the “unblinking eye” of Platonov’s description of science in ‘On Love’.
pain that is caused by the fact that consciousness (unlike feeling) has yet to find its adequate equivalent in the material world. This sense of dissatisfaction is the prism through which Chagataev and the reader perceive the surrounding courtyard:

This surprisingly elegiac setting would seem to be at odds with Chagataev’s triumphant ascension to maturity. A microcosm of the world of the text at large, this enclosed “landscape” is hardly the example of Soviet triumph one might expect. Instead, these abandoned artifacts serve as markers of memory and the general evolution of life from inorganic nature to the machine of industrialization. United via Chagataev’s gaze, this collection of objects serves as an impetus for reflection, leading Chagataev—himself a liminal figure of Russian and Turkmen descent—to contemplate his past and future on a threshold that is both spatial (outside, but enclosed) and temporal (day and night).

In the next major scene of the novel, Chagataev attends a party with his fellow graduates from the Economics Institute. The party is described as taking place in a garden slightly beyond the scene mentioned in the opening passage. Despite the general merriment surrounding him,

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309 Платонов, Собрание, 113.
310 The scene is described as a kind of restrained Stalinist orgy: Общее веселье все более увеличивалось. Студенты — экономисты, плановики и инженеры — брали со столов цветы, рвали траву в саду и делали из них своим подругам подарки или прямо посыпали им растения на их густые волосы. Затем появилось конфетти, и оно тоже пошло в дело удовольствия (…) Другие женщины, оставшиеся за столом, тоже были
Chagataev is unable to enjoy the festivities, and finds himself drawn to thoughts about the land of his birth:

Скрипка музыканта иногда замирала, как удаленный, слабеющий голос. Чагатаеву казалось, что это плачет человек за горизонтом, — может быть, в той, никому незнакомой стране, где он когда-то родился, где теперь живет или умерла его мать.
— Гюльчатай! — сказал он вслух.
— Что такое? — спросила его соседка, технолог.
— Ничего не значит, — объяснил Чагатаев. — Гюльчатай — моя мать, горный цветок. Людей называют, когда они маленькие и похожи на все хорошее...

This moment of memory occurs at another threshold, when the sound of music hovers on the border of audibility. Chagataev’s memory thus undercuts the potential Edenic qualities of the party’s chronotope; memory is impossible in Eden, which is preconditioned on a lack of knowledge. The joy experienced by the majority of the guests at the party, then, is at least partially a self-centered Apollonian illusion, one to which Chagataev himself is either not susceptible to, or is perhaps incapable of feeling. He alone notices that one of the other attendees, a chemistry student named Vera, is similarly unhappy:

Лишь одна между ними была без цветов и конфетти на голове; к ней никто не склонялся с шутливыми словами; и она жалко улыбалась, чтобы показать, что принимает участие в общем празднике и ей здесь приятно и весело. Глаза же ее были грустны и терпеливы, как у большого рабочего животного. Иногда она чутко глядела по сторонам и, убедившись, что никому не нужна, быстро собирала со стульев соседей упавшие цветы и красочные бумажки и прятала их незаметно. Чагатаев изредка видел ее действия, но понять не мог (...)
Чагатаев сейчас же возвратился туда: он хотел немедленно опрокинуть столы, повалить деревья и прекратить это наслаждение, над которым капают жалкие слезы, но женщина была теперь счастлива, смеющаяся, с

311 Платонов, Собрание, 114–115.
Chagataev’s desire to destroy the festivities and their natural surroundings in revenge for their ignorance of Vera’s sorrow has clear echoes in Platonov’s earlier work, as well as a 1934 article he composed while working on Dzhan.\footnote{313} Here it is an indication of revolutionary enthusiasm, of an unwillingness to accept pleasure in others if even another individual is suffering. The fact that Chagataev’s erotic desire derives from a sublimation of this enthusiasm differentiates him from the other naïve party guests. Unlike his Russian colleagues, who have been whipped into what is—for them—a kind of Dionysian frenzy by the party and its attendant beauty, Chagataev’s desire for Vera is motivated by an alleged concern for her happiness, out of a moral desire that is more amicable to the sublime.

This potential moral dimension of Chagataev’s desire is attested to by his professed indifference to her “objective” physical beauty:

Чагатаев изредка всматривался в нее и удивлялся, почему она кажется всем нехорошей, когда даже скромное молчание ее напоминает безмолвие травы, верность привычного друга. Ведь это только издали можно ненавидеть ее, отрицать или быть вообще равнодушным к человеку. Но когда Чагатаев видел теперь вблизи морщины утомления на

\footnote{312 Ibid., 116.}
ее щеках, выражение лица, прячущего ее желания, глаза, хранимые веками, опухшие губы — все таинственное воодушевление этой женщины, скрытое в ее живом веществе, все доброе и сильное создание ее тела, то он робел от нежности к ней и не мог бы ничего сделать против нее, и ему даже стыдно было думать о том, красива она или нет.314

In this passage Platonov attempts to add extra authenticity to Chagataev’s thoughts by locating them in a hybrid voice zone between the narrator and Chagataev himself. Serving as a counterpoint to the “ascension of the mind” here the intimacy of physical proximity leads to affection and a sense of personal responsibility (expressed here as shame), and the potential for love.

The possibility of love—which for Platonov is understood as the transformation of purely erotic desire into a more universal concept as the material counterpart of thought—is undermined in a following scene, in which Chagataev accompanies Vera home after the party. Much like the courtyard scene, Vera’s apartment is described as empty; the only object that catches Chagataev’s eye is a diptych hanging over Vera’s bed, which repeats the ambivalent message of the courtyard:

Вера сняла летний плащ, и Чагатаев заметил, что она полнее, чем кажется. Затем Вера стала рыться в своих хозяйственных закоулках, чтобы покормить гостя, а Чагатаев засмотрелся на старинную двойную картину, висевшую над кроватью этой девушки. Картина изображала мечту, когда земля считалась плоской, а небо — близким. Там некий большой человек встал на землю, пробил головой отверстие в небесном куполе и высунулся до плеч по ту сторону неба, в странную бесконечность того времени, и загляделся туда. И он настолько долго глядел в неизвестное, чужое пространство, что забыл про свое остальное тело, оставшееся ниже обычного неба. На другой половине картины изображался тот же вид, но в другом положении. Туловище человека истомилось, похудело и, наверно, умерло, а отсохшая голова скатилась на тот свет — по наружной поверхности неба, похожего на жестяной таз, —

314 Платонов, Собрание, 117.
голова искателя новой бесконечности, где действительно нет конца и откуда нет возвращения на скудное, плоское место земли. Но Чагатаеву, как больному, ничто теперь стало немило и неинтересно.\(^{315}\)

This inscription above Vera’s bed can be seen as a recasting of the Isis inscription from Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, and—much like the inscription—has been attributed to a book on the natural sciences.\(^{316}\) It is both a challenge and a warning. In the first half of the diptych, the hero manages to suspend himself between the physical and ethereal worlds; the second seems to indicate that any such attempt will necessitate the physical death of the body, and that the world and nature shall become forgotten as a result. The diptych thus describes two versions of immortality, much as the essay “On Love” considered two histories of the discovery of fire.\(^{317}\) In the first, the relationship between mind (the heavens) and body (the earth) can be successfully mediated, thus preserving their mutual interaction and enrichment through communication. The second seems to profess alterity and the abjection of the material world; similar to the contents of the garbage bin and the rusted iron wheel of the courtyard, the natural world is destined to become the waste of culture.

Situating Chagataev within the semantic space of the diptych is a difficult task. On the one hand, it is tempting to place Chagataev in the position of the giant from the second half of the diptych. After all, he is about to leave Moscow behind, just as he had left his homeland behind earlier as a child. Moreover, as the last line from the passage above indicates, his erotic desire for Vera (“Чагатаеву, как больному, ничто теперь стало немило и неинтересно.”) has

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\(^{315}\) Ibid., 118.

\(^{316}\) Bodin, “The Promised Land—desired and Lost. An Analysis of Andrej Platonov’s Short Story ‘Džan.’”

\(^{317}\) The comparison goes even further. Only the first half of the painting has a historical prototype (as far as we know). The second is seems to be entirely Platonov’s own literary invention.
the same obsessive characteristics as the giant’s desire for the heavens. This dangerous dimension of Chagataev’s erotic desire would seem to indicate to the reader that Chagataev actually is not “properly” in love with Vera, but is merely attracted by her body as an empty abstraction. This premonition is justified when Chagataev, after attempting to seduce Vera, is shocked to discover that the reason for Vera’s “plumpness” mentioned above is due to the fact that she is pregnant. Chagataev had naively believed that physical proximity caused love, yet this very proximity made him oblivious to the fact that Vera too might have her own history, an oversight made all the more egregious by the fact that Vera’s, unlike Chagataev’s memories of his homeland, is marked on her physical body.

After Vera explains to Chagataev that she is pregnant and that her husband had recently died, Chagataev agrees to marry Vera and be a father to her child. After the marriage ceremony, however, Vera refuses to consummate their marriage, something that Chagataev finds to be physically unbearable:

Она словно боялась погубить в страсти свое бедное утешение, которое явились внезапно и странно; или она просто хитрила, расчетливо и разумно, желая иметь в своем муже неостывающую теплоту, чтобы самой согреваться в ней долго и надежно. Однако Чагатаев не мог вынести своего чувства к Вере на одной духовной и бесчеловечной привязанности, и он вскоре заплакал над нею, когда она лежала на кровати, по виду беспомощная, но улыбающаяся и непобедимая.

Чагатаев не умел терпеть силу своей жизни, он знал ее невинность и доброту, поэтому его оскорбляла чужая недоступность, и он терял память и соображение.318

This scene presents itself as a kind of inversion of the sublime moment from the opening of the novel. If the “mountain of Chagataev’s mind” speaks to the sublimity of his capacity for

318 Платонов, Собрание, 119–120.
knowledge, then here it is the physicality of his own body—expressed as sexual desire—overwhelms him.

Vera’s concerns lie elsewhere, as is revealed just before Chagataev’s departure for his assignment to his homeland, when Vera asks Chagataev to visit some acquaintances. The narrator foreshadows this visit ominously, claiming that it might have the power to destroy Chagataev’s love for Vera. This warning proves prophetic; at the apartment Vera introduces Chagataev to Ksenia, her daughter by a previous husband. In a plot twist that is only possible in Platonov’s bizarre literary world, Chagataev immediately falls in love with her. Even more strangely, Vera explicitly approves of this; it was her main motivation in not consummating her marriage with Chagataev. This quasi-incestuous act by Vera, however problematic for the reader, is also an act of maternal selflessness, made out of concern for the material survival of her own daughter. Such an act takes place because of pure necessity.

Vera’s compelled sacrifice for her daughter raises an important question central to the novella: who bears responsibility for the creation of such a world in which such choices are forced upon people? One possible answer is indicated at the very end of the second chapter, which marks the end of the frame narrative. In what is to prove to be their final conversation, Chagataev urges Vera to give birth to her child as quickly as possible, so that he might partake in the future happiness of the world. Vera doubts Chagataev’s faith, and fears that giving birth to her child will result in nothing more than eternal suffering:

— Ничего, — сказал Чагатаев и погладил Вере ее большой живот, где лежал ребенок, житель будущего счастья.
— Рожай его скорее, он будет рад.
— А может, нет, — сомневалась Вера. — Может, он будет вечный страдалец.
— Мы больше не допустим несчастья, — ответил Чагатаев.
— Кто такие вы?

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Chagataev is reluctant to name precisely who his comrades are in his mission to eliminate unhappiness. However, there is little doubt as to who they are: Soviet society in general, and—as the restored text clearly demonstrates—Stalin in particular.

Yet it also seems that here Platonov is implicitly questioning the capability of Stalin to take care of his citizens, and challenges the idea of “utopia realized” that was an undercurrent of Stalinist ideology. The shame and embarrassment Chagataev experiences—“as if his secret thought was not good”—implies a common goal with this ideology, not complete identification. Despite its role as the imperial center for the framed exotic narrative, the Moscow of Platonov’s *Dzhan* is far from the Edenic paradise many of its inhabitants apparently take it for. In fact, the very belief in this paradise that blinds the inhabitants of the garden party from realizing that there is still work to be done. The evidence of this (the morose Chagataev and unhappy Vera) is right before their very eyes, should they choose to see it. The fact that it is only the liminal vision of Chagataev that is capable of discerning unhappiness in the midst of happiness speaks volumes as to the blindness (and limited scope of) the imperial center. For all the generosity the Soviet state of the novel has shown Chagataev in taking him in from the desert and educating him, it is also clear that the Soviet state is dependent on him in a crucial way, as he provides an excess of ethical vision that society seems to lack.320

This is not to say that Chagataev sees everything perfectly. At first unable to perceive the moral and ethical concerns of Vera, Chagataev too is shown to be susceptible to the same kind of

319 Ibid., 127.
ethical blindness. By convincing himself with the false belief that mere proximity leads to love, he assumes Vera will have sex with him simply because he is available. Even his “honorable” decision to marry her (to justify their sexual relationship in the eyes of society) renders him blind to the fact that at no point did he even consider that Vera might have her own painful past to deal with. This blindness on the part of Chagataev can be seen as a reiteration of Soviet blindness on the interpersonal level.

Vera’s actions are perhaps the most justified from Platonov’s point of view, although they are also the least explained. Even though she hides her pregnancy from Chagataev, she apparently acts in concert with her true desires when she decides to marry him. Her concern for her daughter’s well-being (at the risk of losing Chagataev’s affections for herself) may strike the contemporary reader as bizarre, but it demonstrates the lengths to which she feels compelled to go to care for her child out of necessity, and clearly echoes earlier Platonov texts on motherhood. At this point of the narrative, Vera is the only character who acts purely in the interest of another person. This moral maturity that is born out of necessity is also described as the result of Vera’s own suffering and potential guilt, which is largely centered on her inability to provide for her daughter. If Vera has any personal flaw that is revealed in the text, it is that

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321 Vera’s sacrifice for her daughter marks yet another liminal space in the novel that is defined by a boundary, the incest taboo. Although many critics have pointed out the role of incest and miscegenation in the novel, few have attempted to trace its roots back to Platonov’s earlier work. In this case, Vera’s actions (and Vera’s presence in the novella as a whole) bear an uncanny resemblance to Platonov’s critique of Weininger in the article “Dusha Mira” (1921). In it, Platonov takes issue with Weininger’s one-sided misogyny. The problem for Platonov, as this parallel with Dzhan makes clear, is that Weininger is too generous to men, whose faults can be traced throughout Platonov’s early work. Platonov claims that Weininger had neglected to realize the fallability of men. Citing Weininger’s claim that women are nothing more than “match-makers”, Platonov retorts: “He [Weininger] forgets that if women are svodnitsy, then men are snokhachi [lit. men who sleep with their daughter-in-laws]”. This family drama is reproduced in Dzhan when Vera makes a match between Chagataev and Ksenia. The underlying logic is (as is nearly always the case for Platonov) one of universalism: either all are saved, or all are culpable.

322 The reader knows nothing about Vera’s second (deceased) husband. Her first (Ksenia’s father) has apparently abandoned her and her daughter. When she meets Chagataev, Ksenia talks about how he is working on bridges in the Far East, and when asked if her father loves her, Ksenia replies, “No. He loves strangers. He doesn’t want to
she herself lacks faith, and is unable to see the potential for a happy future for herself. After forcing Chagataev to admit that he has fallen in love with Ksenia, Vera is devastated, even though she arranged the meeting herself and anticipated the result. When Chagataev witnesses her suffering, he embraces her “so as to comfort her, if only with his own warmth, because imaginary suffering is the most inconsolable of all sufferings and does not yield to words.” Vera’s suffering is sublime (i.e. it is the most inconsolable of all, it exceeds the scale of all suffering) as her willingness to sacrifice herself attests.

When Chagataev departs Moscow for his homeland, then, his mission is a dual one: to both save his people, the Dzhan, from physical annihilation in the deserts of Uzbekistan, and to seek out a solution to the sublime riddle contained within Vera’s (i.e. faith’s) sublime act encapsulated in the images hanging over her bed. The beginnings of this solution can be found in an early scene from this section, when Chagataev, leaves his train in the middle of the night and ventures out into the steppe, eventually arriving at a marsh teeming with wildlife:

когда Чагатаев вошел в него, то сразу закричали, полетели и заерзали на месте все здешние жители. В камышах было тепло. Животные и птицы не все исчезли от страха перед человеком, некоторые, судя по звукам и голосам, остались, где были. Они испугались настолько, что, ожидая гибели, спешили поскорее размножиться и наслаждаться. Чагатаев знал эти звуки издавна и теперь, слушая томительные слабые голоса из теплой травы, сочувствовал всей бедной жизни, не сдающей своей последней радости.323

Here sexual activity is described as a natural response to the fear of death, but—unlike other moments in Platonov’s work where sex is viewed with disapproval—it is viewed by Chagataev

love me and Mama”. Given Vera’s unusual marital history, it might be tempting to view her as a poor judge of character. The possibility also exists that Vera lies about her own past. As is the case throughout the text, Platonov is ambiguous, we never find out Vera’s true biography, nor do we discover why her daughter lives with her paternal grandmother instead of her mother.

323 Платонов, Собрание, 129–130.
with compassion, undoubtedly because of his own difficulties in overcoming his sexual urges within the Moscow portion of the novel. At the same time, however, it is important to note that an equally important component of this sympathy is a lack of Platonovian consciousness in the object of pity; the animals in the passage above may instinctually copulate out of fear, but they do so for no reason. Chagataev is not a predator looking to consume them out of necessity, but rather a passive spectator.

This connection between sexual activity and fear is repeated later on in the novel, this time in the context of Chagataev’s relationship to Vera and Ksenia. Exhausted by his travel across an ancient, dried-up seabed, Chagataev collapses in the middle of the day, overcome with emotion:

Сердце его сразу заболело, и он потерял терпение и силу бороться с ним; он заплакал по Ксене, стыдясь своего чувства и отрекаясь от него. Он видел ее сейчас близкой в уме и в воспоминании; она улыбалась ему жалкой улыбкой маленькой первоначальной женщины, которая может любить только в душе, но обниматься не хочет и боится поцелуев как увечья. Вера сидела вдали и шила детское белье, сокращая разлуку с мужем и уже почти равнодушная к нему, потому что внутри ее шевелился и мутился другой, еще более любимый и беспомощный человек. Она ждала его, желала увидеть его лицо и боялась расстаться с ним. Но ее утешало, что еще долгие годы она будет целовать и обнимать его, когда захочет, пока он не вырастет и не скажет ей: «Будет тебе, мама, приставать ко мне, ты мне надоела!»

Unlike the preceding passage, however, here the central concern is not sex as such, but the incomplete evolution of sex into love. The shame Chagataev experiences in the middle of the noonday sun is not, it could be argued, attached to his sexual desire for Ksenya, but rather out of anxiety that his desire for her is only due to predatory aggression, of his own fear of death. The comparison of Ksenya to the “original woman” reads as a reference to a mythological pre-

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324 Ibid., 135.
lapsarian Eve (who knew neither shame nor the necessity of sex), while the depiction of Vera is one that takes place after the fall, in which love becomes constricted, limited only to a temporary bond on a weaker being that is destined to be broken. If the first is predicated on a rejection of physical affection, the latter is predicated on a notion of spiritual impossibility. As both lover and husband, then, Chagataev feels shame and responsibility for his anticipated violence against Ksenya, and for confirming to Vera the mistaken idea that love is impossible, that it can only be founded on the domination of a weaker person.

This unresolved tension between the material and the spiritual is clearly the projection of Chagataev’s own mind. It is important to note, however, the contrasts between the images presented and Chagataev’s actual conception and childhood. Chagataev was not conceived as the result of a violent assault of innocence. His mother, a married woman at the time, feels compelled by the rule of exchange to offer her body in return for a Russian soldier’s offering of soup, an act that is may be incomprehensible to the modern reader, but one that is nonetheless motivated by ethical concern for Chagataev’s biological father.³²⁵ Chagataev’s departure from his mother to Moscow was not, as it is presented above, a result of his own desire for independence. What actually occurs is entirely the opposite: Chagataev’s mother forces him to leave out of pure physical necessity, if he had continued to live with her he would have surely died from starvation.

There is thus a connection between the mythological imaginary and the material historical in Chagataev’s return to his homeland. Both modes of memory are present in

³²⁵ “Но женщине совестно было в ответ на угощение отвергать человека: она молчала и не сопротивлялась. Она думала, чем отблагодарить русского, и не было у нее ничего, кроме того, что выросло от природы. И солдат Чагатаев получил целую безмолвную женщину в обмен на еду в котелке...”(122-123) This passage, significantly, takes place immediately after the description of Chagataev’s sexual frustration.
Chagataev, and both require justice and salvific action. To view this journey as one that goes back in time, however, is true only to a certain point. Although there is a tendency in most critical analyses of *Dzhan* to view Chagataev’s nation as a 20th century equivalent of the “noble savages”, such a characterization is grossly inaccurate. This becomes entirely clear when Chagataev first describes the Dzhan nation to a Party secretary when he receives his mission:

— Говорила. Беглецы и сироты отовсюду и старые, изнемогшие рабы, которых прогнали. Потом были женщины, изменившие мужьям и пропавшие туда от страха, приходили навсегда девушки, полюбившие тех, кто вдруг умер, а они не захотели никого другого в мужья. И еще там жили люди, не знающие Бога, насмешники над миром, преступники... Но я не помню всех — я был маленькый.

Here the Dzhan are described not as those who are untouched by the enlightened ideas of civilization, but rather as the real historical victims of the violence of an unjust society. Elsewhere shown as containing individuals from a wide variety of ethnicities (including Russian), the Dzhan’s suffering is due not to the indifferent cruelty of nature, but the active cruelty of other people. In one of the more moving and woefully underexamined passages in the novel from Chagataev’s childhood, the Dzhan—having been pushed past the breaking point by constant attempts to enslave and murder them—enter the gates of Khiva in an attempt to author their own deaths (i.e. in order to force the authorities to kill them now, rather than prolong their suffering). In a joyful, carnivalesque manner, they descend upon the bazaar in Khiva, and eat their fill. The shocked soldiers and merchants of the Khiva bazaar are either unable or unwilling to prevent their advance, but they likewise are incapable of killing “those who do not fear death”.

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326 Livers, for example, refers to the Dzhan as “virginal” and “prehistoric”. Livers, *Constructing the Stalinist Body*, 33–36.

This, much more so than any other passage in the novel, is a “return of the repressed” in the broadest, social sense. In confronting those political and commercial forces responsible for their material poverty, the Dzhan respond with joy and submission, performing as if they really are those who deserve to die. Having assumed such an order is “natural”, the Dzhan themselves experience disappointment when they fail to meet their deaths. A young Nazar complains to his mother:

— Мы с тобою целы, — согласился Назар. — Знаешь что, мама, мы будем жить — ничего не думать, нарочно нас нет.
— Хорошо тем, кто умер внутри своей матери, — сказала Гюльчатай.
— У тебя в животе? — спросил Назар. — А почему ты меня там не оставила? Я бы умер, и меня сейчас не было, а ты ела и жила и думала про меня: нарочно я живой.

