THE NOVEL AT WORK

REFLECTIONS ON ART AND POLITICS IN SELECTED COUNTER-TOTALITARIAN NOVELS, 1920-70

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For books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are; nay, they do preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them … Who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were in the eye. (John Milton, *Areopagitica*, 1644)

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my own research. It contains as its main content work that has not previously been submitted for a degree at any university.

Patricia Harris

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Abstract

The novel's ability to portray and protest the political is generally well recognized. More controversial is how, and with what effects, the assertive nature of political critique combines with the open-ended qualities of artistic expression. Such is the problem confronting this thesis. My inquiry is based on a selection of early to mid-twentieth century counter-totalitarian novels, drawn from across Western Europe and Russia, and representing a variety of different literary styles and political commitments. In the case of Western Europe, my selected authors are Ignazio Silone, Arthur Koestler and George Orwell; for Russia, they are Yevgeny Zamyatin, Andrei Platonov, Mikhail Bulgakov, Vasily Grossman and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

How we 'read' the artistic/political relationship is important as it influences how we approach texts, the kinds of questions we ask, and the nature of the conclusions we reach. These issues find a theoretical home in the debate on politically committed art, where theorists such as Theodor Adorno and Jacques Rancière oppose the overt commitments of authors such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Bertolt Brecht. My contention is that the abstractions of this debate obscure the density of the relationship, both as it is experienced by authors and as it may strike us as readers. Hence I argue for a grounded approach to the issue: that is, one that is attentive to the detail of texts situated in all the specificity of their political, historical circumstances.

For my guide to the literary practices of the novel, I turn to Mikhail Bakhtin, focusing on the dialogic and polyphonic, the parodic and subversive, and the time/space settings of chronotope. These elements show how the political can be expressed in an evocative and/or subversive way. At the same time, Bakhtin's binary distinctions—the monological and dialogical; the centripetal and centrifugal qualities of language; and the notions of finalizability and unfinalizability—invite further reflection, for they promote an oppositional reading of the artistic/political relationship, and thus form part of the problem

with which I am critically engaged. In concluding, I expand on the intricate intersections between finalizability and unfinalizability; the carrying power of the texts' imaginative calls; and the force of their emotional narratives.

The inquiry is broad-ranging and interdisciplinary, drawing variously on the insights of literary theory, philosophy and political analysis. It aims to be of interest to all those broadly concerned with fiction's powers to speak to the political in its distinctive and controversial fashion.

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Preface: a biographical fragment

> Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand. (Michael Scott, *The Warlock,* p. 320).

Thus Michael Scott, the novelist, cribs from Albert Einstein, theoretical physicist. His affirmation resonates for my thesis, for I too chase the nexus between imagination and knowledge, although in a very limited way. My focus is strictly restricted in time, place and subject, being centred on the relationship between artistic expression and political discourse in a small selection of mid-twentieth century counter-totalitarian novels. Let me explain how I came to be interested in this matter in the first instance. On reaching the end of my inquiry, I realize just how longstanding the origins are, and how much they influence how I read the texts, the kinds of questions I ask, and the nature of the conclusions I reach. The underlying factor, I have come to suppose, is a notion of the mid-twentieth century as a time of fissure and trauma, and of literature as a form of imaginary re-presentation capable of speaking to that sense of fissure and trauma. Although my area of concentration has shifted over time, away from war and trauma and toward ideology and the totalitarian phenomenon, an explanation of the early origins to my interest may be useful in the reading of the thesis.

I was born in England in 1943, late enough to be safe from the war, early enough to be surrounded by its memories and memorials. My post-war childhood was an orderly thing. In the mornings there was grocery shopping and household tasks; in the afternoons a rest followed by the three o'clock walk and tea; in the evenings, reading and preparation of the main meal, supper. My household job was dusting the sitting room. A cold room, as I remember it. The only source of heat was the coal fire and that was full of last night's soot, waiting for the twists of newspaper, kindling and lumps of coal to be coaxed into life in the evening. Most of the time I didn't dust. Door shut, I sat on the chair by the bookshelf and pulled out my parents' volumes. At the bottom, where the shelves were widest, was the family photo album. The photos, first sepia and then black and white, were stuck in with photo corners that kept coming adrift. As I remember them now, those images

started back in Wales, the country of my father's birth, showing various treks and mountain climbs, and then recorded something of his and my mother's courtship—again we have the mountains but this time in Europe; he at ease, she trying to play her part—and moved on to display the arrival of each of us four children, born between 1937 and 1946. After that the pictures take us back to Wales, showing the family on holiday by a cold sea—grey horizons and frozen hands on tin mugs—and later still, from the early fifties on, we are in Europe on the two-week holiday that was planned and saved for from one year to the next.

On those European trips we drove through the calm of the long fields of France in my father's Vauxhall 25 with one or more of our heads stuck through the sunroof depending on who was most carsick. In the villages, children ran out and gave us the V sign. We drove southeast to get to my father's beloved mountains in Switzerland and Austria passing through cities with jagged streetscapes and gaping holes where people had once followed the daily patterns of their lives. The war, yes of course, the war. Something that was only present in our photo album through its absence. Even from the shelter of the car and the safety of English privilege, I knew that the Europe we visited, a shattered, recovering Europe, was different from the Europe of the early photos, when the cityscapes, monuments and cathedrals would, I thought, have had a more settled and established, even innocent, appearance, as through their durability could be taken for granted. Somehow the *shape* of the narrative that I had learned to trust, predictable and resolvable, had been torn apart, in a way that I did not understand and troubled my consciousness.

Much of our family conversation surrounded the war years but in a matter-of-fact, practical kind of way, with my parents recalling the nightly trips to the air-raid shelters, the doodlebugs whose engines cut out just before they dropped their bombs and you knew you were 'for it', the wartime speeches, the rationing, and the deals done with a local farmer to obtain milk for a growing family. All this talk, *this matter of fact talk of the unbelievable*, took place against the familial and predictable rhythms of my day. Despite, or perhaps because of, these securities, I was haunted by notions of ruination and loss, of times before and times after. My father's Home Guard jacket hanging in the cupboard under the stairs, the

underground shelter in the garden, the war memorial by the church and the sight of London's bombed out terraces, all twisted and turned in on each other, spoke to the reality of the war years. So did the authoritative accounts of those who surrounded me. But the experiential reality of my small and ordered world denied it.

All this explains my interest in the mid-twentieth century. But why my focus on fiction? Is there anything else to this apart from a bookish childhood? I think so, for the fairy stories to which I was introduced at an early age affirmed that the mystical could exist with the ordinary, and terror with peace. Baba Yaga's terrible hut, with its chicken legs for stilts and human bones for bolts, with its *oven for cooking children*, penetrated deep into my childhood consciousness and shaped how I saw and interpreted the world around me and shaped how I saw and interpreted the world around me. On my walks to the river I followed an overgrown path where there was a hut, leaning to one side, with windows like squinty eyes. Abandoned, surrounded by silence, creepy. My mother said it was once used to house people suffering from the plague. No one dared to come close to it. Not even, it seemed, the demolition teams centuries later. The hut, the terror, the turning away of the civilized world. Click goes the door and in walk the innocent, thousands of them. The images live on. Baba Yaga flew on a mortar and pestle, using her broom to erase her movements—busy, busy, with her jutting chin and bony legs. Evil covers its tracks.

In *The Uses of Enchantment* Bruno Bettelheim (1976) suggests that fairy-tales allow children to grapple with their fears in a safe environment, enabling them to 'become adult' with a greater sense of meaning and purpose. But I have not outgrown my child reader, not at all. Small and imperious, she is right there in the thick of things, conducting my mental and emotional orchestra. Ian McEwan's *Black Dogs* can hurl me right back into my childhood apprehensions, vividly recreating my sense of the yawning gulf between 'time before' and 'time after'. The novel records how a couple are on a walking holiday in Europe immediately post-war. The woman, June, who has gone ahead, is approached by two massive black dogs, horrible embodiments of evil. Her friend, the narrator, recounts how

she 'sometimes used to see them, really see them, on the retina in the giddy seconds before sleep … the bigger one trailing blood on the white stones':

> They are crossing the shadow line and going deeper, where the sun never reaches … crossing the river in the dead of the night, and forcing a way up the other side to cross the Causse; and as sleep rolls in they are receding from her, black stains in the grey of the dawn, fading as they move into the foothills of the mountains, from where they will return to haunt us somewhere in Europe, in another time. (*Black Dogs,* pp. 171-2)

In my 'adult' grown up way, I have studied history and sociology, retaining my interest in the mid-twentieth century as a time of massive social and political upheaval. But I have increasingly moved away from war and genocide to focus on the totalitarian phenomenon itself. I want to know how aspiration can turn into destruction, utopia into totalizing oppression, and hope into despair; how fascism and Stalinism are both similar and different; and, most of all, what a totalizing ideology might imply for the independence of thought, language and literature.

In continuing my life-time habit of turning to fiction for insights, I have wondered what novels like *Darkness at Noon* (1940/1994) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949/2000) might illuminate about the nature of ideology that academic texts such as Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951/1967) or Karl Popper's *The Poverty of Historicism* (1957/1986) do not (and vice versa). This has led me to reflect deeply on the distinctiveness of the novel as a literary genre, its blurred boundaries with academic and/or documentary modes, and, most of all, its fusion of discourses, artistic and political, as authors variously draw on, modify and develop the literary practices of the novel in expressing their political and philosophical commitments. Such are the issues surrounding this inquiry, which have become the denser the longer I have thought about them.

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Mapping the issues

> Almost certainly, we are moving into an age of totalitarian dictatorships. The autonomous individual is going to be stamped out of existence. But this means that literature, at least as we know it, must suffer at least a temporary death. The literature of liberalism is coming to an end and the literature of totalitarianism is barely imaginable. (Orwell, 1940/2000, p. 131)

So writes George Orwell at the outset of the Second World War. His fears for the future of thought, language and literature are set against the simultaneous rise of fascism across Western European and Stalinism in the Soviet Union. Across the affected nations, official ideology forced its way deep into the social and cultural activities of society—into schools, churches, artists' guilds and universities—leading to the persecution of authors and the destruction of books, the erosion of professional and personal integrity, and a radical challenge to the nature of creative work. That Orwell turned out to be wrong—that the independence of language and literature survives in democratic nations—is indebted to the fact that his own works, as part of a new 'counter-totalitarian' genre of novels, drew on the arts of fiction to portray and protest events.[1]

This genre represents a distinctive and far-reaching move in the history of political fiction, demonstrating the power of the novel and the courage and determination of authors. My interests, though, lie in the dynamics of the texts themselves, where I focus on the challenges involved in speaking politically in a literary kind of way. The nub of the issue relates to the combination of two distinct and potentially opposing styles of discourse: on the one hand, the open and creative nature of the artistic, and on the other, the systematizing and assertive qualities of the political (see van Delden and Grenier, 2012). Let me illustrate with further reference to Orwell's essays, this time a piece written in 1946, where he reflects on both the importance and the difficulties of political writing. He starts by commenting that:

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[1] In calling this genre 'counter-totalitarian' (rather than the more customary term, 'anti-totalitarian'), I underscore that its authors were not just making the case 'anti' but also countering developments by signalling alternatives. I discuss the problematic notion of 'totalitarianism' later in this chapter.

> What I have wanted to do throughout the past ten years is to make political writing into an art. My starting point is always a feeling of partisanship, a sense of injustice. … But I could not do the work of writing a book … if it were not also an aesthetic experience. So long as I am alive and well I shall continue to feel strongly about prose style, to love the surface of the earth, and to take pleasure in solid objects and scraps of useless information. (Orwell, 1946a/2000, pp. 5-6)

In this essay, Orwell explains that he writes *aesthetically,* inspired by his 'perception of beauty in the outside world … pleasure in words and their right arrangement', but also *politically*, where he is driven by his desire to 'push the world in a certain direction, to alter other people's ideas of the kind of society they should strive for' (pp. 3-4). Essentially, this signals a relationship that is productive yet vexed, enmeshed yet fractured, for Orwell's desire to 'expose a lie' does not necessarily sit well with his aesthetic, even while deeply sustained by it. It is the density of the relationship that absorbs me. How might literature 'speak truth' to the political in a way that resonates over time and space? What sorts of opportunities and difficulties are involved? And how do we, the readers, respond to its various artistic/political combinations? Such are the questions underpinning this inquiry. [2]

As will be further explained below, my exploration of these issues is based on a selection of early to mid-twentieth century counter-totalitarian novels, with a focus on works centrally concerned with ideology. I have also aimed to cover distinct historical circumstances, and on this basis stretch the inquiry across both Russia and Western Europe.[3] In the case of Russia, I distinguish between an early and post-Stalinist wave of oppositional writing. For the earlier period, I have selected Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924/1993), Andrei Platonov's *The Foundation Pit* (1930/2009), and Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* (1939/2007); for the later years, Vasily Grossman's *Everything Flows* (1970/2009) and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *In the First Circle* (1978/2009) and

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[2] A note on terminology: I use the term 'artistic' to refer to the broad field of creative endeavour, and the 'literary' in drawing particular attention to the practices of the novel. On occasions, I introduce the term 'aesthetic', either because this is the concept used in the relevant literature and/or to refer to the principles by which we come to appreciate a work of art.

[3] At the same time, in setting boundaries around the study, I exclude the works from Eastern Europe, notably Milan Kundera's *The Joke*, for these were written at a later period when the hopes, doubts and aspirations of the early revolutionary years trailed an established history behind them.

Cancer Ward (1971). For Western Europe, I focus on the 1930s and 1940s, when there was a surge of counter-totalitarian writing. My chosen texts are Ignazio Silone's *Bread and Wine* (1937/200), Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* (1940/1994) and George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945/1951) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949/200).

While I am interested in these texts in their own right—and will spend much of my time detailing just how they undertake their literary/political work—the end purpose of my discussion is to contribute to our understanding of the density of the artistic/political relationship, both as it arises in these texts and at a more general level of conceptualization as pertaining to the traditions and practices of the novel. This endeavour depends on certain key theoretical and methodological considerations, and I outline these before further detailing my choice of texts.

Theoretical and methodological considerations

How we interpret the artistic/political relationship is important, as it influences how we approach texts, the kinds of questions we ask, and the nature of the conclusions we reach. If, for example, we see political commitment as necessarily antithetical to artistic practice, we will react differently to a work such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* than if we surmise that the political can complement or even enhance the artistic. The theoretical background to this issue can be found in the longstanding debate on politically committed art, where protagonists variously query whether the political and the artistic can intersect in a compelling and lively way, or, alternately, stand to contradict and undermine each other (see, for example, Sartre 1948/2001; Brecht 1949/1964; Adorno 1970/2004, 1973/2007; Rancière 2010, 2011). My contention is that these debates, pitched at a high level of abstraction, do not sufficiently illuminate the dense interplay between the artistic and the political, both as it is experienced by authors and as it may strike us as readers.

On this basis, I argue for a 'grounded' approach to the artistic/political relationship. By this, I mean one that arises from a close and attentive reading of texts situated in all the particularity of their immediate circumstances. While the notion borrows from its specialized (and disputed) meaning in sociology, it carries

none of the formal requirements of data analysis, coding, and theoretical elaboration required there (see Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Rather it assumes an interactive relationship between text and reader; an immersion in the text; a rejection of *a priori* reasoning; and a considered attempt to understand the nature of the political issues in which texts are involved and the many and varied ways in which these issues are given literary expression. Given the close links between method and conceptualization, I suggest that such an approach can help inform how we visualize the artistic/political relationship in the first instance.

I also submit that the complexity of the artistic/political relationship is obscured in much contemporary literary criticism, as, for example, when form is divorced from content, the creative role of the author is downplayed, or texts are treated as objects subject to the independent skills of deconstruction. Against such approaches, I visualize authorship as an active process, a doing, a speaking across time and space. The political, too, I see as a process, a commitment, where there are sides to be taken and convictions put on record. Mine, then, is neither the close reading typified by Formalism or the New Criticism, nor the kind of ideological de-construction characteristic of post-Marxist approaches, nor the de-coding of a Derridean approach. Rather it is an 'ordinary' reading: that is, it is one that reflects on how works might appeal to us, the everyday readers, untrained in specialized literary critique. While this mirrors my own non-specialist position, I also defend the value of such a reading on the basis that, in its ordinary way, it has the capacity to illuminate how literary texts resonate in the homes and offices where they are variously pondered, absorbed, criticized, put aside and/or treasured: that is, in those everyday places where they take on their unpredictable impacts independent of specialized critique.[4]

My account draws variously on the insights of literary theory, history and politics. I recognize the difficulties. As Martin van Delden comments, an interdisciplinary approach can entail 'importing concepts from other disciplines without the need to

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[4] Rita Felski (2011, p. 574) assists my case for an 'ordinary' reading when she points out that under various forms of deconstruction 'the critic probes for meanings inaccessible to authors as well as ordinary readers'. With this, she advocates an approach that is 'less censorious of ordinary experiences of reading, including their stubborn persistence in the margins of professional criticism' (p. 585)

examine them properly' (van Delden and Grenier, 2016, p. 236). At the same time, and as his colleague Yvon Grenier notes, disciplines can learn a great deal from each other, and, in their exchange of ideas come to 'appreciate the diversity of forms of knowledge and creativity beyond the academic disciplines' (van Delden and Grenier, 2016, p. 237). So my hope is that in spanning across the disciplines, I better understand the particular 'forms of knowledge and creativity' invested in the selected texts together with their capacities to resound across time and space.

While our interpretations of the artistic/political relationship have implications across the creative arts, including music, theatre, film and the visual arts, my focus is specifically on the traditions and practices of the novel. As Martha Nussbaum (1990, pp. 228-9) reflects, literary texts produce 'certain sorts of practical activity in the reader that can be invoked in no other way,' and that for this to occur 'we need a story of a certain kind, with characters of a certain type'. To gain an understanding of these literary practices, I need a detailed appreciation of the novelist's tools of trade, and for this I turn to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. His approach to the novel is highly productive for my purposes, for it concentrates not on the rules of language, but on the 'single and decisively soft' phenomenon of human consciousness (Emerson, 1997, p. 127). Further, he imposes no ideological or stylistic straitjacket on how we might consider the novel as a literary form, but instead—and in contrast to either Marxist approaches (e.g. Lukács, 1937/1983) or the Formalists' close attention to the techniques of art (e.g. Shklovsky, 1917/1988)—positions the novel as an ongoing conversation between author, text and reader.

In drawing on the detail of Bakhtin's insights, I focus on dialogism and polyphony, parody and the carnivalesque, and the imaginative possibilities of 'chronotope' (the novelistic representation of the relationship between time and place). All these illuminate how the novel, by virtue of its traditions, can express political ideas in a literary kind of way. At the same time, Bakhtin's contrasts between the monological and dialogical, the centripetal and centrifugal qualities of language, and the notions of finalizability and unfinalizability, invite further reflection, for they suggest an oppositional relationship between the artistic and

the political, and thus form part of the problematic with which I am critically engaged.

Benefiting from Bakhtin's insights, and with the aim of better understanding the density of the artistic/political relationship, I ask three questions of the selected novels. First, what are the political and philosophical themes circulating within these works? Second, how do the chosen authors draw on, disrupt and/or extend the traditions of the novel in expressing their convictions? Third, what might these combinations of the political and the literary suggest about a text's capacity to resonate across time and space? The last is the most speculative of my questions, given that our own temporal and physical positions radically influence how we interpret the 'represented world' of the novel (Bakhtin, 1937/1981, p. 253). It is also the most fundamental of my issues, for the life of the literary/political project depends on its ability to appeal beyond its immediate historical location. I revisit this issue at the end of Chapter Three, and explain how I intend to deal with the problem of interpretation.

The selected texts

Rationale for choice

Let me now return to the selected texts, first explaining the rationale for my selection and then offering an overview of the works. In the first instance, I underline that my selection represents a wide number of works in terms of where they are located, what their major interests are, and how these are expressed in literary and political terms. At one end of the spectrum, there are the transparently political novels of Orwell and Koestler, examples of Susan Suleiman's *roman à thèse* as works that 'signal themselves to the reader as primarily didactic in intent, seeking to demonstrate the validity of a political, philosophical or religious doctrine' (Suleiman, 1983, p. 7) At the other, are the novels of Platonov and Bulgakov, characterized by their ambiguity and inference, with their resistance to the orthodoxies of the times expressed through their literary form as well as their political/philosophical content. The selected texts are also widely separated in terms of time and place: Zamyatin's *We,* for example, was written before Stalin took control; *Cancer Ward* some forty years later in the early post-Stalinist years;

and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in the intervening years in the relatively 'democratic' space of British society.[5]

I acknowledge that covering such a wide span of works inevitably leads to a lack of depth as far as any particular work is concerned. When I read the scholarly work on individual texts and writers, particularly that relating to the work of the early Russian authors, I am sadly aware of my own superficiality. All I can plead is that in covering such a broad span of works, and as both a 'generalist' and an 'ordinary' reader, I hope to knit together a complex story across a broad literary and political canvass. My attention returns always to the underlying relationship between the artistic and the political as different imperatives, with the artistic representing the drive toward creativity, and the political the urge for commitment. I am interested to know what the contrasts between the texts might suggest about the dynamics of this relationship; what their most significant differences are in this respect; and if there are underlying factors that might unite the texts, thus illuminating how the artistic and the political can come to resonate across time and space.

There are a number of existing commentaries on the selected novels. Currently, there is a growing body of scholarship on Platonov, where the works of Philip Bullock (e.g. 2005, 2013, 2014) and Thomas Seifrid (1992, 2009) are particularly important. For commentaries on the early Russian authors, I am particularly indebted to Bullock's (2011) comparisons of Platonov, Bulgakov and Zamyatin; and Laura Weeks' (1996) edited collection of essays on *The Master and Margarita*. In relation to the Western European authors, there is the enormous volume of work on Orwell, where I have benefited from Morris Dickstein's detailed discussions of *Animal Farm* (2007) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (2004), and Bernard Crick's far-reaching analysis of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (2007). There are also discussions of various groupings of these works as exemplars of the political novel. Irving Howe's seminal *Politics and the Novel* (1957/2002) has chapters on each of *Bread and Wine*, *Darkness at Noon* and *Nineteen Eighty-*

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[5] An obvious point: all these books are written by men. This is not a matter of research design; merely a reflection of the state of play at that time. The implications are further noted on p. 16.

Four. Other authors, most particularly E. H. Booker (1994a and 1994b) and Erica Gottlieb (2001), have discussed a number of the selected works as representatives of the dystopian genre, and I am indebted to their insights too. There has not, however, been any similar grouping of the selected novels. My approach is also distinctive in that I do not write, as it were, 'in defence' of the political or dystopian novel, but in the attempt to explore how, and with what effects, the artistic and the political may coincide in any given case.

I emphasize that my choice is indicative only, designed for the purposes of illustration rather than an account of the political literature of the period. With my focus on the political and ideological, I do not consider writings on the Holocaust, since these involve a very different form of analysis.[6] By the same token, I have omitted the Russian works dedicated to life in the camps, Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* and Varlam Shalamov's *Kolyma Tales* being the most important cases. Even with these exclusions, any comprehensive review would have needed to cover many more texts, particularly in the case of Russia, where there is a long and continuing tradition of dissent. Important omissions in the period under consideration include Grossman's epic *Life and Fate*, Boris Pasternak's *Dr Zhivago*, Ilya Ehrenberg's *The Thaw*, Anatoly Rybakov's *Children of the Arbat*, Vladimir Dudinstev's *Not by Bread Alone*, and Sasha Sokolov's *School for Fools*.[7] In the case of Western Europe, I have not included the novels of Aldous Huxley, André Malraux and Viktor Serge. In some of these cases, politico-ideological issues are less central than they are in the selected texts, in some they provide the setting of the plot rather than the object of the story, in others the portrayals simply seem less cogent. All such appraisals are subjective and I do not claim to have selected the 'best' or 'only' works, simply a sufficiently varied number to allow reflection on the different manifestations of the relationship between the artistic and the political.

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[6] For discussion, see Clendinnen 1998, Franklin 2011, Friedländer 1992, and Lang 2000, among many others.

[7] Critical works of the nineteenth century include Alexander Herzen's autobiography, *My Past and Thoughts* (1861) and his novel, *Who is to Blame?* (1846), Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* (1862) and Nikolai Chernyshesvky's *What is to be Done?* (1863). Important counter-totalitarian works written after the 1970s include Aleksandr Zinoviev's *The Yawning Heights*, Vasily Aksyonov's *The Burn*, Andrei Bitov's *Pushkin House* and Vladimir Voinovich's *Moscow 2042*.

I also stress that this is not a comparative literary study. In so far as I draw distinctions between the two groups of novels these relate to their historical and politico-ideological context. Nevertheless, I take this opportunity to acknowledge the extensive literature on the distinctiveness of the Russian tradition (see Garrard 1983, Gasperetti 1997, Emerson 2008, and Lieber 2011, among others). In her contribution to the subject, Emma Lieber (2011, pp. 22-8) attributes the singularity of the Russian novel to its 'spirit of playfulness', 'devil-may-care uninhibited ebullience', 'resistance to limits and (especially) endings', 'messianic ambition' and 'unusual commitment to interior life in all of its spontaneity and contradictoriness'. She suggests this is reflected in Bakhtin's view of the novel, as 'intrinsically subversive, committed to diversity, [and] imbued with the spirit of parody and carnival', with this being 'fundamentally different from 'the vision of order and communal discipline often seen as characteristic of the English novel' (p. 21). In my reading of the selected texts, and as subsequent chapters will illustrate, these literary qualities are demonstrated across the two regions, and vary both between and within the novels.

As a final note on my selection of the texts, I acknowledge that with the exception of Orwell and Koestler's works, I have to rely on translations, as my language skills are effectively limited to English. I submit that the difficulties are partially offset by the high calibre of the translations themselves, with scholars such as Robert Chandler (for *The Foundation Pit* and *Everything Flows*), and Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (for *The Master and Margarita*) bringing their in-depth knowledge of language, history and national traditions to the selected works. I also re-emphasize that my inquiry is not of a specialized literary kind, aimed at the formal structure and wording of the texts, but of a broad-ranging, interdisciplinary nature, centred on the texts' political and ideological concerns and their main forms of literary expression.

Overview of the texts

I now offer a brief overview of the novels. The single most important difference between the two groups of works is that the Western European novels were largely written from *outside* the systems of persecution they describe and the

Russian from *within*.[8] This follows a much older pattern wherein artistic freedoms in Russia have always been strictly provisional. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, rulers allowed the intelligentsia a degree of latitude, including contact with the West, as they attempted to build the nation's intellectual and technological capital. But they reacted defensively and punitively when criticized—as, for example, did Catherine the Great in response to Radishchev's critique of serfdom in *A Journey from St Petersburg to Moscow*. Twentieth-century developments represent a tightening of these older controls, with the selected texts subject to the heightened contest between art and politics in the post-revolutionary era. With the exception of *The Master and Margarita*, which appeared in a censored form in the late sixties, none of the works considered here were published in the Soviet Union until the mid 1980s.[9]

Completed in 1921, Zamyatin's *We* (1924/1993) was the first fictional work to be banned under Lenin's new censorship laws. It is set in a highly organized, technological society (OneState), where the inhabitants are known by numbers, and the city is built of glass, allowing authorities to supervise the public and strip them of all vestiges of imagination and dissent. Written some seven to ten years later, *The Foundation Pit* (1930/2009) takes place in a no-man's land somewhere in Russia, with the devastations of enforced labour, the collectivization of agriculture and degraded ideology at the centre of the book. Like *We*, it critiques rationality and utilitarianism, with the hero, Voshchev, searching for meaning and finding none. Bulgakov's major work, *The Master and Margarita* (1930/2007), which was written during the worst of the Stalinist years, protests and parodies the cultural and literary restrictions of Stalinist Russia, through its combination of humour, irony and metaphysical speculation.

Solzhenitsyn and Grossman, composing in the uncertain two decades following Stalin's death, look back over the damage to Russia, her people and traditions.

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[8] Gottlieb (2001) suggests that dystopian novels written under totalitarian conditions tend to be situated in the present, while those that located outside are situated in the future. For a critical analysis of her arguments as they relate to the *We* and *The Foundation Pit*, see Springate 2009.

[9] When referring to the Russian texts where there is a large gap between the dates in which they were first completed and then later published, I refer to the *completion* date in my citations. Such is the case in *The Foundation Pit, The Master and Margarita*, and several of Bakhtin's essays.

Both Solzhenitsyn's novels have an autobiographical base. *In the First Circle* (1978/2009) describes a prison outside Moscow where the scientists and engineers taken out of the labour camps to do security work for the regime have to decide whether to assist the authorities to incarcerate others, or refuse and get sent back to the much worse conditions of the inner camps. *Cancer Ward* (1971) is set in the mid-1950s, a couple of years after Stalin died but when his machinery of surveillance and espionage was still intact. Using the setting of a hospital ward in which the patients are suffering from malignant tumours, it explores the responsibilities of those directly or indirectly implicated in Stalin's great purge. Grossman's *Everything Flows* (1970/2009), a short and experimental work, describes the experiences, memories and relationships of Ivan Grigoryevich, an elderly man who has to find his way in an unfamiliar world after thirty years in the Gulag. In its distinctive way it combines an account of the historical record with a philosophical inquiry into culpability, judgement and freedom.

The Western European novels sit more closely together than their Russian counterparts, being written between 1937 and 1949, when there was a surge of similar writing. They too blend the literary and the political, combining personal experience and conviction with historical events and trends. Silone's *Bread and Wine* (1937/2000), the second of his *Abruzzo Trilogy*, tells the part-autobiographical story of Pietro Spina, a young communist revolutionary, exiled from a number of countries across Europe. The essence of the story is idealism, disillusionment and ideological uncertainty, central features of Silone's own life.[10] Centred on the Moscow trials (1936-8), Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* (1940/1994) describes the arrest, interrogation and execution of Rubashov, an old style but sceptical Bolshevik. Its driving force is Koestler's fury over the perversion of the original revolutionary ideal. Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945/1951) is the classic anti-Stalinist text, while his *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949/2000) takes us into the post-totalitarian Oceania, where O'Brien looks forward to a time when there will be 'no art, no literature, no science … no distinction between beauty and

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[10] *Fontamara,* the first of the series, deals with the brutality of the vigilantes; *Seed in the Snow*, the last, with the hero's quest for peace away from revolutionary activity. *Bread and Wine* is the most critical for my purposes, as it is the work that deals most centrally with the relationship between different forms of totalising ideology.

ugliness', and the future will resemble 'a boot stamping on the human face—forever' (p. 280).

Like their Russian counterparts, the Western European texts are preoccupied with the failure of the Soviet experiment. Totalitarianism Nazi-style was well publicized in the west, re-parcelled as the actions of the enemy. The authors did not need to alert the public to its dangers. Instead—and this is particularly true of Orwell and Koestler—they concentrated on developments under Stalin, which, with their claim to act on behalf of principles long cherished by the Left, were seen to pose the greater challenge to social democracy. As John Rodden says in his 'open letter' to Orwell:

> You were always rather uninterested in the crimes of Hitler because Hitler was an obvious fascist on the other side. You were far more concerned with the behaviour of Stalin. (Rodden, 2007b, p. 186)

An important point: all these books are written by males, and the role women play within them is distinctly limited. Courageous female representatives are found only in *We*, *The Master and Margarita* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four.* In some instances—I single out *In the First Circle* and *Bread and Win*e—women play a stereotypically female role, foil to male truths and ambitions, and this has caused me considerable frustration. However, with my focus on the artistic/political relationship (itself gendered, but in highly complex cross-cutting ways), and in concentrating on the 'totalitarian' notion as my major theme, I have decided to leave this matter alone, simply underlining that because a text is emancipatory in one context, it is by no means necessarily so in another. [11]

Across the regions, the selected texts probe the mechanisms of totalizing control, the threats to intellectual integrity, the origins of totalizing ideology, and the conditions of freedom. To situate these works in purely dystopian or dissident terms is to miss the point, for they were not so much making a case *against* political developments as vitally immersed *within* them. In all cases, there is a kind of 'working out', a use of the novel to make sense of what is happening and

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[11] For an extensive discussion of the complexities of gender, utopia and prose in Platonov's works, see Bullock (2005) *The Feminine in the Prose of Andrey Platonov*.

what the future might hold. Speaking to the seriousness of such an endeavour, Howe reflects how:

> Writer and reader [may] enter into an uneasy compact to expose their ideas to a furious action … and to find some common recognition, some supervening human bond over and beyond ideas. (Howe, 1957/2002, p. 24)

To illuminate what is at issue for the selected texts, I devote the rest of this introductory chapter to three major historical/theoretical issues. The first concerns the broad sweep of developments, where I take the many similarities between fascism and Stalinism as the critical factor; the second, the contested notion of totalitarianism, where there are marked differences in scholarly interpretation; the third, the relationship between the historical 'real' and its textual representation, where I face the question of exactly *what* the selected texts do when they re-create the past and/or project the future. These issues are a step removed from my core interest in the art/politics dynamic; however, I contend that an understanding of them is essential to any grounded appreciation of the novels *in situ.*

Historical matters

The broad sweep of developments

In describing the situation in Europe in the 1930s, Mark Mazower suggests that:

> Liberalism looked tired, the organized Left had been smashed and the sole struggles over ideology and governance were taking place within the Right—among authoritarians, traditional conservatives, technocrats and radical right-wing extremists. (Mazower, 1999, p. 27)

The fascist-style movements spreading across the continent included the Falange in Spain, Austrofascism in Austria, the Metaxas Regime in Greece, the Ustaša in Croatia, and the Estado Nova in Portugal under Salazar, as well as the pivotal developments in Nazi Germany and Mussolini's Italy. Capturing the amoeba-like spread of fascism, originating in local sites and extending through the body politic, Robert Paxton (2005) maps the various stages through which a 'fully-fledged' fascism evolved. First, the emergence of the movement in widespread popular grievances underpinned by disenchantment with the democratic process; second, a 'taking root' of these grievances with vigilante groups asserting political ownership over them; third, the obtaining of power, whereby fascist groups monopolize the political process with the assistance of existing political and military elites; fourth, the exercise of totalizing power; and finally, 'radicalization

or entropy' whereby fascism either becomes more radical (as in the case of Nazi Germany) or reverts to a more traditional form of authoritarian rule (Mussolini's Italy).[12]

Mussolini's regime forms the background to Silone's novels, where the Blackshirts wiped out opposition in the cities and provinces, and the secret police infiltrated most aspects of public and social life. The early stages of the process are portrayed in *Fontamara*, the first of his *Abruzzi Trilogy*, where the upper echelons of the Fascist hierarchy are shown to be organized and calculative, and the vigilantes on whom they rely, disenfranchised and brutal. The narrator recounts that:

> Besides, we knew those men in black shirts. To give themselves courage they came at night. Most stank of wine, and yet, if we looked them straight in the eye, most of them looked away. … When you met them in the street in daylight they were obsequious, but at night and in groups they were evil, malicious, treacherous. They have always been in the service of authority and always will be. (*Fontamara,* 1933/2000, p. 113)

The absolutist cast of fascism, with its quest to extinguish the distinction between public and private life, is one of the key signifiers of the totalitarian phenomenon. *The Doctrine of Fascism* is quite explicit: 'everything is in the State, and nothing human or spiritual exists, much less has value, outside the State' (Mussolini, 1935, np). Further:

> Fascism sees … individuals and generations bound together by a moral law, with common traditions and a mission which, suppressing the instinct for life closed in a brief circle of pleasure, builds up a higher life, founded on duty, a life free from the limitations of time and space, in which the individual, by self-sacrifice, the renunciation of self-interest, by death itself, can achieve that purely spiritual existence in which his value as a man consists. (Mussolini, 1935, np)

Isaiah Berlin (1957/2002, p. 179) points out that once the 'real' self is seen to coincide with a social totality, a dictator is able to 'ignore the actual wishes of men or societies … on behalf, of their "real" selves, in the secure knowledge that whatever is the true goal of man … must be identified with … the free choice of

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[12] Paxton (2005, p. 218) describes fascism as 'a form of political behaviour marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion'.

his 'true', albeit often submerged and inarticulate will'. Hence such developments also, and *thereby*, took aim at the qualities of the western novel with their central investment in the interiority and distinctiveness of the individual. The implications of this—which, critically, are also reproduced in Soviet ideology—reverberate through the selected texts, with the characters confronting the State's totalizing invasions of their private lives, and struggling to express the last vestiges of freedom available to them. In *We*, D-503 agrees to an operation to excise his imagination; in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston Smith succumbs to O'Brien; in *Bread and Wine,* Spina flees in defeat; The issue here is not whether the totalitarian bid ever was or could be realized in practice; rather it is what it portends, the *kind* of society to which it points. And on this, the novels offer few if any lines of escape for their protagonists. In artistic/political terms, their response is a *counter demonstration*, an artistic protest, and a fundamental refusal of the terms of all forms of totalizing ideology.

As fascism tightened its grip over Europe, so totalitarianism Stalin-style took hold in the Soviet Union. Under Stalin, it was the authoritarian components of Lenin's mixed legacy—the establishment of the Cheka in 1917, the accompanying decree giving the Bolsheviks control over all newsprint, and the Red Terror of 1918—that were continued and accentuated, while the democratic hopes earlier voiced under Lenin's *April Theses*, most particularly his cry 'all power to the Soviets!' were dashed. Within a relatively short period, the independent influence of the Soviets had been abolished and affairs of state came to rest entirely with the Politburo (which had originally been established to respond to questions requiring an urgent response). Propaganda and espionage were coordinated under the OGPU (*Obyedinyonnoye gosudarstvennoye politicheskoye upravleniye*), later transformed into the NKVD (*Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del*). Political opposition was eliminated from both ends of the political spectrum. Trotsky, Kamenev and Zinoviev were ejected from the Central Committee in 1927, and Bukharin two years later when he advocated a return to Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP).

Stripped back, Stalin's reformulation of Marxism-Leninism as 'socialism in one country' retained the traditional Marxist proposition that history was formed

through class struggle, that capitalism would eventually collapse through the weight of its internal contradictions, and that a revolutionary proletariat would one day lead the world to socialism. What changed was the manifest privileging of industrial progress over egalitarian ideals, with everything to be subordinated to the drive to turn Russia into a highly industrialized nation with up-to-date technology and a well-educated workforce. As noted by Fitzpatrick, when the NEP was dropped in favour of Stalin's First Five Year Plan (1928-32), the notion of 'backwardness' became 'a very important word in the Soviet Communist lexicon':

> It stood for everything that belonged to old Russia and needed to be changed in the name of progress and culture. Religion, a form of superstition, was backward. Peasant farming was backward. Small-scale private trade was backward … it was the Communists' task to turn backward, petty-bourgeois Russia into a socialist, urbanized industrialized giant with modern technology and a literate workforce. (Fitzpatrick, 1994, p. 15)

The devastations wrought on peasant farming and the established patterns of rural existence are at the centre of Platonov's *The Foundation Pit*. Here Platonov, who had worked as a land reclamation expert in outlying districts in the 1920s, describes how the peasants were burning their grains and eating their animals to prevent them from falling into the hands of the Party, and how the rural community of his novel had come to resemble a 'collective-farm orphanhood standing in the wind of the roads, with a pile of dead stock in the middle of them' (*The Foundation Pit*, p. 65).[13]

Stalin's terror was spread throughout society, with its victims including Kulaks, priests, private businessmen, and virtually anyone declared an 'enemy of the people'. It included three major phases: the forced collectivization of agriculture in the early years, the widespread use of police surveillance and interrogation in the urban centres in the middle of the decade, and the Great Purges of 1937-1938.

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[13] Stalin's industrializing drive produced real social and economic gains. Robert Service (2009, p. 191) notes that the proportion of males aged between nine and forty-nine able to read and write rose from forty per cent in 1897 to ninety-four per cent in 1939, that there was a dramatic rise in the number of schools and educational institutions, with workers and ex-peasants able to buy reading materials at minimal cost, and that the state provided multiple inexpensive recreational facilities, with each medium sized town having its own theatre; and the public spaces laid aside for families to enjoy leisure-time walks.

