



Bodies of Evidence: The Depiction of Violence Against Female Characters in Late Imperial Russian Crime Fiction

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the depiction of violence perpetrated against female victims in Russian crime fiction from the late imperial era (1866–1917). It discusses works by Nikolai Timofeev, Aleksandr Shkliarevskii and Andrei Zarin in which the violence perpetrated against women is not edited out but is described in considerable and striking detail. The article reads both the acts of violence and their literary-fictional portrayal as a reflection of the gender relations operating in patriarchal society at the time and, more specifically, the disenfranchised position of women within the institution of the family. We examine the use of abject and extreme realism in these descriptions as a means of expressing the dehumanization of women that is both a catalyst for, and a consequence of, gendered violence. However, although the use of such realism might imply a criticism of the circumstances that permit violence against female characters, a detailed examination of the specific diegetic terms used by male narrators and focalizers suggests a more ambivalent situation. This discussion of the depiction of violence consequently argues for a revision of the conventionally positive interpretation of the legal reforms enacted in 1860s Russia and of their male enforcers.

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This article considers issues raised by the depiction of violence perpetrated against female victims in Russian crime fiction from the late imperial era (1866–1917). It reads both the acts of violence and their literary-fictional portrayal as a reflection of the gender relations operating in tsarist Russian patriarchal society at the time.¹ We contend that the violence implicit in such an unequal system gains explicit and extreme expression in the representation of gendered violence in crime fiction.² The discussion adopts a dual focus, examining not only the nature and context of the violence committed but also, most significantly, the terms in which it is presented to the reader. Attention paid to narrative voice and focalization reveals how these female victims suffer further violation from a judicial system that is supposed to protect them, as well as the literary works that describe them.

Crime fiction written in Russia during the late imperial period does not, of course, feature female victims exclusively. Nor does it present only male perpetrators of crime. The present article does not seek to offer a quantitative analysis of the statistical dominance of one or other gender among either victims or criminals depicted in the genre.³ Rather, in examining the ways in which violence against female victims is represented, it seeks to show how crime fiction critiques or reinforces the disenfranchised, subjugated and repressed position of women in society.⁴ In so doing, it engages with pre-existing work across a range of fields concerning the image of the female body in literary and cultural contexts.⁵ It also seeks to counter the tendency, identified by Elisabeth Bronfen, to ignore, or look away from, depictions of violence perpetrated against women. Bronfen notes:

representations of feminine death work on the principle of being so excessively obvious that they escape observation. Because they are so familiar, so evident, we are culturally blind to the ubiquity of representations of feminine death. Though in a plethora of representations feminine death is perfectly visible we only see it with some difficulty. (3)

As Bronfen's work makes clear, the representation of female victims of violence is encountered in numerous contexts outside of crime fiction.⁶ However, a consideration of its characteristics in a genre whose historical emergence in Russia coincided with a time of significant reform and modernization is especially revealing.

The legal reforms of the early 1860s in Russia included the transfer of pre-trial investigative responsibility away from the police and into the hands of a court-appointed judicial investigator. This official, it was claimed, would be a humane, empathetic and educated figure.⁷ The introduction of criminal trials open to the public and with a jury led to the establishment of the legal profession of the bar. Nevertheless, both roles could only be performed by men because women were not permitted to access the legal education that was the prerequisite. Works of early Russian crime fiction frequently feature these legal figures as their main protagonists, meaning that violence against women, regardless of the perpetrator's gender, is either narrated or focalized through a male perspective. This point of view can be seen as doubly male when we

1 This discussion adopts Morrissey's definition of patriarchal society as "relations of governance presided over by a 'father' [...]. In its broader sense, therefore, the term 'patriarchy' accentuates the analogous structure of power in a society – between the tsar and his servitors, the lord and his serfs, the husband and his wife, the master and his apprentice, the officer and his soldiers, and so forth. Understood in this sense, it can facilitate an analysis of the interconnections between various forms of domination, which is especially important given patriarchy's overlapping jurisdictions" (24).

2 For previous work on crime fiction and gender in non-Russian contexts, see, for example, [Irons](#); [Makinen](#); [Weststeijn](#); and [Hoffman](#).

3 As [Engelstein](#) explains, works such as E. N. Tarnovskii's *Itogi russkoi ugovnoi statistiki za 20 let (1874–1894 gg.)* did analyse the gender distribution among criminals and victims on the basis of judicial records.

4 This article considers the portrayal of physical violence within these fictional texts to mirror what Pierre Bourdieu calls the non-physical "symbolic violence" manifested in the power differential between the genders in the extrafictional world. See [Bourdieu](#), esp. ch. 4.

5 Examples include Bronfen; Scarry, *The Body in Pain*; Scarry (ed.), *Literature and the Body*; Bal; Suleiman (ed.).

6 During the late imperial era in Russia, readers encountered descriptions of dead female bodies in works including Fedor Dostoevskii's "Кроткая" ("The Meek One") (1876) and Lev Tolstoy's *Крейцеров соната* (*The Kreutzer Sonata*) (1889). Closer to the realm of crime fiction, Raskolnikov's murder of Aliona Ivanovna in Dostoevskii's *Преступление и наказание* (*Crime and Punishment*) (1866) is discussed in [Whitehead](#), *Poetics* 154–5.

7 For more information on the introduction of judicial investigators, see [Burnham](#).

consider that almost all crime writers in Russia at the time were also men.⁸ The birth of crime fiction in Russia occurred at the same time as interest in the “woman question” gained traction.⁹ However, while this coincidence might explain the genre’s impulse not to ignore the issue of gendered violence, the discussion here reveals a presentation of male-authored (in both senses) violence against women that is problematically ambiguous. Although readers encounter both criticism and empathy, they also meet voyeuristic and sensationalist descriptions of violated female bodies. As such, aspects of the works considered here depart from certain more positive depictions of developing female emancipation published in the same period.¹⁰

This article examines four works in which the violence perpetrated against female characters is not rendered invisible but receives more sustained description. The four works comprise two stories, “Убийство и самоубийство” (“Murder and Suicide”) and “Проститутка” (“The Prostitute”), from Nikolai Timofeev’s 1872 collection *Записки следователя* (*Notes of an Investigator*); Aleksandr Shkliarevskii’s short novel “Утро после бала: рассказ присяжного поверенного” (“The Morning After the Ball: A Barrister’s Tale”) from 1878; and the novella *В поисках убийцы* (*In Search of a Murderer*), published by Andrei Zarin in 1915.¹¹ Each of these works features a plot in which at least one female character is the victim of a violent crime (most frequently, although not always, murder) that is described in explicit and considerable detail. As noted elsewhere, graphic depictions of violence (gendered or not) were not the norm for crime fiction in Russia at the time. Most works preferred not to describe the committing or aftermath of criminal violence in any detail in their pages. Timofeev’s collection is unusual among examples of the first wave of Russian crime fiction precisely because several of its stories include unflinchingly realist descriptions of corpses.¹² Shkliarevskii, by contrast, published scores of crime stories in the 1870s and 1880s, but most sanitize the criminal violence committed, and none is as explicit or shocking as “The Morning After the Ball”. Zarin’s novella is also an outlier in his oeuvre in terms of its explicit depiction of gendered violence; others of his crime stories focus on the ingenuity of the detective rather than the violation of victims.¹³

The discussion offered here considers how violence against women can be interpreted not simply as the result of acts committed by individuals but of the wider social system that sanctions this. Consequently, the first section examines the context of the violence committed with particular reference to the family and its status as both the most potent expression of patriarchal society in late imperial Russia and, by extension, as an inherently violent institution.¹⁴ It also considers how the violence depicted might be read as an expression of the anxiety surrounding changes to gender roles in society in the post-reform period.¹⁵ In the second section, the focus moves away from context and towards the diegetic terms in which violence against female characters is described. Our contention is that the realism that is typical of all crime fiction gains greater significance in these works because the gendered violence is described in such uncompromising fashion. Specifically, we examine the use of both extreme and abject realism in these works as a means of dehumanizing women and rendering them something “other” than themselves. The final section considers the problems encountered when the narrative

8 Two notable exceptions are Aleksandra Sokolova and Kapitolina Nazar’eva.

9 The “woman question” debate, initiated by Nikolai Pirogov’s essay “Questions of Life” from 1856, concerned the social role of women, their rights and their access to education, among other issues. For more details, see Engel.

10 Works such as Nadezhda Khvoshchinskaiia’s 1861 novella *Пансионерка* (*The Boarding School Girl*) and Nadezhda Suslova’s “Рассказ в письмах” (“A Story in Letters”) (1864) portray women able to pursue a destiny of their own choosing, outside of the strict confines of the patriarchal family or marriage.

11 Both Timofeev’s collection and a volume of Shkliarevskii’s collected works which included “The Morning After the Ball” were among the most widely read publications of 1872 and 1881 respectively. See Reitblat. Zarin’s *In Search of a Murderer* is the only one of the four works to have been published in serialized form. It first appeared in an illustrated supplement to the journal *Родина* in June and July 1915.

12 See Whitehead, “Abject”.

13 Zarin’s work is less unusual for its time than Timofeev’s collection because contemporary authors such as R. L. Antropov were also publishing stories featuring depictions of gendered violence in the early twentieth century.

14 Muravyeva argues that “Patriarchal families led by men (and sometimes women) used every accessible tool to discipline, control and subjugate women to the family and community needs, often to the harm of their own interests” (237).