Гюльчатай посмотрела тогда на сына: счастье и жалость прошли по ее лицу.328

It is tempting to attribute this moment of dialogue as a reframing of the “wisdom of Silenus” endorsed by Schopenhauer and discussed in Nietzsche’s Birth of Tragedy: “It is best not to be born at all; and next to that, it is better to die than to live; and this is confirmed even by divine testimony.”329 Yet the sublimity of this statement, addressed to a prosperous king in search of knowledge, is undermined by its context.330 Instead, Platonov seems to be drawing on two biblical sources here, placing the words of a suffering Job in the mouth of a small child—“Why did you bring me forth from the womb? Would that I had died before any eye had seen me, and

328 Ibid., 140–141.
329 Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner, 54.
330 In Nietzsche’s version, the words are uttered to Midas by Silenus.
were as though I had not been, carried from the womb to the grave,” treating Giulchatay’s preceding statement as a condensed version of the opening of Ecclesiastes 4.\textsuperscript{331}

Again I saw all the oppressions that are practiced under the sun. Look, the tears of the oppressed—with no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power—with no one to comfort them. And I thought the dead, who have already died, more fortunate than the living, who are still alive; but better than both is the one who has not yet been, and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.\textsuperscript{332}

In this context, Giulchatay’s happiness can be read as the realization of the wisdom her son has attained, her pity, an expression of compassion as she knows herself the burden such wisdom brings.

Love, more than any other quality, defines the Dzhan nation as a whole. Giulchatay later drives her son away to go to Moscow out of love, in order to preserve his life. The particular nature of that love, however, is fully revealed only when Chagataev, having discovered the Dzhan languishing in a marsh, moves among them and overhears the nighttime conversations of his people. One of these takes place between a husband and wife:

В соседнем травяном жилище муж говорил с женой; он хотел, чтобы у них родился ребенок — может, он сей час зачатся. Но жена отвечала: нет, в нас с тобой слабость одна, мы десять лет его зачинаем, а он не начинается во мне, и я всегда пустая, как мертвая... (…) Больше нечего, — соглашалась жена, — нету никакого добра у нас с тобой, я все думала- передумала и вижу, что люблю тебя... Я тоже тебя, — говорил муж, — иначе не проживешь... Дешевле жены ничего нету, — ответила жена. — При нашей бедности, кроме моего тела, какое у тебя добро? Добра не хватает, — согласился муж, — спасибо хоть жена рожается и вырастает сама, нарочно ее не сделаешь: у тебя есть груди, живот, губы, глаза твои глядят, много всего, я думаю о тебе, а ты обо мне, и время идет... (…) — Мы с тобой плохое добро, — проговорила жена, — ты худой, слабосильный, а у меня груди засыхают, кости внутри болят... Я

\textsuperscript{331} Job 10:18-19
\textsuperscript{332} Ecclesiastes 4:1-3
A clear echo of the earlier scene in which Chagataev comes upon the animals in the reeds, sexual activity is divorced from the fear of death and becomes something entirely different. As love, the relationship of husband and wife provides each partner with the consolation required to continue living. Consciousness, understood not as the capacity for thought but as the capacity to be aware of the material and spiritual existence of another person—someone to think about and someone to think (i.e. remember) you—is accompanied with the intimacy of a physical embrace. Capable of withstanding both material deprivation and the weakening of consciousness that accompanies it, the love described here is resistant, an irreducible remainder and memorial of what humanity is capable of. Shown here in miniature, love will return as the central motivating force as Chagataev undergoes two moments of the sublime as he attempts to save the Dzhan.

As Chagataev struggles through the desert with his people, he undergoes a sublime experience in which all of the memories of his life flash before his eyes and overwhelm his conscious mind. What makes the sublime possible in this situation is both Chagataev’s weakened physical state, and the particular characteristics of his natural surroundings:

Платонов, Собрание, 152.
Here physical exhaustion coupled with the inability to differentiate either space or time in the monotonous, repetitive chronotope of the desert announce the annihilation of the material. Chagataev’s position here lacks a vantage point, a location from which he could locate his own body. His consciousness, which had grown accustomed to the responding tension from the material world, increases its momentum to the breaking point in a material vacuum in which neither tears nor screams are possible. This overflowing of consciousness soon shifts to his perception of the present, and it is only the appearance of an indistinguishable object that saves him from oblivion:

While it remains unclear what the object Chagataev saw actually is, the three possibilities are nonetheless intriguing, as they can be viewed variously as modes of transport from different historical eras: an instinctual animal, an immobile but man-made vehicle, or a man-made vehicle capable of its own “life,” its own movement.

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334 Ibid., 174.
335 Ibid.
In the passages immediately following, a second experience of the sublime occurs in which Chagataev sacrifices his own body in order to provide sustenance to his starving people. Like the prophet of Pushkin’s poem, Chagataev’s body is pierced and transfigured. Like Christ, this transfiguration provides sustenance for others. Dying of hunger himself, Chagataev allows the predatory birds of the desert to eat as his flesh in order to draw them close, kill them, and supply a meager meal for the Dzhan. This added dimension of personal flesh transfigured into flesh for all demonstrates the importance of the material to Platonov’s understanding of the sublime. Unlike the Pushkinian prototype, here words are not enough:

Но тоска их может превратиться в радость, если каждый получит щи...
Here the physical sensation of pain is presented as the anticipation of a resolution of an imbalance. The importance of sensation in order to feel the presence of this lack of equilibrium is reminiscent of Lunacharsky’s aesthetics, but also of the sublime in general, in the “negative pleasure” contained in the Kantian sublime. But what is equally present is a kind of sublime humility; although here Chagataev is described as being in possession of the knowledge of illusory suffering, he is equally cognizant that the potential to realize the re-establishment of equilibrium is not his alone, but rather in all people, up to and including the child Aidym.

The kenotic dimension of Chagataev’s humility and selflessness make it possible for him to sacrifice his own body for the greater good, that is, to have it literally ripped asunder by the forces of nature. But it is the same selflessness, paradoxically, that drives Chagataev’s instinct for self-preservation, as seen when Chagataev manages to kill the eagles consuming his flesh one final time:

Чагатаев попытался подняться для лучшего прицела, все истощенные кости его скелета заскрипели, так же как у людей его народа. Он прислушался, и ему жалко стало своего тела и своих костей — их собрала ему некогда мать из бедности своей плоти, — не из любви и страсти, не из наслаждения, а из самой житейской необходимости. Он почувствовал себя, как чужое добро, как последнее имущество неимущих, которое хотят расточить напрасно, и пришел в наибольшую жизненную ярость.

Feeling pity for his own body as well as for the wild creatures consuming him, Chagataev draws on a final reserve of strength made possible by the realization that his body is not his own. Described via negation and paradox—Chagataev was born not out of passion or pleasure, and feels as if he is the last possession of those who have nothing—his insistence to persevere is built purely on the ethical recognition of material necessity. The possibility of the further dissolution

338 Ibid., 191.
of his own body, which must be consider a memorial to that material necessity, leads to the emotive response of righteous fury.\textsuperscript{339}

Marked equally by intense physical violence and rich mythological allusions, the Central Asian passages of \textit{Dzhan} contain the most moving, powerful, and optimistic depiction of Platonov’s understanding of the human condition via the aesthetics of the chiasmic sublime. But perhaps what is most striking about the violence that predominates Chagataev’s experiences is the extraordinary degree of compassion, understanding, and respect for nature that accompanies his near-crucifixion.\textsuperscript{340} This knowledge and newfound understanding of responsibility will return with Chagataev to Moscow.

The concluding chapter of \textit{Dzhan} takes place in Moscow, and thus completes the chiasmic structure of Chagataev’s journey from Moscow to his homeland, and from his homeland back to Moscow. His trajectory, then, does not neatly fit into the classic 19th century, Orientalist narrative of a triumphant return to the center from the periphery. Chagataev is returning not to his home, but his “second home”. In doing so, he retraces his steps as a child when he first arrived in the Soviet Union, making his arrival as much a repetition as a return. This is further emphasized by the presence of Aidym, who Chagataev takes with him to Moscow and whose age is nearly identical to Chagataev’s when he first comes to the Soviet Union. Aidym is welcomed to Moscow, but on a more personal level than Chagataev, who, in the

\textsuperscript{339} This process is remarkably similar to Ivanov’s notion of “sublime ascent” in the previous chapter.

\textsuperscript{340} Although Chagataev suffers repeated vicious attacks from the birds of the desert, he repeatedly sympathizes with them: “Орлица опять улетела живой и несчастной. Если в первый раз он убил ее мужа, то кого он застрелил во второй раз? Наверно, второго ее мужа... Нет, у птиц так не бывает, значит — друга или родственника ее мужа, может быть — его брата, которого она позвала себе на помощь для общего мщения. Но и брат ее мужа погиб,— за кем же она полетела теперь?.. Если там — за горизонтом или в далеких небесах — у нее никого не найдется для боевой помощи, то все равно она прилетит одна. Чагатаев был убежден в этом; он знал прямые, нестерпимые чувства диких животных и птиц. Они не могут плакать, чтобы в слезах и в истощении сердца находить себе утешение и прощение врагу. Они действуют, желая утомить свое страдание в борьбе, внутри мертвого тела врага или в собственной гибели.” Платонов, \textit{Собрание}, 186–187.
opening of the novel, mentioned only Stalin and his teacher at the orphanage he lived in as surrogate parents. The conclusion of the novel, however, indicates that Aidym will be raised by Chagataev and Ksenia, who greets both of the travelers upon their arrival to Moscow. In other words, in Aidym’s undertaking of the voyage from periphery to center, her family will not be limited to the abstract and ideological space of Stalin and Soviet institutions, but by intimate personal relationships with her adoptive parents. This process of increasing concretization (i.e. materialization)—Aidym’s future life promises to be more embodied than Chagataev’s—is, interestingly enough, foreshadowed much earlier on in Dzhan, when Chagataev notices a local portrait of Stalin on his way to find the Dzhan:

Портрет, вероятно, мало походил на того, кого он изображал, но его рисовала, может быть, детская пионерская рука и верное чувство: Сталин походил на старику, на доброго отца всех безродных людей на земле; однако художник, не думая, старался сделать лицо Сталина похожим и на себя, чтобы видно было, что он теперь живет не один на свете и у него есть отцовство и родство, — поэтому искусство становилось сильнее неумелости.341

The aesthetics implied in the evaluation of the portrait above, in which the power of the idea succeeds over—and perhaps because of—the lack of technique and form, clearly is closer to the sublime than the beautiful. Whereas in the portrait described above the idea of newfound kinship can only be expressed in the artistic idea of Soviet authority, by the end of Dzhan the new family of Nazar, Ksenia, and Aidym has become the material resolution of that idea.

This physical change is alluded to in the dinner scene of the concluding chapter, which echoes the earlier passages in which the starving Dzhan survive their ordeal thanks to Chagataev’s bodily sacrifice. When Chagataev and Aidym arrive at Ksenia’s home for dinner,

341 Ibid., 128.
Ksenia experiences something akin to a “hysteric” episode: she loses control over the movements of her body, spills the modest wine she had procured and hides in the bathroom “crying from tormenting, pitiful, shame.” Upon her return to the room, she finds herself physically unable to articulate her desire:

Ксеня вернулась с темными кругами под глазами и просила все же скушать, что она купила и настряпала; больше она ничего не знала, что говорить. Она не могла объяснить, почему ей совестно иногда быть живой и грустно чувствовать себя женщиной, человеком, желать счастья и удовольствия, — даже будучи одна, она от этого сознания закрывала себе лицо руками и краснела под ладонями.  

The meal being shared and the wine spilled connect this scene with the religious subtext of the novel, i.e. a kind of communion of Chagataev’s physical sacrifice, but also Chagataev’s biological conception, when his mother refuses to resist the advances of a Russian soldier:

Гюльчатай ела солдатский суп с говядиной на вечернем пустом базаре, а солдат понемногу касался ее и затем обнимал. Но женщине совестно было в ответ на угощение отвергать человека: она молчала и не сопротивлялась. Она думала, чем отблагодарить русского, и не было у нее ничего, кроме того, что выросло от природы. И солдат Чагатаев получил целую безмольвную женщину в обмен на еду в котелке...

The connection between Giulchatay and Ksenia’s responses, both of which take place within the context of gift-giving and hospitality—which is, of course, the etymology of Ksenia’s name—indicates both a human universality that transcends nationality as well as the notion of “artistic memory” mentioned in “On Love”. In the scene with Aidym and Nazar, Ksenia experiences the same pangs of conscience and shame, but within the context of a ritualized act. Here the food

342 Ibid., 234.
343 Ibid., 123.
serves as the sacrifice, and not her body, which is not demanded because Aidym, the child, is already present.

In keeping with the general notion of progress, i.e. each generation exceeding the previous one in strength and love, Aidym quickly cleans up the mess Ksenia causes when she flees to the bathroom. The moment where she succeeds in recovering some of the spilt wine, “Айдым без нее устроила порядок и даже сияла со стола вино обратно в бутылку, так что сохранилась четверть прежнего количества,” is, in a way, a response to Ksenia’s sacrifice: she returns some of the blood spilt in her name out of love. This is perhaps why, on the day after the dinner, Ksenia seeks out Aidym on her own volition and takes her on a trip through Moscow in order to help her “as an older woman helps a girl.”

The final scene of the novel depicts Ksenia and Chagataev watching over a sleeping Aidym after a day spent together out in Moscow. The positioning of the scene provides a final example of the process of materialization on the one hand, and spiritualization, on the other. By returning to where Nazar first spent the night with Vera (i.e. “faith”), Aidym embodies the solution to the diptych overhanging the bed, a physical testament whose inner strength overcomes the initial sufferings of her childhood.

4.5 Conclusion

In considering the conclusion to Platonov's *Dzhan*, one feels inexorably drawn to the aesthetics and philosophy of one of his contemporaries, Bakhtin. Although multiple scholars have addressed the applicability of Bakhtin's work to Platonov's prose, they are rarely in
connection with Dzhan.\textsuperscript{344} Similarly, few scholars have attempted to articulate how the category of the sublime might be brought to bear on Bakhtin's work, despite his strong Neo-Kantian background, and his familiarity with the third Critique.

An exception to this critical oversight is a brief discussion of Bakhtin and the sublime in Emerson and Medzhibovskaya's brief article, “Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Bakhtin on Art and Immortality.” While there are numerous entrance points to discuss the sublime in Bakhtin's work—the concept of carnival perhaps being the most obvious in the Dionysian-dominant thought of the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century—the authors choose to focus on Bakhtin's earlier works on ethics and aesthetics, juxtaposing Bakhtin's thought with two 19\textsuperscript{th} century giants, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. Both of the latter, the authors argue, employ in numerous works what they term the “isolated sublime,” a term that must be read as a continuation of the individuated sublime familiar from the Kantian (and Chernyshevskian and Lunacharskian) account of the sublime experience.\textsuperscript{345}

For Emerson and Medzhibovskaya, Bakhtin's “substitute” or “surrogate” for the sublime is co-experiencing (soperezhivanie). This places Bakhtin in conflict with Tolstoy, who remains enamored with the Kantian sublime of transcendental reason.\textsuperscript{346} Even in the case of Dostoevsky—an author whose works were much more productive with Bakhtin's thought—the confirmation and certainty that typically emerged from the sublime experience in many of his works must be viewed with skepticism. Bakhtin's version of the sublime then, in this reading at

\textsuperscript{344} For a brief mention, see: Livers, \textit{Constructing the Stalinist Body}, 32–33.

\textsuperscript{345} To take put two canonical examples of the sublime in such cases: Raskolnikov's contraction of the heart at the conclusion to \textit{Crime and Punishment}, and Andrei Bolkonsky's vision at the battle of Austerlitz in \textit{War and Peace}.

\textsuperscript{346} As an aside, it is hard to see this as a “radical reworking” of Kant, as the authors claim elsewhere in their article. It could be argued (and has been in various places) that it is precisely the “purposefulness of moral goodness” that motivates all of Kant's aesthetics, no matter how hard one tries to argue to the contrary, and no matter how hard Kant himself tries to obfuscate the fact. Indeed, this notion becomes the common cornerstone of critiques of Enlightenment philosophy in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, particularly in the aftermath of Stalinism and World War II.
least, seeks to maintain the dynamic aspect of the sublime (constant receptivity to that which is outside the self) while minimizing the excesses of fear or pleasure that might lend a sense of finality to the sublime experience.

While there is certainly much to be said for drawing out the sublime experience into a long duration (thus avoiding the seductions of certainty), there are certain gaps in this account of Bakhtin that can be illuminated through recourse to Platonov's text. In order to do so, however, some preliminary observations are necessary. First and foremost is the question raised by Emerson and Medzhiborskaya's article, namely, is this “Bakhtinian sublime” a “substitute” for the sublime, as they seem to imply at one juncture, or a “surrogate” for the sublime, as they intimate at a later point? In other words, what is in the 19th century account of the sublime that this reading of Bakhtin wants to filter out, and is there anything that needs to be retained?

In order to answer these questions, one has to consider how “co-experiencing” itself becomes possible. It is clear that reaching such a state requires an overcoming of fear that still leaves the individual extremely vulnerable. This is in keeping with the “educated individual” of the 19th century sublime, although the bildung required of such a state is not explicitly touched upon in either the article or (I believe) Bakhtin's writings. What is denied in the resolution of the sublime experience (a kind of Lunacharskian excess of pleasure or life energy) is also keeping with the sublime canon. However, I believe that this potential Bakhtinian understanding of sublimity departs from its predecessors in one important aspect, namely: the humanity of the other. For both Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, the sublime ultimately occurs in confrontation with a depersonalized other, often nature (in the case of Tolstoy) or a divinity that by its very definition is beyond human understanding due to the latter's imperfection (Dostoevsky). In Bakhtin's case,

347 As an example of the sublime’s “negative pleasure”.

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however, the co-participant of co-experiencing is thoroughly human, and the individual's inability to grasp the whole is due to a double excess on both sides of the communicative divide (i.e. an impenetrability of both the perceiver and the perceived). This mutual inability to comprehend, which is accompanied with a repeated, mutual striving to comprehend, is what lays the groundwork for Bakhtinian regard, or respect (in both their common and etymological connotations).

A human other, then, becomes the “surrogate” for the formerly sublime God or transcendentally rational nature in this (admittedly idiosyncratic) reading of Bakhtin's thought. This is a vital, if hardly original, shift in the sublime constellation, one that fits comfortably within the general trajectory of Nietzsche, Ivanov, and Platonov, who remarks in his notes to Dzhan that Stalin had come to replace nature. The growing realization of the contingency of the sublime “object”, and its translation into human categories, is perhaps the most salient feature of the evolution of the sublime in the early 20th century.

Nowhere in Platonov's works is this so clearly encapsulated than in the concluding lines of Dzhan, when Chagataev hold Ksenia's hands while they both gaze at the sleeping Aidym:

Чагатаев и Ксения сидели против спящей девочки на маленьком диване; они молча глядели на Айдым, на ее лицо, где еще были черты детства, страдания и заботы, и на ясное выражение ее зрееющей высшей силы, которая делала эти черты уже незначительными и слабыми. Чагатаев взял руку Ксении в свою руку и почувствовал дальнее поспешное биение ее сердца, будто душа ее хотела пробиться оттуда к нему на помощь. Чагатаев убедился теперь, что помощь к нему придет лишь от другого человека.

348 It is worth noting that this inability to comprehend, while being able to apprehend is also keeping with the Kantian notion of the sublime.
349 Платонов, Собрание, 591.
350 Ibid., 234.
Unlike many of Platonov’s earlier works, in which consummation in any terms is eliminated as a possible resolution (i.e. early science fiction, Chevengur, Kotlovan), here co-experiencing is maintained as a reserved, yet potentially optimistic possibility; the lines above describe Chagataev perceiving Ksenia as she perceives him. The “certainty of vulnerability” attributed to Chagataev clearly resonates with the characteristics ascribed to the Bakhtinian sublime proposed above.

The “accidental family” of Nazar, Ksenia, and Aidym at the conclusion of Dzhan is a testament to the ability of humanity to overcome the “natural” categories of ethnicity and the “biological family” that were so disastrous in 19th century European culture, on the one hand, and the very notion of imperial self-sufficiency, on the other. Reverently silent, Nazar and Ksenia’s united gaze descends upon their child as they touch each other’s hand. The physical traces of Aidym’s suffering are already giving way to a “higher strength”. A sublime object in her own right, she belongs to both of them (and they to her) not because of any biological necessity, but because of the necessity of life itself. The realization that love is possible (though not guaranteed—it is as if Ksenia’s “soul wanted to break out and come to his aid”) but only through an acceptance of the limitations of one’s own insight, is, perhaps, Platonov’s most sublime thought.

Chapter 5: The Postmodern Sublime in Generation P

5.1.1 Introduction: Behind the Curtain of the 20th Century Sublime, East and West

In his draft to Dzhan, Platonov notes, “Stalin had come to replace nature.” In the aftermath of the most tragic period of the 20th century, a similar idea—albeit in a very different
framework—was expressed by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in their critique of the Enlightenment, “The Culture Industry: The Enlightenment as Mass Deception”. Turning to the philosophy of Kant, the authors posit a similar supplanting of nature by culture:

According to Kantian schematism, a secret mechanism within the psyche preformed immediate data to fit them into the system of pure reason. That secret has now been unraveled. Although the operations of the mechanism appear to be planned by those who supply the data, the culture industry, the planning is in fact imposed on the industry by the inertia of a society irrational despite all its rationalization, and this calamitous tendency, in passing through the agencies of business, takes on the shrewd intentionality peculiar to them. For the consumer there is nothing left to classify, since the classification has already been preempted by the schematism of production.  

The authors describe Kant's “secret mechanism” as a kind of double illusion: not only are the ideals themselves false—an acquiescence to Nietzsche in fact if not in spirit—but also that power underlying these ideals is equally artificial, an illusion dictated to art by society with the aim of exerting control. Although the main target of the authors' critique in this chapter is post-war consumerist culture (it would be reasonable to throw in its Nazi and Stalinist equivalents as well), one cannot help but feel that the nature of their complaint—lack of novelty, an emphasis on an ossified style, the claim that the cultural industry does the consumer schematising for him—would be just as comfortable in a critique of 18th century Neoclassical aesthetics, the birthplace of the Russian sublime.

Adorno and Horkheimer claim this 20th century equivalent of the 18th century “imperial” sublime is more extensive and insidious than its historical predecessor. Just as 20th century science managed to discern the secrets of the atom, so too did the culture industry manage to penetrate every aspect of life; even at leisure, the inhabitant of the early 20th century is at work.

