

Dina Khapaeva

Historical Memory in Post-Soviet Gothic Society

ON SEPTEMBER 28, 2006, SAINT PETERSBURG WITNESSED THE REBURIAL of Maria Fedorovna, mother of the last Russian emperor. Her ashes were brought from Denmark to Russia. Russian society as well as the Russian government tried their best to rise to the occasion. The event was carefully planned to reflect a distant feeling of the respect for the will of the deceased, reverence for Russian prerevolutionary traditions, and condemnation of the Bolshevik crime committed against her family. The city was agitated by the event: traffic was blocked by government motorcades; young cadets marched along the embankments, and crowds gathered for the ceremony. One might have been genuinely moved by the manifestation of historical memory were this not a country where cows are pastured on fields where millions of unidentified victims of the Gulag have lain buried since Stalin's time. Unlike the royal ashes, however, these ashes seem to be of no particular concern to Russians.

In other words, post-Soviet society is seriously ill with a partial amnesia that makes its historical memory strangely selective. There are no political debates or hot intellectual discussions on how the Soviet crimes influenced and continue to influence contemporary Russian society. There is no intellectual or political force that would make post-Soviet society face the issue of historical responsibility. The Soviet past

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Gabrielle Spiegel for her comments on the first draft of this text.

is a history without memory. It is a history that is considered by my compatriots “ethnologically,” as if its agents belonged to some forgotten barbarous tribe, as if it had absolutely nothing to do with their own family past, with their grandparent and parents.

A recent survey on Russian mass historical consciousness conducted by Nikolay Koposov and the author in July 2007 in three Russian cities—Saint Petersburg, Kazan, and Ulyanovsk—reveals the full scale of selective amnesia.¹ Nearly half of the respondents give high marks to the Soviet regime. Forty-nine percent think that the Soviet past has had positive effects on post-Soviet culture,² and 44 percent believe the Soviet experience has had a positive impact on contemporary morality.³ It is thus no surprise that Stalin occupies third place in a rating of the “attractive state leaders of the past,” while only 23 percent think his role in Russian history was negative.⁴

Stalinism remains a golden age in the memory of the majority of respondents.⁵ Most important, these attitudes toward Stalinism do not reflect a sudden shift in public opinion. On the contrary, the positive image of Stalinism has been a stable, persistent representation in mass consciousness. Although disappointment with the Soviet regime had reached its peak in July 1990—thus compelling the majority of analysts to announce Russia’s divorce from its Soviet heritage—the golden myth of Stalinism was not challenged by perestroika and has persisted into the present. In 1990, a majority of those surveyed in Leningrad gave almost the same high evaluation of Stalinism as their counterparts do nowadays. “Stalin’s times” were and are still “recollected” as an age when “people were more friendly, open, and benevolent” (1990: 65 percent; 2007: 64 percent); when “there was an atmosphere of joy, optimism, and friendship” (1990: 33 percent; 2007: 40 percent); “people were more kind, less selfish, and more supportive of each other” (1990: 65 percent; 2007: 64 percent); “there was order in the country (1990: 82 percent; 2007: 68 percent); and “people were hard working” (1990: 66.7 percent; 2007: 71 percent).⁶

Could we presume that Russians are not informed about their history, that they simply do not know about the Great Terror and the

crimes committed during the Soviet period? According to the same 2007 opinion pool, 92 percent know about repressions under Stalin, and two-thirds have no illusions about the scale of the terror: 63 percent estimate the number of victims between 10 and 50 million. At the same time, 80 percent think that “Russians have every right to be proud of their history,” and 66 percent agree with the statement that the Russian people bear no responsibility for the crimes committed under the Soviet regime.

Over the last 10 years, the “normalization” of the Soviet past has become the keystone of official discourse on Russian and Soviet history and has been welcomed by the population. Our survey of historical consciousness shows that a desire to “normalize” the Soviet past, to provide Russians with a “usable past,” represents the mainstream in mass consciousness, one that bypasses political boundaries and divisions. This “a-historical turn” in Russian mass consciousness is manifested not only in the survey figures quoted above. The survey data show a profound similarity in the attitudes towards the Soviet past among the government-supporting United Russia, the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (the LDPR, headed by rightist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy), and supporters of the liberal Yabloko, who otherwise position themselves as political opponents. A positive evaluation of Stalinism provides post-Soviet society with a common background where political divisions matter less than a sense of historical unity. An “unmasterable” past allows for a political consensus based on an antidemocratic national solidarity.⁷

However, the consequences of historical amnesia are not limited to such direct and obvious political implications. Studies of historical memory have made it evident that the mass violence and atrocities experienced by European society in the twentieth century affected the emotions and psychological reactions not only of the contemporaries of those events, but also of succeeding generations (Welzer, 2005: 63; Pruss, [2005: 218]). In the Russian case, these consequences might be only more profound given that the Soviet crimes constitute an integral part of the history of three generations. The social, psychological, and moral traumas resulting from this experience have not yet been seriously considered.

The collective historical amnesia that reigns in contemporary Russia demands an explanation. In the first part of my paper I will analyze the mechanisms that suppress historical memory. I will focus my attention on two historical representations of critical relevance for this matter. First, I will discuss the Western-oriented ideology of the post-Soviet intelligentsia. Second, I will analyze the functioning of the myth of the “Great Patriotic War.” In the second part of my paper I will address the influence of historical amnesia on contemporary Russian society. Deep distortions in moral judgments and social relations resulting from suppressed memory will be studied through an analysis of contemporary Russian fiction. Finally, I will consider Russian Gothic society, which originates in historical amnesia.

THE IMPASSES OF AMNESIA: POST-SOVIET “VICTIMS OF TOTALITARIANISM”

Let us consider an important root of Russian national amnesia, namely, the ideology of the Western-oriented intelligentsia. There was a short period (1989–1991) when the Soviet past became an issue of public importance. During this time the “unmasking of the Soviet regime” was a main theme of political debates and a source of political conflict. However, as we will see, neither the “wages of guilt” (to borrow Ian Buruma’s term) nor an upsurge of historical memory was responsible for this.⁸

It is well known that history was an important tool used to legitimize the Soviet regime. History supplied data needed to present the Bolshevik coup d’état as a manifestation of the laws of history, to prove the inevitability of the October Revolution and socialism’s victory in Russia. It also provided illustrations of class struggle, what Karl Marx called the locomotive of human history. Obviously, Soviet history furnished more than sufficient evidence of crimes to justify charges against the regime. Russian democrats were quick to turn history into the main tool for discrediting the regime. By the end of 1989, when the “new history of the Soviet period” began to take shape, Soviet socialism seemed to be deeply compromised.