15 Hoffmann (1) poses a similar question with regard to British “Golden Age” crime fiction. Paperno notes, with reference to the Russian context, that “the Great Reforms of the 1860s, when serfdom was finally abolished, would mark the first significant challenge to [traditional forms of patriarchy]” (26).

presentation of the violence, and not just the violence itself, is gendered. Both of Timofeev's stories are narrated by a male judicial investigator while Shkliarevskii's novella is recounted by a male defence barrister. Even Zarin's novel, the only third-person narrative discussed here, has a male detective as the main protagonist and focalizer. The presence of these male representatives of a patriarchal legal system leads to the objectification, sexualization, even fetishization of female victims that clashes with these figures' professional obligations. As such, our reflection on the performance of male detective figures when confronted specifically with violence against women leads to a re-evaluation of their reception as positive agents of justice. Their ambivalent treatment of female victims complicates any contention that crime fiction in Russia during this era unambiguously critiques the prevailing conditions in society. Finally, the conclusion briefly addresses the ethical implications of academic writing devoted to the representation of violence against women and the potential for risk in this undertaking.

SOCIAL BODIES: FEMALE SUBJUGATION IN SOCIETY AND THE FAMILY

Although they have varied plotlines, the four works discussed here all suggest a causal link between the position occupied by women in a patriarchal society and their status as victims of criminal violence. This first section examines how the brutality experienced by female characters is attributed not merely to their position in society, but more specifically to their subjugation within the patriarchal family. Although it is probably unhelpful to attempt to rank works in terms of their shock value, Timofeev's "Murder and Suicide" is certainly striking for the account it gives of the violence suffered by the female protagonist at the hands of her family. The story focuses on the case of Marianna Bodresova, a 26-year-old peasant woman and unmarried mother of three, living in the provincial town of Deresha, who is arrested after trying to hang herself.¹⁶ While the investigation takes place in 1865, the circumstances explaining Marianna's attempt on her own life are shown to stretch far back in time to her earliest childhood in the 1840s. Indeed, a principal reason for the shocking nature of "Murder and Suicide" is the temporal length of the history of violence that Marianna has endured. Her story provides stark evidence of the utterly disenfranchised position of an illegitimately born woman in the feudal society of pre-Emancipation Russia who has no recourse to external authorities for protection. Even after 1861, her position does not materially improve. Significantly, the various roles fulfilled by Marianna over the course of Timofeev's work – daughter, sibling, sexual partner, mother – are all exposed as being perverted versions of their more conventional conceptions, a perversion that results from the violence of her family.

During the judicial investigator's first interrogation of Marianna, she reveals that she appears on the census as one of the landowner Grondzevskii's house serfs, but without a patronymic because of her illegitimacy. In fact, Grondzevskii was her father and, according to rumour, her mother was a Frenchwoman on his payroll. This woman has no interest in being a mother because she is more preoccupied with "вакханалиями разного рода" ("the bacchanalia of various sorts") (Timofeev 49) that takes place on their Gostitsa estate.¹⁷ The daughter of self-absorbed parents, Marianna's abuse begins early: at four years old she is regularly awoken at night to stroke her parents' feet until they fall asleep. If she does so unsatisfactorily, her mother kicks her. For the least misdemeanour, Marianna is either restrained under the stove for hours or tied to the stump of a tree and forced to eat from the same bowl as the dogs. When one bites her, her parents merely laugh. However, the most severe violence she experiences in childhood occurs during a party when she is five. As neighbours drink and carouse at Grondzevskii's house,

¹⁶ The legal basis for Marianna's arrest after her attempt to take her own life is somewhat confused. As Paperno explains, the 1845 Penal Code introduced some important revision to previous legal statutes concerning suicide: "While nominally remaining criminal offenses, suicide and attempted suicide now carried only religious and civil penalties [...]. At the same time, criminal prosecution was extended to two new crimes not previously addressed in Russian law: the aiding and abetting of suicide and the instigation of suicide" (28). Marianna is arrested by the local police and taken to the judicial investigator primarily because they do not know how to proceed with her case. The inclusion in Timofeev's volume of a story detailing a case of suicide reflects the interest that the issue was attracting in Russia at the time. As Paperno notes: "Journalists, hygienists, municipal authorities, scientists, writers, and the general public were united in the belief that, for the first time, Russia was hit by an epidemic of suicide [...]. It was a matter of common opinion that suicide was both a 'sign' and a 'product' of the age – the era of the Great Reforms, associated with disintegration of the social and moral order" (45).

¹⁷ All translations from Russian are the authors'.

a passing bear handler is invited into the front yard. Following the performance, Marianna's mother asks him what a bear would do to a human being if one was thrown to it and he replies, "известно задерет" ("tear them to pieces obviously") (50). At that moment, she kicks Marianna hard in the chest, causing her to fall backwards off the steps, whereupon the bear pounces on her. Although the handler pulls the animal off, Marianna has still been injured:

[она] оказалась без чувств, но из носу у нее текла ручьем кровь от ушиба, на спине была разорвана рубашонка и струилась слегка кровь из тех мест, которых успела уже коснуться лапа медведя. (50)

[[she] appeared to be unconscious, but a trickle of blood flowed from her nose from a blow and the shirt on her back was ripped and blood streamed lightly from those places that the bear's paw had managed to reach.]

The description of Marianna's injuries is relatively brief and matter of fact here, but the details of the context remain shocking. Using an animal to inflict the violence that the mother desires her child to suffer is quite literally inhuman. The image of Marianna's ripped shirt reminds the reader of the unbuttoned shirt and jacket she is wearing when she is first arrested. Such mirroring implicitly links Marianna's experience of childhood trauma with her suicide attempt as an adult. While elsewhere in "Murder and Suicide" Marianna's abusers are male, her childhood abuser is female and, worse still, her own mother. The impact of the violence is arguably heightened because it represents such a perversion of the conventions related to maternal love and affection. Timofeev thus engages with an issue of contemporary interest in the late imperial era: the potential for tyranny within families in which women and girls had no autonomy and could fall victim to abuse.¹⁸ However, he also complicates the issue by casting the mother as the primary abuser and by depicting an unusual form of violence.

In spite of the pre-Emancipation setting, Marianna's mother does not escape punishment: the local authorities sentence her to exile, where she dies two years later.¹⁹ When Grondzevskii also decides to leave the estate, Marianna lives with the village elder's family for some ten years. With her father's return, however, the implications of Marianna's lack of freedom become clear and further violence soon ensues. By now, she is engaged to the son of her adoptive family, Stepan, but, as serfs, they cannot marry without the landowner's permission. Any hope regarding Grondzevskii's possible agreement is tempered by rumours about his "безнравственные наклонности" ("immoral inclinations") (52). Their fears prove well-founded when, rather than allowing Marianna to marry, Grondzevskii "пленившись ее красотой и свежестью, пользуясь своим правом отца и помещика, оставил ее при себе" ("captivated by her beauty and youth and, taking advantage of his right as a father and as a landowner, brought her to live with him") (52). The overt reference here to both of his patriarchal roles underscores Grondzevskii's complete authority over Marianna. His abuse of this power is revealed a few lines later when the reader is told: "среди разных возмутительных сцен Марианна сделалась любовницей Грондзевского" ("amid various outrageous scenes, Marianna was made Grondzevskii's lover") (52). The diegetic presentation of this sexual violence will be discussed in greater detail below. However, Grondzevskii's belief in his inalienable right to inflict violence on those he considers subordinate to his authority is clear. When Stepan threatens to inform the authorities, he is severely beaten and then conscripted into the army. The investigator-narrator notes that, although a report is made about Grondzevskii's abuse, "for some reason" it is not followed up. Timofeev's illustration of the impunity with which Grondzevskii is able to act makes clear his critique of patriarchal society and, in particular, the violent perversion of family life that it permits.²⁰

Any hope that the sudden death of her father a few years later might ameliorate Marianna's circumstances is dismissed with the appearance of her previously unknown half-brother.

¹⁸ "Murder and Suicide" reflects the context of the second half of the nineteenth century in which "public attention would focus increasingly on marital and child abuse" (Morrissey 27).

¹⁹ Before the judicial reforms introduced in the early 1860s, influential local landowners, such as Grondzevskii, might have expected to avoid the consequences for such infractions.

²⁰ Timofeev's depiction of Marianna's abuse chimes with the claim made by Efimenko that "Nowhere is the continued vitality [of patriarchal assumptions] as sharply revealed as in the sphere of relations defining the woman's place in the family" (69). See also Schrader 164–8 for discussion of the relationship between corporal punishment, domestic violence and the position of women in patriarchal families.

Grondzevskii Jr's tenure as master of Gostitsa marks the third period of sustained abuse in Marianna's life, and is the subject of, arguably, the most shocking passages in "Murder and Suicide". The fact that her half-brother is already married offers Marianna no protection whatsoever; marriage is illustrated as having no more sanctity than family. Grondzevskii Jr immediately finds Marianna more attractive than his sickly wife, makes her a housemaid and then "влюбился в свою сестрицу, как он потом называл ее" ("fell in love with his little sister, as he then called her") (60). His use of the epithet "сестрица" captures the aberrant conception of family that pertains here as Grondzevskii Jr begins an incestuous, non-consensual relationship with Marianna. He demonstrates his authority over Marianna when, after she gives birth to three children, he convinces her to deny that he is the father so as not to attract attention to their relationship. When her half-brother's wife dies, Gostitsa again becomes the site of considerable debauchery and Marianna's status as little more than a material asset of the estate is made brutally clear. During one of his gambling parties, for instance, Grondzevskii Jr uses Marianna as a stake in a card game; when he loses, she is temporarily "won" by a man named Zrudskii who displays a similarly proprietorial attitude, declaring: "ты [...] теперь моя, все я над тобой могу делать" ("you [...] are mine now and I can do anything with you") (60).²¹ Marianna's exploitation as a form of currency exchanged in a bet gives effective expression to her utterly dehumanized position. Nor is Zrudskii the only neighbour with whom Grondzevskii Jr disposes of Marianna in such transactions. On one occasion, an argument flares up between two men who cannot agree who has won her. To resolve the matter, Marianna is summoned, ordered to strip to her shirt and hide in the adjacent, unlit room. The two men then enter the room and the first to find her "wins", taking her home with him for two days. The use of a perverted children's game of hide-and-seek as the prelude to another period of sexual abuse is grotesque and demonstrates how severely the conventional family model is corrupted in Timofeev's story.