The Gulag is extensively represented in the Russian texts, for Stalin's forced labour camps were not hermetically sealed from the rest of society as were the Nazi Death Camps, but part of its social and political fabric. Anne Applebaum (2003, pp. xv-xvi) records how the meaning of Gulag expanded over time to include 'the Soviet repressive itself, the set of procedures that prisoners once called the "meat grinder": the arrests, the interrogations, the transport in unheated cattle cars, the forced labour, the destruction of families, the years spent in exile, the early and unnecessary deaths'.

In the fascist and communist nations, the State endeavoured to direct art, literature, film and theatre to its own purposes. In Italy, disciplinary powers were jointly invested in the Ministry for the Press and the Secret Police; in Germany, the Propaganda Ministry took control of all forms of written communication as well as public meetings, art, music, film and radio; in Russia, the secret police and the Union of Writers monitored and disciplined writers, with socialist realism enforced as the sole legitimate style from 1934 onward. These developments, more than any other, are essential to an understanding of the work of the selected texts. This is not just in the case of the Russian authors, who risked their lives and professional security in writing, but also more broadly in that both groups of writers, Russian and Western European, faced a political/ideological situation with the potential to undermine the centre of intellectual and artistic life. Hence in defending liberties in society at large, authors *thereby* defended fiction as they had come to know it; equally, in defending fiction they *thereby* defended social and political freedoms for society as a whole.

Totalitarianism: a contested but useful notion?

So far I have used the term 'totalitarianism' in a broad sense to refer to the centralization of state power, mass propaganda, the systematic deployment of the secret police, and the widespread use of terror. Most significantly, totalitarianism can be seen to involve ambitious cultural/ideological projects designed to recruit artists and writers to the purposes of the State (as will be further discussed in Chapter Four). However, there are significant disagreements in history and political science over the utility of the notion. Those arguing in favour of the concept concentrate on the invincibility of political power and the similarities

between the Stalinist and fascist regimes; those who argue against focus on the fractures, divisions and inefficiencies within the state machinery, citizens' actions in either complying or resisting, and the differences between the regimes. These contrasting interpretations are important both in modifying my global references to 'totalitarianism' and in raising the question of where the fictional texts stand on the broad spectrum of representations. A brief review follows.[14]

Hannah Arendt provides the foundational 'totalitarian' case for political science. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951/1967) she depicts totalitarianism as a monolithic form of political domination intent on imposing a prescribed pattern of thought, belief and behaviour on its subjects and eliminating all forms of diversity and dissent. In a metaphysical way, she gestures to its fanatical sense of purpose and claim to be the servant of history: 'it is the monstrous yet seemingly answerable claim of totalitarian rule that, far from being "lawless", it goes to the sources of authority from which positive laws receive their ultimate legitimation' (Arendt, 1951/1967, p. 460). On her analysis, the phenomenon differs from all other forms of political oppression, including 'despotism, tyranny and dictatorship', for:

> Whenever it came to power it developed entirely new political institutions and destroyed all social, legal and political institutions of the country … transformed the classes into masses, supplanted the party system, not by one-party dictatorships, but by a mass movement, shifted the centre of power from the army to the police, and established a foreign policy openly directed toward world domination. (Arendt, 1951/1967, p. 460)

Arendt's position is echoed in the contemporaneous accounts of 'totalitarian' authors such as Merle Fainsod (1953) and Leonard Schapiro (1960). Opposition to their views emerged from the mid-1960s onward, with critics underlining the political use of the notion in cold war rhetoric.[15] In a recent contribution, Slavoj Žižek (2011) contends that the theory of totalitarianism, as applied to the Stalinist regime, has always worked to guarantee the legitimacy of the liberal-democratic

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[14] In these discussions, comparisons are most often drawn between the Nazi and Stalinist regimes, with Mussolini's Italy seen as an authoritarian, but never fully 'totalitarian', state. Such arguments are made on the basis of Mussolini's economic, cultural and/or foreign policies (see in particular, Arendt 1951/1967). Hence when I refer to Italy's 'totalizing' ideology, I indicate the philosophical basis on which Italian fascism attempted to eradicate the distinction between public and private life, as noted above.

[15] For review and discussion of these earlier developments see Barber 1969 and Burrowes 1969.

hegemony. Even at its worst, he maintains, Stalinism had some vestige of an emancipatory potential. Abott Gleason (1995) similarly shows how the totalitarian notion has served a variety of political purposes in the West. His analysis traces the first formal development of the concept in the writings of Giovanni Gentile in the 1920s; its statist rendering in the work of Carl Schmitt, which was later abandoned in the 'totalizing' drive of the Nazi regime; and the popular usage of the term after the Second World War, where the concept enabled the hostility previously directed at Mussolini's Italy and Nazi Germany to be transferred to the Soviet Union.

From a different perspective, 'revisionist' historians argue against the absolutist thrust of the totalitarian hypothesis. Against totalizing depictions, they point to various inefficiencies in State machinery, levels of public acquiescence to centralizing controls, and the persistence of pockets of resistance throughout the populace (Geyer and Fitzpatrick, 2009). Gorlizki and Mommsen, for example, point out that in the Soviet Union there were a number of intersecting and competing organisations, including the Communist Party, the NKVD and the state cabinet, each with their own separate interests in education, culture, military affairs and the economy, and conclude that 'the Soviet political order was never a smoothly functioning "machine" as it has been portrayed in some versions of the totalitarian model' (2009, p. 84). The relationship between Lenin and Stalin's regime is also subject to considerable debate among contemporary historians, with some arguing that Stalinism was the natural and inevitable consequence of Lenin's actions (e.g. Pipes 1995), and others suggesting that there were several points when different paths could have been taken (e.g. Gill 2002). For Sheila Fitzpatrick (2000, p. 3), Stalinism is best understood as 'the complex of institutions, structures, and rituals that made up the habitat of *Homo Sovieticus* in the Stalin era'. Here she includes:

> Communist Party rule, Marxist-Leninist ideology, rampant bureaucracy, leader cults, state control over production and distribution, social engineering, affirmative action on behalf of workers, stigmatization of 'class enemies', police surveillance, terror, and the various informal arrangements whereby people at every level sought to protect themselves and obtain scarce goods. (Fitzpatrick, 2000, p. 3)

Significantly for my purposes, a number of theorists now argue for the incorporation of elements of both the totalitarian and revisionist approaches. Robert Service (2009, pp. vii-viii) suggests we need an interpretation that brings together the 'red in tooth and claw' nature of Stalinism and the 'insubordination and chaos' that accompanied its 'harshly imposed hierarchy' Accompanying this, there is a resigned acceptance of the utility of the totalitarian notion. John Connelly (2011, p. 819) describes it as a 'defunct theory, useful word', reflecting that 'despite our best efforts, we never get beyond it' while Michael Geyer (2009, p. 2) reflects that it is 'deeply imbued in how historians grapple with and understand the two regimes'. And some time ago, Fitzpatrick reflected that:

> Ten or twelve years ago it was very useful to reflect that the model had an inherent bias and did not explain everything about Soviet society. Now… it is possibly more useful to point out that there were some things about Soviet society that it explained very well. (Fitzpatrick, 1986, pp. 410-11)

How far and in what ways are these differences of interpretation reflected in the selected texts? In approximate terms, Zamyatin, Orwell and Koestler can be said to follow a 'totalitarian' track, capturing the momentous nature of events but not their complexity. Silone's *Bread and Wine* is more qualified, pointing to the devastating effects of totalizing ideologies, whether fascist or communist. In partial contrast, and written directly under the political minutiae of Stalin's control, *The Foundation Pit* and *The Master and Margarita* describe a chaotic present in which many of the ingredients described by the revisionists—party rule, ideology, bureaucracy, leader cults, police surveillance, terror, and the struggle to survive—combine in an unpredictable and alarming fashion. In these accounts the irrationality, unpredictability and contingent nature of institutional power is almost more daunting than the workings of a well-oiled machine. Different again, Solzhenitsyn and Grossman's novels record specific events, describing how individuals variously comply, resist and actively co-operate in events. Their novels, above all, illustrate the blurred boundaries between the inner and outer zones of terror.

I end this part of the discussion with a caveat: the great majority of the authors were unlikely to have thought of themselves as writing in a 'counter-totalitarian' cause in the general political sense of the term. Platonov and Bulgakov were

writing before the notion had any general salience; Solzhenitsyn focused on developments in the Soviet Union, and did not generalize about their implications; Grossman, who travelled through the occupied zones, was alone among the Russian authors to speculate on the resemblances between Soviet and European developments. While the Western European authors were more concerned with totalitarianism as a political phenomenon, it was only Orwell who consistently talked about totalitarianism itself, declaring that:

> Every serious line of work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism as I understand it. (Orwell, 1946a/2000, p. 5)

And Orwell, of course, has had a profound influence on how we have come to understand the nature of the totalitarian phenomenon. This brings me to the problematic relationship between history, text and fiction: an issue that has a lateral connection with the artistic/political relationship and cries out for attention.

History, text and fiction

Under the New Historicism (Greenblatt, 2005) and various forms of deconstruction (Barthes, 1967/1981), the lines between the historical and the fictional are redrawn so that the one is seen as an artefact of the other, and the difference between fiction as imaginative reconstruction and history as discipline is dissolved. Thus Barthes asks whether history, 'bound to the standards of the "real", and justified by the principles of "rational" exposition",' can really be distinguished from 'imaginary narration, as we find it in the epic, the novel, and the drama' (Barthes, 1967/1981, p. 261, cited by White, 1984, p. 12). This allows him to foreclose on any attempt to distinguish between the historical and the fictional, for he can dismiss any such move on the grounds that it fails to see that historical 'reality' is purely a matter of textual construction. Responding to this is important for my purposes, for if the historical real is simply a discursive construction, then neither history as discipline nor the novel as a creative genre can say something 'true' about the nature of historical circumstances, a point I wish to resist.

I take my lead from the arguments of Paul Ricoeur as expressed in *Memory, History and Forgetting* (2004). Like Hayden White (1973, 1984), Ricoeur

acknowledges that there is no form of historical knowledge that can lay claim to be definitive or absolute, for our understanding is always/already infused with the narrative symbols through which we seek to reconstruct the past. At the same time, he argues for the conceptual and ethical importance of retaining a sense of 'what really happened'. On this basis he makes a 'truth claim' for history and memory, arguing that 'there could be no good use of memory if there were no aspect of truth. So in a sense "what really happened" must keep concerning us' (Ricoeur, 1999a, p. 11). But fiction, Ricoeur reminds us, cannot follow imagination wherever it wants to go, for it, like history, needs to narrate events in a manner that draws on reality and makes sense of things. Fiction and history, he says, 'each concretize their respective intentionalities only by borrowing from the intentionality of the other' (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 559).

His qualification is important, most particularly in the case of historical fiction, which has an evident line of responsibility to the historical record. We expect an author to 'get the facts right' (in so far as they are subject to historical determination) and to recognize well-founded historical interpretations: hence a book is charged with failing *as a novel* if it is misleading in important historical respects. Further, and as the furore over Helen Demidenko's *The Hand that Signed the Paper* illustrates, if an author of fiction makes an implicit or explicit claim for the credibility of a work on the basis of their experience and/or identity, they cannot later rescue that work on the grounds that it is 'only fiction' should those claims turn out to be false.[16] Thus when Robert Manne (1995, p. 26) accuses Demidenko of being unable to 'distinguish between fact and fiction, truth and falsity', he is concerned with what might be called the internal veracity or 'truth' of the novel. This notion persists even in the case of a non-realist text. So when Geyer (2009, p. 4) complains that Orwell contributes to the image of Stalinism as an 'ideologically driven, mind-altering police state', he voices the same kind of

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[16] Helen Demidenko is in fact Helen Darville. Her novel *The Hand that Signed the Paper*, published to great acclaim in Australia, tells the story of a Ukrainian family trying to survive the Stalinist purges, while also indirectly implicating Jewish communities in their own persecution. Darville falsely claimed to be the daughter of Ukrainian parents, saying that the book was based on the accounts of recorded interviews with her own relatives. The book was awarded the Miles Franklin Award in 1995 before the deception was revealed.

criticism as he might have levelled at a historical text: namely, that Orwell has got it *wrong*.

But what, more precisely, is the nature of the 'truth' that is invested in a historical account and how might it be distinguished from that of fiction? As classically advanced in nineteenth century historiography, the truth of a historical interpretation is established through the 'correct application of the historical method' where it needs to be 'justified by the facts' and 'square with the story related in the narrative part of the discourse' (White, 1984, pp. 2-3). As White argues, the problem lies in the claim that the historian 'finds' the 'real' history from pre-existing facts, rather than *creating* history through selecting certain facts and arranging them in a particular way in order to tell a particular story. In elaborating on this in his *Metahistory* (1973), White maintains that historians draw on western narratives through telling certain kinds of stories (romance, satire, comedy or tragedy), filtering their account through different ideologies (conservative, liberal, radical and anarchist), and expressing their views through the use of one or more 'poetic tropes' (synecdoche, metaphor, metonymy, irony).

But even granted that no absolute distinction between fiction and history can be drawn, the question of their differences persists, for to neglect this is to ignore the particular things that each one can do that the other cannot. On this, I suggest that if history's archetypal form of truth resides in its capacity to make use of the archive in a credible and consistent way (that is, on the basis of the criteria of correspondence and coherence), the novel's belongs to its capacity to portray historical phenomena in a way that 'rings true' to the internal reality of our subjective worlds. This is particularly important when revealing the human consequences of trauma, for, as Ricoeur (2004, p. 559) observes, 'horror' is not itself a 'historical category', and it is only the power of a literary imagination that can 'give eyes to the horrified narrator'. Illustrating this evocative capacity, *Everything Flows* describes how at the end of the Ukraine famine:

> The children had heads heavy as cannon balls; thin little necks like necks of storks; and on their arms and legs you could see every bone. … By the spring they no longer had any faces at all. Some had the heads of birds with a little beak. (*Everything Flows*, pp. 130-1)

There is also the novel's capacity to re-create the historical record through the experiences and memories of its characters. Commenting on this, David Lodge (2002, pp. 13-14) argues that while historiography can provide real insights into selected lives, 'the more scientific the method, the more scrupulous it is in basing all its assertions on evidence, the less able it is to represent the density of those events as consciously experienced'. In contrast, the novel 'creates fictional models of what it is like to be a human being moving through time and space' (Lodge, 2002, p. 14). Thus, for example, in *Cancer Ward* Kostoglotov speaks to the loneliness of the exiled when he says:

> Soon it will be summer, and this summer I want to sleep on a camp bed under the stars, to wake up at night and know by the positions of Cygnus and Pegasus what time it is, to live just this one summer and see the stars without their being blotted out by camp searchlights – and then I would be quite happy never to wake again. (*Cancer Ward*, 1971, p. 319)

But there is more than this too, for fiction also speaks its truths through the fantastic, the satirical and the ironic. In *We*, for example, Zamyatin creates OneState, a glass city where the citizens 'walk the same as always, a thousand heads with two fused, integrated legs, with two integrated arms, swinging wide' (p. 121) and Bulgakov has Woland's visit to Moscow stand as a lasting joke against the compulsory atheism of Soviet society. This, I will argue, represents a very particular way of speaking 'truth' to power: always oblique, and yet, at the same time, strangely evident and always compelling.

Such representations—realist, metaphorical and satirical—provide the foundations for my study. My premise is that the actuality of the historical—its power to command, compel and kill—imposes both a political and an artistic imperative on the texts. Politically, works need to voice their countervailing truths in as compelling and convincing way as possible; artistically, they need to find imaginative and resonating ways of confronting the devastations of power. It is against this background that I interrogate the art/politics problematic, probing how far its abstractions can respond to the dense and demanding nature of an always historically-situated relationship.

Structure of thesis

To return to my starting point: in exploring the counter-totalitarian literature, I am interested in the nature of the challenges, difficulties and opportunities involved in giving the artistic a political voice, and in how various literary/political combinations might shape our own perceptions as 'ordinary' readers. I have intimated that the complexity of these matters, central to an understanding of the nature of the literary/political enterprise, is obscured when form is divorced from content; the creative role of the author is bypassed in favour of the autonomous productivity of texts; and—as I shall argue in the next chapter—in many if not most of the theoretical abstractions surrounding the arts/politics problematic. Against this, I aim to contribute to a grounded understanding of the artistic/political relationship through a close consideration of the selected texts in all the specificity of their historical and political circumstances.

I reiterate that I approach this issue as both a 'generalist' and an 'ordinary' reader, hoping to knit together a complex story across a broad literary and political canvass. As acknowledged, an in-depth account of the individual texts is sadly lacking, with my study riding on the insights of scholars who have spent years studying the depths and complexities of the selected texts, with this being particularly the case in relation to the early Russian authors. My attention, as I have said, concerns the underlying relationship between the artistic and the political as different imperatives, where I explore the dynamics of their intersections and ponder if there are qualities that might unite the texts across their differences, thus illuminating how the artistic and the political might come to resonate across time and space.

In part this is an open inquiry, reflecting on the nature of the political and philosophical themes circulating in the novels, exploring how these are given a literary voice, and speculating on how various political/literary combinations might influence a work's capacity to attract and sustain the lively interest of readers. A considerable proportion of the study is thus dedicated to exposition, that is, to the exploration and illustration of just how the texts do their artistic/political work. At the same time, the thesis is also an *argument*: an argument against *ex-cathedra* statements, an argument against binary oppositions,

and an argument against the assumption that a political discourse is necessarily antithetical to the artistic life of a text.

This interlocking sequence of exposition and argument unfolds over the course of the thesis. Chapter Two focuses on the art/politics problematic, expanding on the issues raised earlier in this discussion; Chapter Three explains how I intend to draw on Bakhtin's work, expanding on the perplexities as well as the richness of his insights. At the end of this chapter, I have a rich foundation on which to approach the texts, and several unanswered questions, with these centred on Bakhtin's notions of unfinalizability, polyphony and a polyphonic truth. Following that, I discuss the novels in four bands, each representing a different set of responses to different political and literary circumstances. Chapter Four considers *The Foundation Pit* and *The Master and Margarita* as examples of works produced in the early to mid-Stalinist period; Chapter Five takes *Bread and Wine*, *Darkness at Noon* and *Animal Farm* as representatives of texts responding to the ideological crisis facing the European Left; Chapter Six reflects on *In The First Circle*, *Cancer Ward* and *Everything Flows* as part of the dissenting literature in the immediate post-Stalinist period; Chapter Seven compares *We* and *Ninety Eighty-Four* as examples of manifestly dystopian works. The final chapter draws the threads together and offers a series of suggestions about the qualities and dynamics of the artistic/political relationship.

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Two
Contested territory: art and politics

The great novelists are philosophical novelists; that is, the contrary of thesis-writers. (Albert Camus, 1955/2000, p. 92)

The novelist's universe would lack depth if it were not discovered in a movement to transcend it. (Jean-Paul Sartre, 1948/2001, p. 45)

There is a significant difference in emphasis in these two citations: Camus wants the novel to raise far-reaching philosophical issues; Sartre desires it to transcend the universe as currently known. Such differences form the theoretical background to my study: the point of my departure and the place to which I return in concluding. This chapter sketches the contours of this highly contested terrain, concentrating on those perspectives that have most influenced my approach. The discussion falls into four parts. First, a brief exposition of the underlying problematic, particularly as relates to the novel; second, detailed attention to Milan Kundera's (1988, 1996, 2007) extended case against the politicized novel; third, a review of the wider debate on politically committed art; fourth, an explanation of the reasons for my own approach. I do not attempt any full exposition of the views involved, all of which trail a long history behind them, but simply flag their implications for my reading of the selected texts. As an epilogue to the chapter, I describe the 1966 trial of the Russian authors Yuri Daniel and Andrei Sinyavsky, a historic event that speaks to the shaping powers of fiction and the courage and conviction of the authors.[1]

The underlying problematic

That there is seen to be a tension between the artistic and the political in the first instance owes itself to their juxtaposition as two different forms of epistemology or logic. Illustrating this, Marten van Delden and Yvon Grenier (2012, p. 5) suggest that an artistic logic is characterized by its 'keenness to cultivate various

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[1] In setting parameters around the study, I distinguish the art/politics debate from the related argument as to whether or not art can/should serve a morally educative purpose, where the Formalists early challenged the ethically oriented positions of authors such as Leo Tolstoy (1898/1996) and Mathew Arnold (1869/2009). For contemporary discussions of the issue, see Booth 1988, Carey 2006, Jansen 2015, Nussbaum 1990 and Krapp 2002, among many others.

kinds of ambivalence' and by 'its welcome of the paradoxes that result from the simultaneous consideration of multiple views, sentiments and perspectives'. In contrast, a political logic 'shuns irresolution and ambivalence', favours 'fairly symmetrical and impervious narratives', and tends to look for 'closure [and] action … rather than purely reflective or contemplative activities' (p. 3). Similarly, Anne Surma (2012, p. 5) suggests that while the aim of an 'art text' is to 'explore ideas and questions relating to the complexity of human experiences, actions, events and their interaction', that of a 'political text' is to 'offer singular answers to how best to interpret and manage those experiences, actions, events and their interaction'. Critically, Surma (2012, p. 5) also problematizes the distinction, arguing that 'notwithstanding their different cultural positioning, some kind of interplay between producer, text, reader … is common to both'.

The close intermeshing of the artistic and the political is integral to the novel as a literary form, given its grounding in its social and political circumstances. This by virtue of its origins: Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* has its hero reading so much about chivalry that he sets out to revive it; written just over a century later, Jonathon Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) can be read as a satirical account of European government and much else besides. However, I submit that the potential tension between the artistic and the political as contrasting epistemologies is likely to be most marked in works with a specifically political *content,* where I refer broadly to the circulation of power and ideology, with all of their implications for our personal, social and political lives. [2] This is because in speaking about such matters we tend to speak about them in a political *kind of way*: that is, we set priorities, examine values, and suggest that the world should be ordered according to particular principles. In consequence, a political logic inescapably enters the artistic fabric of the text, influencing how ideas are presented and characters are portrayed, with this exposing authors to an inherently unsettled, and always-contested, domain.

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[2] In establishing an approximate territory for the political novel, I follow Howe's (1957/2002, p. 17) description of it as one in which 'political ideas play a dominant role or in which the political milieu is the dominant setting … or a novel which permits this assumption without thereby suffering any radical distortion'.

In building on the insights of van Delden and Grenier, I position the artistic and the political as 'imperatives', with this corresponding to, but expanding, their notion of the two as distinct 'logics'. In this respect, I point to their inner energy, their driving forces, whereby the artistic represents the push towards creativity and expressing something in and for itself, and the political, the urge for commitment, for settling around particular values, views and priorities, with literary expression being largely a means to an end. Under this construction, there is a productive tension between the two elements, with the 'in-itself' of creativity pulling in an opposite direction to the 'for something else' of commitment. On these grounds, I continue to recognize the tension between the artistic and the political, but also signal their potential complementarity: something that van Delden and Grenier fully reveal during the course of their arguments and the depth of situated detail that characterizes their *Gunshots at their Fiesta* (2012).

Implications for the novel

The counter-totalitarian literature provides a particularly rich source for exploring the implications of the art/politics dynamic, for in defending social, political and intellectual freedoms, it protects the conditions on which the novel, as we have come to know it, depends. There is, then, a certain necessity to its literary/political enterprise; something that the novel must do if it is to survive. Put another way, if the sentiment underlying Victor Cousin's *'l'art pour l'art'* is to have any practical force, there needs to be an *actual* political-literary configuration in which authors have the freedom to practice their arts and readers the freedom to read and debate as they see fit.[3] At the same time, the tension underlying Cousin's aphorism—whereby the creative and singular properties of art are channelled into a more systematic and purposeful form—persists. This is something authors have to actively negotiate, with their efforts always raising questions as to how far the artistic and the political can successfully speak to each other, or alternately, might

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[3] Grenier (2006, p. 13) observes that 'if a correlation exists between literature and freedom, the novel and non-authoritarian politics, it involves not so much the writer's political dispositions but the conditions of literary production themselves, at the center of which one finds some of the fundamental conditions for freedom itself: imagination, conversation, and criticism.'

dissolve into a form of literary didacticism in which something essential about artistic practice appears to have been distorted or lost.

The tension at the core of the enterprise is accentuated by the fact that the novel's traditions both invoke, even require, a response to monolithic domination, while also circumscribing the terms and conditions on which this response can be made. In concluding his 2011 Jerusalem Prize acceptance speech, Ian McEwan said:

> A novel, of course, is not merely a book, a physical object of pages and covers, but a particular kind of mental space, a place of exploration, of investigation into human nature. … Let me repeat -- the novel as a literary form was born out of curiosity about and respect for the individual. Its traditions impel it towards pluralism, openness, a sympathetic desire to inhabit the minds of others. (McEwan, 2011, np)

If we set McEwan's views against Arendt's (1951/1967, p. 464) description of totalitarianism as a system aimed at 'the destruction of plurality, and the reduction of the infinite differentiation of human beings to a single purpose or I', the novel is counter-totalitarian by virtue of its literary form. The irony is that these same attributes circumscribe the extent to which authors can assert a countervailing ideology and/or use characters as their own political or moral servants. Addressing precisely this point, Bullock observes that:

> Just as the novel resists the utopian instinct … so too does it refuse to offer a coherent philosophy of its own … for to do so would be merely to replicate in inverse form the black and white premises of utopianism, and therefore fall victim to an identical didacticism. (Bullock, 2011, p. 94)

Silone speaks to the difficulties in the 'Author's Note' to the revised version of *Bread and Wine.* Here he explains that he had originally written his novel '*ex abundantia cordis*' immediately following the invasion of Abyssinia and during the Moscow trials, when his 'state of mind' was more inclined to 'overemphasis, sarcasm and melodrama than calm narration'. He continues:

> Should I now mention the lessons that it seems to me I have learned? The first is that a writer with a strong sense of social responsibility is more exposed than anyone else to the temptation of overemphasis, of the theatrical and romantic, and of a purely external description of things and facts, while in every work of literature the only thing that matters is *the interior life of the individual*. Another thing that has grown in me in the course of years is an aversion to all forms of propaganda. (Silone 1960/2000, pp. 179-80, my emphasis).

Silone subsequently revised the text to make it truer to fiction as he saw it. Should he have written differently in the first place? Hard to say; his regrets were voiced some twenty-five years after he first wrote *Bread and Wine*, a work that reflected the political circumstances of its times and cannot be extracted from them. But my underlying thesis is that any such question is itself misplaced; that it is better to desist from evaluating texts from the vantage point of either 'Literature' or 'Critique' and from the outset to see them as artistic/political composites, with all the dense and tangled intersections that this implies. In taking this position, I come up against Kundera's extended case against the politically assertive novel: a set of arguments with which I am in silent conversation throughout this thesis.

Milan Kundera

Essentially Kundera argues that by asserting a particular truth, the novel undermines its fundamental difference with authoritarian discourse. For him, the novel is 'the imaginary paradise of individuals … the territory where no one possesses the truth, neither Anna nor Karenin, but where everyone has the right to be understood, both Anna and Karenin' (1988, p. 159). Further:

> The incompatibility between the novel and totalitarianism is deeper than the one that separates a dissident from an apparatchik, or a human-rights campaigner from a torturer, because it is not only political or moral but ontological. By which I mean: the world of one single Truth and the relative ambiguous world of the novel are moulded of entirely different substances. (Kundera, 1988, p. 26)

It is on this 'ontological' basis that Kundera takes his stand against the explicitly political or 'committed' novel. Elaborating on this, he describes how during the terror in Czechoslovakia, the only thing he 'deeply avidly wanted, was a lucid, unillusioned eye' (1995, p. 106). He found this in the 'art of the novel':

> [This offers] an outlook, a wisdom, a position; a position that would rule out any identification with any politics, any religion, any ideology, any moral doctrine, any group; a considered, stubborn, furious *non-identification*, conceived not as evasion or passivity, but as resistance, defiance, rebellion. (Kundera, 1995, p. 156, original emphasis)

For Kundera (1995, p. 7) the novel's refusal to pass moral judgement does not represent 'the immorality of the novel, but its *morality*' (original emphasis). On this point, he argues that in contrast with the 'so-called philosophical novel' typified by its subjugation to 'moral or political ideas':

> Authentic novelistic thought is always unsystematic; undisciplined; it is similar to Nietzsche's; it is experimental; it forces rifts in all the idea systems that surround us; it explores (particularly through its characters) all lines of thought by attempting to follow each one to its end. (Kundera, 1995, p. 172)

Kundera (1995, p. 173) contends that conviction is the enemy of the novel, for it represents 'a thought that has come to a stop, that has congealed'. Hence a novelist must 'systematically desystematize his thought, kick at the barricade that he himself has erected around his thought'; Nietzsche, he maintains, is the model for philosophy, as his work represents 'not epistemology, not aesthetic or ethics, the phenomenology of mind or the critique of reason etc., but *everything human*' (p. 173, original emphasis). Elaborating on this matter, Grenier (2006, p. 3) suggests that:

> For Kundera, the point is not to separate completely the novel (and conceivably art in general) from politics. … In fact, politics is especially deserving of being "penetrated" and "unmasked" since it is the realm where reductive ideology and propaganda flourish. … The novelist speaks about politics, but from a higher position than politics, one that never fails to surround politics with its broader and more meaningful cultural context. (Grenier, 2006, p. 3)

What is the particular viewpoint of the novelist according to Kundera? Above all, it is an essentially inquiring and hypothetical frame of mind, or, as Grenier (2006, p. 5) puts it, the novelist is 'an "explorer of existence" rather than a prophet or a historian'. Precisely because the novelist is not 'longing for final solutions', Kundera conceives the novel 'as intrinsically incompatible with authoritarianism, especially in its most radical form: totalitarianism' (Grenier, 2006, p. 5). The corresponding notion of the novelist as one who is *not* political—or is somehow *outside* the political—is core to Kundera's sense of identity, on which he records that he has encountered many 'odd conversations':

> 'Are you a communist, Mr Kundera?' 'No, I am a novelist.' 'Are you a dissident?' No, I am a novelist.' 'Are you on the Left or the Right?' 'Neither, I am a novelist.' (Kundera, 1995, p. 156)

Kundera strongly objects to the politicized reading of texts, recording how he 'deeply, violently, detests those who look for a position—political, philosophical, religious, whatever—in a work of art rather than searching in it in an effort to know, to understand, to grasp this or that aspect of reality' (Kundera, 1995, p. 91).

This is closely related to his critique of western readings of the literature of Eastern Europe, where he declares that:

> If you cannot view the art that comes to you from Prague, Budapest or Warsaw in any other way than this wretched political code, you murder it, no less brutally than the work of Stalinist dogmatists. And you are quite unable to hear its true voice. The importance of this art does not lie in the fact that it pillories this or that political regime, but that, on the strength of social and human experience of a kind people here in the West cannot imagine, it offers new testimony about mankind. (Kundera, 1977, p. 6l; cited by Lodge, 1990, p. 159) [4]

When a participant in a panel discussion referred to *The Joke* as a 'major indictment of Stalinism', Kundera retorted 'spare me your Stalinism, please. *The Joke* is a love story' (cited by Lodge, 1990, p. 159). But Kundera, of course, cannot control how his works will be read and interpreted: texts have a life independent of their authors, and, as Grenier (2006, p. 3) comments, many of Kundera's novels 'can be effortlessly interpreted as political novels'. The result, 'is an oeuvre in which the tension between the intent of the author and the "intention of the text" yields a fruitful and stimulating ambiguity for both social scientists and literary critics' (Grenier, 2006, p. 3).

Kundera's critique of the politicized novel leads to his thoroughgoing condemnation of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. 'Orwell's novel', he proclaims, 'is firmly closed to poetry; did I say novel? It is political thought disguised as a novel' (1995, p. 222). He concedes that Orwell's thinking 'is certainly lucid and correct', but nevertheless maintains that 'Orwell's situations and characters are as a flat as a poster', unable to throw light on the 'human situation' (p. 222). In considering whether *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 'might at least be justified as a popularization of good ideas', he returns a resounding negative arguing that 'ideas turned into a novel function no longer as ideas but as a novel instead, and in the case of *1984*, as a bad novel, with all the pernicious influence that a bad novel can

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[4] Varlam Shalamov says something strikingly similar of *Kolyma Tales*: 'my writing is no more about camps than St-Exupéry's is about the sky or Melville's about the sea. My stories are basically advice to an individual on how to act in a crowd... [To be] not just further to the left than the left, but also more real than reality itself. For blood to be true and nameless.' (http://shalamov.ru/en/)

exert' (p. 223). Quite what this 'pernicious influence' represents, and in what respects it is exercised by *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, is left unsaid.[5]

In maintaining that 'experimental thinking conjugates with uncertainty, polyphony, and perpetual quest' and 'ideologies connect to truth, dogma, and final judgment' (Grenier, 2006, p. 6), Kundera has much in common with Bakhtin. The problem is that he makes his case by reducing the political to partisan debate, and, as Grenier (2006, p. 14) comments, forgets that politics as 'as a dimension of human experience to be reflected upon' can be subject to 'sophisticated and detailed comments and investigation'. Further, he collapses his definitional and evaluative criteria, turns his preferences into prescriptions, and imposes his own set of rules on a genre that he positions as outside the pernicious influence of rule-making. Most problematically, his views are based on a dualistic view of art and politics, where the assertions of a didactic politics are placed in sharp contrast with the imaginative creativity of art, allowing little or no room for their creative interaction,

At this point, I leave Kundera for the longstanding debate on politically committed art, where protagonists variously query whether the political and the artistic can intersect in a compelling and lively way, or, alternatively, stand to contradict and undermine each other. In elaborating on these issues, I compare the 'committed' positions of Jean-Paul Sartre (1948/2001) and Bertolt Brecht (1949/1964) with the 'distanced' readings of Theodor Adorno (1970/2004, 1973/2007) and Jacques Rancière (2010, 2011). While I benefit from each side of the debate, I take issue with the abstracted and prescriptive nature of the arguments, their distance from the practices of authors and readers, and their dislocation from the social and political circumstances in which texts originate and take on their significance.

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[5] As noted in Chapter One, Orwell's counter to Kundera can found in his essay 'Why I Write' where he explains that he writes aesthetically, feeling strongly about prose style and taking pleasure in 'solid objects and scraps of useless information', but also *politically*, with his starting point 'always a feeling of partisanship, a sense of injustice' (1946a/2000pp. 5-6).

The art/politics debate

On behalf of political committed art: Sartre and Brecht

As a founding member of *Les Temps Modernes,* Sartre used its initial issue (October, 1945) to argue that literature's failure to engage at a political level was tantamount to supporting the status quo. He expanded on this in a series of essays published under the title *What is Literature*? (1948/2001). Making the case that the 'aesthetic imperative' is simultaneously a 'moral' one, he starts with a problematic distinction between prose and poetry. The poet 'sees words inside out as if he did not share the human condition' (p. 6). In contrast, in prose:

> Words are not first of all objects but designations for objects; it is not first of all a matter of knowing whether they please or displease in themselves, but whether they correctly indicate a certain thing or certain notion. (Sartre, 1948/2001, p. 6)

Sartre then argues that the 'committed' writer is one who 'knows that words are action' and who understands that 'to reveal is to change, and that one can reveal only by planning to change' (p. 14). Taking an extreme view, he contends that 'there are only good and bad novels' and that what distinguishes one from the other is not artistic merit but ethical purpose: 'the bad novel aims to please by flattering, whereas the good one is an exigence and an act of faith' (p. 47). Acknowledging that the impact of a text ultimately depends on the act of reading, 'without which there are only black marks on paper' (p. 29), Sartre proposes that:

> To write is thus to both disclose the world and to offer it as a task to the generosity of the reader … but as the real world is changed only by action, as one can feel oneself in it only by exceeding to in order to change it, the novelist's universe would lack depth if it were not discovered in a movement to transcend it. (Sartre, 1948/2001, p. 45)

For Sartre, the aims of writing and reading should thus be moral rather than aesthetic, with this 'rising above' the varied pleasures and frustrations that both may bring. While his fundamental support for political commitment would make him sympathetic to the endeavours of the selected authors, his assertion that the act of writing should transcend the universe as currently known cannot respond to their more grounded concerns. I wonder, for example, how he would reply to Ivan Grigoryevich when he says 'I used to think freedom was freedom of speech, freedom of press, freedom of conscience … but freedom is the same whether you

are a locksmith or a steelworker or an artist—freedom is the right to live and work as you wish and not as you are ordered to' (*Everything Flows*, p. 84).

Brecht, writing contemporaneously with Sartre, similarly collapses the artistic and the political. 'For art to be unpolitical,' he insists, 'means only to ally itself with the "ruling" group' (1949/1964, p. 196). More than Sartre, he attempts to translate his political principles into an artistic practice. Commenting on this, Douglas Kellner (nd) draws attention to the influence of Karl Korsch, who Brecht referred to as 'my Marxist teacher'. Korsch, who was one of the first intellectuals to be thrown out of the Communist Party for deviating from the Party line, stressed the historically distinct and specific features of bourgeois society together with the development of a method that allowed these to be analysed as distinct social formations. Consequently, Brecht's plays centre on a specific environment or period, illustrating how its features shape, assault and destroy its characters (for example, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle, The Threepenny Opera* and *Mother Courage*). His main innovation, the 'estrangement' effect (*verfremdungseffekt*) aims to break the illusion of theatre and prevent audiences from self-identifying with the characters by disclosing and making obvious its artistic techniques. For Brecht:

> The artist's objective is to appear strange and even surprising to the audience. He achieves this by looking strangely at himself and his work … the aim of this technique, known as the alienation effect, is to make the spectator adopt an attitude of inquiry and criticism to the incident. (Brecht, 1949/1964, p.136)

Estrangement is often linked to the Russian formalists' *ostranenie*. Etymologically, the two notions—*Verfremdungseffekt* and *ostranenie*—are commonly grounded in the 'strange' (*'fremd'* in the German term and *'stranyi'* in the Russian). Further, both involve distancing the viewer/reader from the play/text, prolonging Viktor Shklovsky's 'process of perception' (1917/1988, p. 20). But there the resemblances end, and the differences are significant. For the Formalists, defamiliarization is an artistic end in itself, the means by which the 'process of perception is slowed' and we come to apprehend 'a stone as stony' (Shklovsky, 1917/1988, p. 20). For Brecht, estrangement is first and foremost a

political strategy, designed to distance the audience from the play *in order that* they will grasp the structural issues involved and be moved to political action.

So, and as with Sartre, we see the subordination of art to a designated political/ethical purpose. Brecht's stance is the more puzzling as he was well aware of the enforcement of socialist realism in the Soviet Union and had to struggle with its implications for playwrights as he did with the more general trajectory of political developments under Stalin. In both his and Sartre's formulations, there is little appreciation of the dictatorial logic of the aesthetic/political collapse, nor of the highly varied ways in which artistic/political combinations may shape our consciousness. Theirs are essentially *directives* for artistic/political practice, not observations on how, and with what effects, artworks are created in particular political and social circumstances. It is with the purpose-driven nature of their accounts that their contemporary, Adorno, takes issue.

The case against commitment: Adorno and Rancière

A leading member of the Frankfurt School, Adorno sees modernity, with its indefatigable drive to rationalization, standardization and conformity, as the ultimate cause of domination and oppression, whether in its state-capitalist, fascist or Soviet manifestations (Jay, 1984). Under these conditions, art can best resist by *not* having a purpose: 'in so far as a social function can be predicated from works of art, it is their functionless' (Adorno 1970/2004, p. 297). Adorno argues that contemporary artists, while largely free of the systems of religious and aristocratic patronage of earlier epochs, have become subject to a 'culture industry' that produces standardized cultural goods, leading to mass stupefaction and docility. Hence if they are to preserve the distinctiveness of their work, they need to stand back from political critique and concentrate on developing the 'truth content' ('*Wahrheitsgehalt*') of art, a complex notion based on the internal dialectic between form and content, where the work illuminates the core of the human tragedy as experienced in the here and now, while leaving matters practically unchanged: 'art has truth as the semblance of the illusionless' (Adorno, 1970/2004, p. 132).

While his theoretical position means he is pessimistic about this happening, Adorno sees opportunities in the avant-garde, dissonant and disruptive, arguing that these are able to disturb convention and follow their own patterns and rhythms. In literature, he favours Kafka and Beckett; in poetry, Celan; in music, Schoenberg. Their works, he argues, so thoroughly expose their own internal contradictions that they force readers/viewers to contemplate the hidden contradictions in society at large; a quality he describes as 'the artfulness of all anti-art' (1970/2004, p. 39). The point here is obscurity: audiences must be left with a profound uncertainty as to the reality of things, they cannot be directed, as in Brecht's case, to the underlying patterns as perceived by the author.