We might think that at this point, when Russian democrats turned the Soviet past into an issue of public attention, they would have started reflecting upon its meaning for Russian history and for the Russian present. On the contrary, the “blank spots” suddenly lost any appeal as a theme of political debates. Public interest in the Soviet past disappeared as rapidly as it had emerged during glasnost. By 1992 its place on the political scene had been completely taken by discussions about the choice of an economic model for the “New Russia.”⁹

Quite ironically, denial of the relevance of Soviet past was linked to the mass idealization of the West that overtook Soviet society in the mid-eighties and early nineties. The idealization of the West—namely, the representation of Western society as not only economically and socially advanced, but as also morally and aesthetically perfect—emerged in the consciousness of the Soviet intelligentsia in the sixties. By the mid-eighties, the idealized image of the West had turned for the greater number of Soviet subjects into a remedy against the much hated “everything Soviet.” This semantic opposition was soon converted into a causal relation: Russia had diverged from the “mainstream of human history” when the Bolsheviks came to power. The Western model of development was perceived as the only way to follow if Russia wanted to join the “rest of the civilized world.” By the beginning of perestroika the idealized West had become a mass ideology that pointed the way out of the impasses of “real socialism.”

The very definition of the search for “historical truth” as “unmasking Stalinism” allowed Stalinism to be exempted from Russian history as something casual and peripheral that had nothing to do with those who were not “Stalinists.” The more complete the picture of Soviet history and its crimes that emerged (thanks to the efforts of Western-oriented democrats), the more irresistible the temptation to identify this past with the despised regime and not with those who had lived under it. The democrats were quick to acknowledge that the Soviet past had nothing to do with those who had decided to transform the country into a Western democracy. Even more, the condemnation of the Soviet regime helped democrats to label themselves “the victims

of totalitarianism, of Soviet power.” The rest of post-Soviet society was happy to join the club. As a result, the unmasterable Soviet past became a no man’s land in Russian history.

However, the radical denial of the Soviet past challenged the consciousness of the Russian democrats and their supporters. It forced masses of ordinary Russians to experience the discontinuity of historical time as a matter of daily routine.

In the early 1990s, Russian democrats felt the Soviet regime to be compromised not only as social system or political regime. The “demystifications” of glasnost left nothing important to be mentioned about the Soviet past. In the colloquial Russian of the period, the Soviet past was frequently called a nontime, a “break in the chain of time,” an “interruption” of the flow of time. Seventy-four years of Soviet power destroyed the historical continuity and left a gap in the perception of historical time. Soviet history ceased to be perceived as a time period filled with historical events.

The perception of the Soviet past as a temporal gap forced Russian democrats to equate the Russian present with a remote historical period. According to the famous dictum of the period, Russia in the early nineties was “the United States in the early twenties,” a country on the “eve of capitalism.” The Russian present was conceptualized and imagined in terms of the historical past of the West. The normal historical temporality that had been interrupted in 1917 was to restart in the early nineties. Russia would have to pass through the same stages as “the rest of the civilized world” to arrive, at the end, at the perfection of Western society. However, since so many countries had already traveled this historical path, it was thought that Russia would travel it much more quickly by imitating the West.¹⁰

The most important presupposition that made this transition from the remote historical past (Russia’s postcommunist present) to the future (the idealized West’s present) possible and plausible was the belief in progress. Without the deep conviction, shared by the Russian democrats (led by Western-oriented Russian economists like Yegor Gaidar), that human history is a journey from a somber past to

a radiant future, Russia's trip to the perfect present of Western society would have been problematic. Indeed, the existence of the Soviet past was damaging for the ideology of progress. Only later, at the end of the 1990s, Russian Western-oriented democrats would discover empirically what Western intellectuals had conceptualized philosophically in the mid-1970s: Auschwitz and the Gulag had destroyed the idea of social progress and darkened the radiant future with the threat of imminent catastrophe.¹¹ As Gabrielle Spiegel puts it: the "Holocaust put to rest, finally and forever, . . . a Western, modernist, progressive and ultimately optimistic view of history" (2002: 150). The Soviet past had to disappear under the wages of national amnesia so that Russia could enter the "whole civilized world." The memory of the Gulag had to be obscured by the illusions of Western-oriented ideology in order to inspire post-Soviet Russians with the radiant vision of tomorrow's Westernized Russia.

The condemnation of the "crimes of the Stalinists" turned out to be a short-term political project formed by the political conjuncture of the late eighties and early nineties and as such failed to affect profoundly the consciousness of the masses. It failed to provoke public debates on the relevance of the criminal Soviet past for Russia's future. On the contrary, it spared Russians from any sense of historical guilt and responsibility, and provided grounds for the gradual restoration of the positive image of Soviet history that followed the collapse of the Western-oriented ideology.

"THE GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR": AN OBSTRUCTING MYTH

Let us now consider the functioning of the Stalinist narrative about World War Two, which plays a critical role in preventing reflection about the Soviet past. It should be stressed from the start that the memory of World War II occupies a special place in the historical consciousness of contemporary Russians. According to the opinion poll previously cited, 76 percent of respondents believe the victory in the "Great Patriotic War" to be the most important event in Russian history.¹² Attitudes toward World War II bypass political divisions and unite political rivals.

Every attempt to contest, criticize, or even to analyze the actions of the Soviet Army during the war is perceived by both liberals and nationalists as a cynical insult to the memory of the heroes who died in an unprecedented patriotic sacrifice. A proposal to pass a “memorial law” that would prohibit any criticism of the “heroic sacrifice of Soviet soldiers” during the war (widely discussed by the media in May 2007) is the most recent illustration of the intensity and importance of this memory (Narochnitskaya, 2007)

The celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the victory in World War II in 2005 marked an important stage in the reactivation of the war myth. The official discourse, predominant during the celebrations, reproduced the Stalinist narrative about “our glorious patriotic victory.” It could be summarized as follows. On June 22, 1941, the peaceful Soviet Union was cowardly attacked by Nazi Germany. Led by Stalin, the Soviet Army rescued the world, the country, and the Soviet people, defeated the world enemy, and rewarded the heroes after the victory. Civilians, who were proud to sacrifice their lives for the sake of victory, wholeheartedly supported the Soviet Army in its moral, romantic, and heroic struggle. According to a recent opinion poll, 49 percent think that 27 million dead was a fair price to pay for victory (<http://www.levada.ru/sobytiadaty.html>). Over the past few years, the Russian authorities have been quite successful in their attempts to build a national(istic) consensus based upon this narrative.

Among the very few attempts to break with the official discourse was a special number of *Neprikosnovennyi Zapas* (NZ) that focused on Russian and German memories of World War II.¹³ German authors critically reflected on the impact of memory of the war in postwar Germany, while their Russian counterparts meditated on the memory of the “victors.” This publication deserves special attention because it reflected—despite the clearly formulated intentions of the editorial team—the role and place of the war myth in mainstream post-Soviet historical consciousness.