Sitting in a movie theater, the spectator is forced—Adorno and Horkheimer are insistent on the coercive nature of cinema, a view that was shared by Lenin—into a position in which the aesthetic space of the movie becomes the primary vehicle for understanding the world, a process that is extended into every sphere of personal interaction, leaving no room for “reflection or imagination.”

The defeat of nature (which is overwritten by the culture industry), reflection and imagination are all familiar terms from Kant's account of the sublime. However, the terms of their defeat eliminate the agonistic nature of the Kantian sublime experience. The Kantian imagination, in their account, is not even given the opportunity to fail, having no material (i.e. natural) measure at its disposal to attempt a (failed) comprehension. Instead, the authors speak of a “relentless rush of facts” that eliminates “sustained thought”.352

According to Adorno and Horkheimer, the elimination of the reflective moment in mass culture makes the Kantian sublime impossible within the aesthetic experience of mass culture, and prevents the sublime experience outside of mass culture as well. The disenchantment (or “overwriting”) of nature by culture, to the extent that the former disappears from experience, is dually understood by the authors as totalitarian propaganda and the language of capitalist advertising:

Advertising becomes simply- the art with which Goebbels presciently equated it, l’art pour l’art, advertising for advertisings sake, the pure representation of social power. In the influential American magazines Life and Fortune the images and texts of advertisements are, at a cursory glance, hardly distinguishable from the editorial section. The enthusiastic and unpaid picture story about the living habit and personal grooming of celebrities, which wins them new fans, is editorial, while the advertising pages rely on photographs

352 A similar thought in regards to the sublime can be found in Jameson’s classic text: Jameson, Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, 34–35.
and data so factual and lifelike that they represent the ideal of information to which the editorial section only aspires.\textsuperscript{353}

Certainly, such an extreme stance goes too far in its exaggeration of the totalizing power. Nevertheless, the claims enumerated here are vital in understanding how the sublime returned to prominence in the post-war period.\textsuperscript{354}

The central concern of this chapter is an examination of the Russian postmodern sublime in Pelevin’s 1999 novel, \textit{Generation P}. Pelevin’s novel—written during what can now be seen as an exceptional period in Russian history following the collapse of the USSR but before the neo-imperial turn of the early 21\textsuperscript{st} century—is the product of two intersecting cultures, that of the late Soviet period, on the one hand, and the “hyper-capitalism” of the turn of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, on the other. Though more related than is still commonly thought, each had distinct evolutions in their respective understandings of the sublime. The trajectories of each of these evolutions will be mapped in this introduction from a common historical origin. It will begin with a revisiting of the “Marxist sublime” mentioned in the introduction to chapter three, and its extension in the works of Lyotard, Zizek, and Sloterdijk. It will then turn to a discussion of the sublime in Moscow conceptualism.

\textbf{5.1.2 The Marxist Sublime Revisited}

Following the codification of Socialist Realism in 1934, the sublime as a distinct aesthetic category of philosophical thought became largely muted in Soviet culture. While it

\textsuperscript{353} Horkheimer, Adorno, and Noerr, \textit{Dialectic of Enlightenment}, 145.
\textsuperscript{354} Adorno would later bemoan the impossibility of the sublime (in its idealist sense) in his Aesthetic Theory. See: Adorno, \textit{Aesthetic Theory}, 186–199.
continued to be included in academic works such as histories of literature and aesthetics, the constraints of official culture prevented open debate, and those who worked on the margins of this official culture rarely drew upon the philosophical traditions for which the sublime was of central importance.\textsuperscript{355} There were, however, exceptions. Mikhail Lifshitz—a critical admirer of Lunacharsky and a colleague of both Platonov and Lukacs when all three worked together at \textit{Литературный критик}, continued to work on Marxist aesthetics throughout the 1930s. Moreover, it is his work on Marx and aesthetics, which—in all likelihood—served as the inspiration for Eagleton’s “Marxist sublime” discussed in chapter three of this study.\textsuperscript{356}

Lifshitz’s study of Marx’s aesthetics was published in a number of different outlets, including the very same \textit{Literary Encyclopedia} that contained Lunacharsky entry on Lenin and literature.\textsuperscript{357} The most extensive treatment, however, is to be found in his \textit{Karl Marx. Art and the Social Ideal}, which went through at least three editions in the Soviet period (1933, 1960, 1972). In the first section of the study, dedicated to Marx development from “revolutionary democracy” to “scientific communism”, Lifshitz discusses Marx’s aesthetic views in the context of two works by his then mentor and friend, Bruno Bauer: \textit{Trumpet of the Last Judgement, or Posaune} (1841) and \textit{Hegel's Doctrine of Religion and Art} (1842).\textsuperscript{358}

Published anonymously, both works are written from the assumed perspective of a devout pietist, who finds in Hegel’s aesthetics a radical critique of the established order. The assumed pose is, of course, entirely disingenuous, but what is most intriguing about it is the

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{355} This would include movements that drew on the Russian religious tradition, as well as avant-garde groups such as the Formalists. There is, of course, a strong connection between the mechanism of the sublime and Shklovsky’s отстранение but the latter tends to have little of the energy (or the capacity for spirituality) of the former.

\textsuperscript{356} An abridged English translation of Lifshitz’s study was published in 1973. Lifšic and Winn, \textit{The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx}.

\textsuperscript{357} \textit{Лифшиц, “Маркс,”} 843–920.

\textsuperscript{358} One of Bauer’s other mentees later in his life was a young Friedrich Nietzsche. See: Nietzsche, \textit{On the Genealogy of Morals}, 278.
\end{footnotesize}
inversion that takes place in the critique of Hegel’s historical narrative of the beautiful, sublime, and Romantic in his *Aesthetics*.\(^{359}\) In the author’s ironic retelling, Hegel is depicted as follower of “the Greek religion”, i.e. atheism:

Гегель большой друг греческой религии и вообще греческого народа. Никакую религию он не изображает и не восхваляет так восторженно, как греческую. Естественно. Ибо она, в сущности, вовсе не есть религия. Он называет ее религией красоты, искусства, свободы, человечности.\(^{360}\)

The political context to the charge is clear. During this period, the “Greek religion” is inevitably connected to the French revolution, a charge that the author makes more bluntly elsewhere: “В лице француза Гегель усматривал настоящего мессию народов, в революции - подлинное спасение человечества.”\(^{361}\) Meanwhile, Hegel’s description of the sublimity of monotheism, usually read as the antipode in his dialectic, becomes, in the view of the naïve author, a critique of religion as a whole:

"Теперь мы понимаем чудовищно насмешливое в словах Гегеля, когда он говорит: ‘Искусство возвышенного’, то есть искусство, которое указанным способом делает созерцаемым Единого, ‘должно быть названо священным искусством как таковым, исключительно священным искусством’. Он хочет сказать, что созерцание практического отношения Единого к миру, это созерцание, которое в самом себе несообразно, разорвано и недостойно, есть настоящее священное искусство. Священным является искусство, когда оно разрушает формы красоты, ритм и гармонию и представляет созерцанию только эгоистическую нужду Единого. Не форма, не истинная идеальность содержания делают искусство священным, но лишь материальный интерес, который так же мало заботится о форме, как мы равнодушны к тому, в какой форме испечен хлеб, который мы едим."\(^{362}\)

\(^{359}\) Hegel, *Aesthetics*.

\(^{360}\) Лифшиц, “Маркс,” 872.

\(^{361}\) Ibid.

Here the sublime reflects not the ineffability of the law, but rather—to place Ram’s phrase in a different context—“the essentially arbitrary nature of autocratic power,” in which the monotheistic god is recast as a despotic demiurge:

“Все должно утратить свою истинную определенность,- восклицает мнимый защитник религии,- свою форму и образ, если предназначено оно господа славить... По Гегелю, вселенная есть виноградное точило, которое попирает Единый, чтобы сокрушить все определенное, прекрасное, великое, тонкое или великолепное мира сего и оставить его сокрушенным, как свидетельство силы Единого.”

Marx’s connection with these two works is somewhat tenuous—as Lifshitz himself readily admits—but the discussion is supposed to serve as a surrogate for two articles by Marx, “On Religious Art” and “On the Romantics” that have been lost. What is known for certain is that Marx—much like Lomonosov in his study of Boileau—made a list of various excerpts from contemporary works on aesthetics at the time these works were published.

Two of these are particularly illustrative in their connection with the postmodern sublime. Both are excerpts from Johann Jakob Grund’s “Art of the Greeks” (1810-1811), a work that clearly belongs to the Enlightenment tradition of the sublime. The first excerpt concerns “shapelessness” in religious art as an indication of a culture’s political despotism that prevents “the elevation of the soul”:

"Безобразное и причудливое питают определенную ненависть к искусству и гонят его своим дыханием. Поэтому изображения богов у древних народов с точки зрения их художественной ценности всегда одинаковы. Мы не находим нигде, чтобы те из них, которые имеют вполне естественный характер, когда-нибудь усовершенствовались. Ибо, поскольку поняние о божестве было ограничено страхом и бог, которого страшатся, освящал начало общественного союза, а главы этого союза

\[\text{Ibid., 1:101.}\]
\[\text{Grund, Die Malerey der Griechen oder Entstehung, Fortschritt, Vollendung und Verfall der Malerey 1. 1.}\]
открывали в этом страхе средство руководить простонародьем или держать его в подчинении, они сделали этот страх перед богом цитаделью своего господства, распространяя его в народе и сохраняя неизменным изображение бога в безобразной, способной внушить ужас форме. Так как страх стесняет душу, то народ, воспитанный в страхе, никогда не может ее расширить и возвысить; напротив, прирожденная способность к подражанию и воспитанное на этом художественное чувство бывают у него почти совсем подавлены" (выписки из книги Грунда, I, 14).365

The second excerpt from Grund discusses Egyptian religious art as inferior to the beauty of form obtained later in Greece:

В религиозном мире господствует не бескорыстное наслаждение формой, а практическое удовлетворение потребности. И потому искусство, возникающее на этой почве, не есть еще подлинное искусство. Таковы, например, по мнению Грунда, которое приводит Маркс, египетские изображения, служившие для непосредственно утилитарных целей. "Потребность не имеет никакой высшей цели, кроме удовлетворения. Поэтому, хотя эти знаки были фигурами, связанное с ними значение превратило абрис и форму самого египтянина в иероглифы, смысл которых оставался недоступным исследованию; они говорили поэтому рассудку, а не глазу" (Грунд, I, 65).366

Here Lifshitz’s framing is just as noteworthy as the excerpt itself. His deployment of Kantian vocabulary—“disinterestedness pleasure of form”, “practical satisfaction of need”—is intended to emphasize the non-idealist dimension of Egyptian art, a move that might serve his own needs more than Marx’s. Nonetheless, what is interesting in the Ground excerpt is the notion that hieroglyphics serve as a language, rather than a representation. Grund’s conclusion that hieroglyphics speak to the mind, and not the eye, is the height of an Enlightenment hubris that, like Chernyshevsky’s aesthetics, is predicated on the notion of a universal, intelligible, and

365 Lifshitz, Собрание сочинений в трех томах, 1:127.
366 Ibid.
objective vantage point. On the other hand, its lack of a “higher goal”—or at least, one discernible to Grund—prevents this language from becoming “authentic art”.

Marx would return to the sublime in the 1857, while working on the *Grundrisse*. As was the case previously, Marx’s interest takes place in the margins of his work, as a series of excerpts from Teodor Vischer’s *Aesthetics*. According to Lifshitz the same aesthetic concerns, predominate, namely an interest in beauty as a defined aesthetic concept, and the sublime as one that borders on the formless. The first can be seen in an excerpt that Vischer himself quotes from Schiller’s *Aesthetic Letters*: “Beauty is indeed form, because we contemplate it; but it is at the same time life, because we feel it. In a word: it is at once a state of our being and an activity we perform.” The conclusion of Schiller’s letter—not found in Lifshitz’s list of Marx’s excerpts—is: “hence the possibility of the most sublime humanity is thereby actually proven”.

This version of the “beautiful sublime” is accompanied by a quotation from Burke’s *Observations*:

где в отрывках о «возвышенном» он [Marx] выписывает все, что указывает на количественный характер этой категории (в возвышенном «качественное становится количественным»), тенденцию бесконечного движения, стремление к колоссальному, выход из границ и нарушение «меры». «Чистая форма всякой стороны жизни есть строго исходящее из ее качества и точно ограниченная мера отношений (данного образования). Эту меру превосходит возвышенное, оно выходит в бесконечное, но должно одновременно удержать форму или ограниченную меру. Форма, как граница, должна оставаться, погрузившись в ненадежное — в одном и том же оформлено и бесформенно. Темнота есть отличительная черта всякой возвышенности (Берк).

The quote from Burke is worth contextualizing with the passages of the 1840s. Burke’s primary affect for the sublime was, of course, anxiety and terror, two qualities that connect it with Marx’s previous excerpts. Here, however, the question of sublime form is not quite the formless, as it was in the case of “despotic art,” but rather as the paradox of form and unform. There is a temptation to extend the political allegory here as well. If “democratic” Greek art was primarily concerned with “beautiful form”, and non-Western despotism espoused “formlessness”, then Burke’s conception of the sublime can be read as a synthesis, albeit not one to the benefit of the kingdom. Lifshitz, in a discussion of the 1840s passages, does not hesitate to do so:

Количественный принцип, стремление к чувственно-возвышенному, преклонение перед естественным бытием предмета - все это черты, которыми Гегель рисует духовный мир восточных деспотий. Таким образом, в официальной романтике прусского государства Маркс видел ребяческое обращение к детству человеческого общества. 369

This is, of course, Hegel turned on his head, and one cannot help but wonder the extent to which Lifshitz felt the Soviet 1930s were a similar cultural formation. Speculation aside, what is central here is the implicit connection between Marx’s readings of the sublime and his notion of the commodity, the “bad Marxist sublime” of infinite regression in Eagleton’s discussion.

What makes the commodity different from the despotic imperial sublime, however, is its ability to take on the “appearance of form”, not unlike Burke’s description of the sublime mentioned earlier. If Schiller is correct in his notion that beauty is both a state and an action, allowing for “the most sublime humanity”, then it would follow that the despotic sublime would be humanity repressed. The “official romanticism of the Prussian state,” however, would seem to be something else. Greek and Egyptian culture, despite their difference regarding form, could

369 Ibid., 1:117.
both be called—again drawing on Schiller—naïve modes of consciousness. The “official Romanticism” of the 19th century, however, is most certainly sentimental, i.e. reflective. Thus, the inversion of Hegel comes full circle: instead of the best of the Greeks and Egyptians, romantic culture gets the worst: a hypocritical despotism that masquerades as Greek freedom, with the commodity as its most sacred fetish.

### 5.1.3 From the Romantic to the Postmodern (Lyotard, Zizek, Sloterdijk)

The preceding discussion might seem removed from the postmodern. This is not the case. The proliferation of additional works and archival materials facilitated by the Soviet Union in the 1930s would have repercussions far beyond the Soviet sphere. Lyotard’s 1988 *Inhuman: Reflections on Time* discusses a connection between sublimity and the Avant-garde motivated by a reading of the art of Barnet Baruch Newman. In it, he rehearses the history of the sublime from Boileau to Kant, paying particular attention to Burke’s treatise. His interest in the sublime, in other words, largely corresponds to that of Marx, who he invokes in his discussion:

> Yet there is a kind of collusion between capital and the avant-garde. The forces of skepticism and even destruction that capitalism has put into action—something that Marx never ceased to analyze and identify, in some way encourages among artists a mistrust of established rules and a willingness to experiment with means of expression, with styles, with ever-new materials. There is something of the sublime in capitalist economy. It is not academic, it is not physiocratic, it denies nature. It is, in a sense, an economy regulated by an Idea—infinite wealth or power. It does not provide any example from nature that might verify this Idea. In subordinating science through technologies, especially those of language, it only succeeds, on the contrary, in making reality appear increasingly intangible, subject to doubt, unsteady. The experience of the human subject—individual and collective—and the aura that

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370 Additional discussions of the sublime in Lyotard can be found in “What is Postmodernism?” as well as his extended engagement with Kant’s analytic. See: Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 77–79; Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*.  

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surrounds this experience, are being dissolved into the calculation of profitability, the satisfaction of needs, self-affirmation through success.\textsuperscript{371} There is a connection, in other words, between the romantic and postmodern sublime, just as there was between the romantic sublime and its revival at the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, and it’s possible to detect a recognition of Horkheimer and Adorno’s culture industry in Lyotard’s paradoxical observation that “it’s still the sublime as Burke and Kant described it, and yet it isn’t their sublime anymore.”\textsuperscript{372} In the postmodern era of a “crisis of overcapitalization”, however, the threat directed at the avant-garde “no longer needs Party-states to be effective. It proceeds directly out of market economics.\textsuperscript{373} The aesthetics of the sublime, in Lyotard’s reading, is read as a response to the “calculated realism” of the art-market, which is capable of seducing the artist into succumbing to “innovation”, a pale appearance of the “true sublimity” of the Heidegerrian \textit{ereignis}. Lyotard claims that the “metaphysics of capital,” with its regulating idea of “infinite wealth and power,” is a technology of time, i.e. literally a discourse on technique, a way of figuring time in language in such a way that it becomes automatic. The avant-gardist task is to undo this language of inevitability, to call into question “the presumption of the mind with respect to time.” The “sublime feeling”, for Lyotard, “is the name of this privation,” of the resistance of the infinity imposed by the commodity.\textsuperscript{374}

Lyotard’s commentary on the sublime touches upon the technological obsolescence of “Party-states”, a clear reference to the Soviet Union that was to collapse three years later. A similar discussion of the late Soviet Union and the sublime can be found in Zizek’s 1989 \textit{Sublime}

\textsuperscript{371} Lyotard, \textit{The Inhuman}, 105.
\textsuperscript{372} Ibid., 193.
\textsuperscript{373} Ibid., 104–105.
\textsuperscript{374} Ibid., 107.
Object of Ideology. Zizek begins his work with a discussion of Lacan’s claim that Marx “invented” the symptom of psychoanalysis, and insists Marx’s understanding of the commodity fails to account for surplus-enjoyment (Lacan's plus-de-jouir). Reading this as a classic example of Freudian disavowal, Zizek intimates that Marx represses his knowledge of capitalism’s “Idea of wealth and infinite power”, because its admission would be too traumatic. The trauma, in this case, would be Marx's own understanding that the “internal contradictions” of capitalism might not lead to its inevitable collapse.

Such a reading fails to take into account Marx’s interest in the sublime, which is absent in Zizek’s work. What can be retained from it, however, is an explanation for the obsolescence of Party-states intimated by Lyotard in his thoughts on the sublime:

How can we not detect in this formulation the fact that Marx failed to cope with the paradoxes of surplus-enjoyment? And the ironic vengeance of history for this failure is that today [1989] there exists a society which seems to correspond perfectly to this vulgar evolutionary dialectics of forces and relations: 'real socialism', a society which legitimizes itself by reference to Marx. Is it not already a commonplace to assert that 'real socialism' rendered possible rapid industrialization, but that as soon as the productive forces reached a certain level of development (usually designated by the vague term 'post-industrial society'), 'real socialist' social relationships began to constrict their further growth?

Here the Soviet Union is depicted as containing the “stagnation” that Marx predicted for the end of the capitalist economy. Running throughout Zizek's commentary on Marx is the notion that “real socialism” has lost the Faustian bargain: having completed the 19th century task

375 It is this paradox which defines surplus enjoyment: it is not a surplus which simply attaches itself to some normal, fundamental enjoyment, because enjoyment as such emerges only in this surplus, because it is constitutively an excess. If we subtract the surplus we lose enjoyment itself, just as capitalism, which can survive only be incessantly revolutionizing its own material conditions, ceases to exist if it stays the same, if it achieves an internal balance. This, then, is the homology between surplus value - the 'cause' which sets in motion the capitalist process of production - and surplus-enjoyment, the object-cause of desire. (…) All this, of course, Marx “knows very well... and yet”: and yet (…) he proceeds as if he does not know it...” Zizek, The Sublime Object of Ideology, 54.

376 Ibid., 54–55.
(industrialization), it is no longer capable of stimulating additional appetite in itself as a socialist country, just as it was incapable of producing sufficient “consumer goods”. The transition from socialism to capitalism is thus best understood as a rediscovery of the unsatisfied desire present in Lyotard's “idea of infinite wealth and power”.

A standard critique of ideology, such as the classical Marxian notion of “false consciousness” in which the emergence of the idealist absolute in the commodity could be rectified by properly recognizing it as a contradiction instead of a sublime paradox is of limited use in post-industrialist culture, Zizek continues. His explanation as to why this is the case relies upon a concept of “cynical ideology,” which draws upon Sloterdijk’s *Critique of Cynical Reason*.

Cynical wisdom, in Zizek's formulation, is a “mature” mode of thought, one that is entirely cognizant of the “lies” of ideology. It could readily be assumed, then, that it would be immune to the sublime, which is founded on the very “probity and integrity” that is dismissed as being hopelessly naïve. Yet this is not the case. The sublime can persist in cynical ideology in what Zizek terms the “sublime material” of money. Zizek argues that an analogy can be drawn between the Kantian subject of the sublime and the contemporary character of money: both, in addition to their material bodies, contain an “indestructible and immutable’ body that persists beyond the corruption of the body physical,” one that “depends on the symbolic order.” In Kant, this “body within the body” is recognized in the human capacity for universal reason; in

\[\text{377 This, of course, was turned into a commodity itself in American mass culture of the 1980s. In the spirit of Zizek, I offer the following well-known example: in 1985, The Wendy’s company launched television advertisement entitled “Soviet fashion show”. The ad is shot in a dimly lit hall accompanied by acoustic (a sign of backwardness in the time of question) violin music playing in the “Russian style”. The fashion models—whose bodies were the polar opposite of the “cocaine chic” of the time—monotonously parade down the “runway” in formless dresses. The voice-over provides a wonderful exercise in the logical ambiguity of late capitalism: “Having a choice is better than not. Choose fresh. Choose Wendy’s.”\]

\[\text{378 Ibid., 12.}\]

\[\text{379 Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 12–13.}\]
Zizek, money's “body within a body” is recognized by the forces that issue the currency. Cynical wisdom, according to Zizek, knows this (i.e. that money is an arbitrary measure guaranteed by violence) but acts as if it does not. Akin to a lapsed believer, the cynical subject carries on with the ritual, even though it knows the divine does not really exist, the antithesis of the unity of state and action that is the marker of Schiller’s “most sublime humanity”. Zizek’s late 20th century “correction” of Marx is, in essence, a capitulation of Marx’s own thoughts regarding the sublime and the cynicism that inheres in official romantic culture.