Adorno reserves his specific criticisms of Sartre and Brecht for an essay entitled 'Commitment' (1973/2007). Here he contends that 'all that remains' in Sartre's form of engagement is 'the abstract authority of a choice enjoined, with no regard for the fact that the possibility of choosing depends on what can be chosen' (Adorno, 1973/2007, p. 180). Further, Sartre's works are 'bad models of his own existentialism, because they display in their respect for truth the whole administered world his philosophy ignores: the lesson we learn from them is one of unfreedom' (p. 180). Adorno is kinder to Brecht, seeing him as 'more consistent than Sartre and a greater artist', and as endeavouring to 'translate the true hideousness of society into theatrical appearance, by dragging it straight out of its camouflage' (pp. 182-3). Nevertheless, he maintains that Brecht's elevation of 'the didactic play as an artistic principle' means that the 'primacy of lesson over form … became a formal device itself' (p. 184). Most critically, his 'didactic poetics' with their rejection of 'artistic individuation' obscure the very political truth they seek to demonstrate, for this truth 'involves innumerable meditations, which Brecht disdains' (p. 184).[6]

Adorno's case against didacticism is convincing. However, his position on the 'purposelessness' of art depends on his critique of capitalism under conditions of late modernity, where authors are relatively free to express their views, even if

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[6] Instructively, Adorno also criticizes Brecht for his failure to be more openly critical of Stalinism: 'for what he justified was not simply, as he long sincerely believed, an incomplete socialism, but a coercive domination in which blindly irrational social forces returned to work once again' (p. 187).

this is to assert the right of *not* having a purpose. Hence he cannot properly respond to the circumstances confronting the Russian authors, where the right to speak is itself in jeopardy. Further, his marked preference for the obscure neglects the variety of ways in which art can provoke and compel, and how these are embedded in the historical context in which a work is produced. So, for the purposes of this study, we have the 'foundation' but not the 'solution' to an understanding of the density of the art/politics problematic.

From the early 1960s, the move to poststructuralism challenged the meta-narratives associated with the respective positions of Sartre and Brecht. This did not so much erase the arts/politics debate as recast it in a different key, with Rancière being one of the most widely cited (post-Marxist) theorists in the contemporary context. Originally a student of Althusser's and later a critic of his pessimistic reductionism, Rancière argues that:

> Political art is an in-between notion that is vacuous as an aesthetic notion and also as a political notion. It can be said that an artist is committed as a person, and possibly that he is committed by his writings, his paintings, his films, which contribute to a certain type of political struggle. An artist can be committed, but what does it mean to say that his art is committed? Commitment is not a category of art. This does not mean that art is apolitical. It means that aesthetics has its own politics, or its own meta-politics. (Rancière, 2004a, p. 60)

Rancière shifts the problematic from the notion of freedom, so important to Sartre, to equality, with equality construed as our equal claim to be considered significant, to count in public. This is not the equality of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, but as Andy Lavender (2012, p. 310) points out, 'a free space of individuation' in which 'communities are defined not so much by their *togetherness* as by their facilitation of *difference*, the fact that they enable individual expression'. Building on this, Rancière redefines the notion of politics to mean the arena in which we are able to challenge established perceptions of what carries significance and weight in our public life, or, as he terms it, 'the distribution of the perceptible'. In a widely quoted statement, he claims that:

> All political activity is a conflict aimed at what is speech or mere growl; in other words, aimed at retracting the perceptible boundaries by means of which political capacity is demonstrated. (Rancière, 2011, p. 4)

Rancière argues that the hierarchical logics of the academic disciplines and bureaucratic institutions establish what is to count as significant in public life. Hence the emancipatory potential of an artwork comes to depend on its ability 'to disrupt the relationship between the visible, the sayable, and the thinkable without having to use the terms of the message as a vehicle' (Rancière, 2004, p. 63); or, as Tony Fisher (2011, p. 3) puts it, in its ability to 'remain politically significant without assuming a doctrinal standpoint or aspiring to social activism'.

In a parallel move, Rancière argues for a challenge to the rules governing art itself. In *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2004a), he distinguishes between the 'ethical', 'representative' and 'aesthetic' regimes of art. These regimes are not so much temporal (although they do have distinct cultural and historical associations) as distinctive ways of thinking about the relationship between art and society. Each of the ethical and representative regimes establish hierarchical standards for evaluating art: under the ethical regime these relate to art's perceived value to society; under the representative regime, to art's capacities to portray/represent reality in distinctive and superior ways. The aesthetic regime challenges these hierarchies by inserting art into the fabric of society, where it insists on art's 'absolute singularity' while destroying 'any pragmatic criterion for isolating this singularity' (Rancière, 2004a, p. 23). In a formulation that resembles Brecht's, but stripped of its political imperatives, Rancière argues that:

> Critical art is an art that aims to produce a new perception of the world, and therefore to create a commitment to its transformation. This schema, very simple in appearance, is actually the conjunction of three processes: first, the production of a sensory form of 'strangeness'; second, the development of an awareness of the reason for that strangeness, and third, a mobilization of individuals as a result of that awareness. (Rancière, 2010, p. 142)

What Rancière offers is a highly abstract formulation, a template, operating at a significant distance from the coalface where authors actually put words to paper and attempt to make them work. How, I wonder, might he respond to Silone's (1949/2001, p. 113) reflection that for him 'writing has represented … the painful and lonely continuation of a struggle' and that if he has written books 'it has been to try and understand and to make others understand'. Just what a work like *Bread and Wine* might 'help us understand' is open to dispute, but I suggest that Rancière does little to help us appreciate what is involved in the production of the

text, where we have Silone's struggle with fascism, the spoiling of his revolutionary hopes, and his commitments to the people of the Abruzzi.

Towards my own position

What are the implications of these contrasting positions for my own approach to the artistic/political relationship? First, I accept each of Adorno and Rancière's cautions concerning any mandatory harnessing of art to politico-ideological purposes. Particularly given the consequences of the compulsory enforcement of socialist realism, I endorse Adorno's (1973/2007, p. 184) suggestion that any form of mandatory commitment can limit 'artistic individuation' and impose a single version of truth against its 'innumerable meditations'. At the same time, I question his and Rancière's systematic preference for the more obviously 'strange' forms of artistic representation. In the case of the novel, this ignores the likelihood that the conventional and unconventional are likely to coexist in any given case. As Bakhtin insists, the novel is not a pure art form but a pastiche, incorporating the multiple discourses of everyday life with which it is constantly in dialogue. Hence elements of a political logic will almost invariably coexist with its more creative and open-ended modes of literary expression. Rather than wish these factors away as artistic hindrances, I argue for the importance of reflecting on them in an open and curious fashion.

I also take issue with the level of abstraction at which Adorno and Rancière pitch their arguments, whereby the consequences of individual artworks are 'read off' certain principles about how the artistic 'ought' to operate to achieve certain effects. This effectively skips or assumes the responses of readers and/or viewers. Depending on how and to whom it is expressed, a political logic may cause alienation, frustration, impatience or passive acceptance, or, alternatively, widen the discursive scope of a text, offer anchorage points in an otherwise free-floating discussion, and/or provide grounds for ongoing contest and controversy. The question, then, is not what texts 'ought' to do, but how they actually do in fact achieve their effects, always taking the variability and unpredictability of the 'ordinary' reader into account.

Under rarified constructions such as these, texts are effectively removed from the exigencies of their social and political contexts. As Michael Holquist points out, 'literary texts, like other kinds of utterance, depend not only on the activity of the author but also on the place they hold in the social and historical forces at work when the text is written and when it is consumed' (1990, p. 68). Gabriel Rockhill, Rancière's translator and critic, goes to the point at issue when he says:

> I would like to argue in favour of abandoning unnecessary conceptual abstraction and the reification of art and politics in the name of understanding them as socio-historical practices that can and have been linked in various ways. Art and politics have no fixed natures. They are concepts in a struggle that vary according to the social setting and historical conjuncture. (Rockhill, 2011, p. 46)

In relating this to the historical conjuncture of the selected texts, I point out that the ideologies associated with fascism and Stalinism were of a particularly totalising kind, threatening the social and political freedoms on which literature depended. They thus invited an equally strong political response, a kind of political counter-stroke: to give the open-ended and plural a clear predominance over the critical and assertive might have seemed an unaffordable luxury given the urgency of the times. In saying this, I am by no means suggesting that the overtly political stance of an Orwell cannot be questioned or evaluated. Neither am I proposing that critical assertions do not carry risks and tensions for the literary. What I am saying is that in order to understand the specificity of the literary/political interplay one must grasp, properly grasp, the circumstance in which it arise. There are, of course, multiple ways of challenging monolithic domination, realist and fantastic, transparent and oblique, and their literary/political potential cannot be understood in an abstract way, but only through a detailed immersion in the varied arts of the novel and the political circumstances in which these are given particular forms of expression.

To pause for a moment on this issue of context: here I take careful note of Rita Felski's (2011, p. 577) argument that history is not 'a kind of box or container in which individual texts are encased and held fast', but rather 'a profusion of whirlpools and rapids, eddies and flows, in which objects, ideas, images, and texts from different moments swirl, tumble, and collide in ever-changing combinations and constellations' (p. 578). Further, and drawing on the work of Bruno Latour

(2005), Felski argues that if we are to understand the work of texts we need to 'slow down at each step' and 'forego theoretical shortcuts' (p. 578). While I do not undertake the kind of microscopic work that Felski enjoins, I do attempt to 'slow down' and pay close attention to the workings of the selected texts in all the immediacy of their social, political and literary circumstances.

Hence the brunt of my argument is that prescriptive and/or abstract readings of the artistic/political relationship stand to ignore what living, practising authors do in the actual circumstances confronting them. To give an analogy: it is like theorizing how buildings ought to be constructed while ignoring how they have in fact been built in particular periods and circumstances, with particular effects for those who inhabit these dwellings. It is, in other words, a restricted reading, conducted from 'on high'. Against this, I reiterate my case for a careful consideration of the varied work undertaken by texts in all the particularities of their individual circumstances. Such an approach will not lead to any definitive set of propositions, but by the same token is more likely to reveal the rich and often contradictory ways in which the artistic and the political combine in any given set of historical circumstances.

Finally, I press that the relationship between art and politics will always be subject to contestation and dispute. And this is something to be celebrated, not ironed out by theoretical critique. It matters whether we prefer a Tolstoy or a Dostoevsky; whether or not we think Bakhtin interpreted Dostoevsky correctly; and whether we think that the novel has a serious role in the evaluation of political and ethical matters in the first instance. Such debates contribute to the novel's capacity to speak to us across time and space in a lively and compelling way. They form part of our shared conversations about the nature of literature and help form our responses toward a particular work: they are matters that we write about, think about and talk about. They belong, in short, to the democratic space, with its opportunities for dialogue and debate, on which the novel, as we have come to know it, depends.

It is on this basis that I approach the selected texts, seeing art and politics as situated practices rather than objective categories, and as involving particular

literary and political tasks dependent on the historical context, with these having variable consequences for a text's capacity to resonate across time and space. In the next chapter I explain why Bakhtin offers such a productive, if sometimes contradictory, basis for this kind of situated exploration. Before concluding this part of the discussion, I wish to offer a brief account of the 1966 trial of the Russian authors, Yuri Daniel and Andrei Sinyavsky. As well as speaking to the courage and convictions of the two authors, the event demonstrates the power of fiction in protesting the political and the miserable nature of the logic that attempts to hold it in check. I therefore want to acknowledge and record it.

Epilogue: fiction on trial

Writing under the pen names Nikolai Arzhak and Abram Tertz, Daniel and Sinyavsky had managed to get several of their critical pieces published in the West. Daniel was sentenced to five years in the labour camps, Sinyavsky to seven. Their works were not available in the Soviet Union and had never posed a serious threat to the security of the regime. Proving almost totally counterproductive for the regime, the proceedings sent 'a powerful message of self-liberation to the nascent democratic movement, a message that far exceeded the impact of the authors' underground works' (Parthé, 2004, p. xii). The question, then, is why the authorities reacted as they did. Political miscalculation? Customary heavy-handedness? Almost certainly both, but something more fundamental was also at stake, something relating to the political voice of fiction. As Marshall Shatz (1980, p. 120) observes, by putting Sinyavsky and Daniel in the dock the authorities tacitly confirmed the shaping powers of fiction and validated the author's role as social critic.

Socialist realism, endorsed as the Party's sole official style in 1934, remained the approved literary form. Obliging authors to create 'positive heroes' who supported developments in the Soviet Union, it presupposed their responsibility for the views of the character they created. Reflecting this, and throughout the trial, the prosecution applied a 'dogged literalism' to the fictional and fantastic, attributing to the authors themselves the views of the characters they had created (Shatz, 1980, p. 119). In defending their works, Daniel and Sinyavsky countered that fictional texts could not be treated in this way, as satire, hyperbole and

fantasy were *literary* devices, and needed to be judged accordingly. At the same time, they acknowledged the political content of their works and in this respect were at one with the prosecution. As Shatz reflects:

> [While] the authors based their defence primarily on the autonomy of literature, the freedom of the artist to choose the literary form that will best express the creative process of his imagination … they could not fully reject the political role of literature in the name of "pure art" though this was the strongest line of defence. In fact, their works were deeply concerned with Stalinism and the origins of his despotism. (Shatz, 1980, p. 120)

Daniel's indictment centred on his satirical novel *This is Moscow Speaking* (Arzhak/Daniel 1961/1969). The book opens with Moscow radio announcing that August 10th, 1960, would be a 'Public Murder Day', and that all citizens over the age of sixteen could settle old grievances by killing any other citizens, excepting security officials, police and members of the armed forces. The hero of the story, a war veteran considered killing those responsible for the atrocities of the Stalinist era, but his memories of war and slaughter fill him with such revulsion that he concludes that he wants to kill no one. Throughout the trial Daniel made his political intentions clear:

> In 1960, when I was writing this story, I – and not only I, but any person who thought seriously about the situation in our country – was convinced that the country was on the eve of a cult of personality. Stalin had not been dead all that long. We all remembered what were called 'violations of socialist legality'. … We saw again how one single name appeared on the pages of newspapers and on posters, how the most banal and crude statement of this person was being held up to us as a revelation, as the quintessence of wisdom. (Labedz & Hayward, 1966, p. 61)

When the prosecution accused him of perpetrating a 'malicious slander on the Ukrainian people', Daniel countered by asserting that fantasy could not be slanderous as it was not credible: 'I told you once before what slander is. It is something that it is credible. And the situation I depict is not credible. And if you can't believe it, it's not slander, it's fantasy' (Labedz and Hayward, 1966, p. 70). Nevertheless, he immediately continued, 'but I want to repeat that everything I wrote would be possible if the personality cult were to be restored. If it were to return, anything could happen. I feel nothing is impossible if the state is under the control of one man' (Labedz and Hayward, 1966, p. 70). Making his political and personal commitments clear, he said his greatest concern in writing *This is Moscow Speaking* was to show that:

A human being should remain a human being, no matter in what circumstances he may find himself, no matter under what pressure and from what quarter. He should remain true to himself, to himself alone, and have nothing to do with anything that his conscience rejects that goes against human instinct. (Labedz & Hayward, 1966, p. 62)

In Sinyavsky's case, the charge centred on two dystopian novels, *The Trial Begins* (1960/1982) and *Lyubimov* (translated into English as *The Makepeace Experiment* 1963/1989). *The Trial Begins,* is set at the time of the 'Doctor's Plot' (1953) and portrays the torrid climate of Stalin's last years with its 'atmosphere of arrests and suspicion' (Labedz and Hayward, 1966, p. 103).[7] At the core of the book is the everyday nature of terror. The narrator opens by saying 'I hadn't heard them knock. There were two of them in plain clothes standing at the doorway. They had modest, thoughtful faces and they looked like twins' (p. 5). Later, he describes how Globov is 'delighted by the absence of formality' that characterises his meetings with the secret police:

How deluded was the mercenary Western press whose scribblers portrayed these men as sombre villains! In reality, they couldn't be nicer, they were witty, home-loving … many of them liked fishing in their spare time, or cooking, or making toys for children. One senior Interrogator, employed on cases of the utmost gravity, used his leisure knitting gloves and embroidering doilies and cushion covers. (*The Trial Begins*, 1960/1982, p. 89)

In contrast to *The Trial Begins*, *Lyubimov* centres on the illusions and dangers of utopian politics. In it, Lenny Makepeace, a bicycle mechanic, acquires psychic powers through which he convinces the community of Lyubimov that they are already living in a free and prosperous town. Lenny himself is an enigma. As the narrator notes:

To this day the discussion continues among the masses as to who Leonard Makepeace really was and by what mysterious power he succeeded in dominating the city. There are people who believe him to have been an envoy of God and others that he was sent by the Devil. Personally I stick by the view that there was nothing mysterious or supernatural about his origins and that his whole career can perfectly well be explained in scientific terms. (*The Makepeace Experiment*, 1965/1989, p. 39)

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[7] The Doctor's Plot refers to the arrest of nine doctors on the charge of conspiring to murder government and Party officials. Six were Jewish. All of the doctors confessed their 'guilt'; this was secured under torture. Stalin died shortly after the arrests and the trial did not take place. The seven doctors who survived the investigation were exonerated.

Most broadly, the novel parodies Stalin's isolationism and ideology of progress. With the help of an electric signalling system that turns intruders away, Makepeace ensures that 'the city has vanished as if the earth had swallowed it' (p. 102). Thus separated from the rest of the world, he dreams of a time in which 'we can begin thinking of expansion on a mass scale' and where 'by the living force of our example and our influence over progressive minds' we will 'gain the recognition and sympathy of the world…' (p. 102). When the prosecutor suggested that *Lyubimov* was defamatory, Sinyavsky responded in terms similar to Daniel's, stressing the 'illusory' nature of the novel:

> I invested this backwoods town of Lyubimov with some of my favourite qualities of the marvellous and fantastic. The people who walk around the town are ghosts, and change their substance. It is pure fantasy. The basic idea is one of illusoriness, of invisibility. This is not a real town, it's a town existing only in my imagination. The novel is a lyrical one, not a political one. (Labedz & Hayward, 1966, pp. 106-7)

A lyrical but *not* a political novel? Surely it would be more accurate to say that the novel is political in a lyrical kind of way: such being precisely Sinyavsky's point in his critical essay on socialist realism, where he writes:

> Right now I put my hope into a phantasmagoric art, with hypotheses instead of Purpose. … Such an art would correspond best to the spirit of our time. May the fantastic imagery of Hoffman and Dostoevski, of Goya, Chagall, and Mayakovski … and of many other realists and non-realists teach us *how to be truthful* with the aid of the absurd and the fantastic. (Tertz/Sinyavsky, 1960/1982, p. 218, my emphasis)

In so far as they distinguished fiction from politics, Sinyavsky and Daniel were pressing the point that authors are artists, not political functionaries. But it was precisely the power of fiction to speak with a political voice and to help shape the future that was at issue. *This* was why the two wrote as they did; *this* was why the authorities were so troubled. And it is precisely this—fiction's shaping powers, their ability to represent, record and resist the political—that provides the foundations for my inquiry; the basis from which I could not otherwise proceed.

Further, and as is well-represented in the novels of Sinyavsky and Daniel, we have the conjunction of the two forces at the core of my inquiry: the artistic and the political. As established, I see these to represent two imperatives: the creative and the committed, with the creative pressing towards the open and the original, and the committed towards closure and coherence. If the abstractions discussed in

this chapter fail to reveal the dynamics of this relationship, it is because they are too far-removed from the sites in which texts are laboured over and produced. By the same token, they are too distant from the novelist's tools of trade, the practices that make the whole literary/political enterprise possible. To gain insights into these practices, I turn to the work of Bakhtin. This is contemporaneous with that of many of the authors considered here, illuminates the multiple ways in which the artistic and the political can interact in any given set of circumstances, and also poses its own set of theoretical challenges. The next chapter explains and elaborates.

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Three
Bakhtin: a perplexing guide

> The dialogic nature of consciousness is the dialogic nature of human life itself. The single adequate form for verbally expressing authentic human existence is the open-ended dialogue. Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 293)

Many of Bakhtin's most important insights into the novel were developed during the 1930s when he was in exile in Kazakhstan. By that time literature was firmly under the control of the Party and the principles associated with socialist realism strictly enforced. His propositions thus stand as a fundamental refusal of contemporary developments as well as an affirmation of his own theoretical and ethical commitments. In drawing on his work, I pay particular attention to dialogism and polyphony, parody and the carnivalesque, and the time-space configurations of chronotope. In each of these respects, Bakhtin illuminates how the novel, by virtue of its traditions, can express political ideas in a literary kind of way. At the same time, his central contrasts between the monological and dialogical, the centripetal and centrifugal qualities of language, and the notions of finalizability and unfinalizability invite critical reflection in so far as they obscure the multiple and complex ways in which the literary and the political can interact in any given text. This is something to which I return throughout the thesis. The aim of this chapter is to provide a broad-based introduction to Bakhtin's work, doing as much justice as I can to its theoretical complexity

At the outset, I note that critics disagree widely over how to best interpret Bakhtin's work, variously emphasizing its phenomenological, political, ideological and literary elements.[1] Some of the earlier enthusiastic interpretations have been followed by critical analyses. Ken Hirschkop (1999, 2001), in particular, maintains that Bakhtin not only returned obsessively to the same problematic but also borrowed heavily from the work of others. But it can be pointed out that Bakhtin developed his notions in the collegiate environment of

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[1] See, for example, Bernard-Donals 1994, Clark and Holquist 1984, Emerson 1997, Holquist 1990, Morson and Emerson 1990) and Todorov 1985 among many others.

the Bakhtin Circle, where participants were actively engaged in the exchange of ideas, collectively drawing on developments in contemporary German philosophy (Brandist 2002). Leaving that aside, the critical issue for my purposes is Bakhtin's contribution to our understanding of the interaction between the artistic and the political. In discussing this, I follow a series of steps, starting with Bakhtin's key notion of dialogism and its implications for the novel.

Dialogism and the language of the novel

Dialogism signifies that all our different types of expression form part of a continuing chain of utterances, with each presupposing, inviting and anticipating the other, and in which meanings are relative to the situated position of speaker and addressee. For Bakhtin, 'only the mythical Adam, who approached a virginal and as yet verbally unqualified world, could have escaped this dialogic inter-orientation' in which:

> The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction. Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. (Bakhtin, 1935/1981, pp. 279-80)

As part of this interactive process, the novel is always in dialogue, invariably responding to an anticipated audience. In insisting on the importance of this anticipatory quality, Bakhtin (1986, p. 94) urges that 'from the very beginning, the speaker expects a response … an active responsive understanding … the entire utterance is constructed, as it were, in anticipation of encountering this response'. This response is 'not a linguistic background but one pregnant with responses and objections' (Bakhtin, 1935/1981, p. 281):

> Any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it is directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist … it is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgements and accents. (Bakhtin, 1935/1981, p. 272)

In explaining how these chains of meaning evolve over time, Bakhtin proposes that at any given moment there is an oppositional pull between the centripetal and centrifugal characteristics of language, or between a unitary mode (monoglossia) and the diverse, polyglot elements of heteroglossia. The centripetal forces

represent an attempt to 'unite and centralize verbal-ideological thought'; to develop a 'universal grammar' and unify meaning under 'the one language of truth' (Bakhtin, 1935/1981, p. 270). They belong to 'Aristotelian poetics, the poetics of Augustine, the poetics of the medieval church, the abstract grammatical universalism of Leibniz' and are present in all our attempts to ensure a 'maximum of understanding in all spheres of ideological life' (p. 271). In contrast, the centrifugal qualities of language always render meaning provisional and fragmentary, disturbing and dissolving the unifications and centralizations of monoglossia: 'alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward' (p. 272).

This does not signify that the language of the novel is wide open. If meaning is be established in any given instance, the centripetal and the centrifugal must come together: 'every speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear' (Bakhtin, 1935/1981, p. 272). As described by Holquist (1990, pp. 67-8), it is at this moment of alignment that heteroglossia comes 'as close as possible to conceptualizing a locus where the great centripetal and centrifugal forces that shape discussion can meaningfully come together'.

> [This resembles] the situation of a subject surrounded by the myriad of responses to which he or she might make at any given point, but any one of which must be framed in a specific discourse selected from the teeming thousands available. … It is a way of conceiving the world as made up of a rolling mass of languages, each of which has its own formal markers. (Holquist, 1990, p. 67)

At the level of genre, the novel gives voice to the evolving and contested nature of language. Bakhtin sees it as 'the most sociological of the genres', with its heteroglossic language being 'the most immediate and sensitive register of changing social attitudes' (Morson, 1981, p. 668). As a result, concepts such as power, ideology, freedom, and responsibility—the stuff of the selected texts—come laden with qualifications and disputed meanings, entangled with the very phenomena they attempt to express. Time and again, Bakhtin presses this point, arguing that:

> At any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the coexistence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between different epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form. (Bakhtin, 1935/1981, p. 291)

In another observation bearing closely on the selected texts, Bakhtin (1986) proposes that the novel is associated with the 'primary' speech genres: that is, with the patterns of everyday speech before they are institutionalised into the 'secondary' genres governing formal or professional speech. This indicates that the novel expresses how meaning is 'originally' formed at an experiential level before it is abstracted, formalised and removed from the experiences in which it was first embedded. The selected novels resound to this, often expressing their resistance to ideological theoreticism by speaking to the grounded aspirations of people living in the here and now. In *Bread and Wine*, to take a key example, the protagonists' views, thoughts and beliefs are embedded in the cultural fabric of Italian life, with their different socio-ideological languages revealing the contrasts between the pragmatism of the mountain dwellers, the obfuscations of government bureaucracy, and the authoritative dictates of Party and Comintern.

Genre-distinguishing moves

These literary insights are underpinned by Bakhtin's observations on the distinctiveness of the novel at the level of genre. Here I mention two proposals, the first of which I find problematic and the second helpful in interpreting the artistic/political interplay. In the first, Bakhtin compares the novel with lyric poetry. The poet's language 'is *his* language … he makes use of each form, each word, each expression according to its power to assign meaning … as a pure and direct expression of his own intention', with this 'suspended from any mutual interaction with alien discourse, an allusion to alien discourse' (Bakhtin, 1935/1981, p. 285). In contrast, the language of the novelist, recreates the contested and ambiguous ways in which:

> Actual social life and historical becoming create within an abstractly unitary language a multitude of concrete words, a multitude of verbal-ideological and social belief systems; within these various systems (identical in the abstract) are elements of language filled with various semantic and axiological content and each with its own different sound. (Bakhtin, 1935/1981, p. 288)

My difficulty relates to the *separation* of the novel from the poem. In reality, can such a clear distinction be drawn? My counter-suggestion is that the poetic quality of words is highly significant in allowing a novel to portray the force of the political in an evocative and compelling way. This, as I shall show, is particularly important in Platonov's *The Foundation Pit,* where Chandler (2009a, p. 172) suggests that Platonov uses words 'more creatively than even the greatest Russian poets who were his contemporaries'. Here Platonov's words illuminate the physicality of our existence, with even involuntary bodily movements brought to the level of our consciousness: thus, for example, 'Voshchev felt the cold on his eyelids and used them to close his warm eyes' (*The Foundation Pit*, p. 3).

In his second genre-distinguishing move, Bakhtin compares the novel with the epic. The epic, he says, is constructed 'in the zone of an absolute distanced image, beyond the sphere of possible contact with the developing, incomplete and therefore re-thinking and re-evaluating present' (Bakhtin, 1941/1981, p. 17). As construed by the epic, the past is 'absolute'; 'monochronic and valorized … closed as a circle, where inside it everything is finished, already over … there are no loopholes through which we can glimpse the future' (pp. 15-16). Hence:

> By its very nature the epic world of the absolute past is inaccessible to personal experience and does not permit an individual, personal point of view or evaluation. One cannot glimpse it, grope for it, touch it; one cannot look at it from any point of view, it is impossible to experience it, analyse it, take it apart, penetrate into its core. (Bakhtin, 1941/1981, p. 16)

In contrast, the novel owes its origins to a period in the late middle-ages when the 'creative consciousness of man' took the 'present in all its open-endedness as the centre for artistic and ideological orientation' (Bakhtin, 1941/1981, p. 38). At that juncture, 'epic distance was disintegrating' and artistic representation became focused on 'a contemporary reality that was inconclusive and fluid' (p. 39. Thus:

> From the very beginning the novel was structured in the zone of direct contact with inconclusive present day reality. At its core lay direct personal experience and free creative imagination. (Bakhtin, 1941/1981, p. 39)

A key point to arise from this is that as a 'high-distance genre', the epic cannot be re-evaluated or re-modelled, whereas the novel 'has no canon of its own. It is, by its very nature, non-canonic. It is plasticity itself. It is a genre that is ever questing, ever examining itself and establishing itself to review' (Bakhtin,

1941/1981, p. 39). Holquist (1990, p. 74) underscores the significance of this when he observes that 'epic-ness' is not confined 'to a moment in the distant past' but represents 'an always-still-available possibility', with the imposition of socialist realism representing just such an instance. In this respect, I pay close attention to the work of the Russian authors, and most particularly *The Master and Margarita*, where Bulgakov achieves an outright act of literary defiance, not just in parodying the expectations of the Writers Union and other official bodies, but also, and more so, in writing in a literary form that steadfastly refuses current orthodoxies.

The distinction between the novel and the epic also has significant implications for the portrayal of the text's hero. Bakhtin suggests that the origins of a novelistic representation first became evident in the authorial statements accompanying the new novels of the eighteenth century. These intimated that a hero 'should not be "heroic" in either the epic or the tragic sense, but must combine in himself negative as well as positive features, low as well as lofty, ridiculous as well as serious' (Bakhtin, 1941/1981, p. 10). Further, he should not be 'portrayed as an already completed and unchanging person, but as one who is evolving and developing, who learns from life' (p. 10). Consequently, this person can never be fully explained by his or her social situation and/or political predicament. Rather:

> One of the basic internal themes of the novel is precisely the theme of the inadequacy of a hero's fate and situation to the hero himself. … He cannot become once and for all a clerk, a landowner, a merchant, a jealous lover, a father and so forth. If the hero of the novel actually becomes something of the sort … then the surplus of humanness is realised in the main protagonist. (Bakhtin, 1941/1981, p. 10)

This 'surplus of humanness' is, to a greater or lesser extent, reflected across the selected texts, where the heroes, almost without exception, combine the 'low and the lofty', and have the capacity to evolve and develop. Hence, we come to mourn their downfall: as, for example, in the cases of D-503 in *We*, Winston Smith in *Nineteen Eighteen-Four*, and Rubashov in *Darkness at Noon*. In other more nuanced cases, we walk alongside the melancholy of Voshchev in *The Foundation Pit*, the frailties of the Master in *The Master and Margarita*, and the failed aspirations of Pietro Spina in *Bread and Wine*.

The detail of how the novel undertakes its dialogical work is the subject of Bakhtin's essay 'Discourse in the Novel' (1935/1981). The 'purpose of the essay', he says, 'is to 'demonstrate that the study of verbal art can and must overcome the divorce between an abstract "formal: approach and an equally abstract "ideological" one' (p. 259). Defining the novel as 'a diversity of social speech types … and a diversity of voices, artistically organised', he argues that the 'internal stratification of language, prescient in every language at any given moment of its historical existence, is the indispensable prerequisite of the novel as a genre' (p. 263). These languages include:

> Social dialects, characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, languages that serve the socio-political purposes of the day. (Bakhtin, 1935/1981, pp. 263)

Building on this, Bakhtin suggests that the novel filters its languages though various 'stylistic unities': that is, distinct forms of literary representation located on 'different linguistic levels and subject to different stylistic controls'. He identifies five such forms: direct authorial intervention, stylized forms of everyday narration or speech (*skaz*); semi-literary forms such as diaries or letters; various 'literary but extra-artistic' forms such as 'moral, philosophical, or scientific statements'; and the stylistically individualized speech of the characters (Bakhtin, 1935/1981, pp. 261-2). In the selected texts, this diversity works to withstand any unitary reading of the literary/political interface. In *Cancer Ward*, for example, Solzhenitsyn varies his style from the more formal to the more commonplace, and uses different speech patterns for each of his characters. These contrasts offset the novel's more didactic elements, and open a space in which we, as readers, can in engage our own thoughts and speculations.

In summary so far: Bakhtin offers detailed insights into how the novel undertakes its dialogical work, stressing the interlocking ways in which our communications are infused by what has already been spoken and what we believe will be spoken in the future. While dialogism applies generally, if by no means uniformly, to the novel as a literary form, Bakhtin's earlier notion of polyphony is reserved for only a manifestly 'novelistic' minority of works. As outlined below, it is here that he

introduces some of the most puzzling questions concerning the artistic/political relationship.

Polyphony and unfinalizability

Like dialogism, polyphony is concerned with the evolving nature of meaning. Its focus, however, is less on the nature of language, more on the relationship between the author and his or her characters, with these characters seen to have their own autonomous consciousness. In his early work, Bakhtin attributed the 'invention' of polyphony to Dostoevsky. Later, he revised this to suggest that the Dostoevskian novel was less 'an unprecedented event' and more 'the purest expression of what had always been implicit in the genre' (Clark and Holquist, 1984, p. 241). In both his earlier and later readings, the critical issue is the Dostoevskian ability to create a 'profound and unresolved conflict with another's word at the level of lived experience … on the level of ethical life … and finally on the level of ideology' (Bakhtin, 1935/1981, p. 349).

Bakhtin's philosophical commitment to polyphony is underpinned by his key concept of 'unfinalizability'. Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson (1990, p. 36) describe the notion as 'an all-purpose carrier' of Bakhtin's view that the world 'is not only a messy place, it is also an open place'. In elaborating on this, they cite Bakhtin's reflection that:

> Nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future, and will always be in the future. (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 166, cited by Morson and Emerson, 1990, p. 36)

Just as the world is unknowable so is each and every individual. Here the notion of our 'physical and temporal specificity' can be seen as 'a sort of synecdoche of our larger irreplaceability' (Morson and Emerson, 1990, p. 185). This has its foundations in Bakhtin's keen interest in relativity, then emergent in the new physics of Planck, Einstein and Bohr. Commenting on this, Holquist (1990, pp. 4-5) observes that like Einstein, Bakhtin shows that 'all meaning is relative in the sense that it comes about only as a result of the relation between two bodies *occupying simultaneous but different* positions in space' where bodies range from 'the immediacy of our physical bodies, to political bodies and to bodies of ideas in

general' (Holquist, 1990, p. 19, original emphasis). Consequently, when we look at each other:

> We are both doing the same thing, but from different places: although we are in the same event, that event is different for each of us. Our places are different not only because our bodies occupy different positions in exterior, physical space, but also because we regard the world from different centres in cognitive time/space. (Holquist, 1990, p. 20)

Taking issue with the certainties then advanced in mechanistic psychology, Bakhtin asserts that 'man is not a final and defined quality upon which firm calculations can be made' but a free being who can 'violate any regulating norms that might be thrust on him'. In diametric contrast:

> Monological discourse denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities, another *I* with equal rights (*thou*). … Monologue is finalized and deaf to the other's response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any *decisive* force … it closes down the represented world and represented persons. (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 292-3, original emphases)

It is the singularity, unknowability and the autonomous consciousness of the other that a truly polyphonic author must try to represent. Dostoevsky, Bakhtin claims, 'thought not in thought, but in points of view, consciousness, voices … he tried to perceive and formulate each thought in such a way that a whole person was expressed and began to sound in it … this, in condensed form, is his entire worldview from alpha to omega' (1963/1984, p. 93). He argues further that once the hero's self-consciousness becomes the dominant motif in a work, it 'breaks down the monological unity of the work' and the hero becomes 'relatively free and independent' for everything that once positioned him as a 'once and for all completed image of reality' is transformed instead into 'the material of his self-consciousness' (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 51). Hence:

> Every true reader of Dostoevsky, who perceives his novels not in the monologic mode and who is capable of using Dostoevsky's new authorial position, can sense this peculiar active broadening of his consciousness … [with this being] primarily in the sense of a special dialogical mode of communication with the autonomous consciousness of others, something never before experienced, an active dialogic penetration into the unfinalizable depths of man. (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 68)

In commenting on the significance of Bakhtin's approach in this respect, Booth (1984, p. xviii) points out that under the western 'objectivist' tradition (as associated with writers such as Henry James), the author is 'always imposing

upon his characters what they must say, rather than allowing their personalities the freedom to say what they will, in their own way'. In contrast, 'as presented in full force by Bakhtin … the novel represents 'the essential, irreducible, multi-centeredness, or "polyphony" of human life'.

It is often asked how far polyphony allows authors to voice their own views and values. On this, Morson and Emerson (1990, p. 233) point out that Bakhtin repeatedly affirms that a polyphonic author 'neither lacks the opportunity nor fails to express his ideas and values'. He is emphatic on this point, asserting that 'the consciousness of the creator of a polyphonic novel is constantly and everywhere in it and is active to the highest degree' (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 68). Further:

> The issue is not an absence of but a radical change in the author's position … the author is not required to renounce himself or his own consciousness, but he must to an extraordinary extent broaden, deepen and rearrange this consciousness … in order to accommodate the autonomous consciousness of others. (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 68)

While opening a promising space for exploring how the political/authorial voice might operate in a given text, this also invites perplexing questions. How might one know whether the 'radical change' envisaged by Bakhtin has taken place? Who might be the judge? How might the shift, however imperfectly achieved, affect how we read and relate to a text? Or, to go to the centre of my interests, what sort of provision does this make for the iteration of a political discourse that asserts particular values, views and priorities, and attempts to reach determinate solutions? These are vital issues, and I reconsider them later in this chapter and throughout the thesis. At this juncture, I leave polyphony for the novel's parodic and subversive traditions, which support a more directly political role for the novel than the discussion so far might imply.

The parodic and subversive

Most broadly, Bakhtin's view of the parodic is closely linked to his contention that 'the word lives, as it were, on the boundary between its own context and another, alien, context' (1935/1981, p. 284). In this dialogical sense, the novel is necessarily 'parodic' in that it involves a multiplicity of voices with each taking their meaning from the other. Put another way, all authors are in the process of 'writing back to' or parodying other artistic forms, whether they do so consciously

or not, and all will utilise and retract the literary styles of other writers. Commenting on this, Bakhtin (1941/1981, p. 5) says that the novel 'gets on poorly with other genres, it exposes the conventionality of their forms and their language; it squeezes out some genres and incorporates others into its own peculiar structure, re-formulating and re-accentuating them.' As other genres become 'novelized' they too exhibit the distinctive qualities of the genre:

> They become more free and flexible, their language renews itself by incorporating extraliterary heteroglossia and the 'novelistic' layers of language, they become dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humour, elements of parody and finally—this is the most important thing—a certain semantic open-endedness, and living contact with unfinished, still evolving contemporary reality. (Bakhtin, 1941/1981, p. 7)[2]

Consequently, the novel refuses to stabilize around any given form: 'throughout its entire history, there is a consistent parodying or travestying of dominant or fashionable novels that attempt to become models for the genre … the ability of the novel to criticize itself is a remarkable feature of the genre (Bakhtin, 1941/1981, p. 6). As Morson (1981, p. 669) puts it, the novel is not so much a genre 'but the *anti-genre,* no sooner does it start to develop rules than other novels parody those rules, just as they parody all other literary and social conventions'. In relation to the selected texts, parody at the level of genre is particularly important in the cases of *The Foundation Pit*, which parodies the production novel, and *Animal Farm*, which, in taking the form of a child's tale, travesties its own instructional form.