The murder of the title refers to Marianna's premeditated killing of Grondzevskii Jr in 1863 as revenge not just for his violence but also for her father's earlier abuse.²² As if to underline the idea that she has no alternative means of escaping the abuse, it is not remorse regarding this murder that leads her to attempt suicide. Rather, her attempt on her own life is prompted by two factors, both of which are linked to the shame she experiences because of the abnormal way in which her family is constituted. First, her eldest son's repeated questions about the identity of his father cause her considerable stress; she has understandably never told him that he was conceived as a result of rape by his uncle. Secondly, she is increasingly anxious about the imminent return of Stepan, her former fiancé, who knows nothing of her life since his conscription. Her suicide attempt brings about the involvement of the judicial investigator, whose work results in Marianna's confession to the killing. It is at this stage that patriarchal society intervenes for one last, fatal time. The narrator argues that he has no alternative but to remand Marianna into custody for the murder of Grondzevskii Jr. Although he hopes that the mitigating circumstances will ensure a reduced sentence, Marianna is still subject to the letter of the law. Her sense of shame, compounded by separation from her children, renders her situation untenable and she soon successfully commits suicide by slitting her own throat. Despite the sympathy of the individual investigator, therefore, the judicial system is portrayed as being complicit in the violence enacted by patriarchal society.

A similar picture of a female character subjected to male-perpetrated violence that has its roots in family abuse and exploitation is painted in Timofeev's story "The Prostitute". After a dog is found gnawing a severed arm in the town of Priezhek in December 1866, the narrator-investigator follows the animal back to a body which has been disposed of in icy water under a bridge. When it is recovered, bystanders recognize it as that of a local sex worker, Tereza Pavlovna R-kina, also known by the nickname "Turus'ka".²³ The case is solved relatively easily: the murderers are two men with whom Tereza was seen arguing in a tavern and who killed her

21 As part of these card games, various of Grondzevskii Jr's neighbours "win" Marianna and are permitted to take her home with them for several days. Each such period represents another passage of abuse, even if that abuse is not directly represented in the text.

22 In its depiction of the crime to which Marianna is impelled in "Murder and Suicide", Timofeev's work echoes research presented by Anuchin in 1873 and foreshadows work by Zeland in 1899, both of which discuss crimes committed by women as a result of domestic violence.

23 Timofeev's story never provides a full surname for Tereza. This decision is likely informed by the narrator-investigator's desire to imply that the events of the story might have their basis in reality and that the identity of the victim therefore needs to be protected.

when she refused to hand over her gold necklace. However, in line with much early Russian crime fiction, the narrator's investigative efforts are primarily directed at uncovering details of Tereza's back story, particularly the circumstances that led her into poverty and sex work. In so doing, he learns that Tereza is the victim not just of a single violent act but of a much more sustained period of exploitation and abuse.

Significantly, the narrator discovers that Tereza is actually the only child of the noble and wealthy Prince Gabskii. However, when she is still young, Gabskii leaves her and her mother to pursue an affair with a ballerina, during which he squanders the family fortune. In spite of his betrayal, when her mother falls ill and they require his financial support to survive, Tereza begs her father to come home. Their dependence upon the patriarchal provider is such that, when Gabskii does return, neither woman reminds him of his previous transgressions. Rather, they appease him to ensure that, in the event of her mother's death, Tereza will not be abandoned again. When her mother does die, Tereza begins to be exploited by her father as an asset for material gain just as Marianna was. She is forbidden to marry the man she loves and instead her father arranges her marriage to a wealthy 70-year-old Count. Gabskii is not blind to the nature and implications of the deal he is striking:

Вполне сознавая, что он торгует родной дочерью, безжалостно губит ее на веки, продавая безжизненному старикашке – сластолюбцу, совершает постыдное, гнусное дело, он тем не менее не призадумался над этим, не остановился, а торопился скорее покончить подлую сделку. (Timofeev 367)

[Fully aware that he was trading his own daughter, mercilessly ruining her forever, selling her to a lifeless old man – a sensualist, committing a shameful, vile deed, he nevertheless did not think about it, did not stop, but rather hurried to conclude the despicable deal as soon as possible.]

As evidence of his incontestable authority over his daughter's life, Gabskii simply proclaims: “это моя воля... и она будет свято исполнена...” (“this is my will... and it will be sacredly fulfilled”) (365). The use of the adverb “sacredly” here ascribes a religious authority to paternal agency, as if to suggest that any attempt to deny Gabskii's will would be an act of heresy. The violence implied in this forced marriage assumes a more sinister, paedophilic nature when the narrator learns that, in the past, “у [графа] текли слюнки, глядя на Терезу, когда она только что вышла из института” (“the Count's mouth had watered, looking at Tereza when she had only just left school”) (365). In fact, Tereza does, at least temporarily, escape the dominion of her father. On the morning of the planned wedding, she runs away with the man she loves, leaving a note for Gabskii in which she threatens to commit suicide if he tries to force her return.

When her father is imprisoned for debt, Tereza enjoys a brief period of respite with her husband and young son. However, upon his release, Gabskii's rage at his daughter's previous disobedience prompts a series of indirectly violent acts that ultimately lead to Tereza's murder. First, he frames her husband for a crime he did not commit. The repercussions of this false accusation lead to the husband's suicide and Tereza is again left in a financially precarious position. The money she earns as a seamstress is insufficient and so she decides to begin sex work. The narrator explicitly places responsibility for Tereza's (lack of) choice not simply on Gabskii but on society more broadly:

никто не протянул руку помощи несчастной, не нашлось ни одного мало-мальски доброго человека, который помог бы ей подняться, восстать нравственно из той бездны, в которую она погружалась с каждым днем, с каждым часом все глубже и глубже. (340)

[No one extended a helping hand to the unfortunate woman; there was not a single kind person who would help her to ascend, to rise morally from the abyss into which she was sinking deeper and deeper with every day and every hour.]

The conditions of her life as a sex worker can be seen both to echo the disenfranchisement she suffers at her father's hands and to foreshadow her violent murder. The narrator describes how her circumstances “навсегда и окончательно убили в ней человеческую личность и веру в хорошее, низведши ее на степень какого то животного, без всякого права на свободное, независимое существование” (“forever and irrevocably destroyed her human identity and faith in goodness,

reducing her to the level of some sort of animal, without the right to a free and independent existence”) (343). Gabskii’s sense of entitlement to her body and her fate is replicated by Tereza’s murderers, who kill her for not acceding to their demands. First, the confession by one of the perpetrators reveals that the argument in the tavern was prompted by Tereza’s refusal to go home with them. Later, they kill her because she does not immediately surrender her necklace. Although these two episodes involve violence of starkly different degrees, each demonstrates the risk that female characters take if they try to deny male attempts to exert authority and ownership over their bodies. Timofeev’s story draws a clear line of association between the actions of Gabskii and those of the actual murderers: both express the same sense of patriarchal entitlement and the concomitant lack of female agency.

It is also important to acknowledge how Timofeev’s narrative weaves a reflection of the socio-historical reality of sex work in late imperial Russia into its consideration of women’s susceptibility to gendered violence. In much the same way as with its graphic descriptions of violence which will be discussed below, Timofeev’s story seeks to direct greater public attention to a topic that was generally taboo in society. As Siobhán Hearne argues in her discussion of the policing of prostitution in the period, “through regulation, the tsarist authorities attempted to limit the visibility of prostitutes to safeguard public morality” (Hearne 729). This policy is given oblique spatial representation in the opening paragraph of “The Prostitute” with the description of how the town is divided into two by a bridge over the river, under which:

местные власти отвели [место] для стирки и полоскание белья, и в видах ограждения общественной нравственности от бесцеремонных прачек, заголяющих ноги выше колен, обнесло забором, закрывающим его от взоров публики. (324)

[the local authorities had declared [a space] for the laundering of linen; and in order to separate public morality from unceremonious laundrywomen, with legs naked to above the knee, had installed a fence to conceal it from public view.]

It is precisely here, in this simultaneously invisible yet supposedly immoral space, that Tereza’s dismembered body is found. There is a clear conflation here between the “unclean” activity of the washerwomen and the business of sex workers. Moreover, the control exerted over Tereza’s body by patriarchal society in her sex work is shown to extend beyond death: after having her body recovered from the water, the investigator verifies her identity by confirming that she “значилась в списке проституток” (“was registered on the list of prostitutes”) (238).²⁴ Under the supposedly paternal guise of protecting female sex workers’ health and to appease prudish public morality, the Russian state regulated women’s bodies in a manner not applied to men and, in so doing, perpetuated the violence inherent in the patriarchal system. Gabskii’s desire to fulfil his own sexual desires through his affair with the ballerina should be seen as triggering a series of events that include his attempt effectively to prostitute Tereza by means of forced marriage; his vengeance against her husband that leads to her entry into actual sex work; and her eventual murder. In the depiction of the almost limitless power and authority exercised by male family members over their female relatives, especially fathers over daughters, both of Timofeev’s works would appear to condemn the violent inequalities operating in Russian society at this time.