These dual readings of the late 20th century and the early 18th century intersect in Sloterdijk’s *Critique of Cynical Reason* and its study of Weimar Germany. Important for the immediate purposes of this study are four moments in Sloterdijk’s diagnosis of contemporary cynicism. Contemporary cynicism—which Sloterdijk claims has spread to a collective (i.e. industrially reproduced) type as opposed to its individualistic Diogenic predecessor, which Sloterdijk terms “kynicism”—is necessarily urban in nature: “Only the city can assimilate the cynic, who ostentatiously turns his back on it, into the group of its outstanding individuals (…) on whom it depends.”

Secondly, present-day cynics “can be understood as border-line melancholics, who can keep their symptoms of depression under control and remain more or less able to work.” Secondly, present-day cynics “can be understood as border-line melancholics, who can keep their symptoms of depression under control and remain more or less able to work.”

Thirdly, “their psychic apparatus has become elastic enough to incorporate as a survival factor a permanent doubt in their own activities.” Finally, cynicism is “enlightened false consciousness’: to choose such a formulation seems to be a blow against the tradition of enlightenment. The sentence itself is cynicism in a crystalline state. (…) Logically it is a

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381 Ibid., 5.
382 Ibid.
paradox, for how could enlightened consciousness be false?383

The problem of sublimity in the postmodern period thus contains two dimensions, much like the chiasmic sublime of the preceding century. The first of these is primarily social and cultural, the “retreat of nature” detected by Platonov, Horkheimer, Adorno, and others. This dimension of the sublime is primarily concerned with questions of power, and is thus reminiscent of Harsha Ram’s conception of the “imperial sublime”. The second dimension is more concerned with the interiority of the subject itself. The model here is provided by Sloterdijk’s conception of “cynical wisdom”, and the challenges of overcoming a psychic state in which “enlightened consciousness” finds itself in contradiction with “barbaric action”. Any understanding of “sublime resistance” in the face of this first dimension of the sublime must be accompanied by an overcoming of the second.

Before turning to Pelevin’s Generation P with this in mind, I would like to examine briefly a few works of art from the late Soviet period as evidence for the applicability of this theoretical framework. It can be argued that Soviet ideology, much like its capitalist counterpart, can be understood as a technology of time. The clearest examples of Lyotard’s task of the avant-garde—the undoing of “the presumption of the mind with respect to time”—are to be found in the non-conformist art of 1970s and 1980s, particularly in the works of Moscow Conceptualism. Komar and Melamid’s appropriation and personalization of the genres of official Soviet culture, as can be found in works such as Slogans (1972) and Perfect Slogans (1976), are perhaps the most well-known cases in point. Similarly, Slogan (1977), a performative work of the Collective Actions Group in which a red banner with inscription “I am not complaining about anything, and I like everything, although I have never been here and know nothing about these parts” was hung

383 Ibid.
in front of a countryside landscape outside of Moscow, can be read both as an appropriation of the genre of the Soviet banner of official culture and a testament to the “inaccessibility of nature” in post-industrial society through the “feigned submission” of the humility topos.

The most sublime expression of this thought of late Soviet art, however, is undoubtedly to be found in Erik Bulatov’s *Horizon* (1971-1972). Repressing the personalized dimension of the works discussed above, it depicts a seascape, in which five Soviet citizens—their backs are turned to the viewer—gaze out towards the horizon. The implication, clearly, is to consider the painting in the context of Caspar David Friedrich’s *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818), the classic visual text of the romantic sublime. Yet it is clearly “not that sublime anymore” in two important respects: this is a collective vision, and not an individualized one, and the human figures themselves are decentered, placed in the lower left quadrant of the painting, below the gaze of the viewer, whereas in Friedrich’s painting the viewer encounters the wanderer along an ascending, centralized line of perspective. This vanishing point is maintained in Bulatov’s painting, but instead of revealing the setting sun—as one might expect—the entire horizon line of the sea is obscured by horizontal bands of red and gold. This interruption of classic “natural” perspective reads as evidence of the substitution of nature by official Soviet culture and as a recognition of its facilitation by the 20th century avant-gardists such as Malevich. The conflict between these two varying perspectives, naturalist and suprematist, is not resolved but sustained, allowing the viewer to remain in a position that is not subject to the rhetorics of either technique.

Sloterdijk’s conception of contemporary “cynicism” can also find a late Soviet analogue in the era of stagnation. A recognition of the illusory nature of the goals of Soviet ideology was certainly widespread, but this clearly did not prevent acts that prolonged their existence. The goal for many, of course, was a minimal participation in such structures and personal disavowal
of them, one that can be traced in the deep suspicion—in Moscow Conceptualism and elsewhere—of any language that could be endowed with a modicum of sustained political power. One of the classic literary texts of this period, Venedikt Erofeev’s *Moscow to the end of the Line*, is exemplary in this regard. The wide variety of stylistic registers Erofeev endows his alcoholic protagonist with can be read as a literary equivalent to the tension achieved in Bulatov’s painting. There is something of the sublime in this, as Mark Lipovetsky has noted in commentary on one passage in the novel:

> The collision of the parody of Symbolist style with vulgarity and ideological clichés produces an effect that is at once comically debasing and elevating: the emotional impact of poetry finds expression in an increased consumption of the cologne ‘Freshen-up,’ and the circumstances are retold in the language of the biblical ‘Song of Songs.’

384 Like Sloterdijk’s cynic, Venichka is an urban creature, but one that is entrapped; his inability to escape the urban landscape is one of the central themes of the novel. As romantic escapism to nature proves impossible, alcoholism, i.e. the ability to stimulate directly the material of one’s body, thus ensuring the self of its material existence, is conceived of as a masochistic, Dionysian alternative. This surrogate of the natural sublime, in which the collapse of the Kantian imagination is reenacted on the field of the individual body, finds a parallel in a similar fracturing of consciousness, but is denied the subsequent resolution of the intercession of reason.

The comical debasement in Venichka’s language prevents the full exaltation of the classic sublime, the existence of which is foreclosed by the world he exists in. Such debasement, however, also serves as a vital corrective, and can be read as humility. Like Sloterdijk’s cynic, Venichka is an urban creature; his inability to escape the urban landscape is one of the central

themes of the novel. Yet whereas Sloterdijk’s cynic “has the understandable feeling about itself of being a victim and of making sacrifices,” Venichka actually makes these sacrifices, thus avoiding the contradiction at the heart of modern cynicism.

This can be seen in a particularly Dostoevskian passage early in the novel, when a nauseous Venichka is denied alcohol at the restaurant at the Kursk train station. This moment of deprivation, which results in physical suffering due to the absence of Venichka’s “regulating idea”, becomes a lyric digression whose theme is the rejection of the physical world:

И опять меня оставили. Я вслед этой женщине посмотрел с отвращением. В особенности на белые чулки безо всякого шва; шов бы меня смирил, может быть, разгрузил бы душу и совесть…
И грубы-то ведь, подчеркнуто грубы в те самые мгновения, когда нельзя быть грубым, когда у человека с похмелья все нервы навыпуск, когда он молодушен и тих! Почему так?! о, если бы весь мир, если бы каждый в мире был бы, как я сейчас, тих и боязлив и был бы также ни в чем не уверен: ни в себе, ни в серьезности своего места под небом — как хорошо было бы! Никаких энтузиастов, никаких подвигов, никакой одержимости! — всеобщее молодушие. Я согласился бы жить на земле целую вечность, если бы мне прежде показали уголок, где не всегда есть место подвигам. «Всеобщее молодушие» — да ведь где это спасение ото всех бед, эта панацея, этот предикат величайшего совершенства! А что касается деятельного склада натуры…

Here Venichka’s physical sensation of nausea initially sublimates into a desire to find similar material deficiencies in the woman who denied his only need. Finding no release on this level of perception, his physical disgust elevates to the moral plane, and his invective against the individual woman takes on a collective, social character. The incomprehensibility of human cruelty—expressed in the figure of a rhetorical question—then leads to further amplification, as

385 Ерофеев, Москва-Петушки, 6.
Venichka’s thoughts expand to a universal scale.\textsuperscript{386} The ensuing lyricism is decidedly theatrical in character, recalling the conclusion of Sumarokov’s \textit{Дмитрий Самозванец}—“Ах, если бы со мной погибла вся вселенна!”—in which the sublime passion tragic hero desires that the universe mirror him in his perishing. Here of course, the emotional affect is inverted, as Venichka desires “universal faint-heartedness.” Both desires, however, are transgressive: Dmitry departs from the moral behavior understood as normative in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, whereas Venichka departs from the inability to treat others with dignity that is normative of late Soviet society.\textsuperscript{387} The universal cultural cynicism that Venichka rejects, is the disgusting truth of the “enthusiasts, great deeds, and dedication” of official Soviet culture, which are rhetorically subjected to anaphoric negation. “Universal faint-heartedness,” and not the official “universal happiness,” is then claimed as the “predicate of most sublime perfection.”

Such transgressive actions, in Erofeev’s novel, are routinely punished. Following this soliloquy, Venichka is confronted by three “executioners” who summarily expel him from the station out into the street. This transition from sublime subject to being subjected to the sublime is depicted apophatically by Venichka, who refuses to relate what transpired to the reader, “what it was like from the restaurant to the store and from the store to the train, human language cannot describe.”\textsuperscript{388} A possible reading of this gap in the narrative is that Venichka experiences the effects of alcohol withdrawal (vomiting, diarrhea, hallucinations). Venichka’s chiasmic journey (train station to store / store to train station), a miniaturized version of the greater journey of the novel, is presented as a Dionysian dismembering; the verb to vomit (вырвать) shares an

\textsuperscript{386} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{387} Boris Godunov is mentioned slightly earlier in the chapter, as is Ivan Kozlovsky, who played the role of the skomorokh in Mussorgsky’s opera in his final role. (Venichka hears a passage of from Gounod’s \textit{Faust} performed by Kozlovsky when he enters the restaurant).
\textsuperscript{388} Ерофеев, \textit{Москва-Петушки}, 6–7.
etymological root with “to tear asunder” (разорвать). After instructing himself to “remember those two hours (…) in the most ecstatic, most sparkling day of your life,” the flow of narrative is likewise interrupted via an apostrophe:

Давайте лучше так — давайте почтим минутой молчания два этих смертных часа. Помни, Веничка, об этих часах. В самые восторженные, в самые искрометные дни своей жизни — помни о них. В минуты блаженства и упоений — не забывай о них. Это не должно повториться. Я обращаюсь к вам всем родным и близким, ко всем людям доброй воли, я обращаюсь ко всем, чье сердце открыто для поэзии и сострадания:

«Оставьте ваши занятия. Остановитесь вместе со мной, и почтим минутой молчания то, что невыразимо. Если есть у вас под рукой какой-нибудь завалящий гудок — нажмите на этот гудок».

Так. Я тоже останавливаюсь. Ровно минуту, смутно глядя в вокзальные часы, я стою, как столб, посреди площади Курского вокзала.

Moments of transcendence appear throughout Erofeev’s novel, and, as Lipovetsky points out in his reading, “sorrow and fear are directly linked to the sight of the transcendent truth.”

Although the comic and the profane intervene throughout as well, they are strikingly absent in the novel’s paradoxical conclusion, in which Venichka narrates his own death at the hands of four strangers.

Wracked with fear—an expression of the very same “sublime faint-heartedness” discussed earlier—Venichka is murdered in the presence of laughing angels and a silent God. The tragic force of the novel’s conclusion leads Lipovetsky to read it as the absolute negation of the possibility of real transcendence. Citing the prohibitive attitude of underground Soviet culture to any language of power, he writes:

389 Ibid., 7.
390 Lipovetsky, Charms of the Cynical Reason, 171.
It emerges that God and the Logos are able to show their presence—and supremacy—in only one way: through the murder of the individual voice and consciousness. This is why Venichka is not a holy fool: unlike the classical holy fool, he does not represent God, but is betrayed by him. (Italics in original)\textsuperscript{391}

The strength of skepticism espoused in Lipovetsky’s reading make it the best kind of critical provocation. In it, Venichka’s murder mirrors the violence carried out by the monks and soldiers against the skomorokh in Tarkovsky’s \textit{Andrei Rublev}, a scene that is likewise accompanied with powerful silence. For Lipovetsky, “the silence of God is no less cynical than the laughter of angels. Not only does God refrain from helping Venichka and, moreover, supporting him in his trial, but the murderers that pursue him actually embody his power.”\textsuperscript{392}

There are, however, objections that can be made. Neither prophets nor saints place much value in an individualized voice or consciousness; indeed, it is the very fact that their voices and consciousness are neither that defines who they are. Death is likewise less of an issue for them than it might be for some, and this seems to be the case with Venichka “who knows he will die soon”. The overwhelming emotional state he experiences at the end of the novel is closer to wonder (удивление) than fear, and is thus closer to the sublime than it is to terror.\textsuperscript{393}

An alternative explanation is possible. The first question to be asked is why angels laugh. Throughout canonical scripture, angels (and God for that matter) only laugh at the demonic and sinful. Such laughter is morally innocent and unconcerned with death, just as the children’s laughter Venichka compares it to is. The next question is: why doesn’t God laugh? The only textual information we have that would address this is a passage earlier in the novel in which

\textsuperscript{391} Ibid., 187–188.
\textsuperscript{392} Ibid., 189.
\textsuperscript{393} Ерофеев, \textit{Москва-Петушки}, 51, 54.
Venichka claims we would keep silent if he met God. Yet when he does (if Venichka does indeed “meet” him, the text seems ambiguous on that point), it is God that is silent. The implication is a connection between the two (i.e. Venichka and God), a connection in which an individual struck with fear is overcome with wonder when they recognize their personal, limited connection with a transcendent principle. In this case, the principle is clearly the author himself. Moreover, the angels seem to recognize this as observers external to this relationship, this is why they laugh. Venichka will persist after his death, thanks to his author, just as the author will persist, thanks to Venichka.

5.2 Generation P: Behind the Small Screen

Similarly to Eugene Onegin and Dzhan, the plot of Generation P adheres to the general contours of the bildungsroman. Set in Moscow beginning from the collapse of the Soviet Union up until the financial default in 1998, it follows the life of Vavilen Tatarsky, a member of the final, “lost” Soviet generation, as he makes the transition from an alienated would-be dissident poet to an advertising copywriter. As he climbs the corporate ladder, he soon realizes that everything—from advertising to politics to the very existence of the world itself—is dependent on a small group of individuals and disembodied forces that manufacture his reality. At the novel’s conclusion, Tatarsky reaches the highest position in this hierarchy of virtual reality,
becoming both the head creative for constructing Russian reality, and the consort of the Babylonian goddess Ishtar.394

This general trajectory takes place on three narrative layers in the novel: Tatarsky’s “real” experiences in post-Soviet Moscow, his creative growth as seen through the advertisements he produces, and a series of mystical visions Tatarsky experiences under the influence of hallucinogenic drugs. At the novel’s conclusion, these three narrative layers intertwine, but the novel’s conclusion—like that of *Moscow to the End of the Line*—remains morally ambiguous. By examining the deployment of the sublime throughout the novel, this chapter attempts to achieve a reading of the novel that places it beyond the bounds of simple satire.

For a novel as pre-occupied with the manufacturing of postmodern reality as *Generation ‘II’*, it comes as no surprise that the dedication—“В памяти среднего класса”—is addressed to perhaps the most elusive of Russian social phenomena of the early post-Soviet period and the most commonly accepted proof of the benefits of neo-liberal capitalism. The novel’s epigraph echoes the dedication’s ambivalence to the new order. Quoted in English, it contains five lines from a song by Leonard Cohen:

I’m sentimental, if you know what I mean
I love the country but I can’t stand the scene.
And I’m neither left or right
I’m just staying home tonight,
getting lost in that hopeless little screen.395

A proclamation of love unable to overcome the material reality of its beloved, the epigraph relates ideological disaffection and a desire to withdraw from society in favor of a constructed reality that is less painful. This professed weakness in Cohen’s song, however, is contrasted with the concluding lines of the final verse, which are—tellingly—not included in the epigraph:

    But I'm stubborn as those garbage bags
    that Time cannot decay,
    I'm junk but I'm still holding up
    this little wild bouquet:
    Democracy is coming to the U.S.A. 396

The concluding lines of the verse are equal parts humility and resistance, testifying to the author’s personal survival and retention of the beautiful, even as he submits to the ironically phrased—but nonetheless compulsory—incantation of sublime authority. In the Russian cultural context, the irony of the second half of Cohen’s stanza gains two additional dimensions: not only was “patience” required to overcome the initial shocks of the transition to the new order, but the democracy itself is absent even the United States, i.e. the idea of democracy is very much the same kind of utopian drive present in Soviet ideology that had recently exhausted itself.

    The sublime, in such a context, has to be approached and understood on a multitude of levels. In his everyday urban life, Tatarsky acts as a cultural subject, i.e. as one who is subjected to the “imperial” dimension of the late capitalist sublime in 1990s Russia. In his role as a “creative” Tatarsky acts as the purveyor of the very same commodities he finds himself subjected to elsewhere. Finally, much like Venichka’s “sober intoxication”, Tatarsky’s use of illicit drugs and the visions he sees offer a third way of understanding the sublime in Pelevin’s

396 Ibid.
novel. In all three instances, however, the techniques, affective states, and shapes of thinking examined earlier in this study appear.

5.3 Generation 'P' in Post-Soviet Moscow

Pelevin opens his novel in a deceptively idyllic setting: “Когда-то в России и правда жило беспечальное юное поколение, которое улыбнулось лету, морю и солнцу - и выбрало 'Пепси'.” Yet just as the very end of the first sentence of the novel is invaded by the parasitic presence of a commercial slogan—“Choose Pepsi” 397—the naïve optimism is broken by an ironic commentary that reveals this choice had all the free will of a Soviet election:

Наверно, дело было не только в замечательных вкусовых качествах этого напитка. И не в кофеине, который заставляет ребятишек постоянно требовать новой дозы, с детства надежно вводя их в кокаиновый фарватер. И даже не в банальной взятке - хочется верить, что партийный бюрократ, от которого зависело заключение контракта, просто взял и полюбил эту темную пузыряющуюся жидкость всеми порами своей разуверившейся в коммунизме души. Скорей всего, причина была в том, что идеологи СССР считали, что истинна бывает только одна. Поэтому у поколения "П" на самом деле не было никакого выбора, и дети советских семидесятых выбирали "Пепси" точно так же, как их родители выбирали Брежнева. 398

The narrator’s feigned denials (it wasn’t the taste, the drug, the corruption, or it wasn’t just them) ultimately leads to the first mention of a sublime authority, Soviet ideologists. However, the “solitary truth” that is recognized universally is not the truth of a future communist utopia, but rather its emerging antithesis:

Как бы там ни было, эти дети, лежа летом на морском берегу, подолгу глядели на безоблачный синий горизонт, пили теплую пепси-колу,

397. “Pepsi: The Choice of a New Generation”, “The Choice is Yours” were two slogans used by Pepsico to promote Pepsi in the 80s and 90s.
разлитую в стеклянные бутылки в городе Новороссийске, и мечтали о том, что когда-нибудь далекий запретенный мир с той стороны моря войдет в их жизнь.  

What lies across the sea is Soviet ideology prefaced with a minus sign. Undefined because it is unknown, the non-Soviet world comes to stand as a sublime object capable of fulfilling the desires of the final Soviet generation, as that “nature” is blocked off by the red bands in Bulatov’s *Horizon*.

In the time immediately following the Soviet collapse, however, Western consumerism proves to be just as, if not more, absurd as its Soviet counterpart:

Прошло десять лет, и этот мир стал входить - сначала осторожно и с вежливой улыбкой, а потом все уверенней и смелее. Одной из его визитных карточек оказался клип, рекламирующий "Пепси-колу", - клип, который, как отмечали многие исследователи, стал поворотной точкой в развитии всей мировой культуры. В нем сравнивались две обезьяны. Одна из них пила "обычную колу" и в результате оказалась способна выполнять некоторые простейшие логические действия с кубиками и палочками. Другая пила пепси-колу. Весело ухая, она отъезжала в направлении моря на джипе в обнимку с девицами.

Here the “cold war” of the first and second worlds is re-articulated in the context of the “Cola Wars” of American consumer culture. The evolutionary context evoked by the use of apes here—the first can barely accomplish the most elementary of tasks, while the second is nearly human—neatly parallels the comparative success of Soviet and American (captured in the red, white, and blue of Pepsi logo) culture, and is further emphasized by the disparity in libidinal

399 Ibid.
400 Ibid. Judging by the chronology, this would be around the year 1984 which, in addition to any Orwellian associations, is approximately the time of Gorbachev’s ascension to power (March 1985). The advertisement belongs in the “so good it has to be true” category. The ad campaign, “Chimps”, designed for Pepsi by BBDO International, was awarded a bronze Lion at the Cannes Lions International Advertising Festival in 1994. This passage, strangely, is omitted from Bromfield’s English translation, perhaps because of copyright concerns.
potential. In other words, the retreat of constructed Soviet reality to the postmodern “hyperreality” of Western consumerism is understood—both in America and in the late USSR—as a “natural” outcome of a Darwinian struggle for “the survival of the fittest.”

Into this historical and cultural context the narrator introduces Vavilen Tatarsky, the protagonist of the novel. His first name—an ill-conceived neologism bestowed by his father—is an acronym of Vassily Aksyonov and Vladimir Ilich Lenin. Tatarsky’s Soviet existence neatly fits a familiar model of a politically disaffected Soviet citizen. Having decided to become a poet after discovering Pasternak at the age of twenty-one, Tatarsky gets a meaningless job as a translator of Central Asian languages into Russian, which will allow him to compose his verses “for eternity” by night. For Tatarsky, these two realms of existence are entirely distinct, and he greets the collapse of the Soviet Union with indifference, believing his “work for eternity” will remain unchanged. However, Tatarsky soon comes to realize how dependent this dissident space of personal expression is on the totalitarian state that gave birth to it. This bitter discovery puts an end to Tatarsky’s career as a poet, as he understands that any concept of eternity is dependent on external validation: “он записал в свою книжечку, придя домой: ‘Когда исчезает субъект вечности, то исчезают и все ее объекты, - а единственным субъектом вечности является тот, кто хоть изредка про нее вспоминает.’”

Now ejected from the contemplative space that Soviet culture had provided, Tatarsky is thrown into a world that is barren of inner meaning:

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401 Tatarsky’s parents—much like Onegin’s—play a minimal role in his life.
402 Pelevin, Sobranie sochinenii v 3-kh tomakh, 3:14.
403 His final work, which combines the rock group DDT’s song «осень» with the apocalyptic vision of Svidrigailov from Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment ends with him wondering what will come to fill the vacuum left by the collapse of Soviet society: Что такое вечность - это банька. Вечность - это банька с пауками. Если эту баньку Позабудет Манька, Что же будет с Родиной и с нами? Ibid., 3:15.
... всё вокруг – дома, деревья, скамейки на улицах – вдруг как-то сразу постарело и опустялось. Сказать, что мир стал иным по своей сущности, тоже было нельзя, потому что никакой сущности у него теперь не было. Во всем царила страшноватая неопределенность.  