The novel is also parodic in a more directly subversive/political way. In his essay on the prehistory of novelistic discourse, Bakhtin (1940/1981) proposes that of the many heterogeneous factors involved in this development, two were of 'decisive importance': polyglossia and laughter. Observing that languages 'throw light on one another: one language can, after all, only see itself in the light of another language', Bakhtin (1941/1981, p. 12) argues that as contact with other languages became more common and sustained during the classical period, authors had to

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[22] Bakhtin (1941/1981, p. 7) makes a large claim here, contending that 'in the process of becoming the dominant genre, the novel sparks the renovation of all other genres, it infuses them with its spirit of process and inclusiveness. It draws them ineluctably into its orbit precisely because this orbit coincides with the basic direction of literature as a whole'.

face the singularity of their own language and, by the same token, the polyglossic nature of language in general:

> When the period of national languages, coexisting but closed to each other, comes to an end … words and language began to have a different feel to them; objectively, they ceased to be what they had once seemed to be. (Bakhtin, 1941/1981, p. 12)

In essence, polyglossia works to 'free consciousness from the tyranny of its own language and its own myth of language', thus 'forcing men to experience beneath these categories a different and contradictory reality that is otherwise not captured within them' (Bakhtin, 1940/1981, p. 61 and p. 59). Concomitant with this development, laughter, originally little more than the art of 'ridiculing of another's language or another's discourse', is elevated to 'a new artistic and ideological level' (Bakhtin 1940/1981, p. 50). It is laughter that 'destroys epic distance' for, with its 'comic familiarization of the image of man', it 'brings the world closer and familiarizes it in order to investigate it fearlessly and freely' (Bakhtin 1941/1981, p. 25). Time and again Bakhtin emphasizes its 'fearless' and 'experimental' qualities:

> Laughter has the remarkable power of making an object come up close … where one can ... examine it freely and experiment with it … As it draws an object into itself … laughter delivers the object into the fearless hands of investigative experiment – both artistic and scientific – and into the hands of free experimental fantasy. (Bakhtin, 1941/1981, p. 23)

These developments are reproduced in the seriocomic traditions of the novel and more particularly the practices of the menippea, with these involving a multi-toned form of narration; a sustained use of the parodic and the humorous; unusual or fantastic time/place settings; and a far ranging interest in fundamental philosophical issues (Bakhtin, 1963/1984). I return to this in detail in Chapter Seven when discussing the fusion of the artistic and the political in *We* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, also noting their relevance in Chapter Four when discussing the serio-comic cast of *The Master and Margarita.*

At a more intricate level of analysis, Bakhtin introduces the notion of 'double-voiced discourse' (or 'hybrid utterance'), whereby a sentence that 'grammatically and syntactically belongs to a single speaker' in fact contains within it 'two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two languages, two semantic and

axiological belief systems', and the author's voice is 'refracted' through the interchange (Bakhtin, 1935/1981, p. 284). To illustrate this, he shows how Dickens uses an inflated language to ridicule the hypocritical and shallow financier Mr Merdle in *Little Dorrit*:

> Oh what a wonderful man this Merdle, what a great man, what a master man, how blessedly and enviably endowed – in one word, what a rich man! (Cited by Bakhtin, 1935/1981, p. 304)

With this level of detail, Bakhtin is able to show how the novel can be political by virtue of its literary form. To further illustrate, I draw on a passage in *Bread and Wine* where Silone sets the literal pragmatisms of the peasants against the obfuscations of official ideology. The setting is a community gathering where the schoolmistress, acting as an agent of government, recites the broadsheet *News from Rome* in a 'piercing voice':

> 'We have a leader for whom all nations on the earth envy us,' she read. 'Who knows what they would be prepared to pay to have him in their country…'
> Magascià interrupted. As he disliked generalities, he wanted to know exactly how much other nations would be willing to pay to acquire our leader.
> 'It's a manner of speaking' said the schoolmistress.
> 'There's no such thing as a manner of speaking in commercial transactions' said Magascià. 'Are they willing to pay for him or not? If they are willing to pay, what are they offering?'
> The schoolmistress repeated angrily it was just a manner of speaking.
> 'So it isn't true they want to buy him then?' said Magascià. 'And if it isn't true, why do they say it?'
> Sciatàp also wanted more specific information. Would it be a cash or credit transaction? (*Bread and Wine,* pp. 312-13)

Notably, the irony of the exchange is directed against the schoolmistress, with the 'internal dialogism' of her utterances speaking to the failure of government to reach out to the people on whose labour it depends. Thus Silone anticipates the 'answering word' of his readers, who, in order to respond fully to the irony, need to have some understanding of the impoverishment of the peasants, their manipulation by the landlords, and the failures of government to respond to the exigencies of rural Italy.

What, then, is the relationship between Bakhtin's analysis of the novel's subversive/parodic traditions and his insistence on the dialogic and evolving nature of meaning? The answer is complex and interesting. On the one hand, the

two work symbiotically, with the indeterminacy of the carnivalesque—its 'semantic open-enededness, and living contact with unfinished, still evolving contemporary reality'—synthesizing perfectly well with 'the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification' of the dialogical (Bakhtin, 1941/1981, p. 7, and 1935/1981, pp. 272-3). On the other, the one-sided character of the parodic-travestying traditions appear to be at distinct odds with the multi-voiced nature of the dialogical, producing a distinct twist in the issues as so far discussed, whereby the tension arises from *within* the literary/political practices of the novel, rather than *between* the literary on the one side and the political on the other. And this, in its turn, suggests an alternate reading of the notion of tension, now construed not in negative terms, but as the energy released by the intersection of two equally valid forces.

Chronotope

I now reflect on Bakhtin's notion of chronotope, which, although not so closely related to the literary/political interplay as the other qualities considered so far, has a significant impact on how the imaginative dimensions of the texts. Not always easy to understand, the notion is an amalgam of the Greek words for time, 'chronos' (χρόνος), and space, 'topos' (τόπος). As described by Bakhtin (1937/1981, p. 250), chronotope constitutes the 'organizing centre for the fundamental narrative events of the novel … the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied … to it belongs the meaning that shapes narrative'.[3] Acknowledging that the term was introduced as part of Einstein's theory of relativity, Bakhtin says that its specialized meaning 'is not important for our purposes'; rather:

> We are borrowing it for literary criticism almost as a metaphor (almost, but not entirely). What counts for us is the fact that it expresses the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space). … In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. (Bakhtin, 1937/1981, p. 84)

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[3] Chronotope appears to bear some resemblance to the Formalists' distinction between *fabula*, the chronological order of events, and *syuzhet*, the way they are brought together as a narrative.

In describing how chronotope has evolved as a literary practice over time, Bakhtin extends Kantian notions of time and space as perceptual categories to consider how changing literary representations illustrate a shifting pattern of human consciousness. To this end, he traces different treatments of time as they arise between various forms of the ancient novel ('the Greek romance', 'the adventure novel of everyday life' and 'ancient biography and autobiography) and then moves to an extended consideration of chronotope in the Rabelaisian and post-Rabelaisian novel.

As presented in the 'Greek romance'—where Bakhtin focuses on Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*—time does not impact on the character of the heroes: 'it leaves no trace in the life of the heroes or in their personalities' and 'does not have even an elementary biological or maturational duration' (1937/1981, p. 90). Hence:

> All adventures in the Greek romance are … characterized by a technical, abstract connection between space and time, by the reversibility of moments in a temporal sequence, and by their interchangeability in space. (Bakhtin, 1937/1981, p. 100)

In contrast, in the 'adventure novel of everyday life' it is 'precisely the course of the hero's life that makes up the plot of the novel' (Bakhtin, 1937/1981, p. 111). Building on this, the autobiographical and biographical texts of the classical period constructed the human image 'to new specifications, that of an individual who passes through the course of a whole life' (Bakhtin, 1937/1981, p. 116). From that point on, time is not something external to the individual, but the substance of his or her life, something within his or her own capabilities. This is a key point for the selected texts. In *Darkness at Noon*, for example, Rubashov can do little or nothing to forestall his execution; he knows from the outset that he has only a short measure of chronological time left. But the *meaning* of that time lies within his own construction: how he sees it, what he does with it, how it impacts on his reappraisal of all the previous moments that have now come together in a particular and final eventuality.

It is, though, to the Rabelaisian novel that Bakhtin attributes the great widening of space-time configurations characteristic of contemporary texts, whereby 'everything of value, everything that is valorized positively, must achieve its full potential in temporal and spatial terms; it must spread out as far and as wide as

possible' (Bakhtin, 1937/1981, p. 167). I discuss the importance of this in subsequent chapters, but briefly illustrate here by comparing *Darkness at Noon* and *The Master and Margarita.* In *Darkness at Noon* the time/space configuration is limited to the last few days before Rubashov's execution and the enclosed space of his cell; in *The Master and Margarita*, it stretches back in time to the year of Christ's crucifixion and in space to a universe beyond the earth. These differing configurations of space/time are intimately related to the politico-ideological stretch of the narrative in each case. In *Darkness at Noon* this is focused on the ideological issues immediately confronting Rubashov and the inexorable fact of his impending death; in *The Master and Margarita* on far-ranging questions of artistic integrity, courage, and betrayal, with the Master confronting his own acts of cowardice and encouraged to look beyond the narrow restrictions of the Soviet literary bureaucracy.

At every step so far, Bakhtin's analysis illustrates the complexity of the artistic/political relationship. Dialogism signifies the contested nature of meaning; polyphony gestures to the unfinalizable and the unknown; parody demonstrates the novel's capacities for subversion and mockery; chronotope illustrates the imaginative possibilities of the varying time/space configurations. There is one further question that requires consideration before I draw the threads together: the problem of 'truth'.

On the problem of truth

At the outset of thesis, I emphasized that the selected authors are actively involved in the political and ideological issues of their times, citing Howe's (1957/2002, p. 24) proposal that in the political novel 'writer and reader enter into an uneasy compact to expose their ideas to a furious action … and to find some common recognition, some supervening human bond over and beyond ideas'. My question, then, is whether and how far Bakhtin's approach to the novel allows for this form of 'common recognition and supervening human bond'.

As usual the answer to this question can only be problematic. On the one hand, Bakhtin's (1935/1981, p. 273) commitment to the traditions of the carnival— where there is 'all languages [are] masks and … no language [can] claim to be an

authentic, incontestable face'—precludes any axiomatic assertion of any particular truth. Under this construction, each meaning takes its substance from another, and each achieves its stability at the moment of the utterance, only to dissolve and be remade in conjunction with another set of meanings/utterances. Most fundamentally Bakhtin (1986, p. 170) suggests that 'there is neither a first nor a last word and … even past meanings, that is those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable, finalized, ended once and for all (but) will always be renewed in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue'.

On the other hand, Bakhtin remains intensely interested in truth. He argues at length that while a polyphonic/dialogical truth cannot reside in a single axiom, it finds its place in the intersection of many simultaneous voices: 'truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born *between people* collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction' (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 110). Here truth and meaning have an experiential and collective basis, requiring a variety of communicating voices, coexisting one with another, where:

> At the base of the genre lies the Socratic notion of the dialogical notion of truth, and the dialogical nature of human thinking about truth. The dialogical means of seeking truth is counterposed to official monologism, which *pretends to possess a ready-made truth*, and it is also counterposed to the naïve self-confidence of people who think they possess certain truths. (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 111; original emphasis)

Significantly, Bakhtin (1963/1984, p. 69) also explicitly argues against relativism, maintaining that 'both relativism and dogmatism exclude all argumentation, all authentic dialogue, by making it either unnecessary (relativism) or impossible (dogmatism)'. Expanding on this point, Emerson (1997, pp. 220-221) suggests that it is precisely because 'unfinalizability and malleability are inherent in living personalities, in everyday events, and in time-space parameters, that the achievement … of a whole is so indispensable'. Further:

> If there existed a single unitary standard by which all acts could be judged, it would be easy to chart the moral (or immoral) life; when there is no such universal standard, every individual consciousness must define for itself local constraints; it must pass its own judgement, take a stand when blinkered, seek out and defend the truth as he or she sees it. (Emerson, 1997, p. 154)

For the kind of intercommunicative process favoured by Bakhtin to take place, there has to be a prior commitment to an open communicative space. On this basis, I suggest that ideological commitment will persist even in a polyphonic work. This is evident in Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* (1864), a work that Bakhtin cites as a prime example of polyphony. Written in part response to Nikolai Chernyshevsky's *What is to be Done*? (a novel expressing a utilitarian vision of a rational egotism in which social progress is fuelled by an indwelling sense of purpose), it expresses his hero's inchoate rage with the kind of formulaic thinking involved in 'two times two makes four'. While this frustration is never brought to any full conclusion, my point is its expression *only* makes sense *within* the wider framework of the normative issues with which Dostoevsky is in discussion. [4]

Emerson captures this fusion of the polyphonic and value-committed in one of her many detailed observations on Dostoevsky. Having noted that he endows his heroes 'with so much independence, mobility of perspective, uncertainty of motives' that readers, 'wishing to know what is going on, by-pass the author/narrator and respond directly to the heroes', she points out that values nevertheless permeate his works:

> Dostoevsky, a teacher and a prophet no less than Tolstoy, had a point of view on the world and passionate value system that he desired us to take seriously. … He wanted us to refuse the Grand Inquisitor's rationale for a paternalistic social system based on 'miracle, mystery and authority' and embrace instead the free inequality promised by Christ and spelled out in the teachings of the Elder Zosima. (Emerson, 2008, p. 136)

On these grounds, I surmise that the issue for the artistic life of the text is not the assertion of particular truths or values, but *how* these truths are expressed, and, more particularly, whether or not such representations work to extend our political, philosophical and imaginative horizons. In making this case, I acknowledge the importance of the oblique and unfinalizable. But this comes with the all-important qualification that the significance of silence and ambiguity needs to be located within the wider framework of the values implicitly or explicitly

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[4] The point can also be applied to the novels of Kundera, where, as Grenier (2006, p. 14) observes, 'for all the orchestrated ambivalence and polyphony, the reader is not driven away from the main point articulated by the author.'

advocated by the texts. And this, to return to my earlier contention, can only be grasped through a dense reading of the varied forms of literary/political expression, fantastic and realist, arising in particular historical circumstances.[5]

From Bakhtin to the texts: possibilities and puzzles

Let me now explain how I intend to draw on Bakhtin's insights when approaching the selected texts. As earlier noted, in order to illuminate the dynamics of the artistic/political relationship I follow three closely linked lines of inquiry. The first considers the nature of the political and philosophical themes circulating in the texts; the second explores how the authors draw on, disrupt and/or extend the traditions of the novel in expressing their convictions; and the third speculates on what might these combinations of the political and the literary might suggest about a text's capacity to resonate across time and space.

In relation to my first issue, I follow Bakhtin in supposing that the novel is above all a form of social dialogue. As Lodge (1990, p. 6) points out, in treating language as speech ('parole'), that is, as a social activity or dialogue, rather than as a system of formal relationships ('langue'), Bakhtin shifts our attention from the mechanisms through which meaning is produced within a text to the discursive environment through which a text forges its relationship with its readers. With this, and against the 'death of the author' as variously described by Barthes (1967) and Foucault (1969/1988), he endorses the active nature of the authorial role. Indeed, for Lodge:

> Bakhtin's greatest contribution to contemporary criticism may well turn out to be his timely reaffirmation of the writer's creative and communicative power … an idea that structuralism (implicitly), and post-structuralism (explicitly) have sought to discredit and replace with theories about the autonomous productivity of texts and their readers. (Lodge, 1990, p. 6)

This is not to return to a 'life and times approach', for Bakhtin always insists on the importance of social and political context, both in the writing and reading of works. The text, in other words, is context-dependent, for 'at any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions … that will ensure that a word

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[5] For discussion of the importance of how moral criticism is voiced, as opposed to what is said, see John Krapp's (2002) book on pedagogic voice and moral dialogue in the works of Thomas Mann, Albert Camus, Joseph Conrad and Fyodor Dostoevsky.

uttered in that place at that time will have a different meaning than it would have under any other conditions' (Holquist, 1981b, p. 428). In exploring this text/context link, I make use of a number of contemporary and historical sources, pay attention to the multiplicity of socio-ideological languages in a text, and wherever possible refer to the authors' own statements about their works and beliefs. While I attempt to avoid conflating the 'real' with Booth's 'implied' author, I hesitate to draw any clear distinction between the two, for as Booth reflects:

> However impersonal [the author] may try to be, his readers will inevitably construct a picture of the official scribe who writes in this manner—and of course that official scribe will never be neutral toward all values. Our reaction to his various commitments, secret or overt, will help to determine our response to the work. (Booth, 1961, p. 71) [6]

When it comes to my second question—how the authors draw on, disrupt, and/or extend the traditions of the novel in expressing their convictions—I benefit greatly from the detail of Bakhtin's insights, which in their specificity are so radically different from the abstractions of the theorists discussed in the previous chapter. However, I have also intimated that Bakhtin is a perplexing guide. This is so for many reasons: chief among them the fact that his views can point in contradictory directions, with the one suggesting a complementary reading of the artistic/political relationship and the other an oppositional one. On the complementary side, his insights into dialogism, parody, and the imaginative possibilities of chronotope show how the political can be expressed in compelling, evocative and/or subversive ways. In the oppositional case, his pivotal binary distinctions—the monological and dialogical, the centripetal and centrifugal, finalizability and unfinalizability—can promote a bifurcated reading of the artistic/political relationship. In my discussion of the texts, I take advantage of these (apparent) contradictions to illuminate the dense and varied ways in which the artistic and the political can combine in any given instance, with marked contrasts both within and between the texts.

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[6] As defined by Rimmon-Kenan (1983/2002, pp. 87-8) the implied author represents the 'governing source of the work as a whole, the source of the norms embodied in the work'

More fundamentally, I probe Bakhtin's juxtapositions between the finalizable and unfinalizable, as, for example, exemplified in his frequent contrasts between Tolstoy's 'narrowing down of heteroglot social consciousness' as against Dostoevsky's ability to create a 'profound and unresolved conflict with another's word at the level of lived experience … ethical life … and finally on the level of ideology' (Bakhtin, 1935/1981, p. 283 and p. 349). As foreshadowed, my submission is that the starkness of such contrasts obscures the density of the artistic/political relationship, and, more particularly, the formative place of value-commitment in even the most Dostoevskian of works, where, as Emerson (2008, p. 136) reminds us, 'Dostoevsky a teacher and a prophet no less than Tolstoy, had a point of view on the world and passionate value system that he desired us to take seriously'. It is, then, the interpenetration of the finalizable and unfinalizable, of search and silence, and of ambiguity and commitment, that absorbs me and takes up a major part of this thesis.

As illustrated over the course of this chapter, Bakhtin's approach to the novel is an essentially cerebral one, concerned above all with the making and unmaking of meaning. While this can illuminate the cognitive appeal of texts, it does not deal so well with the nature of the emotional bonds formed between text and reader. As Felski (2011, p. 585) points out, the 'significance of a text' is not exhausted 'by what it reveals or conceals about the social conditions that surround it', but that 'it is also a matter of what it makes possible in the viewer or reader—what kind of emotions it elicits, what perceptual changes it triggers, what affective bonds it calls into being'. In considering how these bonds are formed, I give careful thought to the creative force of imagination, the poetic use of language, and the texts' representations of suffering. In adopting this approach, I am proposing that the 'literariness' of the novel is also invested in artistic qualities shared with other forms of creative work, and thus aim to extend rather than qualify or contradict Bakhtin's ideas.

Finally, I acknowledge that at all times I am involved in act of interpretation. This is most evident in the third of my questions, where I speculate on a text's resonating potential. Anticipating deconstruction, Bakhtin suggests that the 'represented world of the text' involves the combination of four components: 'the

reality created in the text; the authors creating the text; the performers of the text; and the listeners or readers who recreate and in so doing renew the text' (1937/1981, p. 253). Acknowledging that 'these real people, the authors and their listeners, may be … separated from each other by centuries and by great spatial differences', he nevertheless insists that they 'participate equally in the creation of the represented world of the text' (p. 253). Hence:

> The event of the life of the text, that is, its true essence, always develops *on the boundary between two consciousnesses,* two subjects. … This is the meeting of two texts—of the ready-made and the reactive text being created—and consequently, the meeting of two subjects and two authors. (Bakhtin, 1986, pp. 106-7, original emphasis)

Contra the assertions of theorists such as Stanley Fish (1980), our responses to texts are not subject to any kind of objective interpretation, for the process of reading, interpretation and reinterpretation is pervasive and indirect, shaping our conversations, daydreams and news-watching, and belonging to the provinces of bedtime readings, armchair musings, reading groups, waiting rooms and cafes. Further, one set of representations influences another. To return to Bakhtin:

> Each utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterance to which it is related by the communality of the sphere of speech communication. Every utterance must be regarded as primarily a *response* to preceding utterances of the given sphere ... Each utterance affirms, supplements, and relies upon the others, presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account. (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 91, original emphasis)

Nevertheless, and as we have seen, Bakhtin believes that author, text and reader may, in some unspecified way, combine in re-creating the 'represented world' of the novel, even when separated by centuries of time and great physical differences. Further, and as his own reflections on classical texts such as Heliodorus' *Aethiopica* demonstrate, he assumes that this process is in some way subject to systematic reflection: a point fundamental to my project. To interpret this, and to put boundaries around an otherwise wide-open situation, I rely on Wolfgang Iser's argument that there is a 'structure of effects' within a work that 'triggers the re-creative dialectics of the reader' (p. 30). As he puts it:

> The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when realized, and furthermore the realization is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader—though this in turn is acted on by the different patterns of the text. (Iser, 1978 pp. 274-5)

Drawing on this insight, I surmise that while our responses are particular to us as unique individuals, the nature of our responses is also more broadly intelligible. Thus, for example, when I propose that Orwell's use of a nostalgic irony in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* creates a sense of longing for 'lost times', I suppose that my argument is commonly comprehensible, even if my interpretation is particular to me as an individual. Equally, when I say that something about Solzhenitsyn's moralizing approach jars my contemporary ear, I believe that what I propose is understandable even if debatable. It is on this basis of a shared, if highly differentiated, set of cultural understandings that I approach the texts, attempting to make my line of reasoning as transparent as possible.

Such are the considerations that guide my exploration of the texts over the next four chapters. Consistent with my argument that art and politics need to be seen as active practices rather than objective categories—where the artistic represents the drive for the creative and the open-ended, and the political the urge for coherence and commitment—I have grouped the novels in four bands according to their political, historical and literary circumstances. Each of these configurations confronts authors with a particular set of artistic/political challenges, and these form the subject of each chapter. To anticipate my arguments: Platonov and Bulgakov face the task of confronting the orthodoxies of their times through the art of 'doing otherwise'; Silone, Koestler and Orwell of counteracting didacticism through a skilful use of the novel's literary traditions; Solzhenitsyn and Grossman of creating a 'creative space' for our imaginative reinterpretations of past events; and *We* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* of 'speaking truth through the fantastic'. I stress that this arrangement is illustrative only, for the challenges are not in fact unique to each group, but rather intersect and cut across them.

Although my analytical frame thus shifts from chapter to chapter, the structure of my discussions follows a similar pattern in each case. First, an overview of the literary and political circumstances surrounding the texts; second, a consideration of how the authors give artistic expression to their political commitments; third, a set of concluding reflections on what these literary/political combinations might suggest for our readings of the artistic/political relationship. The next chapter starts the process by asking how the elusive poetics of *The Foundation Pit* and

The Master and Margarita—works written under decidedly threatening circumstances—might unsettle our consciousness and deepen our insights into the political and ideological issues at their core.

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Four
The novel as literary defiance: Platonov and Bulgakov

> The merging of the hero's discourse about himself with his ideological discourse about the world greatly strengthens the direct signifying power of a self-utterance and strengthens its internal resistance to all sorts of external finalization … and fixed, stable images. (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, 1963/1984, p. 78)

The Foundation Pit and *The Master and Margarita* represent profound acts of literary defiance, steadfastly refusing the ideological orthodoxies of their times. Both texts speak strongly to Bakhtin's insights into the subversive qualities of the novel, and both share much of his philosophical stance on the unfinalizability of time, place and person. Composed in the same epoch as Bakhtin was developing his theories, the novels are subject to the same range of politico-ideological and literary influences. Neither work was published in the lifetimes of their authors. *The Foundation Pit*, which was first completed in 1929/1930, did not appear in the Soviet Union until 1987 having first been published in Paris in a bowdlerized form in 1969. *The Master and Margarita,* which was drafted and re-drafted over the 1930s, was published in a serialized form in Moscow in the mid-1960s, where it attracted a large and fascinated readership (Weeks, 1996).

In writing when literature was increasingly coming under the direct control of the Party, Platonov and Bulgakov face the challenge of opposing monolithic orthodoxies without asserting a systematic counter-ideology and/or literary formula of their own (Bullock, 2011). In considering how they do this, I explore their varied uses of the novel's traditions in expressing their philosophical commitments; attend to the power of their imaginative and emotional calls; and ponder the relationship between the finalized and unfinalized qualities of their works. This represents a broad-based approach, designed to establish the foundations for subsequent analyses of the selected novels and the particular literary/political challenges faced by them. In preface, I outline the historical context to Platonov and Bulgakov's novels, concentrating on the status of literature, the divisions among writers, and the Party's far-reaching move to harness literature to the purposes of the State.

Context: an era of political and literary dissensus

In her discussion of Russia's 'most dangerous texts', Kathleen Parthé emphasizes the literary-centric nature of Russian society, with the written word always playing a central role in the nation's political, ethical and cultural life. Russians, she observes (2004, p. 2), came to be known as a people 'who read broadly and deeply, who could memorize vast quantities of poetry, and were able to recognize from "half a hint" a politically daring subtext'.[1] Above all, art represented a form of sustenance and reflection. On this, Parthé cites Dostoevsky's Underground Man's reflection that *'aside from literature, there was nowhere else to go',* and notes how this belief in the centrality of writing, reading and analysing literature represented:

> The cumulative effects of legends of impassioned discussion groups (*kruzhki*) in the nineteenth century, devotion to writers who had dared to address the nation's burning questions both before and after the Revolution, and memories of an often costly attachment to literature that endured after 1917. (Parthé, 2004, pp. 2-3)

The Russian reading audience was also a deeply divided one, and this, as I shall show, has a marked influence on the commitments and writings of Platonov and Bulgakov. From early in the nineteenth century, the intelligentsia was a fractured group, variously incorporating conservative, nationalist, libertarian, nihilistic and revolutionary movements. By the mid-nineteenth century, the term 'intelligentsia' had narrowed to refer to the 'classical' or 'radical' *intelligenty*, characterized by their commitments to 'materialism, atheism, socialism, and revolutionalism' (Morson, 2010, p. 143). In literature, Nikolay Chernyshevsky was the driving force behind this group, with other prominent members including the populist theorists Pyotr Lavrov and Nikolai Mikhailovsy, the revolutionary anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, and, at the outer edge, Sergei Nechaev with his opportunistic commitment to violence. Morson also points to a strong literary 'counter-tradition', where authors rejected 'theoreticism', insisted on the psychological complexity of our being, and suggested that the importance of the present moment greatly outweighs the significance of utopian or epic time (Morson, 2010, p. 141-57).

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[1] For discussion of the distinctiveness of the Russian literary tradition see Garrard 1983, Gasperetti 1997, Emerson 2008 and Lieber 2011, among many others.

Controversy over the role of art in serving the revolutionary cause provides the immediate background to both *The Foundation Pit* and *The Master Margarita*. The first concerted move to commit written works to revolutionary purposes saw the formation of the *Proletkult* in 1917 under the leadership of Alexander Bogdanov. On the assumption that once workers had achieved economic control a proletarian culture would naturally emerge, the *Proletkult* aimed to hasten the process by sponsoring workshops, journals and proletarian publications. Originally avant-garde in orientation but soon becoming more narrowly educative/ideological, it gave birth to a number of breakaway groups asserting the importance of art's freedom to express itself in the manner it wished. One such group was *The Smithy* (with which Platonov was loosely allied), whose manifesto promised writers complete freedom in the choice of literary method and style, while at the same time endorsing the vital importance of the future of the revolutionary movement.

In a more clearly autonomous move, another group of experimental writers formed the 'Serapion Brothers' with the intention of promoting the uniqueness of art as a sphere of activity separate from utilitarian politics. Zamyatin was a member of this group; so too was Mikhail Zoshchenko, a short story writer and satirist, who developed a deadpan style of writing that mocked the abstractions of official forms of discourse, and whose development of 'skaz' influenced Platonov. In their 1921 manifesto, the Serapion Brothers declared:

> We are with the Hermit Serapion. We believe that literary chimeras are a special reality, and we will have none of utilitarianism. Art is real, like life itself. And, like life itself, it has neither goal nor meaning; it exists because it cannot help existing. (Cited by Seifrid, 2009, pp. 65-6)

Taking a different approach yet again, the Left Front of Art (LEF), formed in 1922, committed itself to the notion of cultural activity as 'life-creation', maintaining that art should be devoted to enhancing the productivity of life rather than narrow aesthetic aims. As noted by Thomas Seifrid (2009, p. 4), under its thesis of 'productionism', LEF called on artists 'to abandon the easel and turn their attention to designing products capable of bringing about the utopian transformation of the everyday life of the proletariat'. Seifrid also observes that Platonov wrote about the notion in his article 'The factory of literature' (1926-

7/1991), and that it is extremely difficult to know how far he was involved in a perfectly earnest attempt to apply the idea or parodying its very basis.

Despite their differences, all these groups asserted the distinctiveness of art as a social and cultural activity, and all strove to develop it, thus contributing to the experimental environment that formed the background to Platonov and Bulgakov's works. In contrast, the VAPP (the All-Union Association of Proletarian Writers), later called RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers), aimed to control all forms of literature and fashion them to one form. As noted by Andrew Kahn (2011, p. 50), from its origins in the mid-1920s, the RAPP 'fought doggedly' to assert the importance of 'class origins over all other criteria as the basis of Soviet art'. Both Bulgakov and Platonov came under its attack: Bulgakov because of his satirical novel *The Heart of a Dog*, and Platonov because of his association with the novelist and critic Boris Pilnyak, who was one of the main targets of the RAPP.

During the greater part of the 1920s, the *Proletkult* and RAPP did not gain the approval of the leading Party members, with the result that experimental art continued to flourish through much of the period. In commenting on this period, Kahn notes that compared with the later authorities:

> Lenin showed far more enthusiasm for the classics. Trotsky was withering about proletariat poetry, and Bukharin was convinced that the creation of high-quality Soviet literature depended on writers of genuine talent, whatever their class origins. (Kahn, 2011, p. 50)

But matters are more complicated than this might suggest, for the authorities' views were bifurcated: on the one hand, they endorsed the classics and established literary traditions; on the other, they collapsed the aesthetic/political space in the name of an over-arching political imperative. Trotsky's enigmatic *Literature and the Revolution* provides a good example. Produced in 1924 with the aim of promoting a revolutionary literature, the work dismisses experimental artists who came alongside the revolution but were not yet part of it as its 'fellow travellers', and maintains that a 'true' aesthetic should be 'above classes' and express 'the first truly human culture' (cited by Wilson 1972, p. 244). The single-mindedness with which Trotsky pursues his vision means that in the last instance art must always, one way or another, be considered an expression of the political, with the

logic of this position inadvertently furnishing the grounds on which art is later subjugated to the 'higher purposes' of Party and State.

By the end of the 1920s, the experimental period was well over. Anxious to exert its controls over art and literature, the Party was no longer willing to tolerate the quasi-autonomous nature of the RAPP. Its decisive move came in 1932, when, under a resolution entitled 'On the Reshaping of Literary-Artistic Organizations', it abolished all independent groups, established the Soviet Union of Writers in their place and expanded the notion of the 'production novel' into the new literary genre, socialist realism, which became the sole permitted artistic form. Membership of the Union was more or less obligatory for professional writers and exclusion meant a virtual ban on publication. The rewards included 'royalties, commissions, access to vacation resorts, forums for discussion of their works, and (under certain conditions) foreign travel' (Emerson, 2008, p. 198). Its activities are a major target of *The Master and Margarita*, where the machinations of the Union, its threats and rewards, are reproduced in the shape of the organization 'Massolit' and its club Griboedov's.

What of the characteristics of socialist realism? What was it that both Platonov and Bulgakov opposed and parodied? In his detailed critique, Evgeny Dobrenko (2011, pp. 97-115) describes five features of the genre: first, 'ideological commitment', which means that art should embody the priorities of the Party; second, 'party mindedness', whereby every artistic act is also part of the political life of the nation; third, 'popular spirit', which requires art to draw on the traditions and languages of the people; fourth, 'historicism', or the principle that literature should reflect 'life in its revolutionary development'; and finally, 'typicality', a notion blending realism with a focus on the positive features deemed typical of revolutionary development. In concluding, Dobrenko (2011, p. 110) suggests that the genre aimed to transform 'Soviet reality into socialism … whatever Soviet reality actually was, socialist realism distilled it into socialism'.

Emerson, who identifies the same characteristics, nevertheless emphasizes that 'socialist realism, like every other party line in Stalinist Russia, was never a fixed

formula and was certainly not in the 1930s' (2008, p. 201).[2] Morson (1979) similarly argues against any simple reading of the genre in terms of literary deficiency, arguing that this fails to appreciate the Bolsheviks' attempt to create a new type of novel juxtaposed to its 'bourgeois' counterpart, where they elevated the politico-ideological over the aesthetic, and eschewed critique in favour of positive outcomes.

The literary/political complexities of the period are reflected in the conflicting commitments of Maxim Gorky, the first Chair of the Soviet Union of Writers. Widely seen as a mediator, and one who had himself been in exile, Gorky stood to gain the respect and trust of many contemporary writers. A supporter of the Bolsheviks after the party split in 1903, he remained critical of Lenin, never formally joined the Party, and always supported an idealist view of human nature, while at the same time supporting the new literary norms associated with socialist realism. Reflecting Morson's observation that socialist realism attempted to create a new type of novel as against its 'bourgeois' counterpart, Gorky claimed that 'when the history of culture is written by Marxists we shall see that 'the bourgeoisie's role in the process of cultural creativity has been grossly exaggerated' (*Transcript*, First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, 1934, np). At the same time, as Chair of the Union, he attempted to temper Party zeal, often at considerable cost to himself.

In summary: the political role of literature was a critical question for the intellectuals of post-revolutionary Russia. For those who supported the purposes of the revolution, yet also asserted the autonomy of art, the challenge lay in developing an alternative style that supported revolutionary aims. For others, who were more directly critical of the radical intelligentsia, the task lay in finding a literary form that questioned revolutionary ideals. I suggest that Platonov belongs to the first group; Bulgakov to the second. As indicated, my discussion is based on the premise that they face the task of challenging current orthodoxies without advancing a systematic counter-ideology or literary ideology of their own. In

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[2] The diversity within the genre is evidenced by the great variability of its novels: compare, for example, Fyodor Gladkov's narrowly focused *Cement* (which Platonov parodies in *Chevengur* and *The Foundation Pit*) and Mikhail Sholokhov's more far-reaching *Quiet Flows the Don*.

considering how they do this, I explore their varied uses of the novel's literary traditions; the power of their imaginative and emotional calls; and the relationship between the finalized and unfinalized qualities of their works. I start with the strangely haunting case of *The Foundation Pit.*

Platonov: *The Foundation Pit*[3]

Platonov's philosophical views infuse the entirety of *The Foundation Pit* (see, Bullock 2011; Seifrid 2009). Born in 1899, he came of age with the revolution and shared its ideals. As mentioned above, he was loosely allied with *The Smithy* during the 1920s, when he submitted articles for LEF's experimental journal. His (always qualified) opposition to the regime was first expressed in his science fiction novels, his novel *Chevengur* (which parodies Gladkov's *Cement*) and his affiliations with Pilnyak. By force of circumstances, he later repudiated his earlier writings, including *The Foundation Pit*, and attempted to produce a socialist realist novel entitled *Happy Moscow* (1935). As Emerson (2008, p. 192) points out, under the conditions he experienced, 'most people, including artists', are neither 'collaborators nor martyrs'. Rather:

> They simply survive, balancing the daily benefits of being useful, 'normal' citizens in their society. This means taking a stand at some points, lying low at others, and constantly devising compromises to protect one's comfort, dignity, work and family. (Emerson, 2008, p. 192)

As indicated, *The Foundation Pit* draws on Platonov's experience as a land reclamation expert in the 1920s, where he saw the start of the Bolshevik policy of grain requisition, the drive to exterminate the kulaks, and the famine in the Volga region in the early 1920s. In describing the consequences, the novel details how peasants were burning their grains and eating their animals to prevent them from falling into the hands of the Party, and how social relationships were destroyed as Party officials decided who would survive and who would be classified as kulaks

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[3] There is a growing corpus of scholarly work on Platonov, and I regret my inability to cover this material here. Important contributions include Bullock's *The Feminine in the Prose of Andrey Platonov* (2005), and his detailed discussion of the 'politics' of Platonov's gaze in *Dzhan* (2014).There is also an extensive coverage of Platonov's oeuvre in *Russian Literature*, 2013, 73, issues 1-2, pp. 1-340. This incorporates Seifrid's discussion of Platonov's work as it relates to dissidence (pp. 285-300), and Bullock's analysis of Platonov and theories of modernism (pp. 301-22).

and 'liquidated as a class'.[4] In recording the harshness of winter and the peasants' response, Platonov describes how:

> Snow fell on the cold ground, meaning to remain there for the winter … only around the animals' sheds did the snow melt and the earth become black, since the warm blood of cows and sheep had seeped out beneath the boards. … After liquidating all their last breathing livestock, the peasants had begun to eat beef and instructed all the members of their households to do the same … the flesh of dear and familiar animals had to be hidden away inside one's own body and preserved from socialist ownership. (*The Foundation Pit*, p. 102)

Throughout the novel, Platonov calls the industrializing drive into question, evoking Alexander Herzen's warning that 'an end that is infinitely remote is not an end, but, if you like, a trap; an end must be nearer—it ought it to be, at the very least, the labourer's wage, or pleasure in the work done' (cited by Morson, 2010, p. 157).[5] In a more abstract way, he also deals with Bolshevik utopianism, where, in a fundamental revision of Marx, Bogdanov had argued that 'science, art, and ideology did not merely reflect the socio-economic structure, but played a crucial role in organizing and therefore creating that structure' (Seifrid, 2009, pp. 38-9).[6] Although Platonov lost his early commitment to these views, he always retained his belief that the earth follows its own laws, which we infringe at our peril. In his 1934 essay, 'On the first socialist tragedy', he reflects that:

> Self-destruction in fascism, war between states—these are the losses entailed by increased production, these are nature's revenge for it. … The tragedy of man, armed with machine and heart, and with the dialectic of nature, must in our country be resolved by way of socialism. But it must be understood that this task is an extremely serious one. Ancient life on the 'surface' of nature was able to obtain what was essential to it from the waste products and excretions of elemental forces and substances. But we mess about deep inside the world, and in return the world crushes us with an equivalent strength. (Platonov, 1934, np)

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[4] Under the Sovnarkom decree of 1930, the kulaks were divided into three categories. The first were to be sent to forced labour camps or shot; the second were to go to distant provinces; the third were allowed to stay where they were, but with a smaller patch of land. As the Red Army and the OGPU were unable to carry out the task on their own, youth from the factories, militia and the Party were sent out to enforce the establishment of the collective farms.

[5] Herzen (1912-1870) was a founder of Russian socialism and one of the main proponents of agrarian populism.

[6] Bogdanov elaborated his theory under the title of 'empiriomonism', where he aimed to unite all forms of knowledge under a universal science he called 'tectology'. This was the target of Lenin's furious rejoinder in *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* (Seifrid, 2009, p. 39).

Such are the political and philosophical concerns underlying *The Foundation Pit*. So how does Platonov express his views by 'doing otherwise'? I suggest three key moves: a multifaceted use of parody; a fluid form of consciousness; and the imaginative use of the time/space configurations of chronotope.