Like “The Prostitute”, Shkliarevskii’s “The Morning After the Ball” features a mute female body, this time one whose voice is even more repressed by the male voices that silence it. The novella’s presentation of the role played by society and family in the violence enacted against women is configured differently than in the other works, but is equally damning. The story is narrated by an unnamed defence barrister hired by Countess von Grossberg to defend her husband, Wil’helm, against charges that, twenty years earlier, he murdered a woman known variously as Laura Fleurie and Baroness Lilienshtein. The victim was found in the bath in a suite of rooms hired by von Grossberg, with a stab wound to the neck and the skin ripped off her face. The two names by which she is known are an implicit indication of the forces at play in the crime. Count Wil’helm von Grossberg is the scion of a noble European family who first meets the victim in Paris when both are children. Laura Fleurie is homeless, an orphan with no memory of her parents, who sells flowers on the street, hence the surname she is given. The stark

²⁴ In the period 1843–1917, “female prostitutes were required to register with the police and attend weekly gynaecological examinations” (Hearne 717).

difference established between the two, in terms of both social class and family circumstance, is a determining element in both the committing and the nature of the crime. When the young Wil'helm, grateful for the kindness Laura has shown him, asks his mother to do what she can for the girl, their social difference is further complicated by a sense of indebtedness. Laura is housed and educated in a Parisian boarding school, with the costs covered by the von Grossberg family. In a conversation with his wife many years later, in which he talks about the murder but does not admit responsibility for it, the Count claims: “моя глубокая ошибка, что я ее из ничтожества довел до равенства... Возмездие я получил глубокими страданиями...” (“my grave mistake was to have led her out of nothingness to equality... I received retribution in the form of deep sufferings...”) (Shkliarevskii 20).

Romantic feelings between Wil'helm and Laura begin in letters they exchange after he has left Paris but become more serious once he returns to make arrangements for her future after finishing school. From the outset, their relationship is defined by his possessiveness and sense of entitlement: he admits to the barrister-narrator that, although he is too much of a gentleman to make Laura his lover, he refuses to allow anyone else to court her. When their sexual relationship does commence a few months later, he observes simply: “быть моей женой Лаура не могла: происхождение клало между нами зияющую пропасть” (“Laura could not be my wife: our backgrounds placed a gaping abyss between us”) (54).²⁵ The stark nature of the Count's perception of their social difference is evidenced by his description of Laura as having a “крепостная зависимость” (“serf-like dependence”) on him (53). And it is Wil'helm's desire to mitigate the effects of this difference that prompts him to buy Laura the noble title Baroness Lilienshtein. Crucially, this purchase is motivated as much by his desire to erase her past as it is to secure the couple's future and, as such, is expressive of one of the novella's central motifs: control.

The fatally violent turn that the Count's desire for dominion over Laura takes is a consequence of his jealousy when, paradoxically, the attempt to mask her personal history lends her greater visibility in society. As her noble name permits the new Baroness entry to more events, Wil'helm becomes convinced that she is having an affair. His suspicions are fanned by the fact that, earlier in their relationship, Laura has confessed to suffering from the influence of another man in her life. In a letter at the time, she reminds him of her past as “a child of the Parisian streets” and warns him that he does not grasp the full implications of this phrase. However, in a move indicative of his desire to limit the influence of Laura's past, Wil'helm destroys the letter before reading to its end. This decision not to avail himself of the full picture means that he fails to see that Laura's change in behaviour coincides with the return of her former servant, George, who knew her as a child in Paris. When she is said to resume her “street” ways, drinking, smoking, repeating salacious rumours, approaching men at the gambling tables, the Count can imagine no other reason for it than her infidelity.²⁶ He regards an upcoming ball as providing the perfect opportunity to observe Laura closely so as to identify and confront her lover. He arms himself with an eight-inch, Damascus steel letter opener, with the intention not of harming Laura but of attacking his rival. Although he does not see Laura interact with anyone in particular, her refusal to allow him to accompany her home after the ball further raises his suspicions. He books rooms at the Chinese Baths establishment nearby and, having found a letter in her dress which he misinterprets as confirmation of an affair, brutally murders her in the bathtub. As will be discussed in greater detail in the third section below, throughout “The Morning After the Ball”, the Count's attitude is that of a man unerringly entitled to the gratitude and devotion of his more lowly female companion. The moment he believes that either wavers, he feels justified not only in violently ending this woman's life as revenge for her supposed attempt at autonomy but also in employing his family's status to evade justice.

Andrei Zarin's *In Search of a Murderer* is something of an outlier among these stories because family is less immediately present as a catalyst for violence. It revolves around the investigation into the murder of a woman whose dismembered remains are discovered in various locations in St Petersburg: her leg in a rubbish pit; her arm carried in the jaws of a dog; and her head and internal organs in a parcel sent in the post. Due to the severity of the mutilation, these

25 Although they never legally marry, Wil'helm and Laura's relationship can be considered a common-law marriage and to represent a non-conventional form of family.

26 The truth is that this former servant is blackmailing Laura because of their sexual relations when she was a child, threatening to inform the Count of their history together.

remains are initially misidentified, causing the investigation to uncover two separate, unrelated crimes: the murder, but also a series of hypnotisms performed to commit theft and possible sexual assault. After initially focusing on the hypnosis cases, the detective, Boris Romanovich Patmosov, revisits the original murder and traces the parcel containing human remains back to a shop in Lodž, owned by Heinrich Bronislavovich Plintus. His inquiries reveal the killer to be Heinrich's wife, Stephanie, who has murdered one of their employees, Bertha Schwartzmann, because of her affair with Heinrich. As such, the crime can be interpreted as motivated by Stephanie's desire to take revenge for the threat to her family life posed by the extramarital affair.

Stephanie's attempt to obliterate Bertha entirely, by mutilating her body, is reproduced on a textual level by having this latter represented almost exclusively as an absence. Although attention is devoted to the back stories of the hypnosis victims, Elena Semenovna D'iakova and Anastasia Petrovna Korovina, there is little mention of Bertha by name outside of the affair and during Stephanie's confession. Unlike the investigator in Timofeev's stories, Patmosov does not track down Bertha's family or endeavour to recover her history. When she is mentioned, it is in terms that reveal her dispensability in a society that views female beauty entirely through the lens of male sexual pleasure and dominance. One of Heinrich's male business associates describes her as "красивая такая девица, кровь с молоком, глаза черные, высокая, стройная" ("such a beautiful girl, full of health, dark eyes, tall, slender") (Zarin 327).²⁷ Later, when gossiping about the Plintus couple, the male Lodž hotel manager tells Patmosov: "Отчего человеку не доставит себе удовольствия? Вот у него была кассирша Шварцман. Ах, какая красивая женщина, если бы вы ее видели!" ("Why shouldn't a man give himself pleasure? Here he had the cashier Schwartzman. Oh, what a beautiful woman, if you could have seen her!") (332). While this gossip proves to be a useful clue for Patmosov, the terms in which Bertha is characterized here serve to minimize the seriousness of the violence committed against her and to undermine her bodily autonomy.

Indeed, the sexualization of Bertha is the dehumanizing precondition that allows Stephanie to literalize this verbal objectification through mutilation.²⁸ It is significant that this act is perpetrated by a woman because it demonstrates that women can perpetuate patriarchal norms and gendered violence. Stephanie's own anxiety about the state of her marriage is described repeatedly: she is possessive of Plintus and "следила за ним повсюду ревнивым взглядом" ("followed him everywhere with a jealous look"), to the extent that "он панически боялся жены" ("he was terrified of his wife") (329). Such quotations do not suggest either that Heinrich is without fault or that Stephanie does not have the right to be upset with her unfaithful husband. Rather, it is significant that the affair between Heinrich and Bertha incites rage in Stephanie to the point of extreme violence. Stephanie's actions imply that she views the victim as an obstacle, a sexual object that transgresses the normative family unit. They further intimate that Bertha's life and bodily autonomy are less valuable to Stephanie than the institution of family: the victim's life is readily sacrificed in order for the aggressor to maintain the ideal of her marriage. In imperial society, where female bodies were frequently seen as a threat to public morality, it is the transgressive woman, rather than the unfaithful man, who must be punished and erased.

ABJECT AND EXTREME REALISM IN DESCRIPTIONS OF VIOLENCE

As the murder and mutilation of Bertha in Zarin's novella suggest, it is not only the social context in which the abuse of women occurs that marks out these four works. Most significant, arguably, are the terms in which that violence is described. These works refuse to look away from the effects of criminal violence, opting instead to describe them in minute and unflinching detail. In so doing, they lend greater significance to the realism that is a hallmark of all crime fiction. Referring to Leonid Andreev's stories with criminal plotlines from a similar era, Edith Clowes argues that he employs the abject to express "existential horror at the human condition" (238).

²⁷ The term "девица" in Russian has the specific connotation of an unmarried woman, so this description of Bertha deliberately confuses elements of sexual propriety and availability.

²⁸ Domanska argues that "dehumanization and depersonalization are considered essential preconditions for mass murder to occur" (89).

In the narratives discussed here, the use of both abject and extreme realism²⁹ conveys a similar existential horror, but one directed more specifically at the female condition in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russian society. The fact that such explicit depictions were permitted at a time of relatively strict censorship suggests that they were seen as an acceptable form of criticism regarding the position of women in contemporary society. In fact, it could be argued that the use of extreme realism coincides with the objective, quasi-scientific approach to crime promoted by the post-reform legal system. However, aspects of these descriptions, particularly the use of the abject, simultaneously serve to dehumanize the female victims and deprive them of agency in a manner that is not obviously consistent with a critical stance.