According to most of the Russian authors in this issue, the unique role that the Second World War continues to play in Russian conscious-

ness is conditioned by the unique historical role that the war played in strengthening the Soviet state and in the process of nation building. World War II became a “myth of origins” that legitimized the Soviet state and the identity of the Soviet people.¹⁴

Without contesting the importance of the war for Soviet history, several questions could be raised in relation to this statement. First, why did World War II become such a “myth of origins,” as opposed, say, to the “Great October Revolution”? Indeed, is it a universal property of war to become a myth of origins? Despite its undeniable importance for the history of France or the United Kingdom, the war did not become such a myth in these countries. The same is also true about World War One. On the contrary, the French Revolution became such a myth for the French. Second, why does World War II remain the legitimizing myth nowadays? During Soviet times, it could legitimate the Soviet regime and the “new nation, the Soviet people.” But what does it legitimize today—after the fall of Soviet communism and the collapse of USSR? Finally, why does the war myth remain the only Soviet myth that survived the destruction of Soviet mythology without the slightest damage? What is the secret of its vitality, which obviously is not limited to its militarist and imperial pathos? Why has it successfully continued to serve as the main unifying myth of the Russian nation after perestroika?

The argument that some authors put forward is that the war created a unique existential experience of ultimate suffering that altered the ordinary life of the Soviet people (see, for example, Kukulín, 2005: 622, 626, 657). However, we might ask to what extent this experience of the war was different from that of the Red Terror during the Russian Civil War, from the killing of millions of kulaks during collectivization, from the Ukrainian famine, from the Terror before, during, and after the war? By the time the war began, Soviet society had amassed an immense experience of ultimate suffering. However, even the expression of this experience was forbidden. The war myth allowed the Soviet people (to use Dmitri Shostakovich’s expression) “to cry openly and to mourn the way they felt.”

To oppose the horrors of the war to the “peaceful prewar days” of the Bolshevik purges was the main function of the war myth. Evocation of the Great Patriotic War masked—and still masks—the everyday tragedies of life under Soviet rule.

Indeed, the war myth was constructed to suppress memory of the Gulag, to rename and suppress the memory of the irrational, unjustifiable sufferings of the victims of the Soviet system. The “smelting furnace” (Adorno, 1971) of the war myth equated the victims and their murderers in order to unite society against a common enemy: the Germans. The heroic narrative buried the crimes to provide a real foundation for the “new nation, the Soviet people.” The most important function of the war myth (which it has successfully fulfilled into the present day) is to assure my compatriots that the Gulag remains just a minor episode in a heroic Soviet history.

Another important function of the war myth consists in presenting German fascism as an absolute evil. To say, during perestroika, that the “communists were worse than the fascists” implied a strong rejection of Soviet power. However, such a characterization could only stress that the absolute evil was “foreign” fascism, not native communism.¹⁵

It is not by chance that the Russian authors of the articles in *NZ* are attracted mostly by the memory of the Soviet victims of the war—prisoners of war, women, soldiers, and civilians. These memories are the subject of their studies. On the contrary, the German memory of the war, as reflected in the articles by German authors, is inseparable from that of the Holocaust, from the question of the historical responsibility of the Germans for their deeds. True, the special issue of *NZ* was not dedicated to the memory of the Gulag. But the German authors were also not required to speak about Auschwitz in their contributions. This simple comparison shows to what extent these problems are inseparable in German consciousness while they are completely separated in Russian consciousness.¹⁶

It should be mentioned that the editorial introduction to this issue of *NZ* stated that the historical significance of World War II could not be analyzed outside the context of Stalin’s crimes or the nature of

the Soviet regime. Nevertheless, the editorial team had to deal with real (not imaginary) authors. Consequently, the Holocaust dominates the reflections in the German part of the issue, while in the Russian half we read mostly about concerns such as Russian prisoners of war and victims among the civilian population

The war myth prevents reflection on the responsibility for Soviet crimes: it is thus the memory of the horrible, bloody but justifiable patriotic sacrifice that enters the texts of the Russian authors.¹⁷ The myth does not allow them to ask why the memory of the war in Germany is inseparable from the condemnation of the criminal Nazi regime, while in Russia it continues to suppress any reflection on the nature of the regime under which the “victorious Soviet people” lived and fought.

The tendency to perceive Stalinism as a normal vector of historical development finds its clear counterpart in contemporary Russian historiography, which in turn influences popular consciousness. According to some well-respected historians, Russians need a national history that would “cure Russians from a nationwide inferiority complex” and stop the “groundless humiliation of Russian national feeling.” History should help present the Soviet period as a “normal process of modernization” that Russian society underwent at the same time as the “rest of the civilized world” (Mironov, 1999: 16-17).¹⁸ These attempts to provide Russians with a “usable past” remind us of the stance of such German historians as Ernst Nolte and Andreas Hillgruber. However, there is no *Historikerschreit* (historians quarrel) in contemporary Russia. On the contrary, praising the history of Russia for its glorious imperial past—under the czars and under the Soviets—has become the predominant view, a view shared by intellectuals and by the population at large.¹⁹

One way to look at this situation is suggested by A. Philippov, an author of a notorious textbook where Stalinism was called an “effective way of modernization.”²⁰ He argues that if Russians do remember Stalinism as a Golden Age, our understanding and evaluation of this period should change accordingly (Filippov and Danilov, 2008; Khapaeva, forthcoming). Following this logic, Russia’s current selective

amnesia and government attempts widely shared by the population to present Stalinism as our “glorious past” testify of positive social and moral developments of post-Soviet society.

However, studies of historical memory in Europe made evident that the mass violence and atrocities experienced by European society in the twentieth century affected feelings, emotions, and psychological reactions not only of the contemporaneous but also of the succeeding generations (Welzer, 2005: 63; Pruss, 2005: 218). In Russia’s case these consequences might be only more profound given that the Soviet crimes constitute integral parts of the history of three generations. Social, psychological, and moral perversions resulting from this experience have not been yet seriously considered. How do we study the hidden work of distorted memory, where should we look for its moral implications and social consequences?

HISTORICAL AMNESIA IN POST-SOVIET FICTION

How can we discover the consequences of historical amnesia? Where we are to seek for evidences that show how the turmoil of historical memory secretly influences social, political, and psychological behavior of the post-Soviet subjects? What kind of sources could reveal for us this hidden work of deformed memory that results in transformations of values, attitudes, customs, and social relations?

Studies on Russian collective historical memory have made considerable achievements. However, these studies—based on such sources as interviews, life stories, and diaries, which thus provide multiple examples of the collective representations of ordinary people—tend to be rather descriptive. They rarely (if at all) address the impact of historical amnesia on contemporary Russian society. Could it be the case that, so far as the hidden work of memory is concerned, it is less palpable via typified sources and objectifying approaches employed by history of memory studies, oral history, or *Alltagsgeschichte* (history of everyday life)?

Clearly, qualitative large-scale surveys can only inform us about the distribution and frequency of a given attitude but cannot contribute

to studying subtle mechanisms employed by the work of memory. Yet, could interviews, even such an impressive corpus of exciting stories as collected by O. Figes and his team (2007), help us answer our questions about the hidden consequences of historical amnesia? Could interviews focused on revealing common features of collective memory address them? Back in the late eighties, these methods had already received serious criticism that emphasized the influence of the interviewer over the respondent, incomplete sincerity of the respondent, and limited capacity of ordinary people to formulate, in the process of interview, problems that they experience (Samuel and Thompson, 1990).