Parody

At the level of genre, *The Foundation Pit* is most evidently a parody of the 'production novel', then the dominant force in Soviet literature. As the forerunner of socialist realism, the production novel was devoted to industrialization, with its positive heroes establishing factories, building new ventures, overcoming hardships, and altogether transforming the city and landscape. *The Foundation Pit* challenges all this, with its core narrative centred on the failure to build an 'all proletarian home' for the nation's proletariat, where the labouring diggers ever more carve out their own grave. The parody is dense, for it retains the hope for revolutionary aspirations while also despairing of them. The book's two most significant characters—Voshchev, a machine factory worker, and Prushevsky, the site engineer—are dreamers and doubters, protesting against a mechanical form of existence'; at the same time, they never relinquish the hope that machines and human effort might transform material and social reality. As Seifrid (2009, p. 111) puts it, 'the most accurate statement to make about *The Foundation Pit* might be that it is at once a parody of the genre of the production novel in mocking its world view, and its apotheosis, a work aimed, in a sense, at being the last production novel that could ever be written'.[7]

The Foundation Pit is also parodic at the detailed level of official discourse, where it refracts and satirizes the new forms of Soviet speech by embedding words such as 'organize', 'collectivize', 'class 'and 'proletarian' into the fabric of its text. Illustrating this, Pashkin, the overfed Soviet official, says flirtingly to his wife 'let me organize myself close to you', and Safronov the ideologue calls for 'the leadership of the proletarian future bright world' (*The Foundation Pit*, p. 31 and p. 45). For Olga Meerson (1997), this produces a kind of 'reverse

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[7] Bullock (2005, p. 6) comments on this in a wider context, suggesting that 'Platonov is a utopian writer, concerned both with attempts to establish a really existing, ideal society in the form of Soviet communism, and with the discursive practices of utopian thought in general'.

estrangement' where what should be 'outrageous, fantastic or tragic' becomes mundane and unnoticeable (cited by Seifrid 2009, pp. 169-70). Enlarging on this issue, Bullock (2011, p 93) proposes that Platonov's characters have to struggle to communicate within a 'historically determined, impoverished form of language', citing Joseph Brodsky's (1987) argument that

> Platonov appears to have deliberately and completely subordinated himself to the vocabulary of this utopia, with all its cumbersome neologisms, abbreviations, bureaucratese, sloganeering, and the like. (Brodsky, 1987, p. 288, cited by Bullock, 2011, p. 93)

Bullock (2005, p. 3) notes that Brodsky's critical point is that Platonov's prose is 'designed to turn the language of the Soviet state against itself'. I emphasize this quality, suggesting that Platonov makes us clearly *aware* of the impoverished form of language with which his characters have to struggle. To give just one example: when Voshchev goes to the trade union committee to 'defend his unneeded labor', he tells the senior official he has been contemplating 'a plan of shared life, general life' (*The Foundation Pit*, p. 4). The administrator isn't interested, declaring 'Happiness will come from materialism, Comrade Voshchev', and it is at this point that Voshchev first experiences 'doubt in his own life and the weakness of a body without truth' (p. 4).

Platonov also has his minor characters speak to the contradictions of the revolutionary project. The 'activist' (who is never known by any other name) can be sitting at his desk in the late evenings, 'probing with painstaking eyes every precise step and task' so as to keep a 'mental and factual watch over the kulak scum' (p. 72). While he thus busies himself constructing 'an essential future' without 'memory of domestic happiness', the activist will occasionally 'stop dead because of the anguish of life' and remember that he himself 'was a bungler and a blind overlooker' (p. 73): With the conflicted mentality of the apparatchik, the activist is never at ease:

> 'Why don't I enter the masses, why don't I lose myself in a shared life led by a leader?' the activist would ask himself at such moments, but he quickly remembered himself, since he did not want to be a member of the general orphanhood and he felt afraid of the long anguish of waiting for socialism, of waiting until every last shepherd came to be in the midst of joy, when he knew it was possible to be an assistant to the vanguard this very day and to possess straightaway all the benefits of future time. (*The Foundation Pit*, p. 73)

In expressing his fear of belonging to a 'general orphanhood', the activist speaks to one of the central metaphors of the novel. As we have seen, the rural community adjoining the foundation pit resembles a 'collective-farm orphanhood standing in the wind of the roads' (p. 65). Further, and as I shall describe later, the child Nastya, adopted by the diggers, is also an orphan of history. Hence the question haunting the novel: what price progress?

A fluid form of consciousness

Bullock (2011, p. 82) suggests that Platonov pursues a 'fluid and shifting form of consciousness in which there is hardly a statement, idea or emotion that can be confidently attributed to a single source'. This fluid consciousness returns always to the disjunction between human aspiration and material actuality. When Voshchev is dismissed from his work, he walks through the night to come to the central part of town. Arriving, he finds that it belongs to 'a bright place of electricity', which is 'separated from nature', a distant place where 'only faraway water and wind inhabited the darkness and nature, and only birds could sing the sorrow of this great substance, since they flew up above and life was easier for them' (*The Foundation Pit*, p. 9). In the town, a contrasting site of human transformation and effort, 'people were labouring with a will, erecting brick partitions, striding with burdens of weight in the timber delirium of scaffolding' (p. 9). Watching the diggers, Voshchev sees how:

> [The workers] are thin as if they had died; the cramped space between each man's skin and his bones was occupied by veins, and it was clear by the thickening of those veins how much blood they must let pass during the tension of labour. (*The Foundation Pit*, p.10).

In conveying his own philosophical desolation, Platonov describes how, on his dismissal, Voshchev is left with 'the general sorrow of life and the melancholy of meaninglessness' (p. 12). It is only when Voshchev joins the diggers that he finds himself ready to admit that 'childhood might, after all, grow up, and that future man might find peace in this reliable building, in order to look out from its high windows onto a world stretched out and waiting for him' (p. 13). Thereafter the narrative speaks to the loss of that hope. In a pathos-ridden account, we read how Voshchev attempts to comfort himself by collecting and storing leaves and other

small pieces of nature in order to protect them from the futility of their own existence:

> A dead, fallen leaf lay beside Voshchev's head; the wind had brought it there from a distant tree, and now this leaf faced humility in the earth. Voshchev picked up the leaf that had withered and put it a secret compartment in his bag, where he took care of all kinds of objects of unhappiness and obscurity. 'You did not possess the meaning of life,' supposed Voshchev with all the miserliness of compassion. 'Stay here—and I'll find out what you lived and perished for'. (*The Foundation Pit*, p. 5)

The melancholy of Prushevsky, the site engineer, is just as telling. The proletarian home is his vision; he wants it to stand in the place of the old town, where people still live 'by fencing themselves off into households' (p. 19). Impatient, he needs it all to happen now, so that 'the walls of his architecture would not be in vain' and 'the building would be inhabited by people … who were filled by that surplus of warmth called the soul' (p. 19). Unable to find meaning in the spiritual, Prushevsky denies the very possibility of the numinous. On one occasion, he walks away from the foundation pit and stops on a hill to look over the land and the road beyond. There, as he 'looked quietly into all of nature's misty old age', he saw 'some peaceful white buildings that shone with more light than there was in the air around them' (p. 60). This single limpid moment is destroyed by bitterness, for Prushevsky can neither understand nor contain it:

> On an earthly extinct star, it was more comfortable for him to feel sadness; an alien and distant happiness awoke shame and alarm in him – what he would have liked, without admitting it, was for the whole world, forever under construction but never constructed, *to be like his own destroyed life*. (*The Foundation Pit*, p. 60; my emphasis)

As Platonov portrays it, the socialist vision dies quietly, almost by stealth, left lying on the ground until destroyed by chance: it is something that might have been, but has now shrivelled into nothingness. For Voshchev:

> Like it or not there was no truth in the world—or maybe there had been once, in some plant or heroic creature, but then a wandering beggar had come by and eaten the plant, or trampled this creature there on the ground in lowliness, and then the beggar had died in an autumn gully and the wind had blown his body clean into nothing. (*The Foundation Pit*, pp. 102-3)

Chronotope: no time, no place, high symbolic significance

Reflecting the fluidity of the novel's consciousness, the time-place configurations of *The Foundation Pit* combine a temporal sense of 'no time' (or 'outside time')

with a physical sense of 'no place'. Here the visual imagery or 'gaze' of the text is highly important, combining with its literary inventiveness: a quality that Bullock (2014) attributes to Platonov's novel *Dzhan*. With this, the 'knots' binding the narrative have a dreamlike quality. When Voshchev is dismissed from his work at the start of the novel, he walks down an open road that is, as it were, *already there*, and it is by force of destiny that he comes to the centre of the town and joins the diggers working on the foundation pit. In this fashion, space and time represent quasi-teleological forces to which human subjects must conform and within which the apparently fortuitous but nevertheless inevitable events of the narrative combine. Here we have something similar to Bakhtin's (1937/1981, p. 100) description of the classical chronotope characterized by the 'reversibility of moments in a temporal sequence, and by their interchangeability in space'.

The crucial meeting between the town's diggers and the members of the adjoining rural community, on which so much else depends, carries this combination of happenstance and inevitability. The diggers are going about their work and the peasant Yelisey simply walks over the adjoining hill to announce that he has come to reclaim a hundred coffins, which, he recounts, his community had earlier stockpiled under the foundation pit for their future use. When the coffins are found, two are retained, one as a bed for the labourers' adopted orphan, Nastya, and the other for her toys. Yelisey drags the rest back them back over the hill, tied together by a long rope. Speaking to the physical dynamics of life, Platonov describes how:

> Taking the end of the front rope of the coffins over his shoulders, Yelisey leaned forward and, like a barge hauler, began to heave these objects across the dry ups and downs of life's everyday sea. (*The Foundation Pit*, p. 63)

Once Yelisey is over the hill, the two parts of the narrative come together, and the diggers, who are as oppressed as any of their counterparts in the western proletariat, play their part in destroying an already decimated rural community. As described by the narrator, it is with enthusiasm that they 'set against the collective farm at full tempo, as a cadre of the cultural revolution' (p. 106). Enhancing the no-place, no-time nature of Platonov's representations, they are assisted by a mythical bear, who has a 'wearily proletarian face' and a smoke-singed coat on account of his tireless hammering (p. 107). Representing an extreme form of

enslavement, the bear is also one of the Party's most efficient mechanisms of death, sniffing out the kulaks and revealing their hiding places.

In another critical episode, the kulaks are 'liquidated' (drowned) following a bizarre forgiveness scene in the OrgYard. Sent to their deaths down the river on a makeshift raft, they are farewelled by Zhachev the cripple, who has no legs and is a symbol of class hatred. As he pushes the raft out, he finds that 'liquidating the kulaks into the distance' brings him 'no calm' for he knows that he too is on limited time: 'socialism, after all, had no need for a stratum of sad freaks, and he too would soon be liquidated into the distance' (p. 115). As the raft disappears down the river, he 'loses the appearance of the class enemy' (p. 115). The scene ends strangely, gaily, almost like a school picnic:

> 'Fa-re we-ll, parasites!' Zhachev shouted down the river.
> 'Fa-re we-ll!' responded the kulaks, sailing off down to the sea. (*The Foundation Pit*, p. 115)

This passage has a mythological quality. Commenting on this, Chandler (2009a, p. 163) observes that while the phrase 'loses the appearance of the class enemy' might simply mean that the kulaks were disappearing from sight, it could also mean that the kulaks 'were ceasing to see Zhachev as the enemy, and *he* was ceasing to see *them* as enemies' (original emphasis). Adding weight to this interpretation, he points out that in Russian the word 'farewell' also means 'Keep forgiving!', thus suggesting that, in the brief moment of time left to them, Zhachev and the kulaks were each able to recognize one another's humanity. This, Chandler suggests, reflects Platonov's 'characteristic blend of delicate irony and deep tenderness', a combination that allows him to 'cherish the individual human soul' while also portraying 'one of the hells that mankind has created' (p. 164).

On the death of Nastya

The adoption and death of the orphaned child Nastya is one of the most important of the novel's symbolic 'out of time' events, representing Platonov's profound despair over the failure of the revolutionary project. Early in the novel, Chiklin, the most hardworking of the diggers, goes to visit the Dutch Tile Factory, which has now fallen into disuse. There he finds a dying woman stretched out on the floor. She is emaciated and her body is covered by fine hair to protect her from

the cold. Despite this, Chiklin immediately recognizes her as the one to whom he long ago lost his heart, when, one day, she smiled brightly at him on her way to work. Lying with her is her daughter, Nastya. The mother instructs her daughter never to tell anyone of her bourgeois origins after she has gone, as no one will talk to or care for her if she does. After the mother dies, Chiklin takes Nastya in his arms and 'cherishes her till morning, the last pitiful remnant of the woman who had perished' (*The Foundation Pit*, p. 50). He then takes her back to town, where the diggers nourish and protect her as their hope for a peaceful future, which, they trust, will persist long after their deaths:

> For a long while, they watched over the sleep of this small being who would one day have dominion over their graves and live on a pacified earth that had dominion over their bones. (*The Foundation Pit*, p. 58)

Close to the end of the book, Nastya becomes ill and dies. We do not know how or why she becomes ill, only that she does. As she lies there, Chiklin 'felt in all the places of her body' and found she was 'hot and damp and the bones were protruding plaintively from within her' (p. 135 and p. 136). He and Zhachev lean against her, 'so as to cherish her better', but Nastya's mind 'went on sadly thinking' and she calls out for her mother's bones. When Chiklin finds them for her, she 'kept holding each of them to her body in turn, kissing them, wiping them with a little rag, and placing then in order on the earth floor' (p. 144).

By morning Nastya has died, and the community is torn apart in grief. The mythical bear (the hammer) 'buried his mouth in the ground and was howling sadly into the deep depth of the soil, unable to think through his grief' (p. 139). Zhachev declares that he no longer believes in communism: 'I'm a freak of imperialism – you can see that! But communism is for children, that's why I loved Nastya' (p. 149). He departs and never returns. Voshchev, who, not knowing that Nastya has died, comes bearing her gifts of leaves, 'stood in bewilderment over this stilled child', asking himself 'wherein in the world communism was going if it didn't first begin in a child's feeling and convinced impression' (p. 148). Chiklin, the guardian of the child, is the hardest struck. Because he is 'unable to cry', he decides to bury Nastya, and everything is suspended in the labour of grief:

> At noon, Chiklin began to dig Nastya a special grave. He dug it for fifteen hours on end—in order that it should be deep and that neither a worm nor the root of a plant, nor warmth nor cold should be able to penetrate it, and so that the child should never be disturbed by the noise of life from the earth's surface. Chiklin gouged out a sepulchral bed in eternal stone and, by way of a lid, he prepared a special granite slab so that the vast weight of the grave's dust should not press down on the little girl.
>
> After he had rested, Chiklin took the little girl in his arms and carried her out with care, to lay her in stone and fill in the grave. The time was night, the whole collective farm was asleep in the barrack, and only the hammerer, sensing movement, awoke, and Chiklin allowed him to reach out and touch Nastya farewell. (*The Foundation Pit*, p. 149)

It is with Nastya's death and Chiklin's unrelenting grief that Platonov leaves us, with the philosophical questions raised by his text unresolved, and nothing certain except for the enormity of loss. Shortly after he had completed *The Foundation Pit*, he wrote:

> Will our socialist republic perish like Nastya or will she grow up into a whole human being, into a new historical society? … The author may have been mistaken to portray in the form of a little girl's death the end of a socialist generation, but this mistake occurred only as a result of excessive alarm on behalf of something beloved, whose loss is tantamount to the destruction not only of all the past but also of the future. (*The Foundation Pit*, p. 150)

Testament to the pressures under which Platonov laboured, these comments have a defensive and apologetic note. But nothing can detract from the power of *The Foundation Pit* as a lament, a poetic mourning. Bakhtin (1986, pp. 119-20) suggests that an utterance is never 'just a reflection or an expression of something already existing and outside it'; rather, it creates something 'that never existed before, something absolutely new and unrepeatable, and, moreover, it always has some relation to value—the true, the good, the beautiful, and so forth' and 'completely transforms' the grounds from which it originates. This is true both of *The Foundation Pit* as a whole, where it transforms the politico-ideological crisis of its origins into a profoundly important literary record, and of its final paragraph, which transmutes metaphysical melancholia into a single moment of human grief.

Bulgakov: *The Master and Margarita*

If *The Foundation Pit* is a lament, *The Master and Margarita* is shot through with laughter. Composed over some of the harshest years of Stalin's long rule, the

novel represents an outstanding act of literary defiance, with its imaginative use of satire, realism and romance firmly set against the limitations and conventions of socialist realism. As a theatre writer and novelist, Bulgakov trails resistance behind him, putting his professional life at stake.[8] In 1930, when he thought his career was finished, he ripped the manuscript *The Master and Margarita* to shreds and made formal application to leave the Soviet Union, with his letter stating outright that he 'would not make any attempt to write a Communist play, being quite confident that I could not succeed in writing such a play' (cited in Curtis, 1991, p. 104). Surprisingly, Stalin intervened—perhaps he admired Bulgakov's courage—and under his influence Bulgakov re-obtained a position at the Moscow Theatre.

The risks Bulgakov encountered in pushing the work to a conclusion were enormous. In her diary, Elena Bulgakova frequently refers to the arrests, trials, deaths and executions of those close to them. For example, on 30th October 1935, she records that 'during the day there was a ring at the door. I went out and there was Akhmatova with such a dreadful face. … It turned out that both her son and husband had been arrested' (reproduced in Curtis, 1991, p. 214). She also recounts that at one of the last private readings Bulgakov gave to their friends, his audience sat silent and numb: 'everything scared them. In the corridor, Pasha fearfully tried to tell me that under no circumstances should it be submitted—terrible consequences might ensue' (cited in Weeks, 1996, p. 140).

The Master and Margarita combines three intermeshing stories: the literary/political situation in Moscow in the 1930s, where Woland (Satan) visits a compulsorily atheistic community; the love affair between the Master and Margarita; and Pontius Pilate's betrayal of Jesus. The last comprises four chapters of the book (one narrated by Woland, one dreamed by Ivan Nikolaevich the 'Homeless', and the other two read by Margarita, having been written by the Master). Each of the three main stories is associated with a different narrative mode: respectively, 'a humorous and ironic' style; a 'rhetorical first-person

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[8] Bulgakov's earlier critical works include his novel, *The Heart of a Dog* (1925), and his plays, *The Days of the Turbins* (1926), *The Crimson Island* (1927) and *Flight* (1928). All were censored and withdrawn by the authorities.

narration, lyrical in tone and elevated in style'; and a realist 'neutral, third-person narrative' (Weeks, 1996, p. 26). Because of this, there has been considerable discussion over whether the work should be read as a triple, double or single novel; arguing against this, Andrew Barrett (1996a) maintains that there can be no single interpretation of *The Master and Margarita* and no one key to unlocking its secrets. Bullock (2011) argues further that Bulgakov's novel comments on/parodies its own status as fiction:

> *The Master and Margarita* contains a novel-within-a novel, whose events, themes and characters are subtly paralleled within the novel as a whole ... [and where] the narrator … directly addresses readers both real and imaginary, inviting them to participate in the literary process and to identity with the Master and Margarita and the novel's other sympathetic characters. (Bullock, 2011, p. 95)

As with *The Foundation Pit*, broader philosophical issues underpin Bulgakov's novel. In this case, they have their origins in Bulgakov's quarrel with the traditions of Russian positivist rationality, and more particularly, with the 'materialism, atheism, socialism, and revolutionalism' associated with the 'radical' or 'classical' intelligentsia of the mid-nineteenth century (Morson, 2010, p. 143). As already outlined, the 'classical' or 'radical' *intelligenty* drew on a materialist metaphysics, a strongly utilitarian philosophy, certainty about their role in bringing about change and the defence of 'revolutionalism on principle' (Morson, 2010, pp. 143-6). Against them stood the strong counter-tradition of the *literati* to which Bulgakov belongs. The distinctiveness of Bulgakov as part of, but partly separate from, this counter-tradition lies in his profound sense of the 'out of time' nature of time, an enduring interest in the metaphysical nature of the world, and an infusion of the present moment with the ancient and the traditional.

How, then, does Bulgakov give literary expression to these philosophical commitments? I focus on three key moves: satire and irony; the imaginative possibilities of chronotope; and the values and actions of the protagonists.

Satire and irony

Bakhtin (1937/1981, p. 159) suggests that satire creates its own special worlds, which 'cannot be understood in a direct and unmediated way but must be grasped metaphorically'. This is true of the central 'trick' of *The Master and Margarita,*

namely Woland's visit, which as well as acting as a lasting joke against the compulsory atheism of Soviet society, challenges literary and religious conventions by re-working the Faustian tradition and portraying Woland as more an emissary of justice rather than an expression of evil. For Bullock (2011, p. 84) Moscow can be seen as 'a modern day Babylon' with the arrival of Woland revealing that 'despite their claims to a superior rationalism, its citizens are as credulous, sinful and deserving of punishment as their Babylonian counterparts'. Whatever the metaphor/s underlying the *Master and Margarita*, we have an iconoclastic *distancing* from current orthodoxies, something I see as essential to Bulgakov's particular way of 'doing otherwise'.

In the opening chapter of the novel, Mikhail Alexandrovich Berlioz, the editor of a 'fat literary journal' and Ivan Nikolaevich—an aspiring young poet who writes under the name of Bezdomny or 'Homeless'—meet at the Patriarch Ponds, the site of the palace of an eighteenth century patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church. The two are discussing Ivan's anti-religious poem, which Berlioz has rejected not because it criticizes Jesus but because it takes him seriously in the first instance. Berlioz, a well-read man, is firm with Ivan Nikolaevich, telling him that 'Jesus as a person never existed in the world, and all the stories about him were mere fiction, the most ordinary fiction' (p. 9). It is when his 'high tenor rang out over the deserted walk', that Woland first makes his appearance. Greeting the couple politely, he questions them on the 'five proofs' of God's existence, and asks how they respond to Kant's construction of a sixth final proof of his own. When the young poet Ivan angrily asserts there is no need for any supernatural power as 'man governs himself', Woland dryly observes that 'to govern one needs, after all, to have a precise plan for a certain, at least somewhat decent, length of time', and that this is rendered impossible by the simple fact of human mortality (p. 13). The issue of divinity is never resolved; rather the passage underlines the foolishness of Berlioz' axiomatic assertions.

Barrett (1996b, pp. 113-16) points out that Woland he is 'by no means Goethe's Mephistopheles', for he has a better understanding of the 'divine scheme', 'participates in it with greater readiness'; in seeing truth and dishonesty for what they are, he is 'both scourge and benefactor to the human beings he encounters in

Moscow'. It is Woland who rides with the Master and Margarita into infinity, and ensures the couple's 'forgiveness and eternal refuge' (*The Master and Margarita*, p. 379). And it is he who speaks some of the most memorable lines of the book. To Matthew Levi, who addresses him as 'spirit of evil and sovereign of shadows', he responds:

> You uttered your words as if you don't acknowledge shadows, or evil either. Kindly consider your question: what would your good do if evil did not exist, and what would the earth look like if shadows disappeared from it? Shadows are cast by objects and people. Here is the shadow of my sword. Trees and living things also have shadows. Do you want to skin the whole earth, tearing all the trees and living things off it, because of your fantasy of enjoying bare light? You are a fool. (*The Master and Margarita*, p. 360)

True to Bulgakov, this scene is also humorous, with Matthew's manner toward Woland exemplified by a kind of collegial hostility—after all they both belong to the world of the 'unreal'—and he merely retorts 'I won't argue with you, you old sophist' (p. 360). But it is, indeed, the symbolic significance of shadows that forms the key 'idea' or thematic 'hero' of *The Master and Margarita* as a work that speaks against the closures of rationality and refuses all forms of positivist certitude. This challenge to the distinctions between the real and the unreal, the actual and the fantastic, recurs throughout the novel, pointing to the fundamental flaws of current orthodoxies and, more widely, the limitations of all forms of positivist rationality.

In a more directly political way, Bulgakov draws on the burlesque, grotesque and outrageous to describe how Woland and his retinue—Behemoth, Koroviev and the more violent Azazello—trick the corrupt, the greedy and the ambitious into self-defeating actions, where they compete with each other for possessions, scarce housing recourses and the affirmation of the authorities. As noted, laughter 'destroys epic distance' for, with its 'comic familiarization of the image of man', it 'brings the world closer and familiarizes it in order to investigate it fearlessly and freely' (Bakhtin 1941/1981, p. 25). In one of *The Master and Margarita's* major incidents, enacted at 'Woland's Magic Show', the audience fight for the bank notes and fancy clothes that flood the stage, only to later find themselves naked on Moscow's public streets holding counterfeit notes. The implication is that all such tricks are well deserved. In referring to Nikanor Ivanovich, the

grasping chairman of the tenants' association of block 302, Woland says to Koroviev, 'I don't like this Nikanor Ivanovich, he is a chiseller and a crook. Can it be arranged so that he doesn't come any more?' (*The Master and Margarita*, p. 101).

In laughing his way through a Moscow beset by housing shortages and bureaucratic surveillance, Bulgakov adapts the traditions of menippean satire in combining the fantastic and the philosophical, and creating characters that are simultaneously real and legendary (see Bakhtin, 1963/1984; Proffer, 1996, pp. 98-99). As in these traditions, his targets would have been well-known to contemporaries, most especially Massolit and Griboedov's Club: Massolit represents the Union of Writers and Griboedov's the House of Writers, where members were rewarded for writing clichéd poems, novels and plays. As the narrator observes:

> Any visitor finding himself in Griboedov's … would realize at once what a good life those lucky fellows were having, and black envy would soon start gnawing him … [in not owning] a Massolit membership card, brown, smelling of costly leather, with a wide gold boarder – a card known to all of Moscow. (*The Master and Margarita*, p. 56)

As always, there is seriousness behind the irony, reflecting Bulgakov's hard-won knowledge of the inferior works produced by the regime, the creative works that might have been produced but never got written, and the artistic aspirations that were crushed before they were born. In focusing on the casualties, Bulgakov attends to the plight of Ivan the Homeless. A poet manqué, Ivan produces the officially approved forms of verse. On first meeting the Master, he admits to being a poet, and sees his visitor wince:

> 'What, you mean you dislike my poetry?' Ivan asked with curiosity.
> 'I dislike it terribly.'
> 'And what have you read?'
> 'I've never read any of your poetry!' the visitor exclaimed nervously.
> 'Then how can you say that?'
> 'Well, what of it?' the guest replied. 'As if I haven't read others. Or else … maybe there's some miracle? Very well, I'm prepared to take it on faith. Is your poetry good? You tell me yourself.'
> 'Monstrous!' Ivan spoke boldly and frankly.
> 'Don't write any more!' the visitor said beseechingly.
> 'I promise and I swear!' Ivan said solemnly. (*The Master and Margarita*, p. 134)

Later, Bulgakov describes how Ivan keeps his promise to the Master. When confronted by the mild-faced interrogator who has come to question him about the death of Berlioz, Ivan says he will never again write poetry: 'the poems I used to write were bad poems, and now I understand it' (p. 337). Ivan reaffirms his commitment when he sees the Master for the last time before the latter flies off to infinity. At this last meeting, the Master asks him to write a sequel to his own work, as he himself will 'be occupied by other things' (p. 373). This, as I will explain later, is the promise that Ivan does not and cannot keep.

In his comparison of *The Foundation Pit* and *The Master and Margarita,* Bullock (2011, p. 82) proposes that while Platonov takes us fully into the 'allure and absurdities' of Soviet utopianism, Bulgakov dismisses the current orthodoxies as 'beneath his contempt' in the expectation that 'his reader will share and revel in his iconoclastic attitude'. At the same time, Bullock underscores that Bulgakov's 'joke' is a deeply serious one, designed to reveal the deceits beneath the orthodoxies, the implausibilities beneath the certitudes, and, above all, the importance of safeguarding artistic integrity. Here he comments that:

> Bulgakov conceives of the irrational and the transcendent as a justification for and defence of the writer's vocation, confident that posterity and immortality will judge him more fairly than the current age. (Bullock, 2011, p. 910)

In parallel, the Master is able to 'correctly intuit' the nature of the events he describes, because 'he has special insight into a world that is beyond the rational, materialist philosophy on which Soviet Russia is built' (Bullock, 2011, p. 91). I come then to the Jerusalem story, and with it to Bulgakov's distinctive use of chronotope.

Time, place and meaning: Moscow and Jerusalem

Whereas Platonov portrays the force of history through its 'no place, outside time' use of chronotope, Bulgakov relies on vast shifts in time and space, blurring the boundaries between the known and the unknown, the fictional and the real. Here we have a vivid illustration of Bakhtin's (1937/1981, p. 167) proposition that in the post-Rabelaisian novel, 'everything of value, everything that is valorized positively, must achieve its full potential in temporal and spatial terms; it must spread out as far and as wide as possible'. This represents a powerful form of

'doing otherwise', with the novel's 'spinning out' of time and space producing a sense of reality beyond the immediacy of internecine politics and bureaucratic rivalries.

In shifting between contemporary Moscow and ancient Jerusalem, Bulgakov blurs the boundaries between the known and the unknown, the fictional and the real. In the case of Moscow, Berlioz' apartment, subsequently taken over by Woland and his retinue, is 'number 50 of no. 302-bis of Sadovaya Street' and its layout and furnishings are described in detail, modelled on Bulgakov's own. The same level of detail applies to the office of the Director of the Variety Theatre, where the furnishings include 'a bunch of old posters hanging on the wall, a small table with a carafe of water on it, four armchairs and, in the corner, a dust-covered scale of some model of past review' (p. 104). In combining this kind of detailed precision with the fantastic nature of Woland's visit, Bulgakov makes the familiar strange, for number 50 of no. 302-bis of Sadovaya Street (as it really exists) can now never be the same again. Thus he mystifies the customary, suggesting that it is only our habits of mind that make it appear predictable and knowable.

In contrast, Bulgakov demystifies the mythical in the Jerusalem story. In introducing Pilate, he is very precise about the time and place, recording that it was 'early in the morning of the fourteenth day of the spring month of Nisan' and that it seemed that 'a rosy smell exuded from the cypresses and palms in the garden, and that the smell of leather trappings and sweat from the convoy was mingled with the cursed rosy flax' (p. 19). There, in the 'palace of Herod the Great', a centurion's 'heavy boots thudded across the mosaic', after which 'complete silence fell in the colonnade, and one could hear pigeons cooing on the garden terrace near the balcony and water, singing an intricate, pleasant song in the fountain' (p. 21).

Having made the biblical story so immediate, Bulgakov resists any literal reading of his account. As well as using the alternative Aramaic names for the main characters and places—Yeshua for Jesus, Yershalaim for Jerusalem, Kaifa for Caiaphas the High Priest, and Kiriath for Judas Iscariot—he changes several key aspects of the Bible story. Yeshua has only one disciple and does not enter

Jerusalem on a donkey, but by 'the Susa gate, accompanied only by Matthew Levi' (*The Master and Margarita*, p. 27). Most significantly there is no supreme moment of death and no resurrection beyond it. Terrified and bloody, Yeshua dies a mortal death:

> In the very first hour, he (Yeshua) began to have blackouts, and then he fell into oblivion, hanging his head in his unwound turban. The flies and horseflies therefore covered him completely, so that his face disappeared under the black swarming mass. In his groin, and on his belly, and in his armpits, fat horseflies sat sucking at his yellow naked body. (*The Master and Margarita*, p. 180)

How might one read Bulgakov's account of the Passion with all of its exactness of detail and its estrangement in interpretation? For Laura Weeks (1996, p. 42), one of the leading authorities on the subject, the narrative works to 'strip Jesus of all the attributes of his role as a Messiah … Bulgakov's Yeshua sidesteps divinity as neatly as he sidesteps the single ray of sunlight that penetrates the colonnade during his interrogation'. But I suggest that Bulgakov's rendering, with all its historical precision, also works to make the historical existence of Jesus the more real, thus evoking the sense that *maybe this is how it all really happened*. In short, if his description of the events in Moscow renders the 'real' fantastic, then his reconstruction of the Passion renders the mystical real, thus redrawing the boundaries between our fictional and non-fictional worlds, the real and the imagined.

At the same time, the novel invites a search for coherence. Surely, one feels, Moscow and Jerusalem, so immediate to our sensibilities, must in some way be subject to the same influences? Isn't there an underlying theme that gives the text an internal unity? Pondering this, Vladimir Lakshin (1968/1996) suggests that it is the poetics of the sun and moon that govern the indeterminacies of the novel:

> The sun—the customary symbol of life, joy and genuine light—accompanies Yeshua along Via Dolorosa as the emanation of hot and searing reality. In contrast, the moon is a fantastic world of shadows, enigmas, and illusiveness—the kingdom of Woland and his guests, feasting at the spring ball in the full moon—but it is also the cooling light of calm and sleep. Together, the luminaries of the day and night are the only certain witnesses of what happened. No one knows when in Jerusalem and of what took place in Moscow. They mark the bonds of time, and the unity of human history. (Lakshin 1968/1996, p. 76)

This indicates that a symbolic, trans-temporal force might unite the events of the novel. This would be quite consistent with Bulgakov's interest in the metaphysical and his refusal of all forms of positivist rationality. But in the third and final part of my discussion, I want to propose that something more is involved: that Bulgakov's destabilization of the real and the unreal, the imagined and the actual, is underpinned by certain core ethical and philosophical commitments, as represented in the actions, views, voices and values of his characters.

On virtue, courage and memory

As well as being serious about artistic integrity, Bulgakov is serious about love, as illustrated in his account of the enduring love affair between Margarita and the Master. This part of the novel, which he wrote first, is important to his art of 'doing otherwise', for, against current orthodoxies, it steadfastly insists on the traditional and the romantic. Thus, in a wonderfully light passage, the Master tells Ivan how their affair started. Out walking one evening, he saw Margarita carrying a bunch of yellow flowers, a colour he particularly disliked. On realizing this, she threw the flowers in the gutter; he immediately retrieved them and they 'then walked on side by side'. When Ivan begs him to go on with the story, the Master says: 'why you can guess for yourself how it went on. Love leaped at us like a murderer in an ally leaping out of nowhere, and struck us both at once' (p. 140). The rest is classic romance:

> She used to come to me every afternoon, but I would begin waiting for her in the morning. This waiting expressed itself in moving small objects around on the table. Ten minutes before, I would sit down by the little window and begin listening for the banging of the decrepit gate. And how curious: before my meeting with her, few people came to our yard—more simply, no one came—but now it seemed to me that the whole city came flooding there. (*The Master and Margarita*, p. 141)

If Bulgakov is serious about love, he is also serious about virtue: not virtue in the absolute, saintly sense, but virtue in its complex, flawed, human manifestations. This is illustrated in the case of Margarita, who shows loyalty and courage in agreeing to become a witch in the hope of finding the Master. Flying over the city in her transformed state, she uses these same qualities to gleefully wreck the apartment of the critic Latunsky, who has savaged her lover's work. When the

small boy on the third floor of the flats is terrified by the noise she makes in smashing the critic's apartment to bits, she stops to comfort him: 'don't be afraid, little one,' she says, her criminal voice grown husky from the wind, 'it's some boys breaking *windows' (The Master and Margarita*, p. 240). She is also generous and compassionate. When, at the close of the Ball, Woland tells her that she can demand 'one thing only' for her services, she wills herself to ask that Frieda, one of the tormented dead, no longer be offered the handkerchief with which she had smothered her two-year old child some centuries ago. But above all, Margarita is courageous, and it is this that separates her from Pontius Pilate and the Master, both of whom, in their different ways, illustrate the damage that cowardice can inflict on personal, spiritual and artistic integrity.

Let me start with Pilate. As Vladimir Lakshin (1968/1996) points out, he did not wish Yeshua to be killed, and even at one point offered him hospitality and a role as a court counsellor. But when Yeshua questions Caesar's right to rule, saying that all authority is 'violence over people', and that a time 'would come when there will be no authority of the Caesars, nor any other authority' (*The Master and Margarita*, p. 30), Pilate vacillates and withdraws. He is, in a word, cowed. Timid in spite of, or perhaps because of, his power, he fears informers and insubordination, is sensitive to ridicule, and shrinks in the face of religious fanaticism (Lakshin, 1968/1996). As a result, he bows to Kaifa's insistence that 'the wretched robber Bar-Rabban' be released over the condemned but innocent Yeshua (*The Master and Margarita*, p. 37), and from that point on the killing of Yeshua is a foregone conclusion. After the execution, Pilate condemns himself again and again, dreaming that he and Yeshua are walking down a moonlit road. When, on one of these walks, Yeshua reflects that 'cowardice is undoubtedly one of the most terrible vices', Pilate cries out, 'No, philosopher, I disagree with you, it is the most terrible vice!' (p. 319).

So, yes, Bulgakov is serious about cowardice, deeply so. At the same time, he is compassionate, and spends more time describing Pilate's torment than the emotions of any other character. In one of the most moving scenes of the book, the Master and Margarita stand with Woland on the verge of infinity and see

Pilate seated on a stone chair with his dog, staring at the moon. He appears to be talking, and Woland explains:

> He says one and the same thing, that even the moon gives him no peace, and that his is a bad job. That is what he always says when he is not asleep, and when he is asleep, he dreams one and the same thing: there is a path of moonlight, and he wants to walk down it and talk with the prisoner Yeshua Ha-Nozri, because, as he insists he never finished what he was saying that time, long ago, on the fourteenth day of the spring month of Nisan. (*The Master and Margarita*, p. 381)

In a lovely aside on Pilate's faithful dog, Woland then reflects that 'if it is true that cowardice is the most grievous vice, then the dog at least is not guilty of it. Storms were the only thing the brave dog feared. Well, he who loves must share the lot of the one he loves' (p. 381).

Given Bulgakov's concern with cowardice, it is significant that he creates a hero who doubts the value of his work and lacks the strength to support it. Condemned by one of Massolit's leading critics, the Master burns his novel and admits himself to the asylum, and it is only the courage of Margarita that saves him. As Pevear (2007, p. xvi) suggests, this establishes 'a thematic link between Pilate, the Master, and the author himself'. Pevear also points out that Bulgakov 'laboured especially over the conclusion of the novel and what reward to give the master', revealing that in an earlier version of this part of the novel Bulgakov had written:

> The house on Sadovaya and the horrible Bosoy will forever vanish from your memory, but with them will go Ha-Nozri and the forgiven hegemon. These things are not for your spirit. You will not raise yourself higher, you will not see Yeshua, you will never leave your refuge. (Pevear, 2007, p. xvi)

In finally settling his account with his flawed hero, Bulgakov arranges for Matthew Levi to ask Woland that the Master 'be given peace'. Woland agrees, saying 'nothing is hard for me to do, you know that', but first asks 'so why don't you take him with you to the light?' Then comes Matthew's sorrowful response: 'he does not deserve light, he deserves peace' (*The Master and Margarita*, p. 361).

In both versions of the Master's reward, Bulgakov proposes that our destiny is intimately bound up with our ability to remember and make sense of the past. This is also the key to the novel's epilogue. Here we read that the authorities conduct a thorough investigation into the incidents surrounding Woland's visit; that 'almost

everything was explained'; and that 'the investigation came to an end as all investigations come to an end' (p. 389). Ivan, now 'Professor Ivan Nikolaevich Ponyrev of the Institute of History and Philosophy', is 'aware of everything, he knows and understands everything. He knows that as a young man he fell victim to criminal hypnotists and was treated and cured. But he also knows that there are things that he cannot manage' (p. 395). Chief among the things that Ivan 'cannot manage' are the memories that crowd in on him on the nights of the full moon. It is then, in his wakeful sleep, that he again sees Yeshua and Pilate walking together, and watches the moon 'begin to rage' so that it 'sprays light in all directions … (and) … drowns the bed' (p. 395). These memories are to vanish, for:

> The next morning, he wakes up silent but perfectly calm and well. His needled memory grows quiet, and until the next full moon no one will trouble the professor—neither the noseless killer of Gestas, nor the cruel fifth procreator of Judea, the equestrian Pontius Pilate. (*The Master and Margarita*, p. 396)

Present at the beginning and end of the novel, and appearing in more chapters than any of the other characters, Ivan the Homeless pulls the threads of the novel together. With only his memory of the Master to sustain him, he acknowledges that there are things that he cannot manage and submits to a drug-induced tranquillity. What price memory? What price artistic integrity? Such are the questions arising from *The Master and Margarita*, a text that reflects on the act of writing through the narrative it tells and the metaphorical, satirical and fantastic manner in which it tells it.

Concluding points: on 'doing otherwise'

This chapter has been based on the proposition that Platonov and Bulgakov face the challenge of undermining the certitudes and literary conventions of their times without asserting a systematic counter-ideology or literary formula of their own: namely, in practising the 'art of doing otherwise'. Here the artistic is an *expression* of the political, just as the political is an expression of the artistic, thus illustrating Booth's (1984, p. xvi) 'form/matter pairing' where 'neither form nor matter can be distinguished in separation from its twin'. In exploring how Platonov and Bulgakov achieve this effect, I have considered their varied uses of the novel's traditions in expressing their political and philosophical concerns; the

power of their imaginative and emotional calls; and the relationship between the finalized and unfinalized qualities of their works. In now reflecting on what this might suggest for the complex of factors enabling a work carry across time and place, I further reflect on each dimension.