In Zarin's work, Bertha is not just murdered by Stephanie but dismembered. This mutilation renders her as other-than-herself, something ambiguous, almost unrepresentable. While her face is disfigured to the point of misrecognition, the remains of her limbs take on non-human forms. The novella's opening scene sees a young boy, armed with a hook, finding one of Bertha's severed legs in a rubbish pit, fused to an assortment of frozen rubbish. At first, the found object is described ambiguously as "что-то мягкое и большое" ("something soft and big"), "большой кусок словно бы мерзлого мяса" ("a large piece of seemingly frozen meat") and "страшный предмет" ("a terrifying object") (Zarin 198–9). Even when the leg is properly identified, the description troublingly merges the human in sexualized form and the non-human:

Поверх ямы с вонзенным в мясо крючком тряпичника лежала согнутая в колене человеческая нога... На ней был белый нитяный чулок, перевязанный красной тесемкой под коленом, а с другой стороны – рваное мясо и кусок расщепленной кости. (199)

[On top of the pit with the hook stuck into the meat lay a human leg bent at the knee... It was wearing a white stocking tied with a red ribbon under the knee, and on the other end – torn meat and a piece of split bone.]

Insofar as this description blurs multiple boundaries of categorization (e.g. waste, meat, human flesh, mortality, sexual attraction), it is abject.³⁰ This confusion of referential categories is further exaggerated in the subsequent description of how another of Bertha's limbs is discovered in the mouth of a dog, which "прельстился недвижно лежащей рукой и, ухватив ее в свою громадную пасть, степенной рысцой побегал со двора на лестницу, в кухню, в расчете позавтракать мясным блюдом" ("was seduced by the motionless arm and, seized it in his huge jaws, leisurely trotted from the courtyard up the stairs and into the kitchen, hoping to have the meat dish for breakfast") (200). There is a striking similarity here between the retrieval of Bertha's arm and that of Tereza's body in Timofeev's "The Prostitute". The potential confusion between Bertha's leg and a foodstuff in the first description is actualized here as the dog begins to eat her arm. Moreover, the use of the verb "прельстился" deliberately perverts the notion of sexual attraction: it suggests that Bertha retains some degree of agency in death and dismemberment by being able to attract a dog in the same way that she previously attracted Heinrich. In so doing, however, it renders the victim even less human.

The tension between attraction and revulsion fundamental to the abject is also present in "The Prostitute". Despite the aversion towards the sexualized female body expressed in both the regulation of prostitution and the authorities' restriction of the laundresses' space under the bridge, the narrator-investigator takes the reader to the very place that is usually obstructed from public view and provides a detailed description of Tereza's corpse. As in Zarin, the use of abject realism obliges the reader to confront the effects of crime, thereby challenging "the prevailing cultural convention of masking the realities of such violence" (Whitehead, "Abject" 513). The terms of the description bring the reader into close proximity with the corpse and force them to share the investigator's sensory and psychological revulsion. The narrator recounts how Tereza's "грешное тело" ("sinful body") was retrieved from the water:

29 Abject realism can be defined as an exaggerated form of verisimilitude that focuses on liminality; that is, boundaries including, but not limited to, those between life and death; subject and object; human and non-human. As such, it frequently focuses on abused and dehumanized bodies. In Andreev's work, Clowes considers that the use of abject realism "appeals to touch and feel, as well as to sight" and concentrates on "the abused and mute corporeal body which is both 'me' and 'not me'" (236–8).

30 In this regard, Zarin's use of abject realism is very similar to that encountered in other works by Timofeev. For more details, see Whitehead, "Abject".

Что это была за безобразно-грязная, вонючая масса!.. Распущенные волосы, в последнее время жизни никогда нечесанные, – сплелись и падали длинными прядями на лицо утопленницы; лицо было покрыто сплошными синяками, правая рука отгрызена; отрепья едва прикрывали ее грязное тело. Признаюсь, несмотря на глубокое сожаление к несчастной, я с отвращением отвернулся от трупа. (Timofeev 340)

[What an ugly, dirty, putrid mass it was!... Her loose hair, which in the last days of her life was never combed, was tangled and fell in long strands on to the face of the drowned woman. Her face was completely covered with bruises; her right arm was gnawed off; rags barely covered her dirty body. I confess that, despite my deep regret for the unfortunate woman, I turned away from the corpse in disgust.]

The repeated references to the unclean state of the corpse, despite its being found in water, underscore the perverse and dehumanizing effects that violence has produced on it. The opening exclamation hints at the conceptual challenge that this decomposing body represents to the investigator's descriptive abilities. However, as will be discussed in more detail in the final section below, the narrator's attitude towards this dead female body combines elements of professional observation with more questionable gendered and moralizing remarks.

Although the descriptions of the mutilated bodies of both Bertha and Tereza are uncompromising in their use of abject realism, it is Shkliarevskii's "The Morning After the Ball" that features the most shocking description of violence perpetrated against a female body. One significant issue to consider in discussing the account of the discovery of Laura Fleurie's body given in the opening chapter is that it is impossible to identify the narrative point of view that informs it. Although the voice belongs to the barrister-narrator, he makes clear that his involvement in the case only began sometime after this "кровав[ый] предлог" ("bloody prologue") (Shkliarevskii 3). The description is therefore not informed by his eyewitness testimony but appears to be confected from various sources, including the police and other witnesses. Differing from the other three works discussed, a notable degree of suspense is created before the discovery of the body. A couple check into a Chinese Baths establishment after a ball earlier that night and the man asks that they not be disturbed until 1 p.m. the following day. When the guests fail to respond to their wake-up call, the concierge calls the police, who break down the door to the suite, and the narrator's point of view follows as they walk through the various rooms. This report is highly detailed but, in a manner that foreshadows the debatable terms of certain later descriptions, the elements it highlights are more suggestive of a sexual encounter than a murder: a white satin dress is thrown over an armchair; an underskirt is discarded elsewhere; and a bed reveals the imprint of two bodies.

The description of the scene the witnesses discover in the bathroom is notable for several reasons. In terms of *fabula*, the level of violence inflicted on the body exceeds anything else in crime fiction of the time; in terms of *siuzhet*, the uncompromisingly realistic detail used to present that violence as well as the inappropriately sexualized terms in which the mutilated female body is described both warrant discussion. We learn that in the large bathtub, half-filled with a mixture of blood and water, leaning against the wall, lies "молодое, прекрасное, белое, алебастровое тело женщины, с чудными, античными формами плеч, роскошной, выпуклой груди и, точно изваянных, выточенных рук, опущенных в воду" ("the young, beautiful, white, alabaster body of a woman with wondrous, antique forms of shoulders, luxurious full breasts and perfectly sculpted, carved hands hanging in the water") (9). The comparison here between the female body in the bath and a classical sculpture is, while not entirely unfamiliar, nevertheless wholly inappropriate. The woman has an alabaster-like appearance not because she is in an inanimate object carved from gypsum but because all the blood has drained from her body. Although crime fiction's realist impulse might justify a description of the corpse, the adjectival qualifiers, all emphasizing the beauty of its various parts, including those most obviously associated with sexual attraction (her breasts), strike a jarring tone. The seeming inability of the informing perspective to view the dead female body outside the framework of sexual attraction suggests a male consciousness that relegates the female figure to an object of desire, even in death. Moreover, this description provides evidence of realism's tendency

towards the use of metonymy which, when applied to the female body, is so effective at expressing the loss of personhood.³¹

The description continues to detail how the victim's head is tilted backwards, and that around her neck is wrapped an unusually long, black and bloodstained plait, the ends of which are attached to the bath handles. In perhaps the most repugnant lines of the scene, the narrator describes the victim's face: "от самых ушей, дугообразно к шее, оно было подрезано каким-то острым оружием, и кожа была сдернута от подбородка на самый верх черепа" ("from her ears, curved towards the neck, it had been cut by some sharp weapon and the skin had been pulled off from the chin to the top of the skull") (9). The nature of the mutilation suggests a literalization in Shkliarevskii's novella of the usually metaphorical facelessness of female victims in a patriarchal society. Equally, the killer identifies his desire to "unmask" Laura as one motive for his crime. The narrator goes on to note an inch-wide wound in the middle of the woman's neck that is separate from the facial mutilation. Blood also covers the back of the bath and the floor, where it appears to have flowed from her cheeks into puddles. In some of these are found pieces of flesh and her eyelids. The final detail concerns the "вырванный глаз" ("ripped-out eyeball") that also lies on the floor (10). Given the distinct diegetic set-up in Shkliarevskii's novella, where the narrator is not a judicial investigator but a defence barrister, the extreme realism employed in this early depiction of sadistic violence poses a significant challenge to the reader. It ought to be the case that it ensures that the perpetrator, when discovered, will be viewed unambiguously with opprobrium and repugnance. However, as will be explored in more detail below, following this first chapter, the remainder of the narrative provides the criminal not only with the opportunity to shape his own story and provoke the sympathy of his barrister, but also to re-violate the female victim.

In Timofeev's "Murder and Suicide", although the years of violent abuse to which Marianna is subjected are shocking, descriptions of the violence itself are not as extreme or detailed as in the other works. This difference is likely explained by the fact that, until Marianna's successful suicide attempt, the victim of this violence is not only still alive but is the source of most of the testimony regarding it. So, for example, the accounts of the various acts of rape are relatively summary and avoid specific detail because of Marianna's own reluctance to experience the shame implied in recounting them. Depictions are more explicit when they stem from evidence not provided directly by Marianna, however. In one of various instances of repeated temporality in the work, Grondzevskii's initial rape of his daughter is described a second time when the investigator travels to Gostitsa and hears testimony from local witnesses:

Так, например, рассказывали, что старик Грондзевский хотел расположить к себе шестнадцатилетнюю Марианну сначала ласками; но она не поддавалась. Тогда начались угрозы, и, наконец, ее, против воли, невзирая на ее протесты, двое клеветов Грондзевского притащили ночью в гумно, где несчастная девушка под грубым цинизмом и насилием, сделалась жертвой сластолюбия. (Timofeev 65)

[So, for instance, they recounted that the old man Grondzevskii wanted to win over 16-year-old Marianna initially with affection, but she wouldn't give in. Then the threats began and, finally, against her will and despite her protests, she was dragged by two of Grondzevskii's lackeys on to the threshing-room floor one night where the unfortunate girl, with gross cynicism and violence, became the victim of voluptuousness.]