Fiction seems to be a particularly fruitful source for studying historical representations of the Stalinist past. As a genre, it addresses moral and aesthetic dilemmas and describes transformations of values, attitudes, customs, and social relations (On post-Soviet fiction as a genre see Emerson, 2008 and Epstein, Genis, and Vladim-Glover, 1999). Being sociology of *society avant la lettre* (Lepenies, 1988), it is capable of generalizing the social types and reflecting the coming-to-being social practices. Most important, fiction gives us an access to the emotions and to the work of the individual memory of its heroes. Through fiction we can analyze the moral and aesthetic transformations that have resulted from historical amnesia to show how the suppressed historical memory of Stalinism guides and influences the individual moral choices of the heroes in these works. Fiction discloses the connection between suppressed memory and the emergence of new moral norms and social structures.

Undoubtedly, the suppressed individual memory of the masses (turned into “collective amnesia”) is reflected in post-Soviet fiction. Indeed, the popularity of the thrillers, detective stories focused on the Great Purges is growing rapidly in Russia.²¹ Even novels can rarely do without the reminiscences of Soviet past that represent their important cultural background.

However, when we turn to post-Soviet fiction,²² we have to deal with a kind of prose quite different from *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy or even *Life and Destiny* by Vasily Grossman, which aimed at reproduc-

ing historical events in a realistic manner. Contemporary post-Soviet fiction is overwhelmed by all kind of monsters—vampires, witches, werewolves—as well as by reminiscences of terror. Could these mystical fantasy texts serve as a source for a historical study at all? Intuitively, there is a relationship between these monsters and a troubled memory. But what is the nature of this relationship?

In my book, *Gothic Society: Morphology of a Nightmare* (2007), I proposed to analyze post-Soviet fiction as a source for studying the consequences of historical amnesia and tried to answer this question by developing the concept of “Gothic aesthetics.” This concept aimed at examining the sociopsychological mechanisms exercised by suppressed memories.

It should be stressed from the start that proliferation of monsters is not a specific post-Soviet phenomenon. The omnipresence of monsters in fiction, movies, and computer games is manifested in American, English, and French production just as well. To my mind, proliferation of the monsters in contemporary cultural products signifies a profound challenge to the aesthetic canon. Indeed, over the last three centuries, flying dragons and witches were carefully boxed into a specific genre, fairytale, by Enlightenment rationality. Now we see them becoming central heroes of novels, movies, that of an adult culture. The human being who used to be center of the anthropocentric universe inherited from the Enlightenment has been pushed to the periphery. A nonhuman—a vampire, a werewolf, a witch, a magician, a dragon—has taken man’s place in contemporary culture. This shift of the cultural dominance—from anthropocentric to nonhuman—makes the figure of the monster so crucial for our understanding of contemporary culture.

Nevertheless, Gothic aesthetics is not a recent product. Seeds of Gothic aesthetics could be found already in the English preromanticism. It was stimulated by a critique of rationalism and of admiration for human nature that was typical for the Enlightenment. Motivated by this criticism, Charles Maturin in his *Melmoth the Wanderer* created a masterpiece where we see a hero of the great novel, a half-monster who had almost lost its human nature. Further disillusionment with the

Enlightenment and its ideals was reflected in works by J. R. R. Tolkien. Inspired by the Anglo-Saxon epos, and deeply disappointed by human ability to incarnate the moral absolute, Tolkien not only invented a new literary genre, fantasy, he also set up a new aesthetic canon where hobbits and dragons—the nonhumans—became a center of interest and attraction that earlier was reserved for man.²³ For the first time since the dawn of modernity, Tolkien created a narrative where nonhumans occupied the place of the principal literary heroes; they thus became the focal point of the interest and attraction that had been earlier reserved for man. In the early eighties, the crisis of scientific rationality and crisis of perception of historical time played important role in turning Gothic aesthetic into dominant trend in the contemporary culture.²⁴

However, post-Soviet characters are dramatically different from the hobbits and even the dragons of Tolkien's mythopoeia. Although Tolkien invented Gothic aesthetics, he was not responsible for the creation of Gothic morality. A believer, Tolkien had no incentive to reveal the ethical consequences of his aesthetics: his hobbits and other monsters act and are judged in accordance with the highest notions of Christian morality. The heroes of the post-Soviet fiction, the nonhumans, are acting in accordance with a specific Gothic morality that guides and explains their behavior. The specificity of post-Soviet fiction as compared to European or American fantasy consists in the fact that it reflects the transformations of post-Soviet society, where Gothic aesthetics and Gothic morality have begun to generate specific social practices.

Indeed, post-Soviet fiction is characterized by a gradual loss of interest in the human condition. True heroes of the post-Soviet fantasy are no longer people. Monstrous nonhumans have successfully replaced man for the writers and the readers of post-Soviet fantasy. Monsters are not to be taken for the incarnation of a Nietzschean Superman: the secret of their attraction and appeal lies in their nonbelonging to disappointing human race. Monsters are proud not to have anything in common with the humble humankind. "How great that I am not a

human!” exclaims a vampire, the central character of *Night Watch*. A vampire styled after a FSB-cop-gangster incarnates a desired aesthetic and moral ideal. Humans appear in post-Soviet fiction either as tools for the nonhumans to exercise their power or simply as nonhumans’ natural food. To deny the world of humans and to reject the idea that mankind is an ultimate value becomes a shared credo of the authors and readers of post-Soviet fiction.

Post-Soviet fiction represents with its symbolic resources the current selective amnesia. It reflects how Gothic morality and Gothic society are flourishing out of the experience of a noncondemned criminal past and abortive repentance.

FROM HISTORICAL AMNESIA TO GOTHIC MORALITY

The analysis that follows focuses mainly—although not exclusively—on the most popular “cult” novels: Sergei Lukyanenko’s *Night Watch* (2006)²⁵ and Vadim Panov’s *Taganski Crossroads* (2006). Their success with the Russian reading public is witnessed by huge print runs as well as by the fact that their novels have been turned into movies and computer games.²⁶ Both novels have similar features that are typical for the genre in general. Both authors leave the realities of Russian culture and society almost intact, which makes their work extremely fertile for an analysis of moral and aesthetic developments. Their main heroes are strikingly similar: they are rank-and-file system administrators, average men on the street. The average reader thus finds himself painstakingly portrayed by the attentive authors as the principal positive hero. In both novels, the plots unfold in contemporary Moscow. Nevertheless, the most important similarity is aesthetic: the credo of both authors as well as of their less successful competitors is to reject the world of humans and to reject the idea that mankind is an ultimate value.