In the first instance, I underscore the far-reaching and varied nature of Platonov and Bulgakov's literary/political combinations. In *The Foundation Pit*, Platonov confronts the paradox that liberation from human suffering is dependent on matter while matter is ultimately obdurate and determinate. To express this in a literary way, he uses parody at the levels of genre and official discourse, illuminates the elusive nature of his characters' consciousness, and creates a chronotope that represents no-time, no-place and hence all times and all places. In *The Master and Margarita*, Bulgakov illuminates the intellectual, artistic and spiritual closures of utilitarian positivism through a combination of satire and irony, radical shifts in time and space, and the use of characters that speak to the importance of courage, conviction and memory. With these literary moves, distinct to each text, the works compel, but differently so. In its profound melancholy, *The Foundation Pit* promotes a sense of the preciousness and vulnerability of our political aspirations; in its sweeping movements through time and space, *The Master and Margarita*, reminds us of the vainness of our aspirations, as sun, stars and moon wheel around our universe.

Turning secondly to the texts' imaginative qualities, I emphasize how the novels make a direct call on our consciousness, bypassing analytic deliberation. In *The Foundation Pit*, this effect is achieved through Platonov's distinctive poetics. While 'the extraordinary weight and density' of his language often derives from its instability, with words 'hovering between different meanings' (Chandler 2009a, p. 172), there are many times when the emotional impact is unequivocal: as for example, when 'Chiklin picked Nastya up in his arms and she opened eyes that had gone silent and that had now dried up like fallen leaves' (p. 140). I re-emphasize that the impact is *experiential* as well as *linguistic*: that is, we come to internalize and experience the image as well as 'think' it. This quality also applies to *The Master and Margarita,* where the text's poetics allow for many lines of escape and conjecture, creating 'a mental space, a field of dreams and contention'

(McEwan, 2011, np). There is also something 'uncanny' about Bulgakov's imagination, whereby he is able to render the events in Jerusalem as though happening in the present, quite literally, 'bringing them home' to us as readers. Thus he envisages, with such precision how:

> The sun already stood quite high over the hippodrome, [and] that a ray had already penetrated the colonnade and was stealing toward Yeshua's worn sandals, and that the man was trying to step out of the sun's way. (*The Master and Margarita*, p. 25)

I stress that while these imaginative qualities are not exclusive to the novel as a literary form, they are vital to it, and have particular effects when combined with its distinctive practices. This is something that we might neglect if, following Bakhtin, we emphasize the contrasts between the novel and lyrical poetry. In the case of *The Foundation Pit*, this would obscure just how the text manages to be so elusive and so haunting, so able to enter the inner recesses of our consciousness; in that of *The Master and Margarita*, it would be to fail to appreciate how Bulgakov's flights of imagination lead to a feeling of release and renewed mental and imaginative energy.

The emotional call of the texts is vital to their resonance across time and space. In this respect, Platonov and Bulgakov do not simply invoke our sympathy for particular characters, but also offer glimpses into the scale of human and political tragedy. In *The Foundation Pit* Prushevsky suffers the 'constriction of his own consciousness and an end to any further understanding of life' (p. 19) while Voshchev experiences 'doubt in his own life and the weakness of a body without truth' (p. 4). In *The Master and Margarita,* Bulgakov us to contemplate the sufferings of the flawed, most particularly the torment of Pontius Pilate with his longing for a meeting with Yeshua that will never take place. As Bullock comments, in refusing to pass judgement on his characters, Bulgakov evokes a reality beyond the academic disciplines:

> [Bulgakov's] interest in what Morson calls 'the excluded middle' – neither the righteous nor the damned, but the flawed reality of our humanity (not for nothing is the Master a coward who doubts the value and permanence of his own novel) stems from his conception of a realm beyond the grasp of human politics, history or ideology. (Bullock, 2011, p. 91)

What of the relationship between the texts' finalizable and unfinalizable qualities? My first point is that in engaging with utopian discourse, Platonov and Bulgakov enter a terrain where political and philosophical binaries dominate the entire structure of thought and discourse. Hence, for theirs to be an effective counter response, it must avoid the black and white-ness of utopianism, and instead enter the world of shadows and ambiguity. Such is surely Woland's wisdom when he says to Matthew 'do you want to skin the whole earth, tearing all the trees and living things off it, because of your fantasy of enjoying bare light? You are a fool' (*The Master and Margarita*, p. 360). My argument, then, is that the unfinalizable qualities of the novels occur *in response to* and *in interaction with* the finalizability of utopian thought: hence the relationship, as I will argue throughout, is best understood as essentially active and dynamic, rather than in static and/or binary terms.

As an extension of this, I submit that the texts' oblique and/or enigmatic qualities exist within, and take their meaning from, the authors' fundamental values. To borrow from Emerson (2008, p. 136), Platonov and Bulgakov can each be said to have 'a point of view on the world and passionate value system they desire us to take seriously'. In Platonov's case this is illustrated in his dedication to a socialism in which the new society 'would be inhabited by people … who were filled by that surplus of warmth called the soul' (p. 19); in Bulgakov's to a fundamental commitment to artistic integrity, personal courage and the freedoms of thought and belief. Without these convictions, the works would float loose from their political concerns. This suggests that unfinalizability cannot be understood simply as an expression of the unknown nature of the world, where all is 'open and free, everything is still in the future, and will always be in the future' (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 166), but must also entertain the active search for meaning or 'truth'.

In summary: these two novels demonstrate a close and symbiotic relationship between the artistic and the political. In making this case, I have emphasized the diversity of their literary/political combinations; illustrated the power of imagination and emotion in conveying the human impact of the political; and pointed to the interactive relationship between their finalizable and unfinalizable

qualities. Building on these foundations, the next chapter turns to the more evidently instructional texts of the Western European authors, and explores how, and with what effects, the artistic and political intersect in their cases.

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Five

The novel as truth-bearer: Silone, Koestler and Orwell

> [In a pedagogical text] truth is impersonal. It is placed in a character's mouth by the author. Characters are not creators of ideas but merely carriers. … In such a world, an independent idea cannot be acknowledged on its own terms: it is either affirmed (that is absorbed) or repudiated. … Without any genuine interaction among characters, dialogue can never be more than 'pedagogical'. (Emerson, 1985, pp. 65-6)

In one of his wartime essays, Orwell (1944/2000, pp. 268-9) mentions a new class of 'roughly political writing' that had arisen out of the European struggle against totalitarianism. Under this genre he includes 'novels, autobiographies, books of "reportage", sociological treatises and plain pamphlets' for all share 'a common origin and to a great extent the same emotional atmosphere'. The 'common origin' include Mussolini's rise to power, the Spanish Civil War, the Third Reich and Stalin's Russia: in brief, the emergence of the twin faces of totalitarianism, fascist and communist. The 'shared emotional atmosphere' is bleak, pessimistic and urgent. Democracy hangs precariously in the balance, political atrocities are perpetrated on a massive scale, and the Left is in disarray as news filters through about the Stalinist regime.

Written before the end of the Second World War, and when the realities of Stalin's regime were still in dispute, Silone's *Bread and Wine*, Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* and Orwell's *Animal Farm* entered and helped shape the earlier stages of a debate that persisted well into the 1960s.[1] Narratives of warning, they dwell on the prospects of the revolutionary movement, ponder whether any such radical move is doomed, and consider whether the sacrifice of the means for the end is an inevitable consequence of the revolutionary drive. More direct and instructional than the novels of Platonov and Bulgakov, they are all, in one way or another, small 'truth-bearers', designed to convince and compel, with their political/philosophical drive tending always toward the pedagogical and assertive, and away from the ambiguous and oblique. They have truths to tell, and, in the

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[1] I leave discussion of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* until Chapter Seven, where I compare it with Zamyatin's *We*. However, many of the comments on Orwell's position raised here also apply to my subsequent discussion.

main, they do so loudly and clearly: theirs is the territory of ideological argumentation.

Hence the critical question for this chapter is whether it is possible for these three novels to create the same kind of generative artistic/political relationship I have attributed to Platonov and Bulgakov's works. At the outset, I stress that political conviction is not itself the issue for the artistic life of the text: to the contrary, I see it as an integral part of a work's ability to speak to us across time and space. At the same time, I recognize that pedagogical assertion can indeed lead to the situation where, in Bakhtin's terms, a text becomes flat and monological, and its characters merely the 'carriers' rather than the 'creators' of ideas (Emerson, 1985, p. 66). The matter is by no means straightforward, for Bakhtin's also acknowledges the persistence of monological elements even in Dostoevsky's works:

> Dostoyevsky the journalist was by no means a stranger to one-sided seriousness, to dogmatism, even to eschatology. But these ideas of the journalist, once introduced into the novel, become merely one of the embodied voices of an unfinalized and open dialogue. (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 166)

In arguing that the novel can thus exert a mediating influence over its unruly elements, Bakhtin does not indicate where the balance might tip over and 'one-sided seriousness' and/or 'dogmatism' turn a work into a monological text. Neither is it something I attempt to theorize here. I am, however, keenly interested in the range of literary factors that might exercise a countervailing influence over the didactic elements of *Bread and Wine*, *Darkness at Noon* and *Animal Farm*. In considering this, I observe that elsewhere Bakhtin speaks very favourably of Dostoevsky as journalist, proposing that:

> His passion for journalism and his love of the newspaper, his deep and subtle understanding of the newspaper page as living reflection of the contradictions of contemporary society in the cross-section of a single day all precisely explained his dialogic vision. (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 29)

So this kind of critical eye—characteristic of the three authors considered here— evidently has its place in enabling a novel to carry conviction across time and place, particularly as far as the more 'applied' interests of everyday readers are concerned. Hence a vital issue for the art/politics problematic is how far the

literary traditions of the novel can counteract the dogmatic qualities of political assertion, thus allowing (finalizable) political commitments to achieve a certain (unfinalizable) resonance across time and place. Prior to considering how this emerges in the texts of Silone, Koestler and Orwell, I outline the historical and political background to their concerns, focusing on the ideological crisis facing the European Left.

Context: ideological crisis

Silone, Koestler and Orwell wrote at a time when many socialist intellectuals, including George Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, and Beatrice and Sydney Webb, remained reluctant to acknowledge the extent of Stalin's persecutions. In explaining this myopia, David Engerman (2001, p. xi) suggests that Stalin's drive to transform the landscape of the country 'from one dotted with peasant villages into a modern terrain of huge mechanized collective farms' fulfilled the Left's desire 'for a well-organized economic system under the hands of experts'. Similarly, Mazower (1999, p. 127) observes that at a time when capitalism was in serious difficulties, Stalin's Russia 'formed a striking contrast to the West—an image of energy, commitment, collective achievement and modernity—the more alluring for being so little understood', with this perception being reinforced by a 'phenomenal will to believe in utopia'.

As information about Stalin's terror filtered through to the West during the 1930s, so support for the regime became increasingly hard to maintain. This was intensified by the dictatorial behaviour of the Third International (Comintern), with its insistence on the strict adherence to Marxism-Leninism and its hard line approach to social democrats, whom they famously labelled 'social fascists'.[2] Some of the difficulties were diffused when the Comintern moved to its 'popular front' policy (1934-1939), under which the national parties were instructed to form broad alliances with all anti-fascist parties with the aim of isolating the fascist dictatorships internationally. The old traditions of 'dictatorship from the top' continued nevertheless, leaving the national communist with little or no

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[2] This assisted Hitler's rise to power, as the German Communist Party's (KPD) refusal to form an alliance with the Social Democrats left the National Socialists as the largest single party in the Reichstag with just over a third of the seats.

chance of formulating an effective response to Stalinism and/or developing an alternative revolutionary program.

Given these developments, those who were either members of the various communist parties, or broadly sympathetic with the aims of the movement, were forced to question the status of Marxism as a revolutionary ideal. In particular, they had to deal with the issue of whether Marxism-Leninism could truly be seen as the opponent of fascism or, whether as some contemporaries came to believe, it simply represented a 'red' fascism, set against the European 'black', with little else to distinguish it. With this threatening to leave a theoretical vacuum as far as the critique of capitalism was concerned, two main lines of response arose, punctuated by numerous intervening positions. The first argued that Stalinism was an aberration from the revolutionary ideal and that the principles of Marxism could and should remain intact. As leading French intellectuals, Sartre and (for a while) Maurice Merleau-Ponty were prominent exponents of this position, maintaining that while Stalin's excesses should be criticised his mission should not. The second view, as classically expressed in Popper's *The Poverty of Historicism* (1957/1986), was that there was something about the nature of totalising ideological thinking, whether in the fascist or communist case, which predisposed it to authoritarian and destructive outcomes: a notion that threads its way meme-like through each of *Bread and Wine, Darkness at Noon,* and *Animal Farm*.[3]

For those members of the Left who had once put their faith in the communist movement as a solution to the injustices of capitalism, there was a strongly personal as well as political dimension to the ideological crisis. Richard Crossman's *The God that Failed* (1949/2001) provides a record of the experiences of this group by drawing together the testimonies of six ex-communists, with

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[3] Originally written as a paper in 1936 and then revised and published in book form in 1957, *The Poverty of Historicism* was dedicated to 'the memory of all the countless men, women and children of all creeds who fell victim to the fascist and communist belief in the inexorable laws of historical destiny' (Popper, 1957/1986, p. ix).

Silone and Koestler being contributors alongside Louis Fischer, André Gide, Richard Wright and Stephen Spender. I return to Silone and Koestler's contributions later, touching here on Spender's account, as it illustrates just why communism, as a part-political, part-philosophical movement was so important, and why its failure was so significant in personal, social, political and spiritual terms.

In reflecting on his motivations for joining, Spender (1949/2001, p. 230) talks about his frustrations with the western notion of liberty, as resting on 'the unrestricted freedom of the individual to exploit other individuals'. He also describes his early childhood sense of human isolation, remembering how, from an early age, he lay in bed and thought about:

> The great loneliness of the human condition where everyone living, without the asking, is thrust upon the earth, where he is enclosed upon himself, a stranger to the rest of humanity, needing love and facing his own death. (Spender, 1949/2001, p. 231)

As a member of the movement, Spender had a close relationship with his minder, a scholarly man called Chalmers, with whom he had long conversations about the proletarian novel and unresolved disputes about how to come to terms with Stalin's persecutions. Spender recalls that when he asked Chalmers about the trials of Bukharin and Radek, Chalmers 'hesitated for a moment, looked at some object in the middle distance, blinked, and then said: "there are so many of these trials that I have given up thinking of them long ago"' (p. 237). Observing that Chalmers had 'accepted present methods because his hope was in the future, and that was that' (p. 237), Spender reflects that:

> It is obvious that there were elements of mysticism in this faith. Indeed, I think this is an attraction of Communism for the intellectual. To believe in political action and economic forces that will release energies into the world is a release of energy itself. … One can retain one's faith in the ultimate goals of humanity, and at the same time ignore the thousands of people in prison camps, the tens of thousands of slave workers. (Spender, 1949/2001, p. 238)

Essentially, Spender's reasons for breaking with the Party were its untruths and ruthlessness. 'The intellectual communists,' he says, 'seemed extremely interested in theory, very little in evidence that might conflict with theory … the same disregard for scrupulousness in anything but theory applied to behaviour. The

ends justified the means' (p. 255). And it is precisely this dynamic which, in its different ways, is portrayed in each of *Bread and Wine*, *Darkness at Noon* and *Animal Farm*.

In brief, Silone, Koestler and Orwell wrote at a time, and helped shape a time, of intense ideological debate. As key protagonists in this controversy, they assert particular points of view and countermand others, with their novels reflecting Grenier's (2006, p. 13) proposal that a political logic tends towards 'moralizing and action-oriented impulses' rather than the 'free, imaginative and interrogative'. As indicated, my question is how the didactic qualities of their texts might be counteracted by the literary qualities of the novel, which, as Bakhtin (1963/1984, p. 166) suggests, can exert their own mediating force. My considerations follow a chronological track, starting with *Bread and Wine*.

Silone: *Bread and Wine*

The political background to *Bread and Wine* emerges in Silone's contribution to Crossman's *The God that Failed*. Here he describes how, together with Antonio Gramsci and Palmiro Togliatti, he became a co-founder of the Italian Communist Party (CPI) in 1921. Although his involvement arose from his deep sense of the injustices facing his small village in the Abruzzi, it tore his familiar world apart:

> My own internal world, the 'Middle-Ages', which I had inherited and which were rooted in my soul, and from which, in the last analysis, I had derived my initial aspiration to revolt, were shaken to their foundations, as though by an earthquake. Everything was thrown into the melting-pot, everything became a problem. Life, death, love, good, evil, truth, all changed their meaning or lost it altogether. (Silone, 1949/2001, p. 98)

For Silone, the Party came to represent 'family, school, church, barracks' (p. 98). He notes how, in binding each member to the movement, its 'psychological mechanisms were the same as that used in certain religious orders and military organizations with almost identical results' (Silone, 1949/2001, p. 98). His doubts grew throughout the 1920s, when 'the increasing degeneration of the Communist International into a tyranny and bureaucracy filled me with repulsion and disgust' (p. 100). His reasons for remaining a member included 'solidarity with comrades who were dead or in prison', the lack of any other revolutionary alternative, and the hope for reform from within (pp. 100-1). As recorded there, a decisive factor

in his decision to leave the Party was his visit to Moscow in 1927 to attend a meeting of the International Communist Executive. Here, along with Togliatti, then the leader of the Italian Communist Party, he refused to vote against Trotsky on the basis they had not seen the documents incriminating him. He describes returning to Italy disillusioned and bitter, postponing his final break with the Party to 1931, when faced with the hard line policy of the Comintern, and its instructions that all reformist groups be treated as social fascists. And this exit, despite all Silone's previous frustrations, was marked by grief:

> The truth is this: the day I left the communist party was a very sad one for me; it was like a day of deep mourning, the mourning of my lost youth. And I come from a district where mourning is worn longer than elsewhere. It is not easy to free oneself from an experience as intense as that of the underground organisation of the communist party. Something of it remains and leaves a mark on the character which lasts all one's life. (Silone, 1949/2001, p. 113) [4]

Much of Silone's ideological angst is reproduced in *Bread and Wine,* the second of his *Abruzzo Trilogy.* The story centres on Pietro Spina, a young communist revolutionary, who, at the start of the novel, has returned to his homeland hoping to fight injustice and promote equality. As the fascist police are hunting for him, his friends disguise him as a priest (Don Paolo Spada), and send him to a small village to recover. Once there, he tries and fails to set up a socialist community among the disenfranchised peasants. The novel ends with his flight across the mountains, his dreams in tatters and those who supported him at risk. For Howe (1957/2002, p. 219), *Bread and Wine* is essentially about despair. He compares it with *Fontamara,* the first of the Abruzzi Trilogy, which, he says, 'exudes revolutionary hope and élan'. In contrast, he believes *Bread and Wine,* written some four years later, to be 'entirely different in tone; defeat is now final, the period of underground struggle at an end, and all that remains are resignation, despair, and obeisance before authority' (p. 220).

I do not entirely agree, for while the novel ends with Pietro Spina's failure and flight, the revolutionary movement continues and is itself up for question. Hence I

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[4] I note the controversy over Silone's political past, following Biocca and Canali's (2000) allegation that he carried on a decade-long correspondence with Arturo Bocchini, head of police in Rome. Rather than speculate on the details, I follow Andrew Stille (2001) in reading *Bread and Wine* as a complex rendering of doubt and faith, compromise and betrayal, where, as later noted, the chapter dealing with Luigi Murica's confession has particular significance.

see *Bread and Wine* to combine faith and doubt with a struggle for social justice, central features of Silone's own life. In literary/political terms, this is expressed in two main ways: first, through aspirational or sermonic passages, where Silone's authorial voice can be clearly heard and there is a certain pedagogical 'flattening' of the work; second, through grounding the views, voices and values of the protagonists in their immediate physical, political and historical context. My argument is that the artistic flattening associated with the aspirational passages is counterbalanced by the text's grounded descriptions.

Aspirational moments

In its aspirational passages, *Bread and Wine* echoes Silone's philosophical commitments as expressed in *The God that Failed*. Affirming the similarities between hero and author, Silone's first biographer, R. W. B. Lewis says that Silone 'became a socialist because he wanted to be a saint', while Howe suggests that Silone was 'a Socialist without a Party, a Christian without a Church' (both cited in Pugliese, 2009, p. 9 and p. 5). Very pertinent then is Bakhtin's (1937/1981, p. 130) proposal that in the classic biographical novel, the 'autobiographical self-consciousness' of the hero represents a 'quest for truth', with the life of the seeker 'broken down into precise and well-marked epochs or steps': a literary form closely followed in *Bread and Wine*.

Spina's commitments are established in the first chapter of the book, when two of his previous fellow-students go to visit their old teacher, Don Benedetto. After tea, they reminisce and beg Don Benedetto to tell them who was his favourite student. After a short hesitation, the old priest owns that it is Spina. He takes some faded yellow pages, and reads approvingly from one of Spina's early essays:

> But for the fact that it would be very boring to be exhibited on altars after one's death, to be prayed and worshipped to by a lot of unknown people, mostly ugly old women, I should like to be a saint. I don't want to live in accordance with circumstances, conventions and material expediency, but I want to live and struggle for what seems to be to just and right without regard for the circumstances. (*Bread and Wine*, p. 201)

The reference to 'ugly old women' jars to my contemporary ear, as does the vaunting nature of Spina's aspirations. Their unflinching nature is further reflected in Spina's views on freedom. When Nunzio, one of those who visited

Don Benedetto, regrets the professional compromises he makes as a doctor, but says he lacks the freedom to do otherwise, Spina retorts:

> Freedom is not something you get as a present. You can live in a dictatorship and be free—on one condition: that you fight the dictatorship. The man who thinks with his own mind and keeps it uncorrupted is free. The man who fights for what he thinks is right is free. But you can live in the most democratic country on earth, and if you're lazy, obtuse or servile within yourself, you're not free. … You can't beg your freedom from someone. You have to seize it – everyone as much as he can. (*Bread and Wine*, p. 215)

As well as placing a heavy burden on the individual, this obscures just how differently freedom is experienced under a democracy from a dictatorship. There are, however, aspirational passages that read more comfortably. In one such, Spina tells his friend Bianchina that because the fascist dictatorship is 'based on unanimity' it is sufficient 'for one man to say no and the spell is broken' (p. 397). When Bianchina asks if this pertains 'even in the case of a peaceful man who thinks in his own way and does no one any harm' (p. 398), he responds:

> Certainly. Under every dictatorship, one man, one perfectly ordinary little man who goes on thinking with his brain is a threat to public order. Tons of printed paper spread the slogans of the regime; thousands of loudspeakers, hundreds of thousands of posters … thousands of priests in the pulpits repeat these slogans ad nauseam, to the point of collective stupefaction. But it's sufficient for one little man, just one ordinary little man, to say no, and the whole of that formidable granite order is imperilled. (*Bread and Wine*, p. 398)

Another memorable 'truth speaker' is Don Benedetto, who plays an important role in representing the form of Christianity for which Silone yearns. 'Christianity', he declares, 'is not an administration' (p. 414). He tells Spina that his 'only consolation' is that there are 'unknown members of underground groups' who will carry on the struggle for social justice. He continues:

> I too in my infliction have asked, where then is the Lord and why has He abandoned us? The loudspeakers and the bells that announced the beginning of the new butchery to the whole country was certainly not the voice of the Lord. Nor are the shelling and bombing of Abyssinian villages that are reported in the press. But if one poor man alone in a hostile village gets up at night and scrawls with a piece of charcoal or paints DOWN WITH THE WAR on the walls then the Lord is undoubtedly present. (*Bread and Wine*, pp. 413-14)

To think that it might be sufficient 'for one little man, just one ordinary little man, to say no' is encouraging, however improbable it may be. The difficulty is that such assertions invite applause rather than unsettlement. Bakhtin would suggest

that they are more 'epic' than 'novelistic'; Adorno (1973/2007, p. 184) that they impose a single version of truth against its 'innumerable meditations'; Kundera (1995, p. 173) that they represent 'a thought that has come to a stop, that has congealed'. So it is important that Silone does not leave such affirmations to stand on their own, but also invites our participation in the text through anchoring the views, voices and values of his protagonists in their immediate physical, political and historical contexts.

Socio-ideological languages anchored in time and place

In all of its ideological uncertainties, *Bread and Wine* remains centred on the realities of rural Italy, the struggle to survive, and the failures of both Church and Party to respond to these exigencies. In line with these commitments, its time/place settings are grounded in recognizable times and places, and it is through these specifics that the experiences of embodied human-beings come to be known. 'By many small signs', Spina learns to tell the *cafoni* from those who live in the valleys: 'they were poor people whose capacity for suffering and resignation had no real limits, and they were used to living in isolation, ignorance, mistrust and sterile family feuds' (*Bread and Wine,* p. 373).[5] When he walks down the hill to the village that will be his refuge, he sees the view below in all its precise and familiar detail:

> The little land there was between the rocks around the village was split up into a number of small fields. The fields were so small and the stone walls that separated them so numerous that they looked like the foundations of a destroyed town. Immediately beyond the village the gorge closed in to form a barrier, and no road led beyond. Two streams of water that came down the mountainsides met at the bottom of the valley and formed a rivulet that divided the village into two parts connected by a wooden bridge. (*Bread and Wine*, 1937/2000, p. 245)

In an important literary move, Silone embeds Bakhtin's (1935/1981, p. 263) socio-ideological languages—as exemplified by 'characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons, languages of the authorities, and languages that serve the socio-political purposes of the day'—in different physical/geographical settings. These take the form of concentric circles with Spina's mountain village at the

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[5] 'Cafoni' is a colloquial term for the disenfranchised peasants. It is used in the original Italian versions of Silone's works as well as their translations. It does not carry the pejorative connotations (boorish, uneducated) later associated with it.

centre, followed by Rome as the seat of fascist government, and a large step further away, Moscow, from where the directions of the Comintern emanate. As the circles widen, so the languages become the more abstracted from the political and social realities of the Abruzzi. In the most immediate circle, the mountain dwellers, with their lives forged in hardship, have little or no use for Spina's utopian aspirations. Magascià, one of their leaders, tells him:

> Everyone has his own troubles, that's all that worries us. At most you worry about your neighbour's. You look at your own plot of land; you look through the door of your house if the door or window is open; when you eat your soup sitting at the front door in the evening you look at your own plate. (*Bread and Wine*, p. 316)

In one of their most telling exchanges, Spina asks the disenfranchised peasants to imagine a country run by people like themselves, where their 'sons and grandsons might be born free' and where laws might be 'in favour of all' (p. 317). In response, Sciatàp tells him 'it's a dream, a beautiful dream', akin to 'abolishing stable doors' (p. 318). With the unbridgeable gap between the two languages—the one abstract and oriented to the future, the other concrete and located in the present—Spina is left undone. After a while he returns to his lodgings and takes out the notebook he has entitled 'On the Inaccessibility of the *Cafoni* to Politics', thinks for a while and then writes: 'perhaps they are right' (p. 318). The 'perhaps' is important, for Silone does not foreclose on the possibility of change, providing an imaginative space wherein we can actively engage with the text and its combinations of hope and doubt.

Shortly after his conversation with Magascià and Sciatàp, Spina receives a package from the Party. Here Silone is more evidently parodic, mocking the farcicality of Party propaganda. The envelope contains 'three voluminous reports' accompanied by a 'laconic note asking him to give his opinion of the documents immediately' (*Bread and Wine*, p. 325). With the material concerns of the *cafoni* on his mind, Spina simply skims the titles of the documents with their absurd capitalizations. These are: 'The Leadership Crisis in the Russian Communist Party and the Duties of Fraternal Parties', 'The Criminal Complicity with Imperialist Fascism of Oppositional Elements on the Right and the Left', and 'The Solidarity of All the Parties of the International with the Majority of the Russian Communist

Party' (*Bread and Wine*, p. 325). Irritated, Spina puts the documents away without reading them.

Later he is called to Rome to discuss the documents with Battipaglia, the interregional secretary. In describing this meeting, Silone transfers his own fateful meeting in Moscow to another time and place, with Spina's encounter with Battipaglia coinciding with Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia. On leaving the train, Spina finds the city unrecognisable with its 'multi-coloured adornment of orders for meetings, garlands, flags, and inscriptions on the walls in whitewash, paint, chalk, tar, and coal' (p. 373). With this, comes a mass hysteria, with the crowd 'crying aloud to the leader, the magus, the great leader who held sway over the flesh and blood of them all' with their chanting 'a kind of exorcistic formula mingling with the sacred music of the bells' (p. 380). Surrounded by chanting crowds, Spina and Battipaglia decide to meet in a small church in order to talk in peace and privacy.

Two different discourses again come into play, illustrating how language is 'shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgements and accents' (Bakhtin, 1935/1981, p. 272). Battipaglia gives priority to Party formalities, and Spina concentrates on what can legitimately be said given one's knowledge of a particular situation. When Battipaglia presses Spina for an immediate response to the documents, saying 'this, as you know, is more a formality than anything else', Spina retorts, 'as you know, I have no head for formalities' and continues:

> If I find it so difficult to understand, if I don't say my native region but my native village, how do you expect me to have an opinion on Russian agricultural policy, to disapprove of some views and approve of others? … I don't even know when I will have time to read all that stuff. I don't even know if I am in a position to understand and form a genuine opinion about it. I've other things on my mind, I mean the position here. (*Bread and Wine*, p. 352) [6]

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[6] The account draws closely on Silone's refusal to sign the documents incriminating Trotsky, as described in *The God that Failed*. Here he recounts how when he refused to sign the denunciation of Trotsky on the basis he had not seen the documents incriminating him, the Comintern official told him that 'whatever the minority says or does, whatever document it draws up against the majority, I'm for the majority. Documents don't interest me. We aren't in an academy here' (Silone, 1949/2001, p. 109).

After a while, Spina draws matters to a close by telling Battipaglia that he has burned the papers as they don't interest him. Alluding to the Party's expulsion of Bukharin, he then asserts:

> What it comes down to is that I do not feel able to form opinions on matters outside my experience. I cannot stoop to any kind of conformity, to approving or condemning things with my eyes shut. (*Bread and Wine*, p. 352)

Battipaglia is furious. 'How dare you describe our condemnation of Bukharin and other traitors as conformity? Are you mad?' When Spina points out that Battipaglia supported Bukharin as long as he was in the majority, and asks him 'how can we hope to destroy Fascist subservience if we abandon the critical spirit?' Battipaglia, 'trembling with indignation', tells Spina that his 'cynicism passes all bounds', and reasserts that Bukharin is a traitor (p. 353). The church prevents him from saying more, so he packs his briefcase and leaves without saying goodbye. To all intents and purposes Spina is expelled.

In both instance described so far—the mentalities/languages of the *cafoni* and the Party bureaucracy—Silone positions Spina outside the frame of consciousness of those he encounters. This is not so when he visits Uliva, an unemployed violin teacher who used to be a member of the same underground cell. Here the text shifts, with the discussion representing Silone's own internal conflict concerning the potentials and risks of revolutionary movements. Spina finds his friend in a bad state: he is 'a lean skinny little hunchback and the suit he wears gives him a sad, neglected appearance' (p. 356). In explaining his despair, Uliva says that under fascism workers have 'either been nationalised or brought to heel and even hunger has been bureaucratized' and are unable to contribute actively to any revolutionary opposition (p. 358). When Spina tells Uliva he is 'condemning the future', Uliva retorts that:

> The present black inquisition will be followed by a red inquisition, the present censorship by a red censorship. … Just as the present bureaucracy identifies itself with all its opponents, so will your future bureaucracy identify itself with labour and socialism and persecute everyone who goes on thinking with his own brain as a hired agent of the industrialists and landlords. (*Bread and Wine*, p. 358)

Their argument continues. Uliva asserts that 'all revolutions, all of them without exception, began as liberation movements but ended as tyrannies' (p. 359). Upset,

Spina replies that even if this were true, even if all previous revolutions had gone astray, 'one would have to say, but we shall make one that remains faithful to itself' (p. 359). Uliva becomes angry, calling Spina a 'ventriloquist':

> Illusions, illusions! The regenerative ardour that filled us when we were in the students' cell has already become an ideology, a tissue of fixed ideas, a spider web. That shows there's no escape for you either. … Every new idea invariably becomes a fixed idea, immobile and out of date. When it becomes official state doctrine there's no more escape. (*Bread and Wine*, p. 359)

Uliva emerges as a more relentless and clearer thinker than Spina. Within hours his house is blown up and he is killed (the novel never reveals why, but the suggestion is that the Party has betrayed him). The issue between the two friends—the possibility of hope against the inexorability of totalizing ideology, of 'the one revolution that will remain faithful to itself'—is never resolved, leaving the text as a compelling reminder of the smashing of utopian aspirations. Hope is slim but never extinguished: a notion to which Albert Camus (1951/2000, p. 15) refers when he says that 'if we believe that optimism is silly we also know that pessimism about the action of man is cowardly'.

In grounding *Bread and Wine* in the political circumstances of his times, Silone shows how rotten political conditions can lead to lasting acts of deceit and betrayal. The most important example is the confession of a young man, Luigi Murica. In this confession, Luigi recounts how, having joined the Party after seeing an unprovoked attack on a workman, he became an informer when arrested by the fascist police. He recounts that 'after some formalities' the police 'started slapping my face and spitting at me, and that went on for an hour' (*Bread and Wine*, p. 422). When a senior official arrived, everything changed, and Luigi found himself half-impressed, half-seduced by the attentive tone of this officer:

> The official who interrogated me railed against his subordinates. … He said he could only guess the motives that led me to the revolutionary groups, [that] youth was inherently magnanimous and idealistic, and it would be disastrous if otherwise. (*Bread and Wine*, p. 422)

In his naivety, Luigi recalls being pleased when the senior official praised his first report, saying it was well written, and relieved to have an allowance that allowed him 'to have soup at midday as well as in the evenings and go to the movies on

Saturday nights' (p. 423). But then he formed a relationship with a woman who trusted in his integrity and his whole situation unravelled:

> An insuperable abyss opened up between my apparent and secret life. Sometimes I managed to forget my secret. I worked for the cell with genuine enthusiasm. … But I was deceiving myself. When my new comrades admired my courage and my activity they reminded me that in reality I was betraying them. … But the truth of the matter is this. Fear of being discovered was stronger in me than remorse. (*Bread and Wine*, pp. 423-425)

Many read this as Silone's own confession (see footnote 3 above), with Elizabeth Leake (2003, p. 137) suggesting that it provides 'a double self-absolution but from the safe setting of a fictional account'. Given all the doubts hanging over Silone's entanglement with the fascist police, my preference is to leave the matter exactly where it is: unresolved. There is one passage in *The God that Failed* that might touch on the matter, but its words hide as much as they reveal:

> For me writing has not been, and never could be, except in a few favoured moments of grace, a serene aesthetic enjoyment, but rather the painful and lonely continuation of a struggle. As for the difficulties and imperfections of self-expression with, they arise not so much from lack of observation of the rules of good writing, but rather from a conscience, which, while struggling to heal certain hidden and perhaps incurable wounds, continues obstinately to demand that its integrity be respected. For to be sincere is obviously not enough, if one wants to be truthful. (Silone, 1949/2001, pp. 81-2)

In what ways, I want to ask, does sincerity fall short of truthfulness, in what ways does Silone attempt to be truthful over and above the claims of sincerity? He does not tell us. Does this matter? I suggest not, for the text's ambiguity can be said to strengthen its 'internal resistance to all sorts of external finalization … and fixed, stable images' (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 78). On that note, I leave *Bread and Wine* for *Darkness at Noon*, a far more ideologically assertive text, briefer, angrier and more directly to the point.

Koestler: *Darkness at Noon*[7]

Centred on the Moscow trials, *Darkness at Noon* describes the arrest, interrogation and execution of Rubashov, an old style but sceptical Bolshevik. As

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[7] Koestler originally wrote *Darkness at Noon* in German, translating it into English in 1940 with the assistance of Daphne Hardy. In July 2015, a German doctoral student, Matthias Weßel found the original German version, (previously believed to have been destroyed). According to Scammell (2016, np) the original German version offers a more explicit critique of Stalinism than the existing translation, and that, once available, 'for readers, it will be like seeing a cleaned oil painting for the first time after the old and discoloured varnish has been removed'.

with *Bread and Wine*, the political background to the novel can be found in *The God that Failed*. Unlike Silone's contribution, Koestler's account is sardonic from start to finish. At the outset, he describes how, when he applied for membership at the Berlin office in 1931, the woman at the desk gave him 'what is commonly called a searching look but might be more accurately called a fish-eyed stare' (Koestler, 1949/2001, p. 29). Once a member of the Party, he found that:

> It was a world populated by people with first names only, without surname or address. … It was a paradoxical atmosphere—a blend of fraternal comradeship and mutual distrust. Its motto might well have been: Love your comrade but don't trust him an inch. (Koestler, 1949/2001, p. 30)

Koestler then describes how, on his visit to the Soviet Union in 1933, he experienced a 'shock with delayed-action effect' on seeing 'the ravages of the famine of 1932-1933 in the Ukraine: hordes of families in rags begging at the railway stations, the women lifting up the compartment window, holding out their starving brats … the old men with frost-bitten toes sticking out of torn slippers' (p. 30). He was inured from accepting the reality of what he saw by the long process of indoctrination: 'the necessary lie, the necessary slander; the necessary intimidation of the masses to preserve them from short-term errors; the necessary liquidation of a whole generation in the interest of the next' (p. 61). He left the Party in 1938 in the wake of the Moscow trials: his was a bitter and disillusioned exit, casting a dark light over all his previous commitments. In 1938, he left the Party bitter and disillusioned, recounting that:

> As a rule, our memories romanticize the past. But when one has renounced a creed or lost a friend, the opposite mechanism sets to work. In the light of that latter knowledge, the original experience loses its innocence, becomes tainted and rancid in recollection. … The shadow of barbed wire lies across the condemned playground of memory. (Koestler, 1949/2001, p. 55)

Koestler's anger over the perversion of the revolutionary ideal drives *Darkness at Noon* from beginning to end. This produces a certain relentlessness, a hammering of the text. As acknowledged, this stands to flatten the artistic life of the text. However, I recollect being absorbed by the book as a teenager, reading it cover-to-cover in a single sitting, and find I have done so again as an adult, more than once over. In considering the literary qualities that might contribute to this carrying power, I focus on the time/space settings of chronotope; the subversive powers of parody; and the representation of the 'humanness' of Rubashov. In

parallel with my suggestions about *Bread and Wine*, I suggest that the combination of these elements counteracts the flattening effects of a didactic or pedagogical text, where 'truth is impersonal' and 'an independent idea is either affirmed … or repudiated' (Emerson, 1985, pp. 65-6). I also propose that the artistic life of *Darkness at Noon* is preserved through the contrasts between its literary/political elements, variously appealing to us imaginatively, cognitively and emotionally.