In this passage, traces of the sublime can be discerned in this “domination of frightening indeterminacy.” Even every-day *material* objects were apparently dependent on the unifying gaze of the Soviet culture, which was capable of endowing them with essence.

Yet even as Tatarsky realizes the essential emptiness of everyday objects that have lost their status within a larger coherent system of value, the narrator notes a bizarre cultural continuity that has managed to persist through the Soviet collapse:

По телевизору между тем показывали те же самые хари, от которых всех тошило последние двадцать лет. Теперь они говорили точь-в-точь то самое, за что раньше сажали других, только были гораздо смелее, тверже и радикальнее.  

This continuity cannot be understood as the preservation of an idea or specific political ideology; it is precisely the content of television that has been inverted (i.e. what is now propagated through television is that which was prohibited). Instead, what has persisted through the collapse is a sensation of nausea. If previously this nausea resulted only from the falsity of what was being reported, here the effect has been doubled: not only is media content false, but the very figures that speak this falseness are now known to be entirely hypocritical.

Tatarsky remains alienated from mass culture, takes a job at a kiosk in Moscow selling the numerous consumer goods that have invaded the country. Social alienation is a defining characteristic of the Russian Byronic hero, which can be traced at least as far back as Pushkin's 1821 *poema* “Prisoner of the Caucasus,” in which the protagonist travels away from the capitals

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to the periphery of the Empire in a quest for meaning and rejuvenation. Pelevin draws upon this tradition in his descriptions of Tatarsky serving out his time in post-Soviet purgatory, ironically restructuring the setting. Like Pushkin's imprisoned anonymous protagonist, Tatarsky is cut off from the world and placed under the careful watch of Chechens:

В ларьке было полутемно и прохладно, как в танке; с миром его соединяло крохотное окошко, сквозь которое еле можно было просунуть бутылку шампанского. От возможных неприятностей Татарского защищала решетка из толстых прутьев, грубо приваренная к стенам. По вечерам он сдавал выручку пожилому чеченцу с тяжелым золотым перстнем.

Гусейн был худеньким невысоким парнем с постоянно маслянистыми от опиатов глазами; обычно он лежал на матраце в полупустом вагончике, (...) в котором лежало много денег и стояла замысловатая модель автомата Калашникова с подствольным гранатометом.\(^{406}\)

That this “prison” is actually a small store, that it is located in Moscow (and not in some “barbarous” periphery), and that Gusein is Tatarsky's employer (and not his kidnapper), all demonstrate just how inverted the “normal” order of things has become for Pelevin's protagonist. In Pelevin's novel, characters do not need to go to the Orient to experience physical deprivation and the possibility violent death; they merely need to go to work at their neighborhood store.

The sublime experience endures in Pelevin's depiction of post-Soviet Russian culture, but it has been significantly reconfigured from the relatively straightforward dialectic of nature and civilization in Pushkin's *poema*. After working for a year, Tatarsky is liberated from his captivity when he happens to run across an old classmate, Serge Morkovin, who asks Tatarsky to join him at his new job in advertising. After explaining to Tatarsky the rudimentary aspects of advertising in post-Soviet Russia, Morkovin assures him that whatever changes may occur in the new economy, the need for advertising will never disappear:

\(^{406}\) Ibid., 3:17.
There are three aspects of this passage that are worthy of note. The first is how Morkovin's “pitch” to Tatarsky promises a reestablishment of the very same eternity that he lost after the Soviet collapse. Morkovin's proposal to Tatarsky, then, is analogous to the change Tatarsky observed in the media: continue your role (continue to engage in creative work), but change the content of your creativity. The second is Tatarsky's own sense of anxiety and excitement at the prospect of earning amounts of money that are so large, he can barely comprehend it, the “idea of infinite wealth and power” contained in Lyotard’s postmodern sublime. Finally, Morkovin's response to a fundamental question of identity, “Am I a cowering creature or do I have rights?” can be read as a post-Soviet revisiting of an “eternal” Dostoevskian question.

The “eternal” question raised by Morkovin has a clear source: Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Specifically, it is posed by Raskolnikov in a conversation with Sonya Marmeladov:

— Мне другое надо было узнать, другое толкало меня под руки: мне надо было узнать тогда, и поскорей узнать, вошь ли я, как все, или человек? Смогу ли я переступить или не смогу! Осмелюсь ли нагнуться и взять или нет? Тварь ли я дрожащая или право имею...

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408 An earlier use of the phrase “дрожащая тварь” can be traced back to Pushkin's “Imitations of the Koran” (1824).
409 Dostoyevsky, *Sobranie sochineniî v pi︠a︡tnadt︠s︡ati tomakh*, 5:397.
In the context of Dostoevsky's novel, it is abundantly clear what the word “right” (право) refers to: the right to commit violence against another individual (in the novel, this violence takes the form of murder). For Raskolnikov, this was the only way he was able to conceive of his own subjectivity. Equally clear is the judgment Dostoevsky carries out on his protagonist: such an action was in violation of the divine law by which all of humanity is judged; such a right cannot be assumed.410

Raskolnikov posits a dilemma in which either one is an insignificant creature subject to the laws of determinism and destined to be the object of domination, or one has the right to enact that domination over others. Meanwhile, in his response of “I am a trembling creature with inalienable rights” Morkovin makes a statement that thwarts the either/or nature of Raskolnikov's binary. Morkovin achieves this by alluding to a Western (i.e. Jeffersonian) notion of natural rights (classically: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness) that are “endowed by the Creator”. Juxtaposed, these two ideas—taken from two different national traditions—can be seen as sharing a common recourse to divine law, but which have opposing orientations: in the case of Dostoevsky, divine law serves as a prohibition, whereas in Jefferson it serves as a protection.

Morkovin's “synthesis” of these two notions brings together the content of the Russian and Western traditions, while effacing the totalizing moral foundation of both. In Pelevin's novel, Russian society is afflicted with instability, crime, and economic chaos.411 People are constantly exposed to life-threatening violence, and even Tatarsky needs an iron grate at his work to prevent assaults. To call this a place where one could pursue “life, liberty and the pursuit of

410In other words, Dostoevsky touches upon the danger of rejecting the empirical dimension of the personality for a disembodied subjective self. The kenotic figure of Christ, meanwhile, serves as an ultimate synthesis of these seemingly incompatible identities.

411Pelevin, Sobranie sochinenii v 3-kh tomakh, 3:19.
happiness” would be hopelessly naïve; it is precisely these rights that are repeatedly denied. It is, in fact, precisely the absence of the security of these rights that makes Morkovin affirm that he is a “trembling creature,” i.e. that he fears domination and violence.

At the same time, Morkovin's synthesis of subjective and objective identities—of dignified humanity with trembling creature—only serves to provide him with the right to deceive and exploit others. Both Dostoevsky and Jefferson attribute the truth of their assertions to a transcendent, divine principle. The apparent obsolescence of a divine principle under the pressure of the consumerist sublime leads Morkovin to incorporate only the negative aspects of Dostoevsky and Jefferson into his own self-definition. What comes to replace the divine principle is something that is tacked on to the very end of Morkovin's response, almost as an apparent afterthought: “лэвэ”, understood in the novel both as “liberal values” and as a colloquial expression for money.

What is missing in this new version of the sublime, however, is the release of this intense emotional energy. This is accounted for in Kant's version of the sublime by the intercession of the faculty of Reason, which provides justification for the failure of the imagination's aesthetic comprehension, thus drawing the sublime experience to a transcendental conclusion. As the next section shall attempt to demonstrate, in Pelevin's novel this intercession is accomplished not by Reason, but rather by the very aesthetic products that Morkovin and Tatarsky produce: advertisements.

5.4.1 The Calm Before the Storm

While working in Gusein's kiosk in Moscow, Tatarsky acquires two qualities that bode well for his future career in advertising. The first is “cynicism, as limitless as the view from the
Ostankino tower.” This striking metaphor signals an important change in Tatarsky's outlook. The horizon depicted in the opening chapter of the novel was one of naïve anticipation, fueled by the hope that something radically different—yet necessarily positive—would shatter the horizon's boundary. After this event occurs, however, this threshold disappears. The world becomes coincident with itself, an eternally receding horizon that is only united by the cynical, hypocritical messages of the media that emanate from the tower itself. The second quality Tatarsky acquires is a kind of intuition by which he is able to discern customers' personalities:

Второе качество было удивительным и труднообъяснимым. Татарскому достаточно было коротко глянуть на руки клиента, чтобы понять, можно ли его обсчитать и насколько именно, можно ли ему нахамить или нет (...) Здесь не существовало никакой четкой системы. Иногда в окошке появлялся кулак, похожий на волосатую дыню, но было ясно, что его обладателя можно смело посылать во все шесть направлений. А иногда сердце Татарского тревожно замирало при виде узкой женской ладони с наманикюренными ногтями.⁴¹³

Though an acquired skill, the lack of a “concrete system” in Tatarsky's aptitude for chiromancy is revealing in two ways. Firstly, it reveals—albeit in impoverished form—Tatarsky's artistic intuition, the ability to read beneath the illusory surface of a particular (in this case, a hand) and create an entire image of a personality. Secondly, the image that is created only functions as a dynamic of confrontation. The only information Tatarsky's intuition imparts is hopelessly impoverished and binary: whether he can take advantage of someone else, or whether he himself is in danger of being taken advantage of.

Tatarsky will employ both of these new aptitudes in his first foray into the world of

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⁴¹²“Цинизм, бескрайний, как вид с Останкинской телебашни.” Pelemin, Sobranie sochinenii v 3-kh tomakh, 3:17.
⁴¹³The second quality was surprising and difficult to explain. It was enough for Tatarsky to quickly glance at a customer's hands to determine whether he could short-change them and for how much, whether he could be rude or not (…) Here there was no fixed system. Sometime a fist would appear in the window like a hairy melon, but it was clear that you could confidently tell its owner to bugger off. At other times, Tatarsky's heart would stop upon seeing a thin, feminine hand with manicured nails. Pelemin, Sobranie sochinenii v 3-kh tomakh, 3:18.
advertising. As the “script-writer” (сценарист), Tatarsky's ability to deceive his clients plays a central role. Unlike the classical model of Western advertising—in which commercials convince consumers to purchase a product—Tatarsky's task remains entirely focused on the client himself. As Morkovin explains to Tatarsky during their first encounter, these clients allegedly share a common psychological profile. The typical procedure centers on a small-time businessman taking out a loan from a bank, who then proceeds to waste all of his newfound wealth on status symbols, expensive automobiles, and copious amounts of alcohol. Exhilarated by a feeling of personal power, the client experiences the sublime as both “infinite money” and “infinite power”:

Когда примерно половина «Смирновской» или «Абсолюта» еще не выпита, джип еще ездит, а смерть кажется далекой и абстрактной, в голове у человека, который все это заварил, происходит своеобразная химическая реакция. В нем просыпается чувство безграничного величия, и он заказывает себе рекламный клип. Причем он требует, чтобы этот клип был круче, чем у других идиотов. (…) Открыл человек какое-нибудь малое предприятие «Эверест», и так ему хочется увидеть свой логотипчик по первому каналу, (...) Так вот, в момент, когда в голове у клиента происходит эта реакция, из кустов появляемся мы. (emphasis added)⁴¹⁴

The catalyst of this “chemical reaction” is not so much the quantity of alcohol consumed, as it is the amount of money consumed. The “unbounded grandeur” experienced by the client can be recognized as metaphorical substitution: the “sublime material” of money—its invincibility—is incorporated within the client's image of his own person. The classically sublime image of “Everest”, the impulse to excessively indulge in intoxicating experience, and the desire to

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⁴¹⁴When just about half of the “Smirnoff” or “Absolut” had yet to be drunk, and the jeep is still working, and death seems distant and abstract, there occurs a particular kind of chemical reaction in the head of the person who has gotten themselves into this mess. There arises in him a feeling of unlimited grandeur; and he order a commercial for himself. What's more, is he demands that his commercial be more awesome than the commercials of those other idiots. (…) Say for example a guy has opened up some small enterprise called “Everest”, and he's just dying to see his little logo on Channel 1 (…) So, at that moment, when this reaction is going on in the client's head, we come out of the brush. Ibid., 3:20.
inscribe one's self in artistic form on the first channel (i.e. the most popular TV channel in Russia), are all expressions of the client's fundamental illusion: he believes that he himself is the money he possesses. As Morkovin notes elsewhere, the consequences of this illusion are almost always tragic for the individual involved, often ending in their physical death.

Morkovin's advertising model has deep cultural roots in Russian literature. The client-copywriter relationship has a clear precedent in the patron-poet model of the odic tradition of the 18th century, in which the poet was called upon to articulate the grandeur of their subject via the rhetorics of the sublime.415 The incongruities between these two models, however, are revealing. In the 18th century tradition, the patron's claim to sublimity was made possible by actual authority (political power, military prowess, etc.) In Morkovin's late-20th century variant, this is clearly no longer the case. Instead, advertisements can be seen here as testaments—and often, epitaphs—of their client's weakness, of their inability to perceive reality. The sublime object (Tsar, Emperor, Prince) as paragon of power and virtue—the primary modes of the 18th century ode—is here replaced by the subject as a depraved lunatic, and the “soberly intoxicated” poet of the ode is replaced with the mercenary calculations of the ad man, who seeks only to acquire some small piece of the client's insanity before he dies.416

Of course, by acquiring a piece of the client’s insanity, the poet not only becomes implicated—this transpired at the moment of transaction—but is then destined to become subject to its effects. The sublimity of the commodity is both like and unlike the chiasmic sublime discussed earlier in chapters three and four of this study. The latter is interdependent, ultimately

416 “Sober intoxication” (трезвое пьянство in Trediakovskiy's 1734 “Ode on the Surrender of the City of Gdansk” docte et sainte ivresse in Boileau's 1694 “Ode sur la prise de Namur), was a common characterization of the sublime inspiration experienced by the odic poet when confronted with his subject. See also: Ibid., 16–19.
striving for a state of equilibrium that ensures the sublimity of the material and the spiritual. The former is, properly speaking, dialectic, and always leaves as its trace a resistant sublime remainder in the form of money that ensures its continued existence.

In this section and those to follow, I will examine three of Tatarsky’s advertisements that when viewed collectively can be seen as participating in a rhetorics of amplification in sweep and intensity. Not only do they accompany Tatarsky’s growing accumulation of wealth, they also represent a kind of historical trajectory of three preceding modes of secular “imperial sublime” in Russian culture from the post-Soviet perspective: the individualized Enlightenment autocrat of the 18th and early 19th century, the nation-state of “official Romantic nationalism” (as discussed earlier in connection with Marx), and the ideological state of the 20th century. The post-Soviet “capitalist sublime”, as embodied in Tatarsky’s advertisements, is capable of ventriloquizing all of these with an ever-broadening intensity and scope.

In Tatarsky's first encounter with a client, Morkovin's model is put into action. The target is a former physics teacher turned perestroika businessman. Having recently received a large loan, the client has rented an entire factory for producing “bird's milk” cakes—his main product—and has already started drinking. Armed with a fake Rolex, a rented Mercedes, and a borrowed sports coat, Tatarsky sets off to meet the client, and finds himself utterly uninspired by the details of his business. This changes, however, when Tatarsky turns his attention to the client's physical and emotional state:

Клиент тем временем задумчиво и насуплено глядел на свою пыжиковую шапку в застекленном шкафу. Татарский посмотрел на его руки. Они были сцеплены замком, а большие пальцы быстро вращались друг вокруг друга, словно наматывая на себя невидимую нить. Это и был момент истины.

– А вы не боитесь, что все может кончиться? – спросил Татарский. – Ведь время сами знаете какое. Вдруг все рухнет?
Proceeding like a psychoanalyst with a patient, Tatarsky engages in an intuitive symptomatic reading of his client's psychic state. This is a risky procedure— as shown by the client's being taken aback and ceasing the action when confronted with it—and Tatarsky's colleagues later reprimand him for it, claiming that his question could have resulted in losing the client. However, the anxiety Tatarsky discovers in his analysis is important. When the client is forced to address his anxiety, its intensity is revealed by his immediate rationalization and disavowal: from his point of view, anxiety is a natural, universal condition of the culture he lives in (i.e. the very notion of someone not being filled with fear is viewed as incomprehensible). What Tatarsky discovers is a deeper reading of the client than Morkovin's model was capable of. Morkovin's notion of “unbounded grandeur” is not what motivates the client's desire, but is simply an effect. The cause, as Tatarsky aptly notices, is the client's anxiety at being separated from the sublime money that makes his illusion possible.

Tatarsky's colleagues fail to recognize the importance of this discovery. When they return to the client with a series of proposals, Tatarsky's concept is proposed last, after numerous other have been rejected. Yet in the end, the client approves the concept, and is willing to pay $35,000 for it, a record sum. Tatarsky's success can be attributed to his deployment of sublime

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417 During all this, the client frowned, directing his brooding gaze toward the fur hat in the glass case. Tatarsky looked at his hands. They were locked together, with their thumbs quickly circling around each other, as if they were winding an invisible thread. This was the moment of truth. “Aren't you afraid that this could all come to an end?” Tatarsky asked. “You know what kind of times these are. What if everything suddenly collapses?” The client winced, looking with bewilderment first at Tatarsky, and then at his companions. His thumbs stopped spinning. “I'm afraid,” he replied, raising his eyes, “Who isn't afraid? You've got some strange questions.”

rhetorics in his proposal. His script begins with a series of historical images attesting to the transient nature of human civilization:

Росла и рушилась Вавилонская башня, разливался Нил, горел Рим, скакали куда-то по степи бешеные гунны – а на заднем плане вращалась стрелка огромных прозрачных часов.

«Род приходит, и род уходит, – говорил глухой и демонический (Татарский так и написал в сценарии) голос за кадром, – а земля пребывает вовеки».  

The depictions of the rise and fall of ancient civilizations—accompanied by an appropriate biblical citation—demonstrate an attempt to evoke the sublimity of nature, albeit in a melodramatic fashion. Yet despite the overwhelming, violent power of nature—the classic sublime object of Burke and Kant—Tatarsky's script asserts there is one object capable of withstanding these forces of destruction, an object that is as sublime to Tatarsky's client as it is ridiculous to Pelevin's reader:

Но даже земля с развалинами империй и цивилизаций погружалась в конце концов в свинцовый океан; над его ревущей поверхностью оставалась одинокая скала, как бы рифмующаяся своей формой с Вавилонской башней, с которой начинался сценарий. Камера наезжала на скалу, и становился виден выбитый в камне пирожок с буквами «ЛКК», под которым был девиз, найденный Татарским в сборнике «Крылатые латиницы»:

MEDIIS TEMPUSTATIBUS PLACIDUS.
СПОКОЙНЫЙ СРЕДИ БУРЬ
ЛЕФОРТОВСКИЙ КОНДИТЕРСКИЙ КОМБИНАТ

418 The Tower of Babel rose and fell, the Nile was flooded, Rome burned, and crazed Huns galloped off somewhere into the steppe, while in the background the hands of an enormous transparent clock turned. “One generation cometh, another generation passeth away,” said a hoarse and demonic voice-over (Tatarsky specifically wrote this in the script), “but the earth abideth forever.” Ibid., 26.

419 The biblical quote comes from Ecclesiastes 1:4. Later in the novel, the same chapter (1:18) is alluded to in an advertisement for Davidoff Light cigarettes: “Во много мудрости много печали, и умножающий познания умножает скорбь: Davidoff Lights.” (For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow: Davidoff Lights). Two additional references are at work here. The fist is an indirect reference to Griboedov's Woe from Wit (То́пе ом вуа), which Tatarsky quotes in his Parliament cigarette ad (which will be discussed in the next section). In addition, the author of Ecclesiastes identifies himself as the “son of David”. As a Russian word, “Davidoff” can be read as a surname (Davidson). Ibid., 3:58.

420 But in the end even the earth with the ruins of empires and civilization sunk into a leaden ocean, above whose roaring surface there remained a single solitary cliff, somehow recalling in its shape the Tower of Babel from the
There are three perspectives of Tatarsky's advertisement that are in need of consideration here: a reading belonging to the Tatarsky's client, a shared reading belonging to both Tatarsky and his coworker, and the reading imparted to the reader of the novel.

The first reading is largely determined by the client's naïve consciousness. He takes the ad as a sincere work of art. Unwilling or unable to admit the acute cause of his own anxiety, the client can easily be seduced by the advertisement's depiction of imperturbability in the face of an alleged universal threat inscribed within nature itself. For the client, the sublime experience is not about positive manifestations of his own personal power, such as those shown in the rejected proposals. Instead, the client identifies with the sublime “negatively”, as the ability to resist even the most overwhelming destructive forces.

Unlike his coworkers, Tatarsky senses that his client's desire for self-preservation exceeds the desire for infinite pleasure or material acquisition. The solution to this desire, Tatarsky implies, is best presented through a fantasy, one that performs the process of misidentification aesthetically without directly implicating the client's anxiety. Instead, this anxiety is both naturalized and historicized; dissolving what is a personal concern into a universal condition. Tatarsky is interested in producing the feeling of privation that Lyotard identifies with the sublime, but this is not an example of “undoing” capitalism’s technology of time, but rather of

beginning of the script. The camera quickly zoomed in on the cliff, and a cake with the letters “LCC” chiseled into stone came into view. Beneath the cake was a slogan, found by Tatarsky in a collection entitled Popular Latinisms:

MEDIIS TEMPUSTATIBUS PLACIDUS.
CALM AMIDST THE STORM.
LEFORTOVO CONFECTIONARY COMBINE

Ibid., 3:27.
going back in time, when nature was the threat (and not, say organized crime or the equally organized tax inspection). Tatarsky is completely cognizant that his proposed commercial is absurd in its content and ridiculous in its execution, but, as far as the client is concerned, he acts as if it is not. In other words, here Tatarsky is practicing the “cynical form of ideology”, propagating falsehood for his own material gain.

The final reading of Tatarsky's script takes place on the level of the text of the novel itself. For the reader, Tatarsky's script can in no way be understood as a sublime text. Featuring the complete annihilation of a clearly melodramatic sublime edifice by the sheer absurdity of the “revelation” of a cake to be a sublime object, it's parodic dimension is clear. Moreover, the reader has been doubly prepared for the deflation, as he is aware both of the history of Tatarsky's “intuition” as well as how images can be undermined through association with commercial products. The comic excess of irony is triggered at the moment of the arrival of the commodity being advertised.