Let us now analyze the new morality as reflected in post-Soviet fiction. It should be mentioned at the outset that the most unexpected result of the fall of the Soviet regime was a feeling of moral disorientation. The collapse of communism, whether praised or damned, left a sense of a moral vacuum, an absence of a coherent system of values to

guide moral judgment. The new realities of social life—such as capital, personal enrichment, business relations, bankruptcy—produced new types of human relations that had to be evaluated in moral terms. To be sure, official Soviet morality was compromised already during the Soviet period. The total denial of anything that could be considered by former Soviet citizens as belonging to the “hypocritical Soviet morality” (which bore no relation to the new social realities) put an end to the fragile Soviet moral consensus. However, no coherent system or systems of values applicable to the new realities that the market economy brought about emerged as its alternative. As interviews conducted by the author in early nineties show, the subjects of post-Soviet society felt utterly confused as to how to morally evaluate their new practices.²⁷ At the same time, the so-called Orthodox Renaissance proved the Russian Orthodox Church completely incapable of providing the basis for a moral consensus in society (were it even not for its manifest nationalism in our multiethnic country), as had not been the case in the traditional society of the past.²⁸

The revolt against “hypocritical Soviet morality” had no impact on attitudes toward Soviet historical mythology. Soviet history supplies the heroes and the consumers of post-Soviet fiction with a positive source for their cultural identity. The “heroic deeds” of the Cheka, the Red Army during World War II or the Bolsheviks during the October Revolution still offer them an undeniably positive example of heroism and patriotism, an exemplar for imitation. Writers and readers gaze with admiration at the age of the Terror because national amnesia has left them with no other directions to turn. “‘Ardent heart, clean hands, cool head.’ Is it by chance that during the Revolution and Civil War all the Light vampires joined the Cheka? Is it by chance that all those who didn’t were killed by the Dark vampires, or by humans whom they tried to protect? They perished because of human stupidity, mean tricks, cowardice, envy” (Lukyanenko, 2006: 321). This monologue by a vampire—the central hero of *Night Watch*—resumes the “lessons of history” and shows the limits of post-Soviet “working through the past.” The image of the Cheka remains for him an uncontested roman-

tic ideal. Dzerzhinsky's motto is the only moral maxim that the hero recites consistently throughout the novel. The hero sees no contradiction between his positive attitude toward the Cheka and his conviction that fascism and communism are equally evil, as well as any other collective project. The motto of Dzerzhinsky, the founder and first head of the Cheka—"Ardent heart, clean hands, cool head"—symbolically guides the hero-vampire to a radical denial of the right of the mankind to exist. "To waste my life serving your cause?" This is the question that a vampire addresses ironically to mankind.

It is no surprise that, according to our 2007 opinion poll, 70 percent of respondents think that Dzerzhinsky "aimed to secure public order and civic life"; 46 percent believe that he "tried to improve the lives of ordinary people";²⁹ while 44 percent deny that he was a "criminal responsible for mass murders."³⁰ Moreover, Dzerzhinsky occupies the third place in our rating of "attractive Bolshevik leaders."³¹

Another example is *Bro's Wanderings* by Vladimir Sorokin, a cult author of post-Soviet fantasy. The action of the novel takes place in post-Revolutionary Russia, where Cheka officers are the main hero's "brothers," supporting him in his mission to destroy mankind and human civilization.

Monsters are the true heroes of the national nightmare born out of suppressed memory. The nightmare of the novels, which are full of macabre atrocities, consists not only in the triumph of supernatural forces at the expense of humans. It is also to be found in the absence of any plausible distinctions between good and evil, which results in the advocacy of narrow-minded selfishness.

What is new in Gothic morality? The main novelty consists in the very attitude toward morality. Morality and moral behavior are considered a misfortune to be avoided, something that can influence the hero's life in the most negative way:

"If this guy would give up his selfish wheeling and dealing, his life would certainly become worse. The more morality, the more misfortune", says the vampire-hero of *Night Watch* (Lukyanenko, 2006: 44). True, such an attitude toward morality stems from a radical reconsid-

eration of the place of humans in the general system of values. Morality as such (not this or that particular system of values) could be dismissed as an irrelevant atavism. Indeed, what moral norms could be applicable to monsters, to vampires—to nonhumans?

Of course, the new attitudes toward morality revealed by the world of fantasy are not reducible to the difference between “fiction” and “reality.” A simple mental experiment helps to prove this statement. If we remove the vampires, werewolves, and witches from these narratives and substitute these nonhumans with cops, gangsters, and their victims, if we bracket the witchcraft and magic objects, the story would not differ much from a pale description of everyday Russian life.

Gothic morality is based on the striking equality of Good and Evil, which is expressed in *Night Watch* by the opposition between Light and Dark Vampires. Their methods and goals are explicitly compared and judged to be the same (Lukyanenko, 2006: 45). Nevertheless, Light and Dark Vampires represent not just a metaphor for the notorious convergence of the state and mafia in Russia. The impossibility of distinguishing Good from Evil—the heroes conclude—makes any attempt to do so a sheer absurdity.

The lack of criteria that would allow the heroes to form their own judgments about Good and Evil is conditioned by the fatal incapacity to answer the question about the nature of Evil. Several of Panov’s stories are explicitly focused on this question. For example, horrifying hordes of monsters appear on earth at regular intervals. They hunt for humans and devour some of them—for example, the hero’s beloved. Monsters are far superior to man and cannot be escaped—and thus a young girl dies. Nobody knows where they come from and why. The author insists that there can be no explanation, either rational or irrational: humans are just the natural prey of these monsters. The impossibility of explaining the nature of evil, either in ethical or in religious terms, results in the mystical fear conveyed to reader by the author of “Wild Horde” (Panov, 2006: 269, 270, 272-3). The fact that humans could be treated just as food for monsters is terrible but inevitable,

horrifying and absurd, hints the author. However, neither this very fact nor human behavior in these conditions can be a matter of moral judgment. Indeed, morality is not applicable to nonhumans. Hence, the behavior of humans in their interactions with nonhumans cannot be morally biased.

The judgment of Good and Evil (whose very natures cannot be distinguished) is grounded exclusively in a subjective evaluation of the given situation. “‘It may be true,’ says Arthur. ‘But this doesn’t change the matter: I am a hunter. And even if Surn [one of the monsters] is just a symmetrical response, I will follow it until I kill it.’ ‘What would you say about those who are hunting the good ones?’ ‘I understand them perfectly well and feel comradeship with them. It is up to us to decide what to do and we have every right to make mistakes,’” says the main character in Panov’s “The Wild Horde” (Panov, 2006: 276-7).

Without a subjective personal decision that does not appeal (and should not appeal) to universal values, there can be no distinction between Good and Evil:

“Do you mean that I could be killed according to your agreement [among the werewolves about hunting humans], and you would do nothing to rescue my life? They would suck out my blood and you would simply watch it happen? Do you mean that you are a good person?”

“First of all, I am not a human, nor are you, and this is innate. A Dark magician can heal people, while a Light magician can refuse to help them.”

“Then what’s the difference?”