In comparison to the first account provided by Marianna, this report is both more accurate in the sense of conveying the forced nature of the assault and more shocking given its revelation that Grondzevskii did not act alone. And yet the term "сластолюбие" ("voluptuousness") still fails to convey adequately the gravity and depravity of Grondzevskii's crime.

The few passages in "Murder and Suicide" that do feature the use of more extreme realism relate to the violence that occurs between Marianna and her half-brother. However, it is notable that this device is employed more frequently in descriptions of physical rather than sexual violence, thus obliquely reducing the impact of passages describing the latter. During Marianna's account of how she decides to murder Grondzevskii Jr, for example, she describes

31 Shkliarevskii's exploitation of metonymical description with reference to criminal violence has much in common with that found in the work of Andreev, as discussed by Clowes.

an incident that occurred between them the day before he intended to depart for the 1863 insurrection. Having summoned his half-sister to the main house and questioned her about the health of their children, Grondzevskii Jr begins to kiss her and tries to pull her towards the divan. When she attempts to extricate herself, he locks the door before seizing her again and the two begin to struggle physically. Marianna describes how their fight lasts a long time and, as she begins to weaken, she feels his hand in her mouth. She bites it, whereupon:

Он крикнул, рванулся от меня в сторону, и потом, как зверь, с остервенением, с пеной в губах, ударил меня кулаком по лицу, так сильно, что я упала навзничь, и кровь струей побежала у меня из носа. Не довольствуясь этим и приходя в ярость все больше и больше, он мгновенно отворил дверь из своей комнаты в следующую, и так, как я в это время уже поднялась с полу, то он с силой вытолкнул меня вон так, что я не удержалась на ногах, и падая, упала грудью на стоявший среди комнаты стол. На этот раз кровь хлынула уже у меня изо рта, и я едва осилила себя, чтобы встать и скорее идти к себе, в убогий угол, оплакать, глядячи на своих трех детей, свое безысходное горе. (76)

[He screamed, pulled away from me to the side and then, like an animal, with real force and foam on his lips, punched me in the face so hard that I fell back and a stream of blood rushed from my nose. Not content with that, and becoming more and more furious, he suddenly opened the door from his room into the next and as I was trying to get up from the floor, at that moment, he threw me out so forcefully that I was unable to stay on my feet and fell, striking a table in the middle of the room with my chest. This time, blood poured out of my mouth and I only just managed to summon the strength to stand up, walk back to my own place as quickly as I could and, looking at my three children, cry about my inescapable grief.]

The details of this assault are shocking in themselves, but arguably create a more powerful effect because of how they echo the attack Marianna suffered as a five-year-old. The reference to her half-brother's bestial appearance associates him with the dancing bear from her childhood. The description of how Grondzevskii Jr first punches and then violently flings Marianna across the room is an echo of her mother's sudden kick in the chest that pushes her towards the animal. The fact of blood streaming from her nose is noted in both passages. Therefore, although Marianna associates this attack by her half-brother with earlier abuse from her father, it is also possible to posit a link to her mother in the perversion of family relations that this extreme realism describes.³²

THE PROBLEMATIC PRESENTATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST FEMALE CHARACTERS

The use of extreme or abject realism in the description of violence perpetrated against women can be seen to offer criticism of the individual and collective acts that constitute it. The effects of gendered violence are not concealed but are laid out in stark detail for the reader in a manner intended to elicit shock and revulsion. Moreover, in the empathy with which the investigator, particularly in Timofeev's stories, listens to testimony and/or in the effort he makes to uncover the stories of these abused women, the works suggest a more humane approach on the part of the post-reform judicial system than had previously been the case. However, what a more sustained focus on the specific terms of these descriptions reveals is the far more ambiguous status of the male legal representatives than has been acknowledged to date.³³ This ambiguity is a consequence of the frequently inappropriate language with which these male narrators or focalizers depict the female victims and the violence perpetrated against them. Too frequently, the attitude revealed in the diegetic terms employed reinforces the existing gender inequality by giving voice and agency to men while simultaneously muting and disenfranchising women.

In Timofeev's "The Prostitute", the narrator-investigator exhibits a complex attitude towards the victim, simultaneously presenting her as a victim deserving of empathy and as a sinful

³² The same technique of extreme realism, mixed with the abject, is evident in the descriptions both of Marianna's murder of Grondzevskii Jr and the investigator's discovery of his body. However, because these passages deal with violence perpetrated by a woman against a man, they will not be discussed in the present article.

³³ See Whitehead, *Poetics* esp. 55–66.

woman to be judged. In so doing, he projects his own values on to Tereza's body, which becomes the site where socio-judicial norms are reproduced and contested. Although the investigator appears genuine in his criticism of the social conditions that have permitted Tereza to fall victim to violence, his inability to describe her body without reference to beauty and nineteenth-century conceptions of the "ideal" woman perpetrate a different form of violence against her. When he first observes her corpse, the simultaneity of attraction and revulsion is key to the abject effect. He notes "выражения лица Турськи рассмотреть было нельзя, потому что оно было сильно раздуто; при жизни же своей, в той среде, в которой вращалась, она считалась "красавицей" ("it was impossible to examine the expression on Turus'ka's face because it was severely bloated. During her life, in the circles she frequented, she was considered a 'queen'") (Timofeev 327).

The abjectly realist description of the corpse discussed in the second section above is provided once the narrator has learned the details of her life, including her poverty, alcoholism and sex work. Unlike certain other instances of abject realism in Timofeev's work, this depiction is not an objective, forensic examination of the status of a corpse, but is overlaid with moral and sexual implications.³⁴ Most notably, the description of the reality of Tereza's decomposing body is immediately followed by an account of how, reflecting on the various misfortunes in her life, the investigator is overtaken by a fantasy:

Под влиянием таких мыслей передо мной всецело предстал образ, не лежавшей на плоту жертвы безобразной Турськи, а Терезы Павловны, очаровательной, полной сил и жизни, девятнадцатилетней девушки. Воображение нарисовало мне идеальную красоту: передо мной стояла высокая, как колос стройная, молодая девушка, с антично строгими, прелестными чертами лица. Глубокие, задумчивые, цвета воронова крыла, глаза смотрели так мягко, так тепло... Роскошные, черные кудри волнами рассыпались по ее белоснежной, лебединой шее. Она улыбалась, с доверчивостью смотря на встречу бегущей жизни. Сколько счастья и радостей, – думал я, ожидало ее в жизни и сколько отрадного могла она, в свою очередь, дать другому, кто бы полюбил ее. (341)

[Under the influence of such thoughts, before me appeared fully the image, not of the hideous victim Turus'ka lying on the raft, but of Tereza Pavlovna, a charming 19-year-old girl, full of strength and life. My imagination sketched an ideal beauty: in front of me stood a tall, slender young girl, with classic, charming features. Deep, thoughtful, the colour of a raven's wing, her eyes looked so soft, so warm... Luxurious, black curls scattered in waves over her snow-white, swan-like neck. She smiled, looking with trust at the life rushing to meet her. How much happiness and joy, I thought, awaited her in life and how much could she in turn have given to another who would have loved her.]

This image is entirely a product of the narrator's imagination, but is interesting for how it inverts many of the features of the previous description: the exposed body of the corpse in rags mirrors the bare, swan-like neck of the living girl; in place of dishevelled, tangled hair covering her bloated face, this "ideal" version has luxurious hair and charming features. What the reader encounters here is something other than narrator sympathy for a violated victim; this is a woman resurrected in his mind for the purposes of his own sexual or romantic titillation.³⁵

Significant here is the male narrator's suggestion of a binary identity for Tereza/Turus'ka as both moral/beautiful and debauched/ugly woman. Despite his sympathy for her plight, the narrator seems also to struggle to understand that a sex worker could be religiously observant:

Турська, при всем своем нравственном безобразии, была в высшей степени религиозная женщина, и в этой то глубокой силе религиозного настроения, высказалась вполне не та презренная утопленница, с личностью которой познакомился читатель, а та

³⁴ See, for instance, Timofeev's story "Преступление суеверия" ("A Crime of Superstition") in the same collection.

³⁵ Timofeev's depiction of Turus'ka's dead body as the catalyst for the narrator's fantasy regarding an idealized Tereza is representative of Bronfen's claim, in her analysis of Gabriel von Max's painting *Der Anatom*, that "the feminine body appears as a perfect, immaculate aesthetic form because it is a dead body, solidified into an object of art ... this form of beauty is contingent on the translation of an animate body into a deanimated one" (5).

величественно идеальная Тереза Павловна, образ которой промелькнул предо мной [...].
(343)

[Turus'ka, for all her moral ugliness, was a highly religious woman, and in this deep strength of religious conviction, was expressed not that wretched drowned woman, whose character the reader has met, but that majestically ideal Tereza Pavlovna, whose image flashed before me [...].]

In characterizing the victim in this way, the narrator reproduces the gendered binary that women can be either moral, religious and attractive, or immoral, godless and ugly, but never both.³⁶ His desire to replace the reality of Tereza's decomposing body with a fantasy idealized through religious belief casts the narrator as a mirror of her father and the patriarchal system, each of which promotes the notion of the ideal woman as a means of exercising control. The paradox here is that, by means of these repeated references to a resurrected, imagined Tereza, the narrator-investigator undermines his expression of empathy for her fate. Imperial Russian society is thus shown simultaneously to value female beauty and morality and to promote the conditions in which the exercise of patriarchal authority leads to the exploitation and destruction of these ideals. Ironically, Tereza is at least doubly victimized by this system because it is the act of attempting to prevent the theft of her mother's gold cross necklace that results in her brutal murder. As one of her murderers claims in his confession, "ну, да и сама она виновата: больно уж креста то ей жалко было, не хотела отдавать" ("well, she is also guilty herself: she felt so sorry about the cross that she did not want to give it away") (375). Like the murderer, the investigator seems incapable of entirely exculpating Tereza from responsibility for her own death. His focus on her life story undoubtedly creates sympathy for her as a victim not just of mortal violence but also of social injustice and the patriarchal system. However, in projecting social and moral expectations on to her even after her death, he reproduces forms of gendered violence against her.