As literature, the juxtaposition of these two perspectives is capable of producing a critique. The banality of a pathetic middle-aged businessman trying to relieve his anxiety through commissioned commercialized art is used by Pelevin as an indictment of the violence inherent in the world of Russian business. The absurd incongruity of the sublime edifice to the sublime object is amplified further by the author when the client is found murdered, his mouth stuffed full with a rival's pastry, in what might be literature's first example of pastry-on-pastry violence.\textsuperscript{421} Part of what allows this absurdity to be felt so keenly, however, is a certain protected
vantage point on the part of the reader, one that allows them to maintain aesthetic distance and avoid personal implication. As I will show in the next two advertisements, Pelevin diminishes this aesthetic distance over the course of the novel, forcing the reader to confront their own implication within the novel's moral frame.

5.4.2 Parliament of Birds

In the opening of the next chapter, Pelevin's narrator returns to the motif of emptiness and anxiety that Tatarsky experienced earlier in the novel. In an ironic description of the fate of the numerous statues of Lenin that dotted the Soviet landscape, he traces their transformation from objects of ideological veneration into the sublime material of money:

А вождь наконец-то покидал насиженную Россию. Его статуи увозили за город на военных грузовиках (говорили, что какой-то полковник придумал переплавлять их на цветной металл и много заработал, пока не грохнули), но на смену приходила только серая страшноватость, в которой душа советского типа быстро догнивала и проваливалась внутрь самой себя. Газеты уверяли, что в этой страшноватости давно живет весь мир и от того в нем так много вещей и денег, а понять это мешает только «советская ментальность».

The theme of anxiety is repeated here, but the focus has shifted from the “emptiness of everyday objects” examined earlier. Instead, the decomposition and collapse described takes on a specifically national character; it is specifically the Soviet soul that is faced with collapse.

422 And the Leader finally abandoned his familiar posts in Russia. His statues were taken outside of the city in military trucks (they said some colonel had come up with the idea of melting them down for scrap metal and made a lot of money before he got whacked), but they were only relieved by a grey anxiety, in which the soul of the Soviet kind quickly decayed and collapsed inwards into itself. The newspapers assured people that the rest of the world had been living in this state of anxiety for a long time and that was why it contained so many things and so much money, and that it was only the “Soviet mentality” that prevented this from being understood. Pelevin, Sobranie sochinenii v 3-kh tomakh, 3:30.
Pelevin thus reworks the Marxian notion of the “withering away of the state” (отмирание государства), recasting it as both physical and metaphysical transfiguration. Governed by a muted anxiety that makes possible the “natural” abundance of wealth and consumer goods—“the whole world has been living like this for a long time,”—the new Russian mentality needs to overcome the fetters of sovok.

As a catalyst for this transformation, Tatarsky finds himself once more in the role of a translator, and is charged with rewriting Western commercial brands into an intelligible language for the Russian consumer. The colonial dimension of his new assignment is personified by his new employer, Dmitri Pugin, a former New York cab driver who returns to Russia in search of the success he was unable to attain in America. In a conversation with Tatarsky, Pugin describes how the American mentality differs from the Soviet mentality:

– В Нью-Йорке особенно остро понимаешь, – сказал он Татарскому за водочкой, к которой перешли после чая, — что можно провести всю жизнь на какой-нибудь маленькой вонючей кухне, (...) глядеть на это говно и помойки, а жизнь незаметно пройдет.

– Интересно, – задумчиво отозвался Татарский, — а зачем для этого ехать в Нью-Йорк? Разве…

– А потому что в Нью-Йорке это понимаешь, а в Москве нет, – перебил Пугин. – Правильно, здесь этих вонючих кухонь и обсожанных дворов гораздо больше. Но здесь ты ни за что не поймешь, что среди них пройдет вся твоя жизнь. До тех пор, пока она действительно не пройдет. И в этом,

423. The first act by virtue of which the state really constitutes itself the representative of the whole of society — the taking possession of the means of production in the name of society — this is, at the same time, its last independent act as a state. State interference in social relations becomes, in one domain after another, superfluous, and then dies out of itself; the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of processes of production. The state is not "abolished". It dies out.” Engels, *Herr Eugen Duhring’s Revolution in Science.*


425. Tatarsky’s new profession (translations between Russia and the West) is an echo of his Soviet one. Now, however, Tatarsky has to make his translations aesthetically convincing.
For Pugin one of the essential differences between the American and Russian mentalities is how time is perceived. In his view, the Soviet consciousness is naïve, accustomed to living in a hermetic chronotope marked by eternity in which the potential for change cannot be perceived. By contrast, in America one can participate in Lyotard's “metaphysics of capital”, the “technology of time” in which infinity—a continuous and never-ending increase in goods, wealth and power—can be felt. Significantly, however, Pugin's statement seems to indicate that this sensation can only be felt as privation, i.e. there can only be the sensation of a missed opportunity. As the narrator notes, Pugin lost his personal connection to the Soviet mentality during his time in New York, where it was displaced with an inexorable, quasi-pathological desire for (material) success: “Соленые ветра Брайтон-Бич выдули из его головы затхлые советские конструкции и заразили неудержимой тягой к успеху.”

Tatarsky's first concept for Pugin—a repositioning of the Sprite brand within Russian neo-national discourse—is a moderate success. His second assignment, a campaign for

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426 In New York you understand particularly keenly, – he said to Tatarsky over the vodka that they had switched to after having tea, – that you could spend your entire life in some small, foul kitchen, (...) [you] look at this shit and garbage, while your life imperceptibly passes you by.
– Interesting, – replied Tatarsky, thinking it over, – but why do you have to go to New York for that? Is it really...
– Because in New York you understand it, but in Moscow you don't, – interrupted Pugin – Sure, there are a lot more foul-smelling kitchens and trash-filled courtyards here. But here you'll never understand that your life is passing among them. Not until it has already completely gone by. And in that, by the way, is one of central characteristics of the Soviet mentality. Pelevin, Sobranie sochinenii v 3-kh tomakh, 3:31.

427 The salty winds of Brighton Beach had blown out of his mind the musty constructions of the Soviet mentality and infected him with an inexorable drive for success. Ibid.
428 In this campaign, Tatarsky—mistakenly thinking the slogan for Sprite is the 1980s slogan for 7-Up, the “un-cola”, positions Sprite as a Russian nationalist alternative for patriots who disagree with Western ideals associated with Pepsi and Coke. One of the slogans for the campaign “Sprite. The un-cola for Nikola” attempted to associate the beverage with the image of a common Russian. Like many other moments in Pelevin's novel, this slogan was brought into life from literature when a Russian brand of kvas named “Nikola” essentially appropriated Pelevin's slogan part and parcel. The campaign as a whole has been extremely successful. One of its most brilliant variations on Pelevin's theme is a series of TV commercials in which an actor who plays an American with a thick accent pretending to be Russian tries to warn the Russian public about the dangers of drinking Western-
Parliament brand cigarettes is more daunting. In his previous concept, Tatarsky was able to recast Sprite as a “nationalist” alternative to the definitively American Coca-Cola, thus preserving the binary opposition between East and West. Such a rhetorical sleight of hand is impossible with Parliament; in the Russian context, the very word (парламент, a borrowing from English) is rooted with Western connotations. The only association that Tatarsky can come up with is “Cromwell's wars in England” as portrayed in Alexandre Dumas' novels.\textsuperscript{429} That the source text for Tatarsky's association is a work of fiction by a Western author—and that in the novel in question the protagonists are fighting against the Parliament—only further demonstrates how the Soviet connotations for Parliament are overwhelmingly negative. However, the Soviet alternative—the very dictatorship alluded to in the statues of Lenin earlier—is likewise unfeasible and obsolete.

In his initial attempts to solve this quandary, Tatarsky tries to develop the sensation of the passing of time as privation that Pugin alluded to in their conversation.\textsuperscript{430} After several false starts, Tatarsky finally arrives at a solution, but only after he experiences feelings of melancholy and an acute awareness of his own mortality:

\begin{quote}
 style soft drinks.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{429} Specifically, the novel Twenty Years After. See: Dumas, \textit{Twenty Years After}.

\textsuperscript{430} In the first, he relies on a pun based on the Russian saying, “steam won't break your bones” (пар kostей не ломит), transforming it into “the steam of bones isn't a lament” (пар kostей не ламент). In the second, he returns to the binary opposition between East and West: “Parliament — The Unyava” (in the original: “Parliament — The Unyava”) but realizes that slogan has to be entirely in Russian. His final attempt: “What does the coming day prepare for us? Parliament. Anreal.” (“Что день грядущий нам готовит? Парламент. Неява) combines the morbid sense of death and lament of the first version with the unreality of the second version by citing Lensky's elegiac verses read on the eve of his duel with Onegin, but suffers from a major grammatical flaw. Lensky's poem, which also serves the basis for his aria in Tchaikovsky's operatic adaptation of Pushkin's novel, occurs in Chapter 6: “Куда, куда вы удалились / Весны моей златые дни? / Что день грядущий нам готовит? / Его мой взор напрасно ловит, / В глубокой мгле таится он.” The poor quality of Tatarsky's efforts here runs parallel to Onegin's narrator's criticism of Lensky's poem: Так он писал темно и вяло / (Что романтизмом мы зовем, / Хоть романтизма тут нимало / Не вижу я; да что нам в том?). Пушкин, “Евгений Онегин,” 4:111–112.
Сев за стол, он разложил на нем свои находки и еще раз осмотрел их. Пальмы с пачки «Парламента» и с фотографии на стене были очень похожи, и он подумал, что они растут в такой точке мира, куда он никогда не попадет – даже, по русскому обычаю, на танке, – а если и попадет, то только тогда, когда ему уже ничего не будет нужно ни от этой женщины, ни от этого песка, ни от этого моря, ни от себя самого. Меланхолия, в которую его погрузила эта мысль, была такой глубокой, что на самом ее дне он неожиданно увидел свет: ему в голову пришел искомый слоган и идея плаката для «Парламента».

Melancholy and the sheer unattainability of Tatarsky's desire—he is currently unable to achieve his desired object now, and even if he were miraculously given the opportunity to do so, he would no longer be able to desire it, i.e. only after death—endows his emotional state with a decidedly elegiac quality. Tatarsky's thoughts here can be seen as the obverse side of the optimistic carefree generation depicted in the opening of the novel. Instead of the anticipation of the arrival of the “forbidden world,” Tatarsky is besieged by the feeling of privation that the forbidden world will remain forever closed off from his life. The collapse of the Soviet Union, instead of heralding in a new age of freedom, is experienced here only as a final denial: given the decline of Russian military prowess, escape from everyday life is no longer possible, even through military exploits.

The feeling of absolute privation and eternal resignation is then sublimated by Tatarsky's in his advertisement for Parliament cigarettes:

Этот плакат представляет собой фотографию набережной Москвы-реки, a

431 Sitting at the table, he laid out his discoveries and examined them again. The palms from the pack of Parliaments and the photograph on the wall were quite similar, and he thought that they grew in a particular place in the world that he would see—even, in accordance with the Russian custom, by tank—and even if he did see them, then it would only happen when he no longer needed anything from this woman, the sand, the sea, or even from himself. The melancholy in which this thought had submerged was so deep, that at the very bottom of it he unexpectedly saw the light: the sought-after slogan and an idea for a poster for Parliament appeared in his mind. Pelevin, Sobranie sochinenii v 3-kh tomakh, 3:56.

432 See, for example, Kant's pre-critical remarks in the Observations: Kant, Kant, 16, 24, 103. as well as his discussion in the Critique of Judgment: Kant, Critique of Judgment, 81. For a more recent discussion, see Lyotard: Lyotard, Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime, 153–156.
сделанную с моста, на котором в октябре 93 года стояли исторические танки. На месте Белого дома мы видим огромную пачку «Парламента» (компьютерный монтаж). Вокруг нее в изобилии растут пальмы. Сlogan — цитата из Грибоедова:

И ДЫМ ОТЕЧЕСТВА НАМ СЛАДОК И ПРИЯТЕН
ПАРЛАМЕНТ

This transformation of Tatarsky's emotional state into the advertisement primarily proceeds through substitution. By replacing the Russian White House with a pack of Parliaments, Tatarsky associates the impossible object of his desire—freedom and pleasure—with the political impossibility of a functioning parliamentary system in Russia in the wake of the 1993 constitutional crisis. The presence of tanks in the center of Moscow can be seen as an ironic commentary on the “Russian tradition of seeing the world by tank”; now the only destination for Russian tanks is the very same Moscow Tatarsky seeks to escape.

What most clearly ties Tatarsky's ad to the sublime is its use of perspective, in which the pack of Parliament dominates the landscape, the proper position for a center of political authority. In the advertisement, the viewer takes the position of one of the tanks approaching the White House, inviting them to fire upon the parliament. The act of firing the tank's cannon—a flash of light and sound followed by a cloud of smoke—visually replicates the visual act of smoking—the glow of a cigarette and the puff of smoke that appears at its end after the smoker inhales. Both acts, according to the ad, result in pleasure (albeit of a particularly deleterious

433 The poster presents a photograph of the embankment of the Moscow River, taken from the bridge on which the tanks of history stood in October 1993. In the place of the White House we see an enormous pack of Parliaments (computer montage). In the background one can see growing palm trees. The slogan is a citation from Griboedov: Even the smoke of the Fatherland is sweet and pleasant to us. Parliament. Pelevin, Sobranie sochinenii v 3-kh tomakh, 3:56.

434 The reference to the crisis also ties the poster to the Ostankino television tower, which was one of the targets of pro-Parliament demonstrators. In the ensuing firefight between the demonstrators and forces loyal to the Interior Ministry, approximately 60 people were killed.

435 The classic architectural object in this regard would be an Egyptian pyramid.
The dual signification of the tank and a cigarette are uncannily similar to the previous scene with Tatarsky’s first client. When confronted with his repressed (i.e. subconscious) anxiety, Tatarsky's client denies it, claiming that anxiety is a universal condition shared by all Russians, i.e. that it is not a result of his own actions. A similar procedure is possible here, but it has to be modified. A smoker may deny that he is potentially harming himself for pleasure, but what is impossible to deny is that smoking is harmful; to claim otherwise would either be ignorant bordering on insanity. In other words, the only way for a smoker to perform the disavowal is to take a cynical approach, to acknowledge the harmfulness of the habit while continuing to pursue it. Similarly, it is difficult to claim that bombing the legislature is an ethical act for a government declares that it is for democracy and capitalism. A cynical government would not find such an action as problematic.

Tatarsky's advertisement, then, is founded on the notion of a cynical consciousness. This aspect becomes even more apparent when one takes into account the genealogy of the slogan used. Although Tatarsky identifies the source of the slogan as coming from Griboedov *Tope om yma*—thus connecting it with the hallucinogenic mushrooms he consumed some hours prior—the phrase “the smoke of the fatherland is sweet and pleasant to us”, has a long history in Russian and world literature. Scholars have traced its source as far back as Homer's *Odyssey*, and have noted its appearance in Derzhavin's “Arfa” (1798), and a Latin variant served as the motto for the 18th century journal *Rossiiskii muzeum* (1792-1794). In all of these texts—and their more modern variants—the “smoke of the Fatherland” is understood as a symbol of “hearth and

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home”, often viewed with nostalgia by the speaker who says it at a distance. In Griboedov's play, however, the phrase appears after Chatsky has already arrived in Moscow. In the lines preceding the quotation, he lists a number of old acquaintances in Moscow, claiming he will soon be sick of them:

Опять увидеть их мне суждено судьбой!
 Жить с ними надоест, и в ком не сыщешь пятен?
 Когда ж пространствуешь, воротишься домой,
 И дым Отечества нам сладок и приятен!

Here, the slogan of the advertisement is realized, as “even the smoke of the Fatherland is sweet and pleasant to us”, that is, despite its flaws, home seems quite pleasant—from a distance. Tatarsky's slogan thus has two readings—two voices—contained within it. The first one is a reading of a naïve consciousness, one that is predicated on a feeling of nostalgia (i.e. a feeling of privation) in which distance in space and time allows one to forget the important details of what one's homeland is actually like. The second reading is the actual realization of these flaws—as Chatsky himself experiences over the course of the play—and, cynically accepting them (which, of course, Chatsky does not).

The unification of these two readings in their act—their judgment of the bombing of the White House—can be seen as a particularly perverse reworking of a maxim Kant attributes to political authority in “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?”: “think what you

437 For example, a 1980 film based on Lomonsov's return to his home is entitled “The Smoke of the Fatherland” (Lapshin, 1980).
438 Chatsky's speech opens with a response to a question posed by Sofia, who playfully takes issue with Chatsky's criticisms of Moscow: “An attack on Moscow? That's what seeing the world means / Where could be better?” Chatsky's response is “There, where we are not” (где нас нет). The exchange has entered into colloquial usage as a Russian equivalent for “the grass is always greener on the other side.” Both the question and the response serve as one of the epigraph's to the seventh chapter of Eugene Onegin. Griboyedov, Sochinenia., 20.
439 I am fate once again to see them! / I will grow tired of living with them, but who is perfect? / When you travel and return home / Even the smoke of the Fatherland is sweet and pleasant. Ibid.
440 Greenleaf and Moeller-Sally, Russian Subjects, 229–243.
want, but obey.” Pelevin translates this maxim into consumerist language: “think what you want, but enjoy buying this commodity.” In doing so, Pelevin opens the possibility of a reading of Tatarsky's advertisement as political commentary.

Pelevin's portrayal of the Parliament ad in the novel builds a relationship between reader and text that differs from the Lefortovo advertisement examined earlier. In the Lefortovo ad, events are depicted in such a way that the reader can maintain a certain critical distance; in these passages, both Tatarsky and the reader can remain aloof and uninvested. Here Tatarsky assumes a purely functional relationship to his client—he creates his advertisement with the express goal of acquiring wealth. Meanwhile the reader—who is privy to Tatarsky's own cynical attitude—is led by Pelevin's narrator to view the entire sequence of events as pure absurdity.

In the passages examined here, both of these relationships shift, bringing both Tatarsky and Pelevin's reader closer to the events being discussed. There is no externalized, concrete client for Tatarsky to manipulate in this case. Instead, Tatarsky draws upon his own personal relationship to his national identity, which is largely experienced as inferiority. This can be seen in his inability to express European concepts in Russian terms; unlike Pushkin’s narrator in Eugene Onegin, this is not an indication of Tatarsky’s sophistication, cosmopolitanism, or wit but the reverse. Equally unclear is whether Tatarsky himself is aware of the connections he makes in the ad. The slogan to the previously advertisement was gleaned from a dictionary, an acceptable strategy for cynically deceiving a concrete ignorant individual. In this case, the

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441 For Kant's original see: Kant, An Answer to the Question. For a discussion of Foucault's extended response to Kant's thoughts, see: Gane and Johnson, Foucault's New Domains, 37–60.

442 That the individual in question is likely to face a violent death, from such a perspective, is seen as an inevitable natural occurrence.
depersonalized client and Tatarsky’s own emotional investment shift the reader’s evaluation in the direction of the ad’s author.

External observation has been replaced by self-reflection reported via Pelevin's omniscient narrator, and the results of Tatarsky's reflection take on the crystallized form of his advertisement. Published in 1999, Pelevin's novel was written in the wake of the 1998 financial crisis in Russia. For some, this event has been read as a consequence of the 1993 crisis in government, in which Yeltsin's administration emerged as the overwhelmingly dominant force in Russian politics. Although Yeltsin's success in maintaining power was the result of a large number of factors, a national referendum in April of 1993 played a central role in portraying his course of action as being justified through democratic consensus.

It is from this specific historical horizon that Pelevin's reading takes place. Importantly, this historical horizon is shared by Pelevin's immediate audience: the Russian public reading the novel in 1999. By broadening the field of investigation—what is examined here is no longer an individual, but rather the idea of a common national identity—Pelevin brings his reader within the horizon of the text of the novel, confronting them with their own position in Russian history, reminding them of events of the recent and more distant past and their own possible connection and implication as a result. Democracy was still coming to Russia in 1999, just like it was in 1833, the year that finally saw both the publication of Woe from Wit and the announcement of the official policy of “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality” of the Russian Empire.

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443 The novel's dedication—“to the memory of the middle class”—can be understood in a variety of ways, but the reference to thousands of would-be middle class Russians losing their life savings is the most readily apparent. Pelevin, Sobranie sochinenii v 3-kh tomakh, 3:7.
5.5 Ascent-Descent-Ascent

The advertisements examined thus far (a final one will be examined in the next section) are designed by Tatarsky to be sold and to sell. For the reader, they are filtered through metapoetic irony. These aspects prevent the occurrence of a “true sublime” in which lyric transport is possible for either protagonist or reader. For most of the novel, these experiences are limited to Tatarsky’s drug-induced hallucinations in which Tatarsky’s perspective and the reader’s merge in their lack of exterior excess (external motivation, in the case of Tatarsky, external decoding, in the case of the reader). Within the space of these visions, the mind’s presumption to time, i.e. that time is money, ceases, creating space for the reflective thought that the culture industry makes impossible.\(^{444}\) The drugs used to stimulate Tatarsky’s vision are hallucinogens, and their chemical components act directly on the body to heighten consciousness without agitating appetites or incurring dependency, unlike alcohol and cocaine, which are portrayed negatively for their ability to dull the senses or cause illusions of invulnerability. These visions are also inspired by Tatarsky’s readings of various esoteric texts on Babylonian mythology he finds in his apartment, which will be discussed in a later section. The choice of setting is not incidental, being reflective both of the general fascination with occultism for Tatarsky’s generation and—for our purposes—the notion that the mythological past of pre-antiquity (the “eastern despotism” discussed in Marx’s excerpts) as an example of the pre-cynical sublime. These visions are interpolate the advertisements just discussed in the novel’s plot. The first vision occurs after the Lefortovo ad and immediately precedes the Parliament ad.

\(^{444}\) There is a parallel with Erofeev’s Venichka, who similarly exists outside of normal time.
while the second takes place after the Parliament ad, and immediately precedes the final ad to be examined in the next section.

Tatarsky’s first vision occurs after consuming mushrooms with his school friend Gireev, an old classmate who continues to actively resist the intrusion of the new order as much as he did the old. The vision itself is abstract, but is reminiscent of Ivanov’s “sublime ascent” and Platonov’s conception of consciousness discussed in previous chapters:

Татарский увидел свой ум - это была ярко-белая сфера, похожая на солнце, но абсолютно спокойная и неподвижная. Из центра сферы к ее границе тянулись темные скрученные ниточки-волоконца. Татарский понял, что это и есть его пять чувств. Волоконце чуть потолще было зрением, потоньше - слухом, а остальные были почти невидимы. Вокруг этих неподвижных волокон плясала извивающаяся спираль, похожая на нить электрической лампы, которая то совпадала на миг с одним из них, то завивалась сама вокруг себя светящимся клубком вроде того, что оставляет в темноте огонек быстро вращаемой сигареты. Это была мысль, которой был занят его ум.