Chronotope

Chronotope, we have seen, is 'the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied' (Bakhtin 1937/1981, p. 250). In its time/space settings, *Darkness at Noon* is limited to the few days before Rubashov's death and the tiny enclosure of a Moscow cell. The novel starts with Rubashov's early morning arrest, when two members of the secret police batter down his door while he dreams of being captured by the Gestapo. It is a familiar scene: the bewildered porter, the watcher upstairs, Rubashov stumbling with his dressing gown sleeve. The two officers drive Rubashov to prison through desolate streets. On arrival, they throw him into Cell 402, which is relatively clean—the straw mattress looked 'freshly filled' and the can 'newly disinfected (p. 9). This enclosed space, with its view of the prison courtyard, the machine gun tower, and a 'streak of the Milky Way' (p. 9), forms the spatial/temporal centre of the novel: the spot from which Rubashov communicates with the prisoner in the next-door cell by tapping the letters of the alphabet on the wall, the fixed spot from which he is taken for his long interrogations, and the enclosure where he recalls his life since joining the Party as a teenager. [8]

Bakhtin (1937/1981, p. 84) describes how, under the imaginative possibilities of chronotope, time 'thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history'. Rubashov can do nothing to forestall his execution; he knows from the outset that he has only a short measure of chronological time left. But the *meaning*

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[8] The description of Rubashov's imprisonment draws on Koestler's experiences in the Spanish Civil war. From his cell in the Málaga jailhouse, he heard men being led out and shot; later, in Seville he was placed in solitary confinement in a cell six and a half paces long and led to believe that he had been sentenced to death.

of that time lies within his power: how he sees it, what he does with it, how it impacts on his reappraisal of all the previous moments that have now come together in a particular and final eventuality. As he sits and reflects in the confinement of the cell, he thinks back over his betrayals and failures, with the text taking us from Moscow to Luxembourg, and from the central Soviet Party to its subsidiaries in Europe. In a highly symbolic ending, he is shot in the back as he stumbles to try and retrieve his pince-nez, which has fallen off, leaving him nearly blind. As he walks to his death:

> A dull blow struck him in the back of his head. He long expected it, yet it took him unawares. He felt his knees give way and his body whirl round in a half-turn. … It got dark, the sea carried him rocking on its nocturnal surface. Memories carried him, like streaks of mist on the water. (*Darkness at Noon,* p. 211)

Parody

In the passages cited above, Koestler is evocative and expressive, appealing to us visually and emotionally. In his parodic representations, he is analytic and critical, targeting a mathematical form of thought in which conclusions are drawn from pre-given axioms, and where all actions are justified as the means to a pre-given end. To portray this, he describes Rubashov's internal train of thought, where, as Bakhtin (1935/1981, p. 284) describes it, there are 'two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two languages, two semantic and axiological belief systems'. In his first diary entry, Rubashov writes about the fate of a leading agriculturalist who, along with thirty of his colleagues, was shot for maintaining a view contrary to official policy. He reflects that what matters is who is 'objectively' right and that this is determined by ideological fiat. Mocking the sensitivities of western liberals, he proposes that:

> The cricket-moralists of the West are agitated by quite another problem: whether B. was subjectively in good faith when he recommended nitrogen. For us that is, of course, complete nonsense … [for] the question of subjective good faith is of no interest. He who is in the wrong must pay; he who is in the right will be absolved. That is the law of historical credit; it was our law. (*Darkness at Noon,* p. 82)

In another parodic move, Koestler sets Rubashov in dialogue with his senior interrogator, Ivanov. The two were 'twins in their development, they were nourished by the same umbilical cord of a common conviction, they had the same moral standard, the same philosophy, they thought in the same terms' (*Darkness*

at Noon, pp. 90-1). Rubashov, facing execution, is partly liberated from his old patterns of thought; Ivanov is not. At one point, the two discuss *Crime and Punishment* in the seclusion of Rubashov's cell as night turns into an early dawn. When Rubashov suggests that the moment of truth for Raskolnikov comes when he discovers that 'twice two are not four when mathematical units are human beings', Ivanov retorts:

> If you want to hear my opinion, every copy of the book should be burned. Consider for a moment what this humanitarian fog-philosophy would do if we were to take it literally; if we were to stick to the precept that the individual is sacrosanct, and that we must not treat human lives according to the rules of arithmetic. … Your Raskolnikov is, however, a fool and a criminal; not because he behaves logically in killing the old woman, but because he is doing it in his personal interest. (*Darkness at Noon,* p. 127)

Here Koestler portrays not just a particular set of ideas, but also a didactic, abstract and clipped manner of speaking, with this illustrating Bakhtin's (1940/1981, p. 75) proposition that parody enables us to 'feel and recognize' the presence of the parodied language within the parodying style. Above all, Ivanov refuses any form of 'sentimentality', reminding Rubashov that 'history is *a priori* amoral; it has no conscience. To want to conduct history according to the maxims of a Sunday school means to leave everything unchanged. You know that as well as I do' (p. 127). On taking leave in the early morning, he observes that nature inflicts far worse casualties than does the revolutionary movement, informing Rubashov that 'for a man with your past, this sudden revulsion against experimenting is rather naïve':

> Every year several hundred people are killed quite pointlessly by epidemics and other natural disasters. And we should shrink from sacrificing a few hundred thousand for the most promising experiment in history? … Yes, we liquidated the parasitic part of the peasantry and let it die of starvation. It was a surgical operation that had to be done once and for all; but in the good old days before the Revolution just as many died in any dry year—only senselessly and pointlessly. … Why should mankind not have the right to experiment on itself? (*Darkness at Noon,* p. 131)

Here the force of the text lies in the imperative of an *answer*, a *refutation.* In pressing his arguments, Koestler hammers home his points, allowing the reader little or no escape. So it is significant that he also spends much time on the memories and regrets of Rubashov, where his tone shifts from the abstract to the

experiential, and from the intellectual to the emotional. These passages are crucial in counteracting didacticism, so I describe them in some detail.

On the humanness of Rubashov

Much of the literary/emotional power of *Darkness at Noon* rests on the fact that Koestler creates Rubashov as one who is able to change and evolve, and most crucially, reflect on the political circumstances that have conspired to create him.[9] At the end of his first diary entry, he observes:

> I have thought and acted as I had to; I destroyed people I was fond of, and gave power to those I did not like. History put me where I stood; I have exhausted the credit she accorded me: if I was right I have nothing to repent of, if wrong I will pay. (*Darkness at Noon,* p. 82)

Three memories in particular haunt Rubashov, all of which centre on a fundamental betrayal of trust. Notably, it is the personal details invested in these accounts that matters: as we come to know the particularities of the betrayed, so we come to care more about them. For Ivanov this would be mere sentimentality; and such, I believe, is precisely Koestler's point.

In the first incident, Rubashov goes to a town in southern Germany to challenge Richard, a young communist who has failed to distribute Party material according to official instructions. They meet in an art gallery, under a drawing of the *Pietà*. Richard is nineteen and has a seventeen-year old wife who is expecting their baby. He stammers when nervous, is committed to the Party, and is honest and naïve. On realizing that he is about to be denounced, he implores Rubashov not to 'throw him to the wolves' (p. 44). Rubashov, who has toothache, ignores his pleas and hastens away, knowing that Richard and his cell are to be betrayed to the Gestapo. When Richard implores 'comrade—b-but you couldn't d-denounce me,' Rubashov responds, 'I have no more to say to you, Richard' and hails a taxi (p. 43). The taxi driver, who has caught the word 'comrade', and turns out to be a communist, offers to drive Rubashov for free, saying 'if your young friend ever wants anything, my stand is in front of the museum. You can send him my

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[9] In this respect, Rubashov resembles Bakhtin's (1941/1981, p. 10) novelistic hero as one who 'should not be portrayed as an already completed and unchanging person but as a person who is evolving and developing, who learns from life'.

number, sir.' Rubashov refuses to take the man's outstretched hand and leaves without thanking the driver or saying goodbye (pp. 44-5).

In the second incident, Rubashov visits a group of communist dockworkers in Belgium. Italy has just invaded Ethiopia, and the workers are determined not to allow any Italian shipments to pass through their port. Since the Party plans to gain financially by supplying the Italians with oil and other resources, Rubashov directs the workers to break their ban. When they refuse, he denounces the entire cell by name, guaranteeing their arrest by the Belgian authorities. Making matters worse, he does so after having gained the trust of Little Loewy, their leader and a dedicated communist. Earlier, when they sat together in a pub, Little Loewy had told him the story of his life: how he had been born in a South German town, how he had learned the guitar and given lectures on Darwin; how he had escaped from the Nazis, crossed over to France; and how he had moved between France and Belgium, always under threat of arrest. When Rubashov asked him why he was telling him all this, Little Loewy responded:

> Because it is instructive. Because it is a typical example. I could tell you hundreds of others. For years the best of us have been crushed in that way. The Party is becoming more and more fossilized. The Party had gout and varicose veins in its every limb. One cannot make a revolution in that way. (*Darkness at Noon,* p. 59)

After Rubashov's betrayal, Little Loewy gives up and hangs himself. Trying to dismiss his treachery in the darkness of his cell, Rubashov finds that the memories flood back:

> He saw himself again in the old Belgian port, escorted by merry Little Loewy, who was slightly hunchbacked and smoked a sailor's pipe. He smelled again the smell of the harbour, a mixture of rotting seaweed and petrol; he heard the musical clock on the tower of old guildhall, and saw the overhanging bays, from the lattices of which the harbour prostitutes hung their washing during the day. (*Darkness at Noon,* p. 53)

The third memory, which is the most personal and intimate of the three, is the one that most torments Rubashov. It concerns Arlova, once his secretary and lover, who, sleepy and apolitical, is denounced for no reason. Rubashov not only failed to support her, but also signed the deposition condemning her. He had always regretted her execution, but in a matter-of-fact way. Everything changes when Gletkin (the junior interrogator) arranges for an old comrade of his to be dragged

past Rubashov's cell on his way to execution, shouting out his name and pleading for help. At that point, all Rubashov's convictions are turned upside down and his 'past mode of thought seems a lunacy' (p. 117). The memory drums its way into his mind, crowding out any kind of ideological rationalization:

> Up till now Arlova had been a factor in the equation, a small factor compared to what was at stake. But the equation no longer stood. The vision of Arlova's legs in their high-heeled shoes trailing along the corridor upset the mathematical equilibrium. The unimportant factor had grown to the immeasurable, the absolute … the hollow beat of the drumming, filled his ears; they smothered the thin voice of reason, covered it as the surf covers the gurgling of the drowning. (*Darkness at Noon,* p. 117)

The images batter their way into our consciousness, just they do into Rubashov's, where they radically disrupt the certainties of his monologic training. Here the parallels between Koestler account and Bakhtin's description of an internal dialogism are striking. In Bakhtin's analysis:

> The second speaker is present invisibly, his words are not there, but deep traces left by these words have a determining effect on the present and visible worlds of the first speaker. We sense that this is a conversation, although only one person is speaking, and it is a conversation of the most intense kind, for each present uttered word responds and reacts with its every fiber to the invisible speaker, points to something outside itself, beyond its own limits, to the unspoken words of another person. (Bakhtin, 1984, p.197)

As Rubashov stares out of the window in his cell, he finds that his attempts to 'think things through to a logical conclusion' are interrupted by utterances from a second voice. The utterances of this 'second self' seem to occur 'without visible cause'; arise 'just where "thinking to a conclusion" ended'; and are almost always accompanied by a 'sharp attack of toothache' (p. 91). On reflection, Rubashov realizes that the 'mental sphere' of these utterances is composed of 'various and disconnected parts' such as the 'folded hands of the *Pietà,* Little Loewy's cats, the tune of the song "come to dust", or a particular sentence which Arlova has said on a particular occasion' (p. 91). He concludes that:

> Those processes known as 'monologues' are really dialogues of a special kind; dialogues in which one partner remains silent while the other, against all grammatical rules, addresses him as 'I' instead of 'you' but the silent partner just remains silent, shuns observation and refuses to be localised in time and space. (*Darkness at Noon,* p. 90)

In such ways, Rubashov's internal thought patterns, foundering on the shore of his memories, refuse the monoglossic attempt to 'unite and centralize verbal-

ideological thought' and 'unify meaning under the one language of truth' (Bakhtin, 1935/1981, p. 270). On these grounds, it is possible to read *Darkness at Noon* as a literary enactment of the principles that Bakhtin wants to establish philosophically. This is the more inviting given that Rubashov's claim that 'we have learnt history more thoroughly than the others … we differ from all others in our logical consistency', is followed, a moment later, by the admission 'the fact is, I have lost faith in myself. That is why I am lost' (*Darkness at Noon*, p. 83 and p. 84).

But this is to offer a very particular reading of the work. Howe takes an entirely different view, contending that Koestler betrays 'a wilful insistence on an either/or dilemma', a 'rigid fascination with absolutes' and 'an equally rigid elimination of any possible lines of action lying between these absolutes' (1957/2002, p. 230). In his reading, Koestler resembles 'a stricken Midas yearning for the bread of life, yet, with every touch, turning experience into the useless gold of ideology' (pp. 230-1). In striking contrast, Orwell (1944/2000, p. 272) maintains that the book 'reaches the stature of tragedy' in its 'lack of surprise or denunciation, and the pity and irony with which the story is told'. Observing that it is 'a political book, founded on history and offering an interpretation of disputed events', he affirms that Koestler is telling us that violent revolution is a corrupting process:

> Really enter into the Revolution and you must end up with either Rubashov or Gletkin. It is not merely that 'power corrupts': so also do the ways of attaining power. Therefore, all efforts to regenerate society *by violent means* lead to the cellars of the OGPU. Lenin leads to Stalin and would have become Stalin if he had happened to survive. (Orwell, 1944/2000, p. 272, original emphasis)

Like Howe, I find that Koestler can hammer home his message to the point that there is no escape from the logic of the text, just as there is no escape from the doctrine it has as its target. But I am with Orwell in my reading of the work. If interpreted as a historical explanation of Bolshevism, the book has to fail. If alternatively, it is interpreted as a cry of Koestler's own angst, expressing his distress at the social, politico-ideological and human tragedy of a revolution gone badly wrong, then, in my reading, the novel convinces and succeeds. In mentioning the differences between these interpretations, I underline the always-contested nature of the artistic/politic interplay with its intersections invariably

inviting contrasting views and interpretations: something that is also very relevant to *Animal Farm*.

Orwell: *Animal Farm*

Unlike Silone and Koestler, Orwell was never a member of the Communist Party, although earlier sympathetic to it. Hence *Animal Farm* is less concerned with the dynamics of ideology, more in exposing the realities of Stalin's regime. In his preface to the Ukrainian edition of the book, Orwell makes his intentions clear:

> In my opinion nothing has contributed so much to the corruption of the original ideal of Socialism as the belief that Russia is a Socialist country. …
> And so for the past ten years I have been convinced that destruction of the Soviet myth was essential if we wanted a revival of the Socialist movement. (Cited by Dickstein, 2007, p. 139)

It was the anti-Stalinist thrust of *Animal Farm* that allowed the book to become a favoured text of the Washington establishment, part and parcel of cold war ideology. Spender (1972, np) recalls that when he asked Orwell whether he would have been 'as bitter an adversary of the Washington admirers of Animal Farm as he was of the Stalinists', Orwell countered that he 'had not written the book about Stalin in order to provide propaganda for the capitalists'. Even at the most cursory reading, the novel's anti-capitalist message should have been evident. In his opening speech, Major declares that:

> No animal in England knows the meaning of happiness or leisure after he is a year old. No animal in England is free. The life of an animal is misery and slavery; that is the plain truth … Man is the only creature that consumes without producing. … Yet he is lord of all animals. He sets them to work, he gives back to them the bare minimum that will prevent them from starving, and the rest he keeps for himself. (*Animal Farm,* pp. 6-9)

The egalitarian impulse is there from the outset. During Major's speech, four large rats sneak out of their boltholes to listen, and narrowly escape being attacked by the guard dogs. When Major raises his trotter and asks the assembled animals whether or not wild creatures should be considered friends or enemies, 'it was agreed by an overwhelming majority that the rats were comrades' (*Animal Farm*, p. 11). So while Mr Jones represents the decadence of the old regime, it is capitalist greed that the horrified animals confront when, at the end of the book,

they peer through the farmhouse window and, looking 'from pig to man, and man to pig again', find that 'it was impossible to say which was which' (p. 120).[10]

Orwell (1946a/2000, p. 6) described *Animal Farm* as 'the first book in which I tried to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole'. Given the evidently political nature of *Homage to Catalonia* and *The Road to Wigan Pier*, I understand him to be emphasizing the *purposeful* nature of his fusion of the political and the artistic: a point central to my interests. To illustrate how he achieves this, I focus on parody, chronotope, pathos and unfinalizability.

Animal Farm as parody

Bakhtin's proposal that the novel is parodic at the level of genre has particular implications for anti-utopian and/or dystopian works. As Morson (1988, p. 142) observes, these texts form part of a wider class of 'anti-genre' writing, where an 'anti-genre' establishes a 'parodic' relationship between itself and the works and traditions of another genre. *Animal Farm* is strikingly parodic in this respect, with the transparency of its allegory travestying the complexity of an extended novel, or the analytical details of a formal essay. In effect, Orwell is saying to the recalcitrant Left: 'listen up now, perhaps if I tell it this simply, you will finally understand'. There is also a level of self-parody, whereby Orwell mocks the didactic nature of his text by making it deliberately childlike, with the animals conforming to their customary stereotypes. Basically, he invents a story that is so transparently parodic that it mocks its own seriousness, and thus tells us that *all* stories, his own included, will ultimately dissolve and be replaced by others.

But Orwell's manner of telling is by no means straightforward. As Guy Cunningham (2013, np) observes, *Animal Farm's* 'simple fable-like voice belies a great sensitivity to how political leaders—and their intellectual enablers—use language to shade and even distort reality'. This would suggest that Orwell is something of a 'trickster' in literary terms, bringing to mind Bakhtin's (1937/1981, p. 159) observation that jesters 'create around them their own special world, their own chronotope', whereby 'their very appearance, everything they do and say, cannot be understood in a direct and unmediated way but must be

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[10] For a detailed discussion of *Animal Farm* as a political text, see Rodden, J. (ed) 1994.

grasped metaphorically'. The Orwell (1946a/2000, p. 5) who writes 'every serious line of work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism as I understand it' thus lies behind the mask of the traditional storyteller in *Animal Farm*.

As noted, Bakhtin suggests that parody works through its contrasts, where it sets one form, language, and/or atmosphere against another. Illustrating this, *Animal Farm* shifts between humour and menace, and mockery and pathos. These contrasts work not so much because the occasions Orwell describes are funny, although they sometimes are, but because the moments of absurdity are offset by dark or terrifying happenings, their awfulness made worse by the preceding light heartedness. Napoleon, eating off his Crown Derby dinner service, is absurd. But the reality of his power and the helplessness of the farm animals are brought home when the pigs first walk out of the farmhouse on hind legs. Hearing Clover's 'terrified neighing', the animals stopped dead in their tracks to see that:

> It was a pig walking on hind legs.
> Yes, it was Squealer … and a moment later, out from the farmhouse, came a long line of pigs all walking on their hind legs. … And finally … out came Napoleon himself …
> He carried a whip in his trotter.
> There was a deadly silence. Amazed, terrified, huddling together, the animals watched the long line of pigs march slowly round the yard. (*Animal Farm,* p. 63)

There are also *Animal Farm's* contrasts between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the reassuring and the disturbing. On re-reading the book, I was struck by how securely the narrative is grounded in the English countryside and its seasons. In the bitter winter, when the animals toiled over the windmill, the 'stormy weather was followed by sleet and snow, and then by a hard frost which did not break till February' (p. 64); in spring, the 'young wheat was thick and green' and 'the grass and bursting hedges were gilded by the level rays of the sun' (p. 75). And when the animals sang 'Beasts of England' the tune was heard everywhere: 'the blackbirds whistled it in the hedges, the pigeons cooed it in the elms, it got into the dins of the smithies and the tune of the church bells' (p. 36). Orwell's evocation of the Englishness of things anchors his dystopia in a long-established rural familiarity. Whistling blackbirds and cooing pigeons warn the intellectuals of the Left that if they continue to be so careless in their mis-readings of

Stalinism, the brutalities described in *Animal Farm* might well take deep root in English soil.

Chronotope

Bakhtin's observations on the fairy tale chronotope have a special interest for *Animal Farm*:

> There appears to be a hyperbolization of time … hours are dragged out, days are compressed into moments, it becomes possible to bewitch time itself. Time begins to be influenced by dreams; that is, we begin to see the peculiar distortion of temporal perspectives characteristic of dreams. (Bakhtin, 1937/1981, p. 154)

It is precisely this 'hyperbolization of time' that allows Orwell to compress the prolonged crisis of Stalinism into the short history of Manor Farm, with the novel covering not just the sequence but also the internal logic of events whereby the revolutionary process reproduces the very abuses it sets out to confront. Early on, the tone of the narrative is highly optimistic, with the third chapter recording that 'it was the biggest harvest that the farm had ever seen … [for] all through the summer the work of the farm went like clockwork' (*Animal Farm*, p. 26). As Dickstein (2007) points out, the downfall starts only five or six pages later, when Napoleon orders that all the windfall apples are to be collected and sent to the harness room for the sole use of the pigs. Critically, the animals accept Squealer's explanation that this is for their own good given that 'the whole management and organization of the farm' depends on the pigs. On hearing this, the animals 'have no more to say', and it 'was agreed without further argument that the milk and windfall apples (and also the main crop of apples when they ripened) should be reserved for the pigs alone' (*Animal Farm*, p. 32)

From that point on, the novel follows the pattern of the parable, with each sequence of events reinforcing what the reader already knows: the pigs are conniving, the rest of the animals are naïve, and the revolution will fail. When Snowball is chased off the farm by 'nine enormous dogs wearing brass-studded collars', the animals accept Squealer's assertion that Snowball is a traitor and needs to be exiled. And so it continues, with the pigs trading with the humans, moving into the farmhouse, and sleeping in beds. If chronotope represents 'the organizing centre for the fundamental narrative events of the novel … the places

where the knots of narrative are tied and untied' (Bakhtin, 1937/1981, p. 250), then the political meaning of *Animal Farm* can be seen to lie within its pattern and sequence of events, which follow a swift optimistic upward drive in the first three chapters of the book followed by the long deterioration thereafter. Such, the chronotope warns, is the pattern of revolutionary change.

Political tragedy

If *Animal Farm* were simply reinforcing Orwell's point about the gullibility of the animals, it would be a starkly moralist fable indeed. But the book tilts quite differently, toward pathos if not tragedy, for it is the animals that trust most who suffer most: namely, Clover and Boxer. Shortly after Napoleon's first slaughter, leaving 'a pile of corpses' at his feet and the air 'heavy with the smell of blood' (p. 74), Clover looks down over the familiar countryside, her eyes filled with tears, and Orwell records how:

> If she could have spoken her thoughts it would have been to say that this is not what they had aimed at when they had set themselves years ago to overthrow the human race. These scenes of terror and slaughter were not what they had looked forward to that first night when old Major first stirred them to rebellion. If she had any picture of the future, it had been of a society free from hunger and the whip, all equal and all working to capacity, the strong protecting the weak. (*Animal Farm*, pp. 75-6)

Clover survives the downfall of the revolution, her hopes dashed. Boxer does not. He keeps working, hoping for the best. After he contracts a chest infection, Squealer arranges for him to be sent to hospital. The animals panic when they see the sign 'Horse Slaughterer and Glue Boiler' on the van carrying Boxer away and vainly rush towards it:

> As though he had heard the uproar outside, Boxer's face, with its white stripe down his nose, appeared at the small window at the back of the van. … A moment later his face disappeared from the window and there was a sound of a tremendous drumming of hoofs within the van. He was trying to kick his way out. … But in a few minutes the sound of the drumming hoofs grew fainter and died away. … Too late someone thought of racing ahead and shutting the five-barred gate; but in another moment the van was through it and rapidly disappearing down the road. Boxer was never seen again. (*Animal Farm*, p. 59)

And here we have it: the finality, the no-going back, the too-lateness, and the five-barred gate that only shuts when hope has left. Boxer, among the most memorable

of all the animals, carries the tragedy of the failed revolution away with him to the knackers.

Un/finalizability?

For Dickstein (2007, p. 140), *Animal Farm* offers 'no single tipping point in the inexorable shift from the genuine equality that marked the early days after the revolution'. But Orwell, as we now know from his recently published letters, intended otherwise. In a letter to his friend Dwight Macdonald, he said that he meant the moral of *Animal Farm* to be that 'revolutions only effect a radical improvement when the masses are alert and know how to chuck out their leaders as soon as the latter have done their job … the turning-point of the story was supposed to be when the pigs kept the milk and apples for themselves' (Orwell 1946b, np). Further, in responding to Macdonald's request that he clarify whether *Animal Farm* applied solely to Russia or made a larger statement about 'the philosophy of revolution', Orwell (1946b, np) said: 'Of course I intended it primarily as a satire on the Russian revolution. But I did mean it to have a wider application in so much that I meant that *that kind* of revolution (violent conspiratorial revolution, led by unconsciously power-hungry people) can only lead to a change of masters.'

It is on the importance of safeguarding the political process with all the tenacity and intelligence available to us that Orwell concentrates, rather than offering any blueprint for the future. He provides numerous clues about the attributes of a decent system: Clover and Boxer are among the most likeable animals because they 'behave decently', Benjamin is admirable because he is sceptical and thinks for himself, Major speaks with passion and conviction, and so forth. However, he goes no further than this, leaving readers free to imagine their own alternatives. I note that for Cunningham (2013, np) this is a weakness of the text. Orwell, he observes, 'ultimately doesn't give the reader much space to think about anything beyond that initial "no" message', and his refusal of tyranny, while important as a gateway, is not enough, for 'the point of a gate is that eventually we need to pass through it'. Against this, I press that Orwell was writing at a time when the search for utopia was itself up for discussion, and suggest that his silence on the shape of the future is part of the politico-ideological point he wishes to make.

Finally, I note that Orwell (1939/2000, p. 75) ruminates that Charles Dickens is able to produce real art through the 'fertility of his invention', 'turns of phrase and concrete details' and because he is 'able to go on being funny because he is in revolt against authority, and authority is always there to be laughed at'. This use of an ironic humour, earnest yet self-deprecating, light yet memorable, pervades *Animal Farm*. A puzzle still remains, however: namely, that *Animal Farm* continues to attract and sustain the interest of readers long after it has outlived its political purpose. One explanation might be that for all of Orwell's (1946a/2000, pp. 3-4) intentions to 'push the world in a certain direction, and alter other people's ideas of the kind of society they should strive for', the enduring qualities of his 'fairy story' do not rise or fall on its success as political allegory, but rather are invested in the power of a good story, simply told, with its pathos deeply invested in an evocative rural nostalgia.

Concluding points: the power of 'countervailing effects'

At the outset of this chapter, I suggested that each of *Bread and Wine, Darkness at Noon* and *Animal Farm* are deeply caught up in the business of ideological assertion. On this basis, I asked whether it was possible for them to create the same kind of generative artistic/political relationship I ascribed to *The Foundation Pit* and *The Master and Margarita* with their oblique interrogations of utopian thought. My analysis has been built around three propositions: first, that political commitment is an integral part of a work's power to carry across time and place; second, that pedagogical discourse can flatten the resonating potential of a work; third, that the literary traditions of the novel can mediate, even transform, didacticism. In relating these notions to the texts, I suggested that Silone's aspirational passages are offset by the socio-ideological languages of his protagonists; that the dogmatic nature of Koestler's ideological assertions is counterbalanced by his humanistic portrayal of Rubashov; and that Orwell's combination of parody, chronotope and un/finalizability gives *Animal Farm* its resonance across time and place.

What I want to do now is combine these reflections with those reached in the previous chapter. In that earlier discussion, I highlighted the diversity of Platonov and Bulgakov's literary/political combinations; the power of their imaginative and

emotional calls in conveying the human impact of the political; and the complex interplay between their finalizable and unfinalizable elements. With a view to developing a fuller understanding of the artistic/political relationship, I ask how *Bread and Wine, Darkness at Noon* and *Animal Farm*—so different in their tone from these earlier novels—might add to and/or qualify these suppositions.

The diversity of the texts' literary/political combinations is striking, confirming Bakhtin's (1935/1981, p. 261) proposal that the novel 'is multiform in style and variform in speech and voice'. This is demonstrated not just in the major contrasts between these three novels and the works of Platonov and Bulgakov, but also in the differences between them despite their shared instructional or truth-telling form. In *Bread and Wine*, ideological issues are portrayed through the contrasting languages of the protagonists, where Sciatàp's gentle reflection that Spina's socialist aspirations are a 'dream, a beautiful dream' like 'abolishing stable doors' (p. 318), sits aside Uliva's assertion that 'to propagate itself every new idea is crystallized into formulas … and invariably becomes a fixed idea, immobile and out of date' (p. 359). In *Darkness at Noon*, a far more assertive and directly instructional text, the 'truth of the matter' is presented through its characteristic patterns of assertion and counter-assertion, with Ivanov's declaration that the Revolution should be allowed to 'sacrifice a few hundred thousand for the most promising experiment in history' (p. 131), crying out for direct refutation. And in *Animal Farm*, Orwell achieves a remarkable effect by parodying the instructional form from the outset, thus underscoring the partiality of all our political narratives.

The imaginative and emotional qualities of the texts are again important, both in their own right and in counteracting didacticism. In contrast to the great spinning out of time and space so characteristic of Platonov and Bulgakov's works, these texts illustrate an 'anchored' form of imagination grounded in particular times and places. In *Animal Farm*, we have the seasons and fields of England; in *Darkness at Noon*, a cell with a glimpse of the Milky Way; in *Bread and Wine*, a village where 'the fields were so small and the stone walls that separated them so numerous that they looked like the foundations of a destroyed town' (p. 245). Commenting on this in relation to Silone, Camus says 'look at Silone, he is

radically tied to his land but is the most European of all writers … Silone speaks for all Europe. If I feel myself tied to him it is because he is incredibly rooted in his national and even local tradition' (cited by Pugliese, 2009, p. 6). The effect is different in each case: in the 'spinning out' of time and space characteristic of the Russian novels, there is an uplift, a sense of reality beyond the immediacy of internecine politics and bureaucratic rivalries; in the 'anchored' portrayals of the Western European texts, a direct call on our political commitment, a move to respond to the injustices of the present. [11]

As with the Russian texts, the sufferings of the characters take us well beyond the 'logic' of the dialogical and the logical. In *Darkness and Noon*, Rubashov's betrayal of the stammering Richard under the *Pietà* with her ageless, folded hands reminds us that politics matter because people matter; in *Bread and Wine*, we are confronted with Uliva's obstinate courage and brutal death; in *Animal Farm*, we can stand with Clover and look out over the ravaged English fields littered with blood, bones, and the small bodies of animals torn to bits. In such ways, the force of the political is *felt* rather than *thought*, with the texts embedding their truths in our consciousness without expressly articulating it. It is in the personal and the particular that the impact of these descriptions lies: in, for example, the fact that Richard is young and trusting, and that his seventeen-year old wife is expecting their baby. This matters to us: in some indefinable way it makes Rubashov's actions worse. The point may seem obvious enough, but I submit that it is obscured in the respective critiques of Kundera, Adorno and Rancière, with their systematic preferences for the strange and/or oblique.

I come last and in most detail to the intersections between finalizability and unfinalizability. My first point is that just as the unfinalizable elements of Platonov and Bulgakov's works are embedded in a set of relatively finalizable values and commitments, so the assertive/finalizable features of the Western

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[11] This pull of the local and its capacity to extend our imagination outward is reflected in Bakhtin's (1937/1981, p. 225) suggestion that in the rural idyll: 'the unity of the life of generations … is in most instances primarily defined by the unity of place. … [This] brings together and even fuses the cradle and the grave (the same little corner, the same earth), and brings together … childhood and old age (the same grove, stream, the same lime trees, the same house'.

European texts are accompanied by considerable silences or 'gaps'. In *Bread and Wine*, the fate of the revolutionary movement is never settled; in *Darkness at Noon*, Rubashov is shot in the back to no purpose and there is no sense of resolution; in *Animal Farm,* the pigs end up sleeping in humans' beds and Orwell refuses to offer a blueprint for the future. It is in and through these silences—a highly important example of countervailing literary effects—that we are prompted to ask further questions and search for new insights.

My reading of the texts also suggests that the distinction between finalizability and unfinalizability, so important to the artistic/political binary, may be too blunt an instrument to account for the nature of our responses to a work. If we take Howe's (1957/2002, p. 17) definition of a political novel as one where 'political ideas play a dominant role or in which the political milieu is the dominant setting', *Darkness at Noon* and *Animal Farm* are more directly and evidently 'political' than *Bread and Wine*. So it might appear that they are the more vulnerable to the risks of pedagogy. On my reading this is not so. This is partly because the narrative of *Bread and Wine* does not particularly appeal (the characters seem contrived, and the tone of the text dated); partly because in all three cases the political content holds my attention as a focal point; and partly because the pedagogical risks associated with a political content are, in each case, counterbalanced by the literary traditions of the novel.

Let me briefly recapitulate on this critical matter. In the case of *Darkness at Noon*, there are times when I withdraw from the text because of its relentless hammering, experiencing a feeling of being 'worn out' by its insistences. Nevertheless, the work continues to haunt me, largely because of the sense of personal, social and political suffering embedded in it. In reading *Animal Farm*, I find that the moral of the fable blends in such a simple and unpretentious way with an old-style story, coherently told by an accomplished writer, that the text takes an imaginative hold not so much despite as through its political directness. Finally, and this time in line with Bakhtin's suppositions, I believe that the most compelling passages of *Bread and Wine* emerge in its more complex moments, when the fine balance between doubt and hope emerges through the contending voices of the protagonists.

In summary, I reiterate the diversity of the texts' literary/political combinations; the importance of imagination in extending our political horizons; the significance of emotion in portraying the human impact of the political; and the intricate connections between the finalizable and unfinalizable. Against many of the prescriptive readings of the arts/politics relationship discussed in Chapter Two, these considerations withstand any single rendering of the artistic/political relationship, and point instead to the multiplicity of ways in which the novel's artistic/political configurations might resonate across time and space. Building on these foundations, I turn to the novels of Solzhenitsyn and Grossman as examples of works that take systematic stock of Russia's past, present and future, and in so doing face their own particular set of artistic/political challenges.

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Six

The novel as historical record: Solzhenitsyn and Grossman

> In recent times our Soviet literature has been persistently labouring over new forms for the socio-ideological novel. This is perhaps the most pressing and important genre on today's literary scene. The socio-ideological novel—ultimately the socially tendentious novel—is a completely legitimate artistic form. Not to recognize its purely artistic legitimacy is a naïve prejudice of superficial aestheticism, which we should have long ago outgrown. (Bakhtin, 1930/1989, p. 256)

Bakhtin offered this surprising acknowledgement of the 'socio-ideological genre' in his preface to Tolstoy's last novel, *Resurrection.* He was writing in 1930, around the same time that he was developing the theoretical notions discussed in this thesis. True to those evolving ideas, he immediately qualified his endorsement:

> But actually this is one of the most difficult and risk-laden forms of the novel. … To organize the entire artistic material from top to bottom on the basis of a well-defined socio-ideological thesis, without stifling it or drying the living concrete life within it, is a very difficult task. (Bakhtin, 1930/1989, p. 256)

Although Solzhenitsyn's *In the First Circle* and *Cancer Ward,* and Grossman's *Everything Flows* are more fluid and complex than Bakhtin's designation of the socio-ideological novel would suggest—and surely there are few, if any, texts in which 'every word, every epithet, every comparison' is devoted to a single, central thesis—they yet remain vulnerable to the 'stifling' or 'drying' effects Bakhtin associates with the socio-ideological genre. As discussed in the last chapter, the stifling effect of pedagogy also applies to the 'truth-telling' novels of Silone, Koestler and Orwell. However, I propose that the challenges facing Solzhenitsyn and Grossman are the greater, for in reconstructing the past and evaluating the role of their characters as active players within that past, they lean always toward the historical 'real' and a morally evaluative stance. If Silone, Koestler and Orwell's novels represent a polemical/assertive form of political logic, Solzhenitsyn and Grossman's works represent its 'stock-taking' character, something that does not lend itself easily to satire, irony and/or story-telling, all of which are important countervailing features in the Western European texts.

Solzhenitsyn and Grossman novels are evidently far-removed from the oblique, philosophically-oriented renderings of either of *The Foundation Pit* or *The Master and Margarita*. Hence the critical question for this chapter is whether and how far they might leave room for our own imaginative re-interpretations as readers while also holding history to account; put another way, how they might combine the open and creative nature of the artistic with the systematizing qualities of the political. Before exploring this, I turn to the literary and political contexts in which their novels emerged and gained their significance.

Context: protesting the past and present

As contributors to the dissenting literature of the period, Solzhenitsyn and Grossman's novels fall under what Parthé (2004) describes as the 'paraliterary' space; that is, the space where literature and criticism coincide and become subject to the political scrutiny of the authorities. Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech', delivered to the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, set the parameters for legitimate dissent. On the one hand, the speech condemned Stalin's abuses; on the other, it remained resolutely silent on the ideological, legal and institutional character of the regime. As Shatz (1980, p. 100) comments, the denunciation 'remained strictly on the level of moral criticism: the Soviet political, economic and social system was fundamentally sound, only the defective character of some of the people who had been running it was at fault'. The speech also made it clear that even if the arbitrary arrests, persecutions and executions were over, the Party's monopoly of political power would continue. Hence: 'the one-party state would be preserved, alternative ideologies would be suppressed and state economic ownership would be preserved … the future of the USSR lay in a return to the past' (Service, 2009, p. 339).[1]

Three years prior to the speech, the critical journal *Novy Mir* published Vladimir Pomerantsev's article, 'On sincerity in literature' (1953). Taking a bold step, Pomerantsev called for a new form of sincerity in authors, observing that 'to say of a writer that his books are characterized by patriotic feeling, love for the people, and faith for the future, is to say nothing' (cited by Shatz, 1980, p. 101). In

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[1] For discussion of the role of dissident literature over this period, see Boobbyer 2005, and Booker and Juraga 1995.

a second important dissenting move, also in 1953, Ilya Ehrenburg's short novel *The Thaw* (the title of which subsequently gave its name to Khrushchev's uneven periods of liberalization) was published and circulated. The novel describes how the wife of a despotic factory-owning husband left him during the spring thaw; in its 'daring subplot' it compares a penurious artist, Saburov, who is unable to exhibit but maintains his professional and personal integrity, with a successful careerist, Pukhov, who produces orthodox and sterile artistic works (Shatz, 1980, p. 104). In this early post-Stalinist stage, the authorities gave cautious but grudging acknowledgement to the existence of both pieces.[2]

As the cold war set in, so the space for legitimate protest narrowed. This is reflected in the official reception of Vladimir Dudinstev's *Not by Bread Alone* (1958). The book describes how a dedicated inventor was systematically defeated on all sides by a short-sighted, selfish and opportunistic bureaucracy. Bureaucratic red tape was traditionally a legitimate literary target, and it was not until the novel was published and endorsed in the West, that Dudinstev was 'shunned, banned and harried into poverty' (Stonor Saunders, 1994, p. 8). In the final and most significant event of the 1950s, described by Shatz as 'the greatest literary sensation of the Khrushchev years' (1980, p. 106). Pasternak was offered a Nobel Prize for his *Dr Zhivago* in 1958. Given the novel's suggestion that the Revolution had sacrificed individual freedoms for economic transformation, the Soviet authorities reacted furiously to its celebration in the West. Ostracized, isolated and vilified as a traitor in the Soviet Union, Pasternak was brought close to suicide and refused the award.[3]

In 1961, Khrushchev reaffirmed his earlier commitments to liberalization in his address to the Twenty-Second Party Congress. With his explicit approval, *Pravda*

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[2] The official response to Pomerantsev's article is nicely illustrated in *Cancer Ward*. Here Dyoma, a student, asks Aviette, the daughter of Rusanov, a senior police officer, for her opinion on the work. She replies 'the man who wrote that article turned everything the wrong way round. Either that or he didn't think his argument through properly. Sincerity can't be the chief criterion for judging a book. If an author expressed incorrect ideas or alien attitudes, the fact that he is sincere about them merely increases the harm the work does' (*Cancer Ward*, p. 310).

[3] For a caustic and absorbing account of Isaiah Berlin's role in bringing the manuscript of *Doctor Zhivago* to the West, the actions of the publishing industry, the possible role of the CIA, and the devastating consequences for Pasternak, see Stonor Saunders 2014.

published Yevgeny Yevtushenko's 'Heirs of Stalin', a poem suggesting that Stalin/ism continued to stalk the upper echelons of the Party. Evoking mausoleums and the slumbering dead, it read:

> He was scheming. Had merely dozed off.
> And I, appealing to our government, petition them
> to double, and treble, the sentries guarding this slab,
> and stop Stalin from ever rising again
> and, with Stalin, the past …
>
> No wonder Stalin's heirs seem to suffer
> these days from heart trouble. They, the former henchmen,
> hate this era of emptied prison camps
> and auditoriums full of people listening to poets. (Yevtushenko, 1961)

When Khrushchev fell from power in 1964, a period of 're-Stalinisation' settled in. Given that the old instruments of espionage and surveillance remained substantially intact, Brezhnev was able to clamp down on the nascent cultural and intellectual freedoms with relative ease. One event followed another. Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, which has been released in book form and circulated in schools in 1962, was quietly withdrawn. The poet Joseph Brodsky was brought to trial on the astonishing charge of 'parasitism';[4] Daniel and Sinyavsky were sentenced to the labour camps for 'publishing anti-Soviet propaganda abroad' in 1966; the editor of *Novy Mir,* Alexander Tvardovsky, was forced to resign in 1977. Until Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost* some two and a half decades later, dissident works were refused publication, confiscated and banned*,* surviving through the underground process called '*samizdat*'*,* whereby banned manuscripts were passed from hand to hand usually in carbon copy form.