“We have no choice. You will understand that the Light Ones cannot fight the Dark Ones without using all the same means. You will understand[.]”

promises the vampire-hero to a neophyte, but he lies (Lukyanenko, 2006: 87, see also 83, 151). He doesn’t know the answer himself. The following testimony, given by the hero at the end of the story, sums

up his search for an answer to the question: “What is the difference between Good and Evil? What is moral justification? What is pardon or mercy? I don’t know the answer. I can say nothing about my deeds even to myself. I am using old, irrelevant dogmas and principles, which I have no need for.” The acute sense of the inability to find plausible criteria for solving moral dilemmas is the most poignant aspect of the novel, if not of the genre as a whole. The search for moral foundations results in the claim that the only valid criterion for behavior is personal interest.

The main feature of Gothic morality consists neither in rejection of the old ethical system (for example, “hypocritical Soviet morality”), nor in an embrace of a new ethical system (for example, the “harsh but just” rules of the mafia). Gothic morality is a denial of any abstract system of values that could be considered equally pertinent for all members of a given community. Consequently, moral judgment becomes concrete, situational, and totally subjective, a deictic gesture that assigns the predicate “good” or “bad” to this or that concrete practice taking place here and now. Power to make such a “moral judgment” is restricted to the boss—the head of the clan, the mafia godfather, the director of a company or rector of a university. The compromise reached by the different clans is also concrete and situational, and is justified not in terms of universal values but in terms of the personal relations between the heads of the clans.

The total denial of morality leads to a cult of force. Gothic morality considers murder an everyday routine—who counts (dead) humans? (Lukyanenko, 2006: 234, 236, 241) “Life against death, love against hate, and force against force because force is above morality. It is that simple,” concludes the hero of *Night Watch* (75).

Gothic morality leads the author of *Night Watch* to a striking innovation. He describes a serial murderer, who is accurately portrayed as a typical maniac; his discourse seems to be copied from descriptions of psychological distortions of this kind. However, Maxim, the serial murderer, is introduced by the author as a positive hero. His affections and emotions about his victims play an important role in the story

and should, according to the author, make readers sympathize with the murder. Maxim feels lonely in his mission to distinguish good and bad people and to execute the bad ones. He follows his feelings and kills a young woman, then the father of a family, and then attempts to kill a 12-year-old child. The accounts of these murders are written in a most naturalistic way. Nevertheless, neither these scenes nor the fact that the victims were not guilty even according to the criteria of the vampires is supposed to cast doubts on Maxim. Lukyanenko calls him an “absolutely lonely Light magician” (155). Maxim ends up as a supreme judge, an arbiter between the Light Ones and Dark Ones, incarnating the subjectivity of a judgment that we can hardly continue to call moral. By and large, the author does not seem to be particularly concerned about the moral implications of his hero’s deeds, as if they were conventional acts that required no special attention. The author tries to satisfy the expectations of his audience. His utmost fear is to be viewed as a prophet of “cheap commonsense morality,” and he is eager to prove that he is above it.

Since the hero of post-Soviet fantasy novels—who focuses only on his own personal interests—has become the supreme instance of judgment, no shared understanding of what is good or bad has the chance to arise even among members of the same clan. Abstract values and norms are replaced by concrete decisions that cannot be generalized. Any kind of altruism, as well as any collective project, is deeply compromised. The only true reality is the struggle for personal well-being.

The only principle that the hero of post-Soviet fantasy never betrays is personal loyalty to the boss. He is always ready to go against his own judgments, betray his inferiors and the norms of his unit to obey his boss’s orders. His inferiors behave in the same way in their relations with him. Personal loyalty to the superior and respect for hierarchy constitute the main and the only uncontested law of Gothic society. The more advanced the position of hero becomes in the course of events, the more his loyalty to the boss gives way to his personal power. Only after reaching the highest hierarchical level in the organization can the hero try occasionally to disobey his boss. However, he has no

hope of occupying the boss's position, because their innate magical powers are different.

Gothic morality correlates with a deep cultural pessimism, with a disappointment in the values of civilization: "There is a killer for every president, there are thousands of adepts for every prophet who will spoil the meaning of his religion and convert its light into the fire of Inquisition. Every book will be thrown into fire, every symphony will be turned into pop music to be played in the pubs, every dirty trick will be justified by a solid philosophical theory," concludes a vampire on the imperfections of human society (366).

FROM GOTHIC MORALITY TO GOTHIC SOCIETY

Gothic morality and Gothic aesthetics have made apparent certain social practices that I call Gothic society. Some features of Gothic society are frequently referred to as the "new feudalism" (or just "feudalism"), the "corporate society," and the "clan economy." Are these old concepts adequate to explain new post-Soviet conditions?

Let us take, for example, the concept of feudalism. True, several social and economic practices of contemporary society (such as the privatization of state functions, the crisis of public institutions, the unprecedented role of personal relations in the social sphere) have quite a few features in common with medieval society, as F. Ankersmit argues (n.d.). Metaphorical comparisons of Soviet mores with feudal society were quite frequent already in Soviet times (Etkind, 2001: 21). These comparisons are still very much in the air. According to recent Internet poll, feudalism is viewed as the most accurate description of contemporary post-Soviet conditions: feudalism is the respondents' first choice among other social orders in the ratings (<http://www.gazeta.spb.ru/2/107736-0/>).

At the same time, the concept of feudalism embraces social and economic conditions that have absolutely nothing to do with contemporary society, such as the relations between title and land ownership, the different forms of peasant dependence typical of rural society, and the predominant role of religion. The concept of feudalism inevitably

evokes the image of a traditional society with a strong hierarchy, based on the nobility, privileges, and land ownership. It connotes not only princesses and knights, tournaments and castles, but also a degree of technical backwardness that our contemporaries would find hard to imagine. In other words, the concept of feudalism can only compromise the worrisome diagnosis, unnecessarily violating the common sense that we are not returning to the Middle Ages. The most important similarities between our conditions and certain medieval practices lie not in the particular economic and social order reflected in the concept of feudalism. They reside in the aesthetic and moral transformations that are generated by Gothic allusions.

To show that civil society, professionalism, and the rule of law are gradually disappearing from the practices of the contemporary state (which we habitually call “democratic”), new concepts have to be invented. “Gothic society” is a concept that attempts to communicate the sense of urgency. Gothic society manifests itself in the evolution undergone by post-Soviet society over the last 10 years.

Without attempting to portray a society that has not yet come into being—and, I hope, never will—I would like to trace some tendencies that have not yet coalesced into a coherent system. However, even in their sporadic and embryonic form they appear dangerous enough to warrant our attention. Gothic fragments penetrate the social fabric of post-Soviet society; Gothic allusions can be glimpsed in its slogans and self-representations, in its emerging customs and aesthetics. Gothic society represents just one possible—and the least desirable—scenario for Russia. Let us consider some of its elements.

In post-Soviet Gothic society, personal dependence and personal loyalty to the boss have become the main principle of hiring, outweighing professional skills, competence, and the institutional need to fulfill particular functions. Job descriptions tend to reflect the concrete portrait of a preselected candidate. However subjective, idiosyncratic, based on personal interests and phobias the boss’s judgment may be, it is accepted by his subordinates out of personal loyalty. Personal relations with the boss are also the main source of personal security, a

much more efficient source in a country where the police are notoriously corrupt. These “elementary particles” of society rely for protection not on the constitution or the legal system but on private armed guards. These who are not involved in relations of personal loyalty and/or family connections find themselves outside Gothic society and its privileges.