"Значит, никакой смерти нет, - с радостью подумал Татарский. - Почему? Да потому, что ниточки исчезают, но шарик-то остается!"445

Here various motifs (light, the predominance of vision, the sense of tranquility) combine in a description that testifies to the persistence of a consciousness independent of physical sensation. Much like the Lefortovo ad campaign, here the primary concept is the resistance and persistence of a kernel of selfhood that is capable of transcending the material. The connection with the Romantic sublime is not coincidental. As Tatarsky continues to walk through the forest in the outskirts of Moscow, he comes across his former Chechen employer, Hussein, who then relates to him the plot of a Sufi poem by “Al-Ghazali”, entitled “Parliament of the Birds.”446

445 Pelevin, Sobranie sochinenii v 3-kh tomakh, 3:47.
446 Hussein’s attribution is perhaps inaccurate. The poem is question is certainly “Conference of the Birds” (or “Speech of the Birds”) and was composed in the 12th century by Attar of Nishapur.
After listening to Hussein’s story, Tatarsky experiences a sudden surge in the power of his thoughts:

Татарский чувствовал, что его мысли полны такой силы, что каждая из них - это пласт реальности, равноправный во всех отношениях с вечерним лесом, по которому он идет. Разница была в том, что лес был мыслью, которую он при всем желании не мог перестать думать. С другой стороны, воля почти никак не участвовала в том, что происходило в его уме. Как только он подумал о смещении языков, ему стало ясно, что воспоминание о Вавилоне и есть единственный возможный Вавилон: подумав о нем, он тем самым вызвал его к жизни. И мысли в его голове, как грузовики со стройматериалом, понеслись в сторону этого Вавилона, делая его все вещественнее и вещественнее.447

The surge Tatarsky experiences in the force of his thought and the merging of his mind with nature is reminiscent both of the Romantic “natural sublime”, and of the Pushkinian model of inspiration discussed in chapter two. The intensity here is neither rapture nor willful, instead the forest itself becomes a thought that insistently presents itself to Tatarsky’s consciousness for contemplation. Elegiac memory is similarly invoked with its imaginative powers of preservation and recreation. When the tower finally takes shape, it loses its hallucinatory quality, and Tatarsky finds himself on the grounds of an abandoned Soviet radar station in the form of a ziggurat. Realizing that “when there is a confusion of tongues, the tower starts to rise,” Tatarsky enters the abandoned structure, ascends to the top, and composes there the Parliament advertisement discussed in the previous section.

Tatarsky’s second vision occurs after taking a synthetic hallucinogen, LSD that he obtained earlier from a stranger he meets while getting drunk in a bar. The tab he purchases is stamped with an image that Tatarsky perceives as simultaneously Lenin and Uncle Sam. He

447 Pelevin, Sobranie sochinienii v 3-kh tomakh, 3:50–51.
ingests it while at home, and the ensuing vision that takes place correspondingly begins in a 20th century setting. Tatarsky sees a city crowned by a blinding, burning light that he describes is compared to a burning tower of an industrial factory or a modern television tower:

Над городом поднималась не то коническая заводская труба, не то телебашня-сложно было сказать, что это такое, потому что на вершине этой трубы-башни горел ослепительно белый факел, такой яркий, что дрожащий от жара воздух искажал ее контуры. Было видно, что ее нижняя часть похожа на ступенчатую пирамиду, а выше, в белом сиянии, никаких деталей разобрать было нельзя. Татарский подумал, что эта конструкция напоминала бы газовый факел вроде тех, что бывают на нефтезаводах, не будь пламя таким ярким.448

The combination of industrial and post-industrial sublime imagery here mixes with the classic sublime object of the pyramid, viewed from the proper physical distance to induce the sublime effect. What all three images have in common, however, is their status as cultural constructs of power (the tomb of the pharaohs, the industrial might of the factory, the projection of ideas via a television tower), inviting a comparison to the political character of Tatarsky’s Parliament campaign and its concurrent theme of social identity. As Tatarsky becomes more aware of his surroundings, he realizes that he is surrounded by people who, like him, feel drawn to the flame above.449 Tatarsky quickly becomes aware, however, that if he continues to look at the flame, it will consume him.

The sense of fear before this sublime object is accompanied by a kind of collective pressure; Tatarsky knows that many had already fallen victim to it, and sense people in front of him dragging him upward as well as those behind him. He momentarily closes his eyes, and the object before him changes, taking on the colossal figure of the apocalyptic Babylonian deity

448 Ibid., 3:141–142.
449 This replicates the use of perspective in the Parliament campaign, which is shown from the point of view of a tank aiming at the White House.
The combination of the pressure to conform to the collective will as well as the ability of sublime authority to respond to questions even before they formulated, is another connection between Tatarsky's second vision and the Parliament campaign. Combined, they can be understood as qualities of cynical ideology. Enkidu takes on a mask and lures people towards him to be destroyed. Yet the deception is not limited to this mask, the very trajectory of the people's journey, as Tatarsky soon realizes, is inverted. Instead of ascending, the people he sees around him are actually descending.

Tatarsky is able to pierce the veil of illusion in this scene that is clearly intended as an allegory for ideological operation. This moment of the sublime, in which fear and anxiety in front of humanity together, at which point the world would come to an end. He accomplishes this by drawing people to him on a series of golden strings that enter through the mouth and exit through the anus. This material grotesque and highlighting of the physical act of consumption (as opposed to the mental act of consuming ideology) ties this passage of the novel with Bakhtinian carnival—which likewise features an elimination of the self— as well as the general Dionysian tenor of the vision. Pelevin, Sobranie sochinenii v 3kh tomakh, 3:142.

Ibid., 3:143.

According to a myth Tatarsky reads before his mystical experience, Enkidu was tasked with collecting all of humanity together, at which point the world would come to an end. He accomplishes this by drawing people to him on a series of golden strings that enter through the mouth and exit through the anus. This material grotesque and highlighting of the physical act of consumption (as opposed to the mental act of consuming ideology) ties this passage of the novel with Bakhtinian carnival—which likewise features an elimination of the self—as well as the general Dionysian tenor of the vision. Pelevin, Sobranie sochinenii v 3kh tomakh, 3:142.
an overwhelming force give way to happiness, rapture, and gratitude, is connected with Tatarsky’s previous experience via the present—yet unseen—sun. If Tatarsky’s first vision revealed that there is an irreducible core to the self that is independent of its sensation of the surrounding world, his second reveals that this irreducible core has its own objective—one is tempted to say material—existence. Moreover, this core is capable of projecting itself as a kind of Gogolian double that is not actually the self but a mere reflection, despite all of its pretensions to wholeness. In other words, the “second nature” that is imposed upon those who live in a world ruled by ideology is not all-powerful but is entirely contingent on manipulating the desires and will of its subjects, much like the events depicted in the Parliament ad were ultimately dependent on the will of the citizenry.

The connection between these two visions is made explicit shortly thereafter; when Tatarsky’s hallucinations end, he immediately recalls his earlier experience on mushrooms. Combined, these two lessons learned form a paradox: an Apollonian insistence on the persistence of the self, on the one hand, and a Dionysian insistence on the importance of real, material, communal (political) power.\footnote{In addition, both of these discoveries—however powerful they are in that moment—prove to be fleeting and ineffable; Tatarsky is unable to relate them to anyone afterwards.}

5.6 Advertising the Divine

As sublime experiences, both of Tatarsky’s revelations regarding the nature and power of the self are portrayed in the novel as fleeting and incapable of being preserved in language. They are also forbidden. As Tatarsky’s begins to return to reality, he is confronted by the Sirruf, a mythological gatekeeper in charge of regulating access to such mystical knowledge. He
explains to Tatarsky that the vision he just witnessed was not the same as the Tower of Babel he had seen previously; instead what he had witnessed was a Tophet, a location where child sacrifice was practiced. He also explains that the myth Tatarsky had read just before his experience on LSD, is, in fact, an inversion of reality. The myth relates that the Babylonian deity Enkidu was charged with collecting the beads of Ishtar’s necklace, who had mistakenly thought they were human. As Sirruf explains, the people of Tatarsky’s vision were entirely the opposite, i.e. they were people who had mistakenly thought they were beads. Moreover, Sirruf points out that Tatarsky himself, as a copywriter, fulfills the role of Enkidu in his creation of advertisements, forcing people to gaze into the consuming fires of Hell.

When further questioned by the Sirruf as to why he decided to take such a potent hallucinogen, Tatarsky replies that he simply wanted to feel the pulse of life:

- Хотел ощутить биение жизни, - сказал Татарский и всхлипнул.
- Биение жизни? Ну ощути, - сказал сирруф.
Когда Татарский пришел в себя, единственное, чего ему хотелось, - это чтобы только что испытанное переживание, для описания которого у него не было никаких слов, а только темный ужас, больше никогда с ним не повторилось. Ради этого он был готов на все.
- Еще хочешь? - спросил сирруф.

The “dark horror” experienced by Tatarsky starkly contrasts with the anaesthetized passivity of the preceding vision. The “beating of life,” in its most elemental, de-spiritualized form, is indescribable suffering; elsewhere Sirruf refers to the real world as the very “material fire” that Zosima had discussed with such fear in Dostoevsky’s *Brothers Karamazov*.
Tatarsky’s desire that the experience “never occur again” echoes Venichka’s “indescribable” pain during the two hours after he was kicked out of the Kursk train station restaurant and before he gets on the train in *Moscow to the End of the Line*. Like Venichka, Tatarsky will also mark the passing of this suffering with a moment of reflection. For Venichka, the nausea he experiences in the gap of narrative is a result of material and self-inflicted dependency, an interruption of his normal state of “sober intoxication” that departs from the social norm. Tatarsky has a similar realization, but unlike Venichka’s chemical dependency, Tatarsky’s is the social model of cynical ideology. The limitations this places on Tatarsky is the inability to reflect, i.e. the inability to interrupt his own automated behavior—as both consumer and purveyor of commodities—in order to allow thought to contemplate itself. A hiatus from this automatization is made possible here, and the rupture Tatarsky experiences as pain prepares him for the reception of knowledge, which takes the form of the Sirruf’s testament to the inherent dignity and beauty of human nature:

Человек по своей природе прекрасен и велик, - сказал сираф. - Почти так же прекрасен и велик, как сираф. Но он этого не знает. А мусор - это и есть его незнание. Это identity, которой на самом деле нет. Человек в этой жизни присутствует при сжигании мусора своей identity. Согласись, что лучше греться у этого огонька, чем гореть в нем заживо.

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This idea is incompatible with the cynical worldview, which forbids dignity (as it does all virtue) as ideological constructs of the weak or ignorant. Yet if the following is true, then Tatarsky worldview is not only wrong, but also evil. Moreover, it is doubly so: as a consumer, Tatarsky is unable to venerate his own inherent worth, choosing instead to invest it in empty objects; as a copywriter, he is also guilty of convincing others to do the same. As Sirruf notes, Tatarsky

455 Ibid., 3:149.
belongs to the “service personnel” that facilitate the scene of his vision. He is also, by extension, responsible for inflicting the same harm on himself.

While Tatarsky may have been aware of this in a superficial manner prior to this (i.e. as the rhetorics of advertising), true understanding and knowledge requires reflection. The force of this truth, however, threatens to overwhelm Tatarsky’s mind: “Татарский подождал еще минуту и понял, что остался один на один со своим умом, готовым пойти вразнос. Надо было срочно чем-то себя занять.” The infinite apprehension of the sublime has possessed Tatarsky’s mind at this moment, and he is only able to channel this excess of thought temporarily by repeating a meaningless mantra acquired from a friend and downing vodka in order to dull his perception.

This too eventually fails, and Tatarsky continues to hallucinate. What he sees is a vision of the burning bush from Exodus, a classic example of the non-representational essence of the divine, expressed in a reflection contained in the divine name itself: “I am what I am”. In the passage from Exodus, God’s revelation to Moses is accompanied with a promise of liberation from Egypt. The vision, however, already bears the traces of Tatarsky’s descent towards material reality, as can be seen in when a hand containing a pickled cucumber emerges from within the burning bush, perhaps to “liberate” him from the aftertaste of the vodka he just consumed. The sublime mixes with the ridiculous here, but the notion of Tatarsky’s need for divine intervention is maintained.

As Tatarsky’s mind begins to revert to its normal state, he decides to turn on the television, where he is confronted with more religious imagery:

456 Tatarsky waited another minute and realized he was alone, one on one with his mind, which was ready to overload. He needed to occupy himself with something immediately. Pelevin, Sobranie sochinienii v 3-kh tomakh, 3:150.
Раздалась торжественная музыка, синее пятно на экране расплылось и превратилось в изображение. Передавали какой-то концерт.

«Го-осподи, к Тебе воз-звах!» — вращая выпученными глазами, пропел человек с напудренным лицом, в бабочке и перламутровом жилете под фраком. Во время пения он странно отгребал ладонью, словно его куда-то снесил невидимый поток горнего эфира.

Татарский щелкнул пультом, и человек в бабочке угас. «Помолиться, что ли? — подумал он. — Вдруг поможет…»

Although the source text of the biblical quotation is from the Christian Old Testament, its musical setting clearly places it within the liturgical tradition of Russian Orthodoxy. In the psalm, David compares his prayer to a sacrifice, and asks for deliverance from his enemies and his own temptations.

The visual context of the image, however, undermines the sacred dimension, just as it did in the image of the burning bush. Located within the television, this vision is necessarily demonic, and it is clear that the music is taking place in a secular setting, i.e. a concert.

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457 Majestic music sounded, and the blue dot on the screen dissolved, becoming an image. They were showing some kind of concert. “Lord, hear thou my pray-er!” sang a man with a powdered face, his eyes shooting in every direction. His face was powdered, and he was dressed in a bow tie and a suitjacket over a mother-of-pearl colored waistcoat. As he sang, his palm cut through the air in a strange manner, as if he was being carried off by an invisible current of celestial ether. Tatarsky clicked the remote control, and the man in the bow tie disappeared. “I guess I could pray,” he thought, “who knows, maybe it’ll work…”. Pelevin, Sobranie sochinenii v 3-kh tomakh, 3:152.

458 Psalm 141 (Psalm 140 in the traditional Orthodox enumeration): I call to you, Lord, come quickly to me; hear me when I call to you. / May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice. / Set a guard over my mouth, Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips. / Do not let my heart be drawn to what is evil so that I take part in wicked deeds along with those who are evildoers; do not let me eat their delicacies. / Let a righteous man strike me—that is a kindness; let him rebuke me—that is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it, for my prayer will still be against the deeds of evildoers. / Their rulers will be thrown down from the cliffs, and the wicked will learn that my words were well spoken. / They will say, “As one plows and breaks up the earth, so our bones have been scattered at the mouth of the grave.” / But my eyes are fixed on you, Sovereign Lord; in you I take refuge—do not give me over to death. / Keep me safe from the traps set by evildoers, from the snares they have laid for me. / Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I pass by in safety. Fyodor Glinka adapted the psalm in one of his “elegiac psalms”.

459 The psalm figures prominently in Orthodox vespers, the Easter vigil, and the Divine Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts. In the case of the latter, the liturgical moment when the hymn is sung echoes the direct experience of the Divine in the vision of the burning bush: it at this moment that the Royal Doors are opened. One of the more well-known arrangements of the hymn was composed by Pavel Chestnokov, who served as the final choirmaster of Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow before its demolition in 1931.
Moreover, it is easy to recognize in the strange secular dress of the conductor the character of Begemot from Bulgakov’s *Master and Margarita*.460

Turning off the television, Tatarsky turns to prayer. It begins in an appropriate sublime register, before shifting to a confessional mode, before degenerating into the colloquial idiom of Tatarsky’s profession:

– Господи, к Тебе воззвах, – сказал он тихо. – Я так виноват перед Тобой. Я плохо и неправильно живу, я знаю. Но я в душе не хочу ничего мерзкого, честное слово. Я никогда больше не буду есть эту дрянь. Я… Я просто хочу быть счастливым, а у меня никак не получается. Может, так мне и надо. Я ведь ничего больше не умею, кроме как писать плохие слоганы. Но Тебе, Господи, я напишу хороший – честное слово. Они ведь Тебя совершенно неправильно позиционируют. Они вообще не въезжают… 461

Like the psalmist, Tatarsky is penitent, declares the goodness of his intentions, and promises to refrain from temptation. However, this moment of self-introspection lead to the only sacrifice Tatarsky is capable of making, an advertisement:

Плакат (сюжет клипа): длинный белый лимузин на фоне Храма Христа Спасителя. Его задняя дверца открыта, и из нее бьет свет. Из света высовывается сандалия, почти касающаяся асфальта, и рука, лежащая на ручке двери. Лица не видим. Только свет, машина, рука и нога. Сlogan:

ХРИСТОС СПАСИТЕЛЬ

СОЛИДНЫЙ ГОСПОДЬ ДЛЯ СОЛИДНЫХ ГОСПОД.

460 Стоящий на задних лапах и выпачканный пылью кот тем временем раскланивался перед Маргаритой. Теперь на шее у кота оказался белый фрачный галстук бантиком, а на груди перламутровый дамский бинокль на ремешке. Кроме того, усы у кота были позолочены — Ну что же это тако! воскликнул Воланд, — зачем ты позолотил усы? И на кой черт тебе нужен галстук, если на тебе нет штанов? — Штаны коту не полагаются, мессир, (…) Но видели ли вы когда-либо кого-нибудь на балу без галстука? Я не намерен оказаться в комическом положении и рисковать тем, что меня вытолкают в шею! Каждый украшает себя, чем может. Считайте, что сказанное относится и к биноклю, мессир! — Но усы?.. — Не понимаю, — сухо возражал кот, — почему, брежь сегодня, Азазелло и Коровьев могли пошарить себя белой пудрой, и чем она лучше золотой? Я напудрил усы, вот и все! Булгаков, *Мастер и Маргарита*, 329.

Вариант:

ГОСПОДЬ ДЛЯ СОЛИДНЫХ ГОСПОД.

Бросив ручку, Татарский поднял заплаканные глаза в потолок. Господи, Тебе нравится? - тихо спросил он.

Here the ironic context obscures a serious point Pelevin is trying to make concerning the aesthetic. Like the vision from the Old Testament, the essence of the divine is not depicted here, only its attributes. Instead of the equivalency of contained in the phrase “I am who I am”, Tatarsky slogan builds on the intensification of another name of God: “Lord of Lords”. This infinite potential is then linked to the sublime idea “of infinite wealth.”

This is the limit of Tatarsky’s artistic talents; it is “all he knows how to do.” Like Bulgakov’s Margarita and Erofeev’s Venichka, he is pushed to both his physical limit and the limit of his the personal trait that defines him, creativity. As in the other two texts, Tatarsky’s second vision is a trial accompanied by a call for supplication by the protagonist.

In the three advertisements and two revelations examined thus far, Pelevin repeatedly turns to the aesthetics of the sublime experience. Moreover, these three iterations of the sublime—when viewed together—are marked by a trajectory of increasing intensification and amplification. The first vision and advertisement are essentially individual and Romantic, and focus on the artistic means for understanding the independence of the self from its sensations. The second bears the markings of a collective, elemental sublime of the early 20th century, and reveals the independent, objective nature of that self despite the power of ideology.

462 Ibid., 3:153.
463 In a review published shortly after the novels publication, Mark Lipovetsky describes the ad as “truly genius is in its vulgarity [пошлости].” Липовецкий, “Голубое Сало Поколения, Или Два Мифа Об Одном Кризисе.”
This broadening of the sublime experience is also marked by a shift in Tatarsky’s relationship with his “clients”, which expand from a concrete individualized other, to a national collective he himself is part of, to the cosmic scale of the divine itself. Finally, the type of thought Tatarsky must accomplish to complete these texts also expands, from an analysis of an object, to self-reflection, to self-judgment.

The critique Pelevin presents here contains a similar moment of self-judgement directed at the reader. The desacralization of the divine and its subjection to the interests of commercial exchange—an alliance between Christian church and imperial Rome—must necessarily be viewed as a commentary on the role played by organized religion in post-Soviet society. This is emphasized in Tatarsky’s ad featuring the Church of Christ the Savior, which was begun during the reign of Nikolai I, destroyed in the Stalinist period, and was in the process of being rebuilt at the time *Generation P* was written. Its continued association with the excesses of the Russian upper class and the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church continue to mark the location as a site of tension today.

The chapter ends with Tatarsky’s entreaty to God, which is equally addressed to the reader. Two responses, naïve and cynical, are possibilities here. In the first, the standpoint of the “true believer” Tatarsky’s ad can be seen as sacrilege and evidence of his own demonic nature. In the second, it can be dismissed as absurd humor, a witty commentary on the inherent falsity of religious belief predicated on one’s own superior, cynical knowledge. A third possibility, however, presents itself in the unique passage that begins the next chapter:

Божья любовь к человеку проявляется в великом и невыразимом в словах принципе "все-таки можно". "Все-таки можно" означает огромное количество вещей - например, то, что сам этот принцип, несмотря на свою абсолютную невыразимость, все-таки может быть выражен и проявлен. Мало того, он может быть выражен бесконечное число раз, и
каждый раз совершенно по-новому, поэтому и существует поэзия. Вот какова Божья любовь. И чем же отвечает ей человек?  

As opposed to most of the novel's text, where almost every word is perceived through the voice-zone of a character (including the preface), this passage is presented without a frame as a kind of “Tolstoyan” moment. The incarnational theology proposed here claims a status for the artistic act that makes it capable of expressing a truth that is divine in nature: poetry (art) is the expression of divine love. Though fleeting, this passage shows that the novel, despite all of its irony and sarcasm, is, at its core, sincere.

5.7 The Golden Room

The qualities of intensification and amplification in the advertisements and visions discussed above run parallel to the events of Tatarsky’s “real life” in Moscow. Moving from one advertising company to another, he soon discovers that the techniques he uses in advertising are not limited to consumer commodities, but also underlie nearly every instance of sensation, stimulation, and perception of all cultural objects. This growing sense of unease leads Tatarsky to take mushrooms again and to the location of his first mystical vision, the abandoned Soviet ziggurat on the outskirts of Moscow. In this, Tatarsky’s final vision, much like his advertisement to God, takes place in the mode of reflection.

464 Pelevin, Sobranie sochinenii v 3-kh tomakh, 3:154.
465 In the end of the novel it is revealed that politics are nothing more than an elaborate technological charade managed by Azadovsky, Tatarsky’s new employer. In one scene, a televised image of a drunk Boris Yeltsin is revealed to be a convincing performance by an intoxicated actor, made possible through the marvels of 3D rendering.
Tatarsky’s return to the origin of his mystical experiences is shot through with melancholy and elegiac sentiment. Ascending the tower, Tatarsky listens to the whispering of the willows in the autumn forest around him, leading Tatarsky to recall the lyrics of a song by the Russian rock group Nautilus Pompilius: “Это сестры печали живущих в ивах.” This reference serves to reinforce the elegiac setting, while simultaneously foreshadowing the formal characteristics of the conclusion of Pelevin’s novel.