In "Murder and Suicide", the investigator-narrator is also unquestionably sympathetic to, and horrified by, the catalogue of violence to which Marianna is subjected. However, these responses are repeatedly complicated by passages in which the victim is objectified and sexualized. For instance, when she is first brought to him after her attempted suicide, the investigator gives a detailed physical description of her, which begins straightforwardly with the observation that she is a "бледн[ая] худ[ая], изнеможенн[ая], но молод[ая] еще женщин[а]" ("pale, thin, exhausted, but still young woman") (Timofeev 39). As it continues, however, the details become more problematic:

Она была красивая женщина, лет около 27, с приятным и правильным лицом, выразительные глаза ее ясно выказывали глубокий скорбь и какое-то затаенное несчастье, очертание губ выражало сдержанность речи, волосы на ее голове были распущены и прикрыты платком, завязанным под подбородком, кофта и рубашка были расстегнуты, и, распахиваясь при малейшем движении, выказывали похудевшую ее грудь. (40)

[She was a beautiful woman of about 27, with a pleasant and fine face; her expressive eyes clearly betrayed a deep sorrow and some sort of hidden misfortune; the contour of her lips expressed a sense of speech being held back; the hair on her head was loose and covered with a scarf tied under her chin; her jacket and shirt were unbuttoned and, in the way in which they opened at the slightest movement, they revealed her slim chest.]

The terms used here are informed by something other than a mere realist impulse. The highlighting of particular features related to her beauty, as well as the description of her open shirt, imbues the passage with a sense of male desire that is inappropriate in the circumstances. There is no escaping the sense that the description is provided by subjecting the female victim to the simultaneously sexualizing and disciplining male gaze. Given the subsequent development of Timofeev's narrative, it is also possible to read the description of Marianna's open shirt as an implicit sign of her lack of modesty and virtue. Similarly debatable in terms of

³⁶ The image of the religiously observant female sex worker is a long-familiar one, with examples from the Bible as well as the character Sonia in Dostoevskii's *Crime and Punishment*.

their revelation of the power differential between these two figures is the language with which the judicial investigator attempts to signal his empathy towards Marianna. As he states his well-intentioned determination to discover the reasons behind her attempted suicide, his use of the first-person possessive adjective betrays a paternalistic, perhaps even proprietorial, sense of his position: “мне жаль было мою бедную подсудимую” (“I felt sorry for my poor suspect”) (41). This use of the possessive adjective is a relatively common feature of nineteenth-century Russian critical realism. However, in the context of a work where the female character is shown to be so violently “possessed” by a series of male characters, the investigator’s decision to deploy it here takes on a more contested role.³⁷

Turning more specifically to the terms in which violence is described, the central issue the reader confronts in this work is the narrator’s tendency to employ terminology that is inappropriate either because it downplays abuse or misattributes agency and responsibility. If we consider again the first description of Marianna’s rape by her father, the narrator’s account states that she “сделалась любовницей Грондзевского” (“was made Grondzevskii’s lover”) (52).³⁸ First, the choice of the term “любовница” to describe Marianna’s position is inaccurate and masks the fact that the sexual contact is non-consensual and incestuous. Moreover, the verb form in Russian (“сделалась”), although one way of expressing the passive, retains the potential to ascribe to Marianna a degree of agency which is misleading. Details of the abuse Marianna suffers during this period are provided in testimony given by her but paraphrased by the narrator, with the reassurance that he will not allow this diegetic shift to undermine the effectiveness of the account.³⁹ However, that move means that responsibility for mischaracterizing or downplaying Grondzevskii’s abuse lies squarely with him. The repeated sexual abuse meted out by Grondzevskii is not described in any detail at this stage until the revelation that Marianna “родила от Грондзевского сына, который, по неестественной естественности, если только можно так выразиться, был и отцом и дедом новорожденного” (“gave birth to a son by Grondzevskii who, by dint of unnatural nature, if it can only be expressed this way, was both father and grandfather to the newborn”) (53). The presence of wordplay here as a means of reporting how a man makes his daughter pregnant through rape is jarring. As the first passage of testimony comes to a close, a different aspect of the investigator’s controversial approach is revealed: Marianna’s three children are in the room and become noticeably upset at various junctures of her account. It is reasonable to argue that, despite the investigator’s stated desire to be empathetic, his act of impelling Marianna to recount such traumatic events from her past risks revisiting the violence upon her. To have a young audience of her own children exposed to the revelation of such abhorrent details of sexual and other violence represents a further act of brutalization.

In Zarin’s *In Search of a Murderer*, the main voice in the diegesis belongs to an uninvolved third-person narrator, but the action is focused through the figure of the detective, Patmosov. The manner in which the murder victim, Bertha, is described in sexualized terms has been discussed above. However, the problematic attitude of the judicial investigator to violence committed against women is more readily discernible in the hypnosis plotline. This part of Zarin’s narrative sees Patmosov follow the lead of the misidentified murder victim, Anastasia Korovina, to discover how the shadowy figure of Chemizov is hypnotizing women into believing they are in love with him as a means of stealing from them. The main hypnosis victim, Elena

37 Possessive adjectives are used by the judicial investigator to refer to Marianna at other junctures in the story. For example, when she eventually confesses to killing Grondzevskii Jr, he states: “В несчастной своей подсудимой я видел честную женщину, и имел основания считать ее такой” (“in my unfortunate suspect I saw an honest woman and had reason to consider her thus”) (Timofeev 73). Following the conclusion of Marianna’s detailed account of the murder, he notes that, “ради характеристики моей печальной героини” (“for the sake of characterizing my sad heroine”) (78), his report included the fact that she fainted twice during her testimony.

38 Timofeev’s inclusion of the crime of rape in “Murder and Suicide” can be seen as part of the acknowledgement in late imperial Russian society of the pervasiveness of all types of violence against women, especially in the countryside. However, “exceedingly few Russians wrote about the realities of sexual assault [...] and of those who turned their attention to rape, most focused on its treatment within the criminal law” (Frank 159).

39 At the beginning of the first section of testimony recounting Marianna’s past life, the judicial investigator justifies his decision to paraphrase her account by claiming that he will not allow this to undermine its effect. He states: “Рассказ Бодресовой передаю своими словами, чтобы не повредить интересу ее истории, потому что не берусь со всей пунктуальностью выразить его словами самой Марианны” (“I am recounting Bodresova’s story in my own words so as not to damage the interest of her case because I do not take it upon myself to express it in Marianna’s own words with all their precision”) (Timofeev 48).

D'iakova, is introduced to the reader in conventionally, though still inappropriately, sexualized terms as “красивая брюнетка, лет двадцати семи, полногрудая, высокая, с алыми губами и матовой кожей” (“a beautiful brunette, about 27 years old, full-bosomed, tall, with scarlet lips and matte skin”) (Zarin 209). More debatable, however, is the morally ambiguous position that the detective, Patmosov, maintains as he undertakes surveillance of Elena and Chemizov from a neighbouring hotel room. Patmosov is already aware that Elena is being controlled by hypnosis and, having drilled holes in the wall between the two rooms, he has an almost unfettered view of what is occurring next door: “ни одно слово не ускользало от его слуха, ни одно движение не пропадало для его глаз” (“not a single word escaped his ear, not a single movement was lost on his eyes”) (299). Instead of immediately intervening to rescue Elena, however, Patmosov delays for reasons unknown, even seeming to make light of the situation when questioning Tania, a hotel employee. Tania tells him how Elena:

никуда не ходит, все в постели лежит. А как придет инженер, сперва говорят они: тру – ту – ту, тру – ту – ту, а потом тихо – тихо станет, а там и поедут. – Целуются? – спросил Патмосов, подмигивая девушке. Таня засмеялась. (298)

[does not go anywhere, always just lies in bed. And when the engineer [Chemizov] arrives first they say blah, blah, blah and then it's quiet, it goes quiet, and then they leave. “Kissing?” asked Patmosov, winking at the girl. Tania laughed.]

This suggestive, almost flirtatious, interaction between Patmosov and Tania, where investigative questioning takes the form of salacious gossip, is entirely inappropriate given the circumstances.

Patmosov's behaviour becomes significantly more challenging when we consider how he fails to intercede to prevent the abuse of Elena. During his surveillance, we learn:

прошел час, другой, третий, а Патмосов внимательно смотрел в щелку и следил за всем, что происходило в соседней комнате. Наконец женщина встала, перешла к алькову и скрылась за занавеской. Инженер оделся и крикнул: “До свидания, до завтра!” (299–300)

[an hour passed, another and a third, and Patmosov watched closely through the hole and observed everything that was happening in the next room. Finally, the woman got up, walked over to the alcove and disappeared behind a curtain. The engineer [Chemizov] got dressed and shouted “Goodbye, see you tomorrow!”]

The lack of information spanning three hours of Patmosov's observations constitutes a significant gap in the reader's knowledge. Although it is possible to think that Elena might just be getting up from a chair and that Chemizov is putting on his coat, the restricted information makes other interpretations possible. One of these is that Chemizov has raped Elena while she was hypnotized. In this instance, the narrative's failure to provide explicit information about sexual violence is not due to a sense of personal shame, as is the case in Timofeev's “Murder and Suicide”. Rather, the decision to edit, or render ambiguous, the account of this scene serves as implicit justification for Patmosov's decision not to intervene and prevent the violence. The judicial investigator's actions appear to be more concerned with capturing Chemizov through a surprise attack rather than with the well-being of Elena. This morally ambiguous act of surveillance therefore highlights how detectives can perpetrate additional acts of violence against female victims through investigative procedures accepted by the patriarchal legal system.