The publication histories of Solzhenitsyn and Grossman's novels tell their own stories. Solzhenitsyn first worked on *In the First Circle* between 1955 and 1958, and then, hoping for publication, submitted a 'lightened' version to the Union in 1964, with its more contentious passages omitted and the text reduced from ninety-six to eighty-seven chapters. Even in this abbreviated form, it was refused publication, and a year later the KGB seized a copy and circulated it among

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[4] Brodsky, whose works were not particularly political, was tried on the charge that he had not earned his upkeep in terms of output. His plea that he had worked diligently to perfect his talents as a poet was not successful, and he was sentenced to five years' forced labour in a distant locality (Shatz 1980).

officials. It was published in its shortened form in the West in 1968, and in its full form in the Russian language in the United States in 1978. In this 'restored' version (1978) Solzhenitsyn writes:

> Such is the fate of Russian books today: they bob to the surface, if they ever do, plucked to the skin. … So also with this novel of mine. In order to give it even a feeble life, I myself shortened and distorted it … but here it is now, the authentic one. By the by, while restoring the novel, there were parts that I refined: after all, I was forty then but am fifty now. (*In the First Circl*e, front pages)

Cancer Ward was similarly refused publication rights when Solzhenitsyn submitted it in 1967, and the Union formally banned the book the following year. It too made its way to the West, to be later published in the Soviet Union. Grossman's experiences were similar. In 1960, his earlier epic novel, *Life and Fate*, was formally 'arrested' by the KGB, who also confiscated his typewriter and its ribbons, asserting that Grossman's writing was no longer in the public interest. Grossman then worked privately on *Everything Flows* until his death in 1964, circulating drafts to close friends. The authorities, he lamented, 'have strangled me into a corner' (Chandler, 2011, p. xxix).

Other important dissenting works of the period include Anatoly Rybakov's *Children of the Arbat* (1966/1988), which describes the experiences of a young member of the komsomol exiled as a result of party intrigues; Sasha Sokolov's *A School for Fools* (1969/2015), which develops a new style 'proeziia' ('between prose and poetry') to enter the inner mental landscape of a schizophrenic adolescent; and Varlam Shalamov's *Kolyma Tales* (1966/1994), which, in Shalamov's words, is characterized by 'a "new prose", which is not the prose of the document but of the ordeal born out of it' (cited by Toker, 1997, p. 554). *Children of the Arbat* was suppressed until perestroika, where it was published as a series of essays; *School for Fools* made its way to the United States, where it was first published in the mid 1970s; *Kolyma Tales* was taken to the United States in 1966 and individual stories were published there between 1970 and 1976.

Solzhenitsyn and Grossman's novels do not have the stylistic adventurousness of either of Sokolov or Shalamov's works. They are, however, distinctive in their systematic reconstruction of the past and their evaluation of characters as active players in that past. It is this evaluative stance that leaves them vulnerable to

Bakhtin's (1930/1989, p. 256) warnings on the 'stifling' or 'drying' of effects of the socio-ideological novel, and it is the dimensions of this problem that preoccupy me here. In preface, I note that the nature of Solzhenitsyn and Grossman's responses to this challenge is substantially influenced by their prior literary orientations. Solzhenitsyn's is a thoroughly Tolstoyian perspective, being based on the conviction that art has a supervening moral purpose perspective. Just as Tolstoy asserts that the distinguishing feature of 'true' or 'authentic' art is its capacity to 'call up in a man that feeling, utterly distinct from all other feelings, of joy, of spiritual union with another and with others' (1898/1996, p. 120), so Solzhenitsyn declares that:

> I have understood and experienced this truth in my life: that world literature as a unifying force is no longer an abstract sum of influences or a generalisation constructed by literary experts but a common body and common soul, a living unity of heart in which the growing spiritual unity of mankind finds reflection. (*Nobel Prize Speech*, 'One Word of Truth …', 1972, p. 24)

In contrast, Grossman's orientation—possibly following his training as a war journalist—is analytical, investigative and critical, evincing a desire to put things on the historical record and give a name to what has gone before. In *Everything Flows* this produces an unusual combination of analytic/critical comment and creative/imaginative description, with priority given to the social and political conditions framing human action. In brief, we have a distinction between a more normative and a more sociological approach, each of which produces its own particular way of responding to the challenges facing the socio-ideological novel.

As established at the outset of this discussion, in taking stock of the past, Solzhenitsyn and Grossman face the challenge of revealing the finalizable elements of historical developments while at the same time offering a place where we can interpret and/or come to terms with the force of the events described. I suggest that this depends on a 'creative space' or 'imaginative gap' where the truths a text asserts, the historical developments it portrays, and the views and values of its characters all have degree of freedom one from another, even while closely woven into the normative fabric of the text. Put another way, history needs to be allowed to 'speak for itself', in just the same way that novelistic characters need to have some autonomy from the author that creates them. I stress that this is

not a plea for unfinalizability, but rather for the intersection between the two, whereby the finalizable nature of historical events combines with the space for imaginative re-presentation.

In using this line of argument as the analytical frame for my discussion, I make considerably less use of the detail of Bakhtin's insights than I do in any of my other chapters on the texts. His warnings about the risks of the sociological novel are, however, always at the centre of my considerations. The discussion falls into two main parts: relating the authors' re-creation of the past and their representation of characters as historical actors.

Re-creating the past

In her discussion of the Gulag literature, Leonie Toker (2000, p. 188) proposes that works that attempt to say something 'true' about the past represent a 'veridical' form of prose where characters and events do not generally refer to 'real events and actual people' but are 'yet felt to be typical, to represent a paradigm, a *replicating* model of human attitudes and fates' (original emphasis). Such texts, she says, engage the reader in a 'metafictional pact' whereby they 'promote attention to the links between the texts and the reality they point at, as well as the nature, extent and purpose of the fictionalisation' (p. 188). This invites consideration of just how Solzhenitsyn and Grossman draw on the powers of fiction to create their 'metafictional pacts', and how far the 'nature, extent and purposes' of their fictionalisations allow historical events to 'speak for themselves', or alternatively, subordinates them to the authors' moral and/or political concerns. I consider each of the three novels in turn.

In the First Circle

In the First Circle is based on Solzhenitsyn's three years (1946-9) as a political prisoner in a security prison just outside Moscow. Its setting is the Marfino Institute for Scientific Research, a security prison staffed by scientists and engineers taken out of the labour camps to do technical work for the regime. Its title, with its Dantean allusion, reflects the fact that even though the prisoners (*zeks*) are isolated from the outside world and cut off from their families, their conditions are appreciably better than those in the inner reaches of the Gulag.

Hence they face the dilemma of whether they should comply with the authorities, in which case they will assist in the imprisonment of others, or refuse, knowing that this means they will be sent back to the labour camps where they may well die. At the end of the book, when the autobiographical Gleb Nerzhin awaits transportation to the forced labour camps for refusing to comply, he sounds almost euphoric in his declaration: 'No, Ilya Terentich, [Marfino] isn't hell! … Hell is where we're going! The special prison is the highest, the best, the first circle of hell. It's practically paradise!' (*In the First Circle*, p. 740).

Toker (2000, p. 124) observes that *In the First Circle* contains 'more referential material than do many of the cautious contemporary memoirs, which suspended references to time, place, and police in order to withhold the information from the secret police'. But what is the purpose of this material and what kind of 'metafictional pact' does it seek to serve? In many instances, it is moral, with the historical detail illustrating not so much the circumstances of the times as the status of the characters in responding to those circumstances, as illustrated in Nerzhin's declaration cited above. Further, in compressing the force of the plot into a finite space and time—a four-day period over Christmas 1949—while at the same time expanding on the motivations, deliberations and actions of the characters, Solzhenitsyn underscores the significance of each and every one of our actions.

Let me illustrate the force of Solzhenitsyn's moral discourse with reference to the predicament of Gleb Nerzhin's wife, Nadya. On becoming a university student, Nadya finds that there are 'practically no research topics without a research classification' and that 'the whole of science was being labelled as top secret from top to bottom' (p. 272). Her situation is untenable: if she owns that her husband has been convicted under Article 58, the authorities will not let her present her thesis, 'let alone work at the university', and if she lies and says he has been 'reported missing on active service', they will trace his details and she will be prosecuted for false information (pp. 272-273). All this is vital information, and I search for more insights: how the university operates; the kinds of procedures to which Nadya is actually or potentially subject; and the ways in which scientific research is bent to the purposes of the regime. But Solzhenitsyn notably fails to

provide such details, instead underlining the enormity of Nerzhin's sacrifice in agreeing to Nadya's request for a divorce. The climax of the chapter, the force of the telling, comes when Nerzhin kisses Nadya farewell, knowing he had 'no hope of being in Moscow in a year's time to kiss her again' (p. 277).

I submit that in its moral foundations, the chronotope of *In the First Circle* has more in common with the heroic cast of Bakhtin's (1937/1981) classic biographical novel than the great widening of time and space of the post-Rabelaisian novel. There are, however, many occasions where Solzhenitsyn does allow the historical detail to speak for itself, thus creating the 'space' for our own imaginative reinterpretations. In detailing Marfino's characteristics as a 'first circle of hell', for example, he records the prisoners' separation from family and friends, their subjection to repeated roll calls and body searches, and their control by prison authorities who are 'paid to suspect that the convict's most innocent act is a treacherous ruse' (p. 172). Reproducing an actual historical event, he describes how when the prisoners are occasionally allowed to see their families, they are driven to a separate prison in a large orange and blue van labelled 'meat' to ensure that the public will not realize that Marfino, which was once a seminary, has been turned into a security prison. He also details the physical characteristics of Marfino, capturing the *ordinariness* and thus the potential *everywhereness* of the mechanisms of surveillance:

> The Acoustics Laboratory occupied a lofty, spacious room. … Big bulbs in frosted fixtures shed a pleasant diffused white light. There was a soundproof acoustic chamber with sides short of the ceiling, at the far corner of the room. It looked unfinished: its exterior was upholstered with ordinary sacking stuffed with straw. … Near the booth, rows of copper sockets gleamed in the black lacquered panel of the central switchboard. (*In the First Circle*, p. 19)

In a parallel but distinct literary move, Solzhenitsyn uses a combination of symbolism and parody to represent Stalin as a dying dictator. The occasion is the evening of Stalin's seventieth birthday, and from the outset, Solzhenitsyn emphasizes the *ordinariness* of the great dictator: 'he was only a little yellow-eyed old man with gingery … thinning … hair, with deep pockmarks in a grey face and a sagging dewlap… with uneven blackened teeth' (*Cancer Ward*, p. 98). This is an isolated and lonely Stalin: 'there was no one he now remembered as a

friend … he had and could have no friend' (p. 102). Most of all, this is a delusional Stalin, a captive of personal isolation and ideological fallacies:

> Stalin felt so lonely because he had no one to try his thoughts on, no one to measure himself against. Still half the universe was there in his breast, all order and clarity. Only the other half, called objective reality, was lost in the swirling mist that covered the world. (*In The First Circle*, p. 153)

It is impossible to say how far this does justice to Stalin's last years: certainly it does not match the energy, ruthlessness and obdurate determination of the dictator who transformed the Russian economy and was responsible for millions of deaths. What it *does* do is underscore Solzhenitsyn's thesis that wrongdoing will bring about its own form of mortal retribution. In so far as this overrides the actual, historical Stalin, it can be said to subordinate the reality of history to Solzhenitsyn's moral concerns. Against this, I argue that we have an imaginative reconstruction that invites us to look at the category 'dictator' in a very different way, reflecting Bakhtin's (1941/1981, p. 10) point that a 'basic internal theme of the novel' is precisely the 'inadequacy of fate or situation' in describing the totality of a human actor.

In summary: *In the First Circle* offers three distinct accounts of the historical: moral, empirical and symbolic/parodic. My argument is that the moral forecloses on the creative space by subordinating history to Solzhenitsyn's socio-ideological thesis; that the empirical leaves history to 'speak for itself' and expands our political imaginaries; and that the symbolic/parodic invites us to revise our preconceptions. Keeping these distinctions in mind, I turn to *Cancer Ward* where the text's metaphorical basis withstands any single line of interpretation from the outset.

Cancer Ward [5]

For Patricia Blake (1968, np), *Cancer Ward* 'irresistibly conveys an image of the immediate post-Stalin period when both victims and executioners were confined, all equally mutilated, in the cancer ward of the nation'. However, at a meeting with the Writers Union, Solzhenitsyn insisted that 'the book is about cancer, cancer as such … as it is experienced every day by the sick' (cited by Blake 1968,

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[5] *Cancer Ward* draws on Solzhenitsyn's experience as a patient in a hospital in Tashkent when on temporary release from exile 'in perpetuity' at Kok-Terek in Kazakhstan.

np). While this can be interpreted as his attempt to defend his novel against the authorities, it is indeed true that *Cancer Ward* is specific about the different forms of the disease, its various treatments, and the hopes and fears of patients. When, for example, Kostoglotov has his tumour examined by the doctors, he 'can feel at once how this toad inside him … had dug itself deep inside him and was pressing against his stomach' (*Cancer Ward*, p. 62).

On this basis, I suggest that the cancer metaphor has a two-fold significance. First, the historical and political, with its notions of malignancy and contamination, as reflected in Kostoglotov's query: 'a man dies from a tumour, so how can a country survive with growths like labour camps and exiles?' (*Cancer Ward*, p. 56). Second, the moral and spiritual, where patients are compelled to take stock of their lives and deliberate the meaning of life and death. As an example of this second theme, we have Yefrem Podduyev, a former labour camp overseer, who has no idea how to face death, for 'the whole of his life had prepared him for living not for dying' (p. 108). Accordingly:

> Day after day, he marched up and down the old floors, rattling the floor-boards, without getting it any clearer in his mind how to meet death. He couldn't work it out and there was no one to tell him. (*Cancer Ward*, p. 111)

It is on this twin basis that I consider *Cancer Ward*'s recreation of historical events, suggesting that its metaphorical base allows it to withstand 'all sorts of external finalization … and fixed, stable images' (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 78). The novel is set in the mid 1950s, when Stalin's machinery of surveillance was still intact and memories of the regime still fresh. As well as the hero, Kostoglotov, who is an exile and ex-prisoner, the rest of the characters include the medical and nursing staff, a member of the secret police, a contractor, a camp guard, a geologist, a Bolshevik scholar and two students. In drawing on the experiences and exchanges of these characters, Solzhenitsyn shows just how *differently* Stalin's regime impacted on its subjects and how *variously* it was understood. When, for example, Zoya the nurse asks Kostoglotov what 'exile in perpetuity' means, it is clear that she knows nothing about the 'Penal Code, all those paragraphs, clauses and their extended interpretations' (p. 180). And she still does not comprehend, cannot comprehend, when Kostoglotov tells her:

> If it were a life sentence, well, I suppose, my coffin would be brought back
> to Russia, but since it's "perpetual", it means that even that won't be allowed
> back. I won't be allowed back even after the sun goes out. (*Cancer Ward*, p.
> 181)

Similarly, Ludmila Dontsova, a doctor in the ward, cannot understand why Kostoglotov was not offered a diagnosis when he was in the camps. In trying to explain this to her, Kostoglotov says 'there were such stormy goings-on where we were, Ludmila Afanasyevna, that I give you my word of honour … I'd have been ashamed to ask about a little thing like my biopsy. Heads were rolling. And I didn't even understand what a biopsy was for' (p. 81). When she protests, saying 'of course you didn't understand. But these doctors must have understood. These things can't be played with' (p. 81), Kostoglotov ceases his explanations and reflects:

> Wasn't that typical of life? Here, sitting in front of him, was his compatriot,
> his contemporary and well-wisher. They were both talking in their own
> language, common to them both, and still he couldn't explain the simplest
> thing to her. It seemed one had to start too far back, or else end the
> explanation too soon. (*Cancer Ward*, p. 81)

In another telling instance, the characters respond very differently to the Party's decision not to commemorate the second anniversary of Stalin's death (March 5th, 1955). Vadim, a student loyal to the regime, is shocked, for he and his brother had grown up with Stalin's portrait in their nursery, and 'always saw over them those thick eyebrows, that thick moustache, that firm steadfast face' (p. 335). In contrast, Kostoglotov 'found it impossible to comprehend ... that on this day two years ago old men had shed tears, young girls had wept and the whole world seemed orphaned' (p. 339):

> He found this preposterous to imagine because he remembered what the day
> had been like for them. … Barrack blocks were not unlocked and the
> prisoners were kept shut up … (but) the news spread and spread. … People
> were moving along the bunks saying, 'Hey kids it looks as though the old
> Cannibal has kicked the bucket'. … And they all started to grin, they were
> all but openly crowing in triumph, those coarse, sharp-boned, swarthy
> prisoners' mugs. (*Cancer Ward*, pp. 339-40)

In their dialogic way, these passages show how 'the word lives, as it were, on the boundary between its own context and another, alien, context' (Bakhtin, 1935/1981, p. 284). Solzhenitsyn, though, never retreats from the actuality of Stalin's terror. In portraying this, he uses a combination of symbolism and parody

to create Pavel Rusanov, a senior police officer, as both mortal human being and executor of terror. Rusanov's disease 'unforseen and unprepared for' had come upon him 'like a gale in the space of two weeks', and 'dragged him in like a fish on a hook and flung him on this iron bed' (*Cancer Ward,* p. 9 and p. 7). Notwithstanding his fears and frustrations, Rusanov is still able to gloat that:

> Each person is permanently connected to central records administration by hundreds of little threads … and …if all these threads … millions in all … were suddenly to become visible, the whole sky would look like a spider's web, and if they materialized as elastic bands, buses, trams and even people would all lose the ability to move, and the wind would be unable to carry torn up newspapers or autumn leaves along the streets of the city. (*Cancer Ward,* p. 208)

Later, Solzhenitsyn portrays the 'actuality' but 'impossibility' of Stalin's terror by making use of the surrealism of the dream, which, as Bakhtin observes in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1963/1984), allows the novel to move 'outside time' while also dealing precisely with events as enclosed 'in time'. In this dream, Rusanov finds himself 'crawling along a concrete tube with uncovered steel bars jutting out from its sides' (p. 229). After a long time, he emerges onto a construction site. The workmen have departed, but a girl is sitting there, her 'straw-like hair hanging loosely without comb or pin' and her eyes 'all water' (p. 230). Subsequently, he finds himself in a mineshaft, which, to his surprise, has a phone sticking out of the wall. He lifts the receiver to ask the operator to be taken to hospital. Instead of a dialling tone a 'vigorous business like' voice summons him to the Supreme Court (pp. 232-6). Fearing for his life, Rusanov goes to Court and the dream ends.

In its surreal form, this dream narrative extends our insights into what it might be like to exist under a reign of perpetual terror. In its telling, it captures something of Platonov's description of the liquidated Kulaks floating down the river in a raft, depicting a world that should never be, was unbelievable in all respects, and yet had come to be. The 'unbelievable' nature of Stalin's wreckage is also captured in the conclusion to the novel. On his release from hospital, Kostoglotov decides to visit the zoo. Here he stands for a long time by the monkey's cage, baffled by a notice pinned to its door, which explains that an 'evil man' blinded the monkey by throwing tobacco into its eyes. Kostoglotov is struck dumb: 'Why? Thrown into

its eyes just like that? Why? It's senseless!' (p. 542). It is partly the simplicity of the notice, which staggers and enrages him: 'this unknown man … was not described as "anti-humanist" or an "agent of American imperialism". He was simply evil.' He is unable to find an explanation. The next day he is travelling back to exile and the book ends as follows:

> The train went on and Kostoglotov's boots dangled over the corridor like a dead man's. An evil man threw tobacco into the Macaque-Rhesus's eyes. Just like that. (*Cancer Ward*, p. 570)

This is a haunting conclusion, combining the coherence of the narrative, whereby Kostoglotov seeks certain truths, and the silence of the space, where he can find no answers. It is strikingly different from Nerzhin's triumphal return to the forced labour camps at the end of *In the First Circle*. So here and elsewhere, I suggest that *Cancer Ward* has the greater potential to sustain and widen the creative space. In evoking frailty, disease and death, it evokes compassion; in its empirical detail, it shows just how differently Stalin's regime was experienced by subjects; in its symbolism it creates a bizarre but terrifying picture of the actuality of terror; in its metaphors it withstands any single reading.

Everything Flows

I now turn to *Everything Flows*, the text most centrally concerned with recording historical suffering in and for itself. Chandler suggests that Grossman wrote for the dead, so that those who 'lie in the earth' would have voice and be remembered (2011, p, xxiii). This is reflected in Grossman's report on the massacre of the Ukrainian Jews in Kazary, where he writes that 'silence and calm hover over the dead bodies buried under the collapsed fireplaces now overgrown with weeds … this quiet is much more frightening than tears and curses' (Grossman, 1945/2005, pp. 252-3). He then tries to make good the loss, to provide a memorial for the dead, by 'calling out' the names of those who now lie under the collapsed fireplaces:

> Craftsmen and professional people; tailors, shoemakers, tinsmiths, jewellers, house painters, ironmongers, bookbinders, workers, freight handlers, millers, bakers and cooks … violinists and pianists … two-year-olds and three-year-olds … eighty-year-old men and women with cataracts on hazy eyes, with cold and transparent fingers and hair that rustled quietly like white paper. (Grossman, 1945/2005, p. 253)

Grossman's endeavour to counteract the 'silence and calm' of public memory takes up a major part of *Everything Flows*. Such, in essence, is the nature of his 'metafictional pact': to remember and to remember as clearly as possible. As one means of doing this, he creates individuals that live for a short time on the pages of his book and then vanish from then as swiftly as they did in real life. In one of the most shocking examples, he describes how Masha Lyubimov, a young woman, is imprisoned for refusing to denounce her husband. When she is in prison, a senior guard knocks out two of her front teeth, and then, twice a week, forces her down a narrow corridor to a room where there are boards covered with sheepskins. There he rapes her. At one point, he gives her five candies. Wanting to send them to her daughter who has been placed in an orphanage, Masha does not eat them, but hides them in her small straw mattress (p. 114). Having for a long time held onto the hope that she will one day return to her family, Masha only 'returns to freedom' when she dies and the medical orderlies 'place her in a box that the timber inspectors had rejected for any other use' (p. 114).

One of the most remarkable features of Grossman's work is how it engages with historical *facts* through the *poetry* of its language. I highlight this because 'facts'—in all of their finalizability—are not usually combined with poetics, but this is exactly what happens here, where Grossman's 'horrified imagination' brings home the full and shocking force of events.[6] He reports, for example, how in the prisoner transport system of the 1930s, 'steel combs were installed underneath the tail wagon of each train' so that if a prisoner 'managed to dismantle the floorboards and throw himself prone beneath the rails, this comb would *seize* him, *yank* him up, and *hurl* him beneath the wheels' (p. 95). In the same detailed fashion, he records the stifled atmosphere of the prison cells, where:

> The cell windows were covered by thick wooden panels, and light from outside penetrated by only a narrow slit. … The electric lights burned twenty-four hours a day with merciless brightness; it was as if all that terrible, stifling heat came from them, from their white incandescence. Ventilators hummed day and night, but the torrid air from the June asphalt brought no relief. At night the air you breathed seemed like layers of hot felt stuffed inside your lungs and head. (*Everything Flows*, p. 149)

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[6]As earlier noted, the notion of a 'horrified imagination' belongs to Ricoeur (2004, p. 559), who observes that 'horror' is not itself a historical category, and it is the power of a literary imagination that 'gives eyes to the horrified narrator', and, I would add, to the ears of the horrified reader.

The most extended example of Grossman's poetic/factual combination is his account of the Ukraine famine. Here he creates a narrator with direct experience of events: Anna Sergeyevna, who thirty years earlier had been a member of one of Stalin's youth brigades. In her early conversations with Ivan Grigoryevich, Anna describes her role as a brigade leader on the collective farms, simply commenting that 'the work became more than my soul could bear' for 'if someone steels a fistful of grain—of the grain, like it or not, they have sown themselves—they get seven years …' (p. 83). Later, when they become lovers, she gives him a full account of events, starting with the fact that the arrest and extermination of the Kulaks was triggered by an essentially administrative decision in which:

> The provincial committee would draw up a plan … and send it to the district Party committee. The district committees would then decide on the number of kulaks to be arrested in each village—and the village soviets would then each draw up a list of names. It was on the basis of these lists that the people were arrested. And who drew up the lists? A group of three—a troika. A group of ordinary muddle-headed people determined who would live and who would die. (*Everything Flows*, p. 117)

Over its several pages, Anna's narrative is packed with historical detail: in Toker's (2000) terms, actual, referential, empirical detail. She records how all the social amenities in the district centre, 'the cinema, theatre, the clubs, and the schools', were turned into prisons to accommodate the forced exodus of Kulaks. During the journey, many people were 'put down in the middle of nowhere … left to fend for themselves in the middle of the snow' with the result that 'the weak froze to death' (p. 122). The famine 'never slept', and as the hunger set in, 'there was nothing that the people didn't eat. They caught mice; they caught rats, jackdaws, sparrows, and ants; they dug up earthworms. They ground up bones to make flour' (p. 128 and p. 131). And then Anna remembers the children:

> As for the children—did you see the photographs of the children from the German camp? They looked just the same: heads heavy as cannon balls; thin little necks like necks of storks; and on their arms and legs you could see every bone. Every single little bone moving under their skin and the joints between them. … By the spring they no longer had any faces at all. Some had the heads of birds with a little beak. (*Everything Flows*, pp. 130-1)

At the end, when the famine took over, 'from the village, came a howl; it had seen its own death. The whole village was howling, without mind, without heart. It was noise like leaves in the wind, or creaking straw' (p. 132). Finally, the 'whole

village died', and the 'flat topped carts', one after the other, carted the corpses away (p. 135).

Both as war reporter and author of fiction, Grossman knew what was involved in reproducing 'what really happened' (Ricoeur, 1999a, p. 11). Chandler (2009b, p. xi) observes that 'the burden of history' carried by *Everything Flows* is so great that 'most novels would sink under its weight'. I have suggested that the reason that the novel does not do sink, but rather resonates across time and space, owes itself to Grossman's particular blend of factual detail and poetic imagination, whereby he grounds us in the actuality of historical events while also widening and deepening our political imaginaries.

Characters as historical actors

I now come to this chapter's second major theme: Solzhenitsyn and Grossman's representations of their characters as historically active and potentially culpable actors. As earlier established, a dialogical/polyphonic text must create a 'plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness, a genuine polyphony of unmerged voices', where its characters are 'not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse' (Bakhtin, 1933/1984, pp. 6-7). But this cannot be left to stand where it is, for I have also argued that the use of 'flat' characters, as vividly represented in Solzhenitsyn's depiction of Pavel Rusanov, can be 'artistic' in the making of a strong political point. Hence I distinguish between those instances where there is an explicit use of the novel's parodic traditions and those in which a character is purportedly portrayed in their own right. If it turns out that such an 'individualized' person is in fact a surrogate for the author's political or moral point, a threat to the integrity of the novel exists, for the individuality of characters, so central to it, has been bent to a different purpose. It is on this basis that I consider the texts, turning first to Solzhenitsyn's depictions, where my reservations are greatest.

Solzhenitsyn's representations

In an interview conducted in 1967, Solzhenitsyn was asked which genre he found most interesting and tried to emulate. To this, he replied 'a polyphonic novel strictly defined in time and place' (cited by Krasnov, 1980, p. 2). He continued:

> How do I understand polyphony? Each person becomes the main hero as soon as the action reverts to him. Then the author feels responsible for as many as thirty-five heroes. He does not accord preferential treatment to anyone. He must understand every character and motivate his actions. I employed this method in writing two books and I intend to employ it in the writing of another one. (Cited by Krasnov, 1980, pp. 2-3)

In commenting on this interview, Vladislsav Krasnov (1980) points out that although Solzhenitsyn never mentions Bakhtin, he would have been aware of his work as it was under substantial discussion in the Soviet Union at the time of the interview. Krasnov also maintains that the issue is not whether Solzhenitsyn understood Bakhtin, but how far he managed to incorporate the polyphonic/dialogical into his works, on which he comments favourably. Against this, I press that it is indeed important to ask how far Solzhenitsyn allows his characters to speak to their own truths or, alternatively, subjects them to a 'monological design' where the hero's 'self-consciousness' is inserted into 'a fixed authorial vision … with its finalizing definitions' (Bakhtin's 1963/1984, p. 52). To discuss this, I compare Solzhenitsyn's depictions of Innokenty Volodin (*In the First Circle*), Lev Rubin (*In the First Circle)* and Aleksei Shulubin (*Cancer Ward*).

Innokenty Volodin's portrait is essentially a moral parable on the imperative of personal conscience and the cleansing nature of suffering. At the beginning of the novel, Innokenty, previously a pleasure-loving diplomat, makes a conscience call to the American Embassy to warn them that information about the atomic bomb is about to fall into Soviet hands. The call is traced to him, and he is arrested, interrogated and imprisoned. When Innokenty makes his decision to call the embassy, Solzhenitsyn interjects to observe:

> The capacity for heroic deeds … depends on will power … the heroic acts that cost the greatest effort are those that are performed spontaneously by sheer will power' (*In The First Circle*, p. 620).

The forces leading to Innokenty's transformation from epicurean diplomat to man of principle are first signalled in a countryside walk he takes with his sister-in-law, Klara. When the couple reach the top of a hill, Innokenty surveys the view and says that this what he needs, for in his personal life he lacks 'a clear view all round, and a chance to breathe freely' (p. 303). Later, in his mother's library, he

searches for a book on Epicurus, and unexpectedly finds her diaries. One entry leaps out at him:

> What is the most precious thing in the world? I see now that it is the knowledge that you have no part in injustice. Injustice is stronger than you, always will be, but let it not be done through you. (*In The First Circle*, p. 439) [7]

Innokenty, we are told, 'sat there for days on end, on the little stool by the wide-open cabinets, breathing their air and intoxicated with it' (p. 439). And so the parable unfolds:

> In his carefree youth, before his crisis, Innokenty had seen nothing reprehensible about backdoor business; he had thought it fun and made light of it. Now it was distasteful, repellent. The great truth for Innokenty used to be that there was only one life. Now with the new feeling that had ripened in him, he became aware of another law: that we are only given one conscience too. (*In The First Circle*, p. 441)

Innokenty's transformation is complete only at the point of his incarceration. After his interrogation, he knows the truth of the matter: he will be confined in a windowless box in Lubyanka's inner prison until he either dies or is executed. But Solzhenitsyn does not leave us with his anguish, or that of those of the thousands of Lubyanka's other inmates, but with his rejection of his old enthusiasm for Epicurean philosophy. As the prison closes in on his hero, Solzhenitsyn declares:

> How wise it all seems when you read these philosophers as a free man! But, for Innokenty, good and evil were now distinct entities, visibly separated by that light grey door, those olive green walls and the first night in prison. His struggle and his suffering had raised him to a new height from which the great materialist's wisdom seemed like the prattle of a child or perhaps a savage's rule of thumb. (*In the First Circle*, p. 711)

The parable-type qualities of Innokenty's portrait also apply to Solzhenitsyn's depiction of Lev Rubin, but in a less pronounced way. Rubin is a prisoner and committed communist, who agrees to co-operate with the authorities in developing the technologies that trap Volodin and later bitterly regret it. While his is not an unsympathetic portrait—it draws on Solzhenitsyn's friend Lev Kopelev—it systematically points to the flaws of a materialist ideology. In the following exchange where Rubin and Nerzhin, positioned as friendly antagonists,

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[7] Compare Solzhenitsyn's declaration in his Letter to Three Students: 'There is nothing relative about conscience. Indeed, justice is conscience, not a personal conscience but conscience of the whole of humanity' (cited by Shin, 1985, p. 344).

debate the nature of social justice in the prison yard, the truth flows clearly in Nerzhin's direction:

> Nerzhin freed himself and stood up from his niche. 'Justice is never relative …'
>
> 'It's a class concept, of course it is;' said Rubin, brandishing an open hand over Nerzhin's head.
>
> 'Justice is the cornerstone … the foundation of the universe!' Nerzhin too waved an arm. 'We were born with a sense of justice in our souls; we can't and don't want to live without it!'
>
> 'You've got nowhere to hide!' Rubin said threateningly, 'You will have to decide one day what side of the barricades you are on!'
>
> Nerzhin answered just as threateningly. 'That's another word you blasted fanatics have done to death! You have put up barricades all over the world! That's the horror of it. (*In The First Circle*, p. 340)

It is but a short step from this for Solzhenitsyn to infer that it is the nature of Rubin's ideals that leads him to co-operate with the authorities. Because Rubin had 'lost all chance of private happiness long ago' he 'made mankind his family' (p. 244). Wanting to do good for his cause, he persuades himself that the end justifies the means, and when asked to work on the phonoscopy 'looked forward to his research with a true scientist's excitement' (p. 247). As Rubin explains to Nerzhin:

> You see old fellow, it's a new science, the science of phonoscopy, with its own methods and horizons. … How great it will be if we both put our shoulders to the wheel! To be founders of a completely new science—that's something to be proud of! (*In The First Circle*, p. 337)

In a yet more problematic step, Solzhenitsyn has Rubin suffer for his commitments. When Dmitri Sologdin, a passionate and doctrinaire Christian, accuses Rubin of sacrificing the means for a misguided end, Rubin finds himself unable to sleep, for 'memories that he had no wish at all to awaken drifted though his mind' (p. 531). These memories include his participation in the collectivization of a rural village where he was under instruction to blow up pits where the grain was hidden, stop peasants grinding corn and baking bread, and prevent them drawing water from the well (p. 531). Rubin is tormented: 'now that he knew how horrible it had been, knew that he could never do it again, how could he cleanse himself of it?' (p. 532). But Solzhenitsyn forecloses on his misery, ending the chapter by asserting 'what excruciating torment a sleepless night can be for a soul grieving over past mistakes!' (p. 532).

Rubin's regrets, convictions and friendliness make him a recognizable and compelling being, who enjoys a good measure of Bakhtin's (1941/1981, p. 10) suggestion that a novelistic character must 'combine in himself negative as well as positive features, low as well as lofty, ridiculous as well as serious', and be one 'who is evolving and developing, who learns from life'. Nevertheless, as a novelistic character Rubin falls seriously short, and must so fall short given his subordination to Solzhenitsyn's authorial vision. The description of his involvement in the brutalities of collectivization is rhetorical rather than detailed, and his sense of remorse is undercut by Solzhenitsyn's authorial interjections. Consequently, we stand to learn little about belief, suffering, remorse and resistance.

Solzhenitsyn's portrait of Aleksei Shulubin (*Cancer Ward*) is strikingly different, for it invites our sympathetic engagement rather than moral judgement. Shulubin is a librarian and Bolshevik scholar who has compromised his scholarly ideals and now deeply regrets it. Towards the end of the novel, he and Kostoglotov enter into a long discussion on their political beliefs. In contrast with the Rubin/Nerzhin exchange, this dialogue emerges as an interactive search for meaning, and Shulubin's views—which may represent the evolution of Solzhenitsyn's own— are treated with respect. [8] At one point, Shulubin makes the case for 'an ethical socialism', describing it as one in which 'all relationships, fundamental principles and laws flow directly from ethics, and from ethics *alone*' (p. 474, original emphasis). When Kostoglotov says, 'I want happiness, you'd better leave me with happiness. Just give me happiness in the few years before I die' (p. 476), Shulubin 'strains his strength to the utmost' to declare:

> Happiness is a mirage. I was happy bringing up my children, but they spat on my soul. To preserve this happiness, I took books that were full of truth and burned them in the stove. … Ideas of what happiness is have changed too much through the ages. No one should have the effrontery to try and plan it out in advance. When we have enough loaves of white bread to crush them under our heels, when we have enough milk to choke us, we still won't be happy. (*Cancer Ward*, p. 476)

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[8] It was during his time in the camps that Solzhenitsyn abandoned his earlier commitment to communism and searched instead for a philosophical form of Christianity based on practice rather than abstract or universalising principles. This is described in some detail in the fourth part of *The Gulag Archipelago*, 'The Soul and Barbed Wire'.

Towards the end of their exchange, Kostoglotov owns to being envious of Shulubin's freedom and depressed about his own return to exile. Shulubin counters: 'you haven't had to do much lying, do you understand? At least you haven't had to stoop so low, you should appreciate that! You people were arrested, but we were herded into meetings to "expose" you. They executed people like you, but they made us stand up and applaud the verdicts as they were announced' (p. 464):

> When we applauded we had to hold up our big strong hands high in the air so that those on the platform would notice. Because who doesn't want to live? Who would come out in your defence? Whoever objected? (*Cancer Ward*, p. 464)

Kostoglotov tries to comfort Shulubin: 'Aleksei Filippovich, it all depends on the number you happen to draw. If the position had been reversed, it would have been just the opposite: you would have been the martyrs, we the time-servers' (p. 465). At first, Shulubin shakes his head, unconvinced. Later, when Kostoglotov asks 'tell me, did you think of these things during the twenty-five years, while you were bowing low, and renouncing your beliefs?', he responds:

> 'Yes, I did. I renounced everything, and I went on thinking. I shoved the old books into the stove and I turned things over in my mind. Why not? Haven't I earned the right to a few thoughts—through my suffering and through my betrayal?' (Cancer Ward, p. 477)

Because it is Shulubin, whose views we are encouraged to respect, that betrays his own ideals, the text avoids the moral bifurcation that so diminishes the portrait of Lev Rubin. The difference is important, for the same moral thesis—the failure of materialism—applies in each case. This reinforces a point that has been implicit in my discussion throughout: namely, that what is at issue for the artistic life of the text is not so much the presence or absence of a moral thesis, nor even perhaps the content of this thesis, but *how* the issue is voiced and whether or not its expression widens our political horizons. Keeping this in mind, I turn to Grossman.

Grossman

Everything Flows is a multi-layered text, with Grossman's discussions of culpability taking three principal forms: 'interpretative', 'representational' and 'analytical'. These contrasts, imbued as they are with historical detail, follow Bakhtin's (1935/1981, p. 288) description of the novel as 'a multitude of concrete

words, a multitude of verbal-ideological and social belief systems'. Further, in their blending of different sources—historical, imaginative and philosophical—they reflect the novel's willingness to borrow from other sources: as Bakhtin (1941/1981, p. 33) reflects, 'the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction, literature and nonliterature are not made up in heaven'.

In his interpretative approach, Grossman explores how 'a group of ordinary muddle-headed people' could come to 'determine who would live and who would die' (*Everything Flows*, p. 117). Here he is exploratory in the first and last instance, complementing traditional historical accounts with literary insights into human culpability. Anna Sergeyevna tells us how she 'came under a spell', learning to believe that 'kulaks were evil, unclean', and that 'those who were being disposed of were like cattle or swine' for they were 'vile in themselves, and they had no souls, and they stank' (p. 118). The point is, Grossman does not retreat from the consequences of people's involvement in the persecution of others; he simply makes the situation comprehensible. Thirty years on, Anna feels like she is 'losing her mind':

> Did Stalin really turn his back on all these people? Did he really carry out such a massacre? Stalin had food, Stalin had bread. It seems that he chose to kill all these people, to starve them deliberately. … 'No', I say to myself, 'how could he?' But then I say to myself, 'It happened, it happened'. And then immediately: 'No, it couldn't have'. (*Everything Flows*, p. 131)

In his parallel fictional/representational accounts, Grossman creates characters that illuminate the small but significant acts of deceit and betrayal that can arise under conditions of terror and help to perpetuate them. In this case, he is closely concerned with a person's sense of self, illustrating Bakhtin's observation that:

> The hero interests Dostoyevsky