The first of these motifs, as is readily apparent from the opening lines of the song, is death: “У реки, где с смертью назначена встреча / у моста где готовятся к страшным прыжкам”. There is thus a common topos between the song and the novel. Both are set in a location marked by death; in the case of the novel, this must be read both as the death of the Soviet Union (the incomplete tower, the incomplete utopia) as well as the notion of human sacrifice.466

The second commonality that the two texts share is an alternation between two juxtaposed instantiations of the feminine. In the Nautilius song, these are depicted as the “sisters of sorrow” and the “wives of joy”:

Жены радости пьют твое время как воду,
А сестры печали внезапны, как дождь,
Женам радости в тягость дороги свободы,
А сестры печали идут за тобой.

In this stanza, the “wives of joy” are portrayed as an agonistic other to the song's addressee. They are connected to the addressee through law (marriage as opposed to kinship), consume time (here a metaphor for life with clear sexual connotations) and compel the addressee to continue

466 Earlier in the novel, it is described as a Babylonian ziggurat, where individuals would attempt to become the consort of the goddess Ishtar.
the labor of life (to bear the burden of the road of freedom). The “sisters of sorrow”, by contrast, provide relief (elsewhere in the song they are described as forgiving and non-judgmental), are subservient, and share a bond with the addressee that is unencumbered by the responsibilities of the marriage contract.467

This invocation of the Eternal feminine if foreshadowed earlier in the novel. When he first ascended the ziggurat, he came upon a faded image from a magazine of a beautiful woman on a beach, a suggested metaphor that is to be understood to represent Russia. As was noted earlier in the context of the Pepsi ad, the collapse of the Soviet Union was depicted as the exhaustion of sexual energy. The reappearance of the Eternal Feminine in the conclusion thus suggests the possibility of its restoration.

After Tatarsky ascends the ziggurat and he approaches the threshold of the room at its apex, he hears a disembodied feminine voice that accuses him of complicity with horrors of the post-Soviet world: “Когда-то ты и мы, любимый, были свободны, – зачем же ты создал этот страшный, уродливый мир? » – А разве это сделал я? – прошептал Татарский. Никто не ответил. Татарский открыл глаза и поглядел в дверной проем.”468 The question posed here is one of personal responsibility, specifically, a failure of responsibility to the beloved that has resulted in the destruction of a previously acquired freedom. Whereas in the earlier description the feminine voices spoke of a world that had become devoid of meaning, here the world is described as being the creation of a single individual.

Tatarsky's ensuing vision is one that is clearly linked to the calmness of the “beautiful sublime” attended by memory:

467 This is made particularly clear through reference to Leonard Cohen’s song “Sisters of Mercy”, which served as a partial inspiration for the song. See: “‘ВРЕМЯ ’ - Журнал Для Интеллектуальной Элиты Общества.”

468 Pelevin, Sobranie sochinenii v 3-kh tomakh, 3:267.
Над линией леса висело облако, похожее на небесную гору, оно было таких размеров, что бесконечная высота неба, забытая еще в детстве, вдруг стала видна опять. На одном из склонов облака был узкий конический выступ, похожий на башню, видную сквозь туман. В Татарском что-то дрогнуло – он вспомнил, что когда-то и в нем самом была эфемерная небесная субстанция, из которой состоят эти белые гора и башня. И тогда – давным-давно, даже, наверно, еще до рождения, – ничего не стоило стать таким облаком самому и подняться до самого верха башни.  

Tatarsky's state closely adheres to the Kantian description of the sublime experience. First, he finds himself able to once more perceive the infinite height of the sky (which take on the classic formation of mountains and towers), followed by a physical shudder. Finally, Tatarsky experiences a feeling of material kinship with the “ephemeral substance” of the clouds above him. Much like in the Kantian account, where the Kantian subject experiences “a feeling that we possess pure self-subsistent Reason”, here Tartarsky perceives a connection with the greater universe based on a sense of purposive positive identity. The inability to experience fully this connection is explained as the consequence of Platonic anamnesis: “Но жизнь успела вытеснить эту странную субстанцию из души, и ее осталось ровно столько, чтобы можно было вспомнить о ней на секунду и сразу же потерять воспоминание.”

I would argue that both of these visions have a common source: the dissident poet's relationship to late Soviet society, which, in its simplest terms, contained both a sense of disaffection with the meaninglessness of culture and the unique (i.e. “divine”) calling of the artist, who was captivated by the Apollonian vision of writing “verses for eternity”, which contained at least an echo of a universal humanity that had been repressed by violence imposed by everyday life. Such a reading seems particularly applicable in light of the uncanny experience

469 Ibid.
470 Pelevin, Sobranie sochinenii v 3-kh tomakh, 3:267.
undergone by Tartarsky immediately after the two revelations, where he finds himself literally suspended above an abyss dropping down through the center of the ziggurat:

Татарский заметил, что пол под столом прикрыт щитом из сколоченных досок. Поглядев в щель между ними, он увидел черную дыру многоэтажной пропасти. «Ну да, – вспомнил он, – это шахта лифта. А здесь машинное отделение, как в комнате, где этот рендер. Только автоматчиков нет». <...> Сначала ему стало страшновато, что доски под ногами подломятся, и он вместе с ними полетит вниз, в глубокую шахту с многолетними напластованиями мусора на дне. Но доски были толстыми и надежными. <...> Татарский прочел название последней передачи перед неровной линией обрыва: 0.00 – Золотая комната. «Что за передача? – подумал он. – Наверно, что-то новое». 471

Important here is that Tartarsky is attempting to bridge the gap that had been opened in his life as a result of the rupture of Soviet society, a point that is emphasized by Pelevin in placing his protagonist on the edge of an abyss that is filled with the detritus of years past. This motif of rupture (in Tatarsky's own life, in his current intoxicated state, in the floor of the room, even in the television schedule that he reads) signals the possibility of crossing a threshold. What remains veiled however is whether the crossing of this threshold be a repetition or something substantially new. Tartarsky himself is clearly unsure, even though he has overcome his initial anxiety.

This threshold moment is further alluded to in the title of the chapter, “Critical Days” (Критические дни) which not only describes the current political situation in the novel (i.e. the crisis that results after the erasure of the computer-generated government / the 1998 crisis in Russia), but is also a euphemism for menstruation. As has been discussed earlier, themes of sexuality (usually in an abstracted, mythological manner via the narrative of mystical union with

471 Ibid., 3268.
the goddess) run throughout the course of Pelevin's text. Yet just as menstruation implies both fertility and the impossibility of conception (i.e. of a new cycle of life beginning), the feminine image that Tatarsky sees atop of the ziggurat seems to foreclose the possibility of reproduction:

Положив подбородок на сложенные перед собой руки, он уставился на фотографию бегущей по песку женщины, которая висела там же, где и раньше. При дневном свете стали заметны пузыри и пятна, проступившие на бумаге от сырости. Одно из пятен приходилось прямо на лицо богини, и в дневном свете оно показалось покоробившимся, рябым и старым. Татарский допил остаток водки и прикрыл глаза.472

This image of the feminine is clearly more Baba Yaga than the Eternal Feminine of German idealism. No longer an effective erotic object (from Tatarsky's point of view), the picture of the woman is shown as being worn down by the passage of time, obscuring its ability to stimulate libidinal energy in the viewer. What follows, however, is Tatarsky own reenactment of the Apollonian vision:

Короткий сон, который ему привиделся, был очень странным. Он шел по песчаному пляжу навстречу сверкавшей на солнце золотой статуе – она была еще далеко, но уже было видно, что это женский торс без головы и рук.473

The fact that what Tatarsky experiences here is a dream (as opposed to the “vision” he experienced earlier) is significant. Unlike the preceding vision, here Tatarsky is entirely within the confines of his own mind, and his dream should be interpreted as a manifestation of his own will and desire. As such, Tatarsky’s dream echoes Venichka’s journey to Petushki, during which

472 Ibid., 3:268.
473 Ibid., 3:269.
Venichka encounters a Sphinx that lacks feet, a tail, and a head. Here however, the threshold moment is contained in the armless and legless representation of desire itself.

After this vision, the chapter ends. The next chapter opens with Tartarsky, bound and naked, finding himself in a series of rooms located underneath the Ostankino television station. The disruption of narrative echoes a similar interruption following Tatarsky’s plea to God. It also casts an air of uncertainty on the novel’s concluding chapter, which refuses to reveal whether it is just a continued hallucination or a real experience.475

There are two art collections in the rooms where Tatarsky is held. The first is an example of how everything under Azadovsky's reign is reduced to its monetary value.476 Purporting to be an exhibition of Spanish art with works by Velazquez, Goya, and Picasso, there are no physical pieces of art present. Instead, certificates attesting to the value of each work of art are displayed, authenticating Azadovsky's ownership. He characterizes the theme of the exhibition as “монетаристический минимализм.”477 The name, of course is misleading; monetary minimalism does not refer to a minimal role played by money, but rather the maximal role money plays in the creation of art.

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474 Ерофеев, Москва-Петушки, 43.
475 In this, it echoes a similar potential indeterminacy in Eugene Onegin.
476 Azadovsky is Tatarsky’s employer and in charge of manufacturing social reality.
477 While it is difficult to match the descriptions from the texts with specific works, what is of importance here is not so much the works themselves (they are, after all, absent) but rather how they can be read as a historical series tracing a certain evolution of depiction of the female body. Thus, in the first description we are presented with a portrait of an individualized female body (the infanta), in the second the female body serves as a metaphorical expression of Spanish nationality, and in the third an even more abstract sculpture of a female body that can only be described through its action (i.e. running). The other collection is more traditional, containing a number of artifacts acquired from around the world including pieces of the gate of Ishtar from Babylon, artifacts from the Processional Way that led to the city from the gate, and a small statue from the Louvre, depicting a worshiper of Ishtar. Pelevin attributes most of the artifacts to the British museum with the exception of the statue. Though pieces of the excavation have been given to a number of museums, the largest reconstruction is in the Pergamon museum in Berlin. The statue, which serves as the model for the bizarre costumes worn by Tartarsky et al, is housed at the Louvre. Entitled, “Ebih-il, the Superintendent of Mari” it has clear echoes with the “care-taking” function of the Institute of Apiculture. Azadovsky, of course, can't help but make a pun at the Russian version of the name, “Эбих-иль”.

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In its focus on the female body, the collection has a clear connection with Tatarsky's “dream” from the previous chapter, in which a statue of an “incomplete” female body is presented as the object of Tatarsky's desire. In other words, what this series presents is the historical disintegration of the female body, a claim that becomes all the more clear in the final “image” in the series: the collection itself, where all representation of the female body has been replaced by a monetary equivalent. To the extent that representations of femininity have been used as metaphors for the sublime experience (for example, in the Isis inscription at Sais in Kant's remark in the Critique of Judgment), this series can be seen as an illustration of the alleged “retreat of nature” that is one of the hallmarks of postmodern thought. Moreover, this retreat of nature, as seen in the disintegration (dismembering?) of the female body, somewhat surprisingly can be correlated to the growing inability to define a stable definition of the sublime object after the advent of modernity. If earlier notions of the sublime allowed the Absolute to be associated with royalty (Velazquez's infanta), the nation (Goya's maja), or the material (Picasso's running woman), in Pelevin's novel the role of the female body in the sublime has been transformed into a disembodied desire. As Azadovsky explains to Tatarsky, “Короче, она стала тем, к чему стремятся все люди, но не просто, скажем, грудой золота, которая где-то лежит, а всем золотом вообще. Ну, как бы идеей.”

Azadovsky then explains to Tatarsky that he was brought here to fulfill initiated into the highest position in the order of advertisers, also referred to as Guild of Chaldeans. The initiation ritual culminates in Tartarsky being presented before the Goddess for approval. What

478 Pelevin, Sobranie sochinenii v 3-kh tomakh, 3:278.
479 The ironic note here is that халдей is can mean a magician and is also a colloquialism for “lackey”. In Eugene Onegin, Martin Zadek (“the head of Chaldean sages”) is read by Tatiana. His Dream Book continues to be extremely popular today.

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he experiences is an obliteration of his self in the light emanating from the Goddess, both as a quasi-mythological being, as well as the collective desire of Russian society:

На зрачок упала яркая полоса света, и Татарский перестал видеть свое отражение - вместо него появились размытое золотое мерцание, словно он только что несколько минут смотрел на заходящее солнце, а потом закрыл глаза и увидел его заблудившийся в нервных окончаниях отпечаток. "И что я должен был разглядеть?" - подумал он.  

Just as the image of the woman attracted Tatarsky not by its face or figure, but by the freedom of movement captured within it, here too the image is disembodied, formless, and composed of the pure energy of the sublime.

The initiation is a success; Tartarsky is chosen as the earthly consort of Ishtar, and assumes Azadvosky's position as the head of the Committee. Azadovsky is murdered by the Chaldeans, his reign having come to an end. Tartarsky is still suspicious of his new role; while his "digital self" is being scanned to be broadcast across the Russian airwaves, he recalls “The Parliament of Birds” from his first mystical vision:

- Фарсук Карлович, вы слышали про птицу Семург?
- спросил Татарский, садясь в кресло и укладывая руки на подлокотники.
- Нет. А что это за птица?
- Была такая восточная поэма, - сказал Татарский, - я ее сам не читал, слышал только. Про то, как тридцать птиц полетели искать своего короля Семурга, прошли через много разных испытаний, а в самом конце узнали, что слово "Семург" означает "тридцать птиц".

Я вот подумал, а может, наше поколение, которое выбрало "Пепси", - вы ведь тоже в молодости выбрали "Пепси", да?

- А что-делать-то было, - пробормотал Фарсейкин, щелкая переключателями на панели.

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480 Pelevin, Sobranie sochinenii v 3-kh tomakh, 3:283.
481 Later on, Farseikin tells of the prophecy of the “oracle of Atlanta” that a man with the name of a city would become Ishtar's new consort. The city of Atlanta, which contains the headquarters of both CNN and the Coca-Cola Company, serves as the perfect locale for this 20th century oracle of Atlantis.
- Ну да... Мне одна довольно жуткая мысль пришла в голову - может быть, все мы вместе и есть эта собачка с пятью лапами? И теперь мы, так сказать, наступаем?

Фарсейкин, поглощенный своими манипуляциями, явно пропустил эти слова мимо ушей.  

This hesitation is perhaps the clearest marker as to how Tatarsky differs from his predecessor, Azadovsky. Whereas Azadovsky personified a purely destructive spirit incapable of self-analysis, Tartarsky is capable of reflection. This reflective quality is what makes Tatarsky capable of artistic creation. If Azadovsky’s reign was founded on the terror of the modernist sublime of annihilation, Tartarsky’s will be founded on the postmodern sublime of reflection.

The beginning of Tartarsky’s reign described in the concluding chapter of the novel is not without bloodshed. He ruthlessly murders Farseikin, who had expressed interest in usurping him, and “liquidates” Berezovsky (although in the latter case, we cannot be sure that any real blood was actually spilled). The “innumerable” ads that he appears in proclaim the arrival of a new age of power. This is no utopia; in one of the final ads for Coca-Cola, Tartarsky, dressed as an American televangelist, crushes a can of Pepsi and proclaims to the walls of the Kremlin a quote from Psalm 14: "There they are in great dread; For God is with the Righteous Generation!"

The statement is decidedly ambiguous. The reader cannot be sure that the advertisement is just another trick, another empty statement of the modernist sublime aimed only at increasing consumption of a new soft drink. Moreover, much of Tatarsky’s experiences in the basement of Ostankino recall the Tophet more than the preservation of the self in Tatarsky’s first vision.

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482 Pelevin, Sobranie sochinenii v 3-kh tomakh, 3:287.
483 Among them: Advertisements for the vodka “False Boris II”, the instant soup “Karmino Burano” (sic), an advertisement for Head and Shoulders (slogan: Снявши голову, по волосам не плачут), and one for the Gap, where Tartarsky throws a brick at store windowpane, claiming “Под Кандагаром было круче!”
The possibility that Tartarsky simply remains delusional is encouraged by a crucial moment in the text. In his “dream” that concludes the penultimate chapter, Tatarsky’s friend Gireev (who supplied him with the mushrooms he takes) appears alongside him, riding the sirruf from Tatarsky’s vision, who is described as “sad and looked like an donkey exhausted by heavy work, and the wings folded on its back looked like a felt saddle.” Gireev reframes Tatarsky’s vision in apocalyptic tones, claiming that perhaps God had created the entire universe in order to test Tatarsky’s soul. Tatarsky rejects him, however, brusquely claiming that he “gets enough shit at work.”

The appearance of Gireev riding a donkey and the comic lowering of tone is a clear reference to Don Quixote, a theme that is reiterated in the “Spanish collection” of the beginning of the next chapter, in which all three Spanish artists (Velasquez, Goya, and Picasso) can be associated with their equally famous works on the theme of Cervantes’ novel. In this context, Tatarsky can be read as a quixotic figure.

However, the final advertisement that concludes the novel undercuts this reading. An advertisement for Tuborg beer, it is said that it brings tears to Tartarsky's eyes:

Идеал его самая любимая видеозапись, после просмотра которой, как шепотом рассказывала секретарша Алла, на глазах у него выступали слезы, вообще ни разу не была показана по телевизору.

Это незаконченный клип для пива "Туборг" под слоган "Sta, viator!" (вариант для региональных телекомпаний - "Шта, авиатор?!"), в котором анимирована известная картинка с одиноким странником. Татарский в распахнутой на груди белой рубахе идет по пыльной тропинке под стоящим в зените солнцем. Внезапно в голову ему приходит какая-то мысль. Он останавливается, прислоняется к деревянной изгороди и вытирает платком пот со лба. Проходит несколько секунд, и герой, видимо, успокаивается - повернувшись к камере спиной, он прячет

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484 Pelevin, Sobranie sochinenii v 3-kh tomakh, 3:269.
In this advertisement, the overwhelming power of the sublime is contained in ephemeral moment. The thought that enters the head of the “Tuborg Man” is obviously a disturbing one, it creates a gap in the narrative, forcing time to stop, “undoing the mind’s presumption in respect to the technology of time” and demanding reflection on the part of the hero. In this moment, the fear of the sublime passes, the hero “calms down” (устраивается), and continues on his journey.

Unlike the other ads of the conclusion, this one is not made for public consumption. It is Tatarsky's own artistic creation, divorced from the realms of consumerism and consumption, viewed only by himself, the narrator, and the reader. In this (and the Kantian) sense, it is disinterested. The moment of the sublime is hidden; it takes the form of negative representation (the hero's back is turned during the crucial moment) with only the frame left to mark the trace of what has transpired.

5.8 Conclusion

An important shift has taken place in the status of nature that differentiates Pelevin's postmodern sublime from versions that preceded it. In Kant's version of the sublime, Isis (Mother Nature) served as a catalyst for the sublime experience, even if the sublime sentiment

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485 Ibid., 3:290.
was to originate within the individual himself. In the Modernist version of the sublime, this concept of Nature is shown to be defeated, as lacking in authority when faced with the power of human nature to overcome it. These two versions of the sublime maintain the authority (either real or deceased) of a world that exists independently of the sphere of human creation and consciousness.

In Pelevin's novel, however, nature of this order is absent. Isis (Mother Nature) has given way to Ishtar, whose fertility is mixed with sexual desire and military conquest. Composed of the desires of all of Russia's population, Ishtar is a stand-in for the postmodern concept of hyperreality. This transition of nature from mother (nature) to lover (civilization) is an infinitely difficult one, and is rife with the possibility of abuse.

Such possibilities of abuse are made apparent during Azadovsky's reign as the head of the Committee. As the embodiment of the modern sublime, his unrestrained exercise of power poses an apocalyptic threat to Russia and the world. If Tatarky is to prove to be any different (and there is no guarantee of this, though I believe the novel does leave such a possibility open), he will have to temper his use of power, it must be constrained. However, the question remains: what authority is capable of constraining human power with no Nature or God left to oppose it?

I would argue that the constraining factor that could come to play a foundational role in Tatarky's reign is the aesthetic, art itself. As opposed to the one-mindedness of Azadovsky, Tatarky repeatedly questions his own worth, as is testified to in his meditation over the final advertisement in the novel. This questioning of his own worth is reminiscent of the postmodern

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486 One such example is the novel's portrayal of the 1998 financial crisis. According to the novel, the cause for the crisis lies in one of Azadovsky's computer programmers being fired for espionage (replacing agreed-upon product placements with other products). Azadovsky decides to kill the programmer as punishment. However, the programmer had his own “nuclear option”, so to speak. He had created a virus within the Committee's computer system that would erase all data, if he personally did not sign into the system every day. Before he is killed, he tries to warn Azadovsky about the virus, but Azadovsky refuses to listen.
sublime in Lyotard, where the subject closes its eyes to the dehumanizing modern sublime in an act of will, all the while realizing that it will inevitably return.

The lessons Tatarsky learns in the process of his ascension speak to the most sublime virtues of the human condition: perseverance (“the sphere remains”), a (“the sun reflects us, not the other way around”), and the transformational gifts of our divine nature (We come from the sky, and are given the power to transform the world and animate it). All of these speak to the inherent dignity and worth of human potential. This is not to say this potential is always realized. The novel is not a moral treatise in this sense, and Tatarsky is no paragon of virtue. Nevertheless, there is a moral truth to the novel, a limited one that makes no pretensions to universal evaluation. It simply states that the human self, the human individual, exists, and that it is something worthy of respect.

Pelevin’s narrator declares that divine love can be expressed in an infinite number of ways, and each time it is experienced as new, a contention that Pushkin would certainly agree with. It is also the case of expressing the impossible, a contention that Platonov would agree with as well. The role of sublime art is to articulate the possibility of such occurrences, and to serve as reminders for when they are forgotten. This is why poetry exists.

Most critical readings of Generation P tend to read the novel as a satire of Russian consumerist society. This temptation, I believe, should be resisted, as I believe it should have been resisted by Nadezhdin, Belinsky, and the Soviet editors who failed to see that Platonov’s Dzhan was one of the most compelling executions of the Soviet sublime in its best light. I would propose that Generation P belongs to this kind of sublime art. The final advertisement that concludes the novel is not a testimony to the “egotistical sublime”, but rather an example of receptive individual reflection that is marked by the tears of universal compassion. Such a
realization has a sobering effect that is devoid of rapture, instead resulting in sensitivity to the connections between phenomena made possible by art that cannot be reduced, but only expanded.

Works such as *Eugene Onegin*, *Dzhan*, and *Generation P* deploy the sublime, but are not consumed by it. Instead, they incorporate preceding works into their own text and offer their own to those that are to follow. Such a positive, irreducible infinity challenges the mind’s imagination and demands attentive, patient reading. In doing so, however, it provides a means of resisting any sublime threat culture—imperial, material, commodified, or otherwise—may array against us.
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