In Shkliarevskii's “The Morning After the Ball”, the questionable presentation of violence against women stems primarily not from the narrator's choice of language or the detective's actions, but from the work's diegetic set-up. As noted previously, the first narrator is not a judicial investigator but a defence barrister hired by Count von Grossberg's wife to defend him against charges of murdering Laura Fleurie. As such, much of the narrative is comprised of acts of testimony given by von Grossberg himself to his barrister, a situation that grants the murderer the ability to control the account of his relationship with his victim. There are various ways in which the diegetic authority granted to von Grossberg proves problematic, but by far the most egregious comes in his account of the period between the couple checking into the suite of rooms and the discovery of Laura's body the following morning. Given that the novella opens with a description of the aftermath of the murder scene, it would be possible for the reader to

imagine what has taken place during this time. However, for reasons that need to be considered carefully and critiqued profoundly, Shkliarevskii decides to allow von Grossberg to include his own “real-time”, eyewitness account of the sadistic killing. It is difficult here to defend the author against charges of including this second account for voyeuristic and sensationalist purposes that simultaneously revel in the depiction of violence and betray the dignity of the female victim. Not only does it grant unnecessary additional agency to von Grossberg, but it also places the reader in the uncomfortable position of possessing superior knowledge to the victim herself. As Laura lies on the divan and Wil’helm asks how she would feel if this were the day she was destined to die, Laura cannot know, as the reader does, that this is indeed to be her fate. By contrast, von Grossberg is granted omnipotent authority as he argues that, although his crime was not premeditated, he had already decided that if Laura was guilty of infidelity, he would kill her.

When Laura goes to take a bath, von Grossberg retrieves a letter hidden in the lining of her dress that convinces him she was being unfaithful. It is this knowledge, he claims, that was the catalyst for the brutal murder. By way of implicit explanation for the specific nature of the mutilation he inflicts, he tells Laura that she has worn a mask her entire life and that “я сорву с лица с кожей эту маску” (“I will rip this mask off your face with the skin”) (Shkliarevskii 98). He recounts how his first act was to lift her head and stab her fatally in the neck. We read how Laura’s body convulses, her face distorts violently and her lower jaw shudders. The Count goes on to describe how he wrapped Laura’s plait around her neck and attached the end to the bath handles. He then used the dagger to cut from one ear to the other and then down the centre of her face. Swearing, he began what he refers to as the “ужасная операция” (“terrible operation”) of “carefully lifting and cutting under the skin” (99). The blood ran in streams right up to his elbows, and warm drops of it splattered his face. Bits of flesh fell off Laura’s face while others he ripped off himself and threw on to the floor; he then pulled out one of her eyes.

In terms of information about the murder, this second account adds almost nothing apart from confirming the killer’s identity. To an even greater extent than in the description in the opening chapter, the female victim is relegated to the position of passive and mute object of sadistic violence. Her lack of agency is emphasized by the reader’s possession of superior knowledge about her fate. In terms of the murder itself, it is the Count who possesses and exercises all the power: he is clothed while she is naked; he stands above her as she reclines in the bathtub; he is armed with a dagger while she is defenceless. Moreover, at no point during this second account does the Count demonstrate any overt revulsion at his own behaviour. He concedes at one point that he was “terrifying” during the mutilation, but the overall emphasis remains on his attempts at self-justification. Finally, and arguably most damningly for the evaluation of Shkliarevskii’s novella, the voice of the barrister-narrator never inserts itself into the diegesis either to condemn von Grossberg’s behaviour or to express sympathy for the fate of the victim. Consequently, the literary work itself becomes an act of misogynistic violence where naked female bodies are offered up to violent death, on repeated occasions, for the titillation of the audience.

In the account of von Grossberg’s trial in the penultimate chapter of “The Morning After the Ball”, the troubling silence of the barrister-narrator shifts to a role of active defence and ventriloquism of his client. The narrator is at pains to emphasize here his desire to serve the ends of legal justice by defending Wil’helm. However, this aim is significantly complicated by the sense that its pursuit enacts a process of individual self-realization, achieved at the expense of the female victim. When the president of the court asks von Grossberg to give an account of Laura’s murder, he is unable to do so and asks the narrator to speak on his behalf. The narrator describes how he begins slowly but then “постепенно воодушевляясь, освоился с своим положением, увлекся содержанием и рассказал все” (“gradually gaining enthusiasm, [I] grew accustomed to my position, was carried away by the content and recounted everything”) (131). He summarizes his defence speech but does take the time to report how he informs the court of the “бешеное состояние графа, когда он терзал свою жертву, рвал мясо, веки, вырвал глаз, брызгал кровью” (“frenzied state of the Count as he tortured his victim, ripped her flesh, her eyelids, pulled out her eye and was sprayed with blood”) (132). The narrator’s transformation from defence counsel for the Count into a figure resembling his double is revealed by the admission that “самое лицо мое было ужасно, руки дрожали...” (“even my face was terrible

and my hands were trembling”) (132). Everyone present in the courtroom is stunned by the narrator’s performance and von Grossberg himself acknowledges, when asked if his barrister’s account has been accurate: “так верно [...] что я как бы вижу свое лицо... самого себя в тот ужасный момент...” (“so accurate [...] that it’s almost as if I see my own face ... my very self at that terrible moment”) (132).

The extent to which the barrister-narrator revels in his discursive recommitting of the murder suggests a vicarious pleasure derived from the power exerted by the male perpetrator over the female victim. Laura finds herself violated all over again, albeit post-mortem, this time as part of a different man’s pursuit of his ambitions. The Count murders Laura out of a sense of outrage that her supposed infidelity has insulted his sense of entitlement to her unwavering devotion; the barrister-narrator diegetically re-enacts her murder as a means of advancing his professional reputation. In literary terms, the empathetic approach of the narrator-barrister to the perpetrator is acutely problematic. No amount of legal eloquence can gloss over the horror of the murder that Shkliarevskii’s narrative has described in detail twice. The sadistic brutality of the crime is the impression that remains with the reader long after the fact. Granting the perpetrator the opportunity to construct an exculpatory narrative of his actions gives him a degree of post-crime agency that he does not deserve. He uses it to blame the victim for her own death, citing her potential illness, her supposed duplicity and infidelity, before violating her all over again in his retelling of the crime. Rather than acting as a defender of morality and of the weak, Shkliarevskii’s narrator-barrister is seduced, in much the same way as is von Grossberg himself, by a gendered sense of his right to superiority and personal advancement, no matter the damage to the female victim. Consequently, “The Morning After the Ball” poses serious questions about literature’s responsibility not to offer up the spectacle of the violent murder of female victims in terms that titillate the audience and further disempower women in a patriarchal society.

CONCLUSION

These four works of late imperial-era Russian crime fiction demonstrate the complex attitude that the genre adopted towards the issue of gendered violence. The dominant convention of the “whydunit” rather than the “whodunit” that prevailed in the early decades of the genre’s development in Russia undoubtedly provided the space in which to explore and critique the social context that permitted the disenfranchisement of women in a patriarchal society to gain violent expression. Timofeev’s “Murder and Suicide” can be considered one of the most striking accounts of the dehumanization and violation of women lacking rights and protection in pre-Emancipation Russia. His investigator’s unearthing of the history of Tereza in “The Prostitute” can be seen to give a voice, albeit limited, to a character whose role as a sex worker lays bare the economic exploitation of so many women by their male counterparts. The dehumanization of Tereza because of her sex work, followed by her murder and mutilation, finds an echo in the hypnosis plotline of Zarin’s *In Search of a Murderer*: Chemizov’s victims become automata who can be exploited for his criminal pleasure. Even as this work conforms more closely to the “whodunit” model, criticism of the consequences of gender inequality are still discernible. Stephanie’s murder of her husband’s mistress demonstrates the pervasive nature of patriarchal modes of behaviour. And yet, alongside such criticism, as Shkliarevskii’s “The Morning After the Ball” makes most abundantly evident, we encounter a presentational ambiguity which reveals that these male authors and their male narrators/focalizers are unable to abandon fully the sexualizing, objectifying and dehumanizing position that patriarchy affords them. In attempting to lay bare the truth of criminal violence against women with a highly realistic approach, these works prove incapable of escaping the use of discursive and linguistic devices that subjugate and re-violate female characters. Such presentation, however unintended, gives the lie to the reformist claims of the post-1860 legal authorities and those who reflected these changes in Russian crime fiction.

It must also be acknowledged that academic writing that focuses on the depiction of violence perpetrated against female characters runs risks. The attention this article pays to the detailed descriptions of the committing and consequences of criminal violence is in no way intended to violate or dehumanize the victims further. In fact, we contend that the previous reluctance to focus on this aspect of early Russian crime fiction functions as a silencing of female victims

that is itself a form of violence. From its inception, criticism of crime fiction, regardless of geographical or historical provenance, has preferred to deal with the genre in a mostly sanitized manner, concentrating on the cerebral and intellectual rather than the physical and material. However, attention to the characterization of male representatives of a patriarchal legal system serves to relegate the violence suffered by victims, particularly female victims, to the margins. A sensitive and critical approach to the blind spots and shortcomings in depictions of criminal investigations led by men into the abuse of women can perhaps redress the balance to some extent. Although this discussion might not be able to restore a voice and agency to these fictional female victims, it can create a space for a consideration of their situation by indicating the limitations of the male voices that describe them.

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