Administrative positions as well as professions are considered personal family legacies that should be transmitted from father to son, while an institution is perceived primarily as a source of personal fortune or a pseudo-feudal estate. Promotion based on personal links and not on competition makes accident an important rule of Gothic society. As a result, such social organization leaves no room for public politics and leads to the closing of the public sphere.

It is not by chance that, according to opinion polls, 91 percent and 84 percent of respondents, respectively, think that the most important means for achieving high social position and acquiring considerable personal fortune are social connections, while 75 percent feel a deep mistrust for the police, and more than 80 percent believe that the police in their own city are corrupt (Levada Center Survey, 2004).

The process of political decision-making is limited to personal compromises among the bosses: university rectors, directors of enterprises, bosses of oil companies. Gothic society does not simply generate a social alternative to democracy: it profits from every loss of democracy. Gothic society has no respect for individuality or privacy, and openly contradicts the idea of human rights.

This description of Gothic society corresponds to the analyses offered by the experts on post-Soviet economy. Andrei Illarionov, who was formerly Putin’s chief economic adviser, chooses the concept of corporatism to describe these new features of post-Soviet society: “The most important rule of the corporation is the absence of any rule. The main principle of corporatism is selectivity, inequality, discrimination. The main principle for determining the status of a member of the corporation is loyalty to the corporation, while experience, professionalism, and service to the state have no bearing” (Illarionov, 2006: 2). The

“selectivity, inequality, [and] discrimination” mentioned by Illarionov are indeed important principles of post-Soviet society and guiding principles in hiring, but these features are not exclusively typical of corporations. Most important, they belong to a different, noncorporate system of moral and social relations. As opposed to professionalism, “loyalty” is, again, not exclusively typical of the corporation, which also values professionalism and experience. “Loyalty” is indeed the most important concept for understanding contemporary Russian society, although its structural principle is not the corporation.

Recently, L. Kosals proposed that we use the concept of the clan economy to analyze basically the same features of post-Soviet society Illarionov’s critique attacked. Kosals emphasizes the anthropological meaning of the concept of clan as a unification of close relatives or families under a chief. The typical features of the clan economy in contemporary Russia are close personal relations based on personal dependence and obligations. The clan can protect its members who break state laws and persecute those who break the rules of the clan. Personal loyalty is fundamental for relations among clan members. According to Kosals, clans—the main actors of the post-Soviet economy—represent nontransparent groups uniting businessmen, politicians, state bureaucrats, mafia, and representatives of the police. Informal internal rules and norms of behavior are respected much more than state legislation. An important feature of current Russian economic conditions is the formation of a “clan state” that protects interests of the major clans (Kosals, 2006: 182-3, 185).

Both concepts fail to describe an unprecedented social system while depicting some of its elements quite correctly. As they try to account for a newly emerging reality, both concepts—corporatism and the clan state—lack all “feudal” connotations as well as moral and aesthetic dimensions. Most important, they are missing an important structural element that characterizes Gothic society and its relations to suppressed historical memory.

The most important feature of Gothic society is the conversion of the *zona*, the particular form of Soviet camp, into a founding principle of

post-Soviet society. Despite the tacit assumption of the classical theory of totalitarianism, there were a variety of camp “cultures.” Although Nazi and Soviet camps shared several features in common—for example, prisoners were not considered humans—there was no equality of prisoners in Soviet camps as opposed to the Nazi extermination camps. From the inception of the Gulag, the Bolshevik policy was to mix criminals with political prisoners. Criminals were considered by the Soviet regime “socially proximal” and were allowed to impose criminal norms on the rest of the prisoners, thus helping the wardens to run the Gulag. In the early eighties, Leo Klein, a Soviet archaeologist, drew attention to the striking similarities between Soviet camps (where he spent a year as a prisoner of consciousness) and the social structure of the Germanic tribes as described by Tacitus, on the one hand, and several features of Soviet society, on the other (Samoilov, 1990).

The *zona* permeates various aspects of social life and relations in Russia; its legacy is not limited to the post-Soviet prison and army. It reproduces itself—and not only in the suburbs and airports, as Giorgio Agamben says with respect to the role that the concentration camp plays in contemporary Western society.³² Aside from its most notorious and obvious manifestations (such as camp slang’s transmogrification into the language of power and literature, the convergence of mafia and state, and the unbelievable degree of corruption), the rules of the *zona* are reproduced in the principles of social organization, as revealed by Gothic allusions that we have described above.

We are leaving a world where the idea of refuge—moral, ideal, political—had existential meaning. However, it is also clear that the tradition of resisting the Gothic scenario has much deeper roots in Western society. In many countries, the unmasterable past has been an issue of serious reflection and debates that profoundly influenced mass consciousness. Condemnation of the crimes provided at least a minimal consensus, based on humanistic values. The total absence of resistance to camp culture, the incapacity to distinguish clearly between the *zona* and “normal life,” due to the long tradition of their contamination under the Soviet regime, and the unwillingness to reflect on concentra-

tion camp history make today's Russia especially vulnerable to a Gothic path of development.

NOTES

1. The opinion poll "History through the Eyes of Russians," whose aim was to create a portrait of Russian mass historical consciousness, was conducted in July 2007 in three Russian cities—Saint Petersburg, Kazan, and Ulyanovsk—and based on a representative sample of the populace. It was designed to measure changes in the perception of history and, especially, in attitudes towards the Soviet past and Stalinism. The survey was part of a larger research project, "Modernization of History Education in Russia," that was supported by the MacArthur Foundation. The 2007 poll paralleled the first study of mass historical consciousness conducted by Dina Khapaeva and Nikolai Koposov in July 1990 (Khapaeva and Koposov, 1992: 4-5; Khapaeva, 1993 : 4).
2. Twenty-one percent evaluate it "rather negatively"; 16 percent think it "has had no impact"; while 13 percent find it "difficult to answer [the question]."
3. Twenty-one percent evaluate it "rather negatively"; 17 percent think it "has had no impact"; while 17 percent find it "difficult to answer [the question]."
4. The distribution of responses to the question "Choose the statement that reflects best your opinion on Stalin's role in the history of our country" is as follows: "positive"—16 percent; "rather positive"—18 percent; "rather negative"—18 percent. For attitudes of the Russian youth see Mendelson and Gerber (2005-6: 87).
5. Stalinism was not the only regime that demonstrated a potential to remain in the memory of masses as a myth of a golden age. Theodor Adorno described this sort of memory of German National Socialism, which persisted even into the late sixties. Adorno shows that this memory continued to praise National Socialism because it fulfilled the collective thirst for power of those who had never had any power and who could feel empowered only as members of such a collective

body. No analysis, however clear it might be, could spare memory from the reality of these fulfilled phantasms and of the instinctive energies that were invested into National Socialism, concludes Adorno in a pessimistic mood (Adorno, 1971: 14). However, the political conditions in Germany after World War II allowed society to develop a considerable degree of resistance to the legacy of the concentration camp universe. Indeed, the political and social climate in Germany is much less favorable for an upsurge of these “phantasms” than that in Russia.

6. The group of questions on Stalinism was designed as a mixture of typical positive and negative clichés on Stalinism; each positive statement had an exact negative counterpart. The respondents had to evaluate all statements with one of three answers: “yes,” “no,” “hard to say.” Each statement opened with an explicit mention of Stalin: “In Stalin’s time . . .”
7. This becomes especially evident if we compare the attitudes to the Soviet past among the supporters of different political parties (Khapaeva, 2007).
8. See Ian Buruma (1995).
9. On the Russian historical consciousness during perestroika see Davis (1989) and Nove (1989).
10. On the Western-oriented ideology, see Khapaeva (1994, 1995a, and 2002). On the perception of historical time by Western-oriented Russians in the early nineties, see Khapaeva (1995b: 6).
11. “Yet I persist in believing that the losses—of history, language, homeland, identity—that stand at the center of my personal history were shared by a entire generation in both Europe and United States, and made themselves felt in the need to comfort, in a philosophical displaced form and forum, an epistemological loss of certainty in the truth and utility of history, a loss we no longer could, or cared, to mask beneath the modernist guise of continuity and progress” (Spiegel, 2006: 4).
12. According to another recent opinion poll, 58 percent of respondents think that the victory in World War II is the most important fact in

Russian history; see <<http://top.rbc.ru/society/21/06/2007/107081.shtml>>.

13. *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* (*Private Stock*) is one of Russia's leading intellectual journals; it is published by the New Literary Review (Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie) publishing house.
14. The idea that World War II was a myth of origins for Soviet society is a *locus communis* that runs through several articles in the special issue: for example, see Hosler (2005: 161), Grinevich (2005: 420), and Kukulín (2005: 645).
15. This judgment is undoubtedly rooted in the very different Western attitudes toward fascism and communism. To quote the words of Anne Applebaum, "No one wants to think that we defeated one mass murderer with the help of another" (Applebaum, 2003).
16. It seems to be especially true if we compare current Russian attitudes to the Soviet past with those of Germans, French or Italians toward fascism. Indeed, German attitudes toward their "unmasterable past," to use Charles Maier's famous formula (1992), passed through different stages and revealed different attitudes. Despite frequent complaints that even in Germany the denazification program was never deep enough, we have to acknowledge that in Germany the unmasterable past attracted serious public attention. True, in the German case, confronting the past was to a large extent determined by the fact that the Germans had lost the war and thus the confrontation with the past was forced on them by the Allies, while in Russia this was not the case. However, this difference does not preclude comparison of current attitudes to the past and historical memories in these countries while respecting the uniqueness of Holocaust. In Germany, the question of historical responsibility animated huge political debates in the late sixties as well as the seventies and eighties, not to mention the most recent confessions. The Nazi past remains an issue of high political importance even in those countries where, as in Austria, the state has never fully acknowledged its responsibility. In Russia, the revolution of 1991 did not result in trials against the mass murderers nor did it even manage to condemn their crimes. The cross-cultural

- comparison of attitudes toward the criminal past is especially important in the Russian context given current attempts to rehabilitate Stalinism as a normal vector of modernization.
17. On the meaning of the Great Patriotic War, see also the polemics in Gabovich (2007), Kukulín (2007), and Khapaeva (2007).
 18. Mironov, like many others, feels himself self-appointed to defend Russian history from less patriotic—and mostly imaginary—historians: “To my mind, Soviet historiography had a tendency to paint black the history of pre-Revolutionary Russia, as nowadays post-Soviet historiography does in relation to Soviet history. . . . There is no other country in the world where historians describe the history of their own country in such a negative way. It is surprising that such a negative attitude on the part of historians has not yet produced in Russians a nationwide inferiority complex and has not yet deprived them of a sense of dignity” (15).
 19. These ideas are certainly proliferating in high school and university history textbooks. See, for example, the open advocacy of Russian nationalism, the messianic role of the Russian nation, and praise of imperialist political ambitions and ideology in Chubais (2004), Preobrazhensky and Rubakov (1999; a textbook for the sixth and seventh forms), Khachatryan (2003; a textbook for the tenth and eleventh forms), and Danilov and Kosulin (1999, a textbook for the ninth form).
 20. The most notorious case was a textbook for high-school teachers, authored by A. Filippov, that praised Stalinism as the most effective way of modernizing Russia: the “Soviet Union was not a democracy. But it was a model and an example of a healthier and fair society for many millions of people around the world” (Filippov, 2007: 6).
 21. On the miniseries about Stalinist times that have been broadcast on Russian TV over the past two years (based on Mikhail Bulgakov’s *Master and Margarita*, Anatoly Rybakov’s *Children of the Arbat*, Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s *The First Circle*, and Vasily Aksenov’s *Moscow Saga*), see *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* (2006).
 22. The Russian version of the genre might be called—and is indeed

sometimes called by its critics—a “Russian collective unconscious” (Golubovich, 2006: 92). As opposed to Western fantasy novels, it is deeply embedded in Russian everyday life, which provides both the content and backdrop for its plots. The post-Soviet fiction speaks with the voice of the masses. It also speaks the language of the street, the ordinary Russian of the Moscow suburbs.

23. For more detailed analysis of Tolkien’s prose see Khapaeva (2008), chap. two, “L’esthétique gothique. Essai de compréhension de la société postsoviétique.” *Le Banquet* (April 2009).
24. For more detailed analysis of crisis of scientific rationality and transformations of perception of historical time see Khapaeva (2008), chap. three.
25. The films *Night Watch* and *Day Watch* were so successful that American sequels of these movies are in production in Hollywood.
26. Lukyanenko’s novels describe a kind of national security apparatus that fuses several features of the Federal Security Service (FSB), the police, and the mafia. The social prototypes of Panov’s novels are more diverse, representing different strata of post-Soviet society.
27. On the moral disorientation of the early nineties, see the chapters “Like the Whole Civilized World” and “Ethical Discourse and the Image of the West” in Khapaeva (2002).
28. According to N. Mitrokhin, only 85 percent agree that Easter is an important Orthodox holiday, and only 62 percent out of 71 percent of those who claimed to be Orthodox believers said they believed in God’s existence (Mitrokhin, 2004: 38).
29. Of those surveyed, 13.5 percent responded “no,” while 34 percent found it “difficult to answer.”
30. Fifteen percent responded “yes,” while 39 percent found it “difficult to answer.”
31. According to an opinion poll conducted in 2002 by the Levada Center, Dzerzhinsky, Lenin, and Stalin occupied the top three places among popular historical leaders; see <www.levada.ru/sobytiadaty1.html>.
32. Which Agamben considers not an epiphenomenon that disappeared

without a trace, but its matrix, a “nomos of its political space”
Agamben (1997: 179, 195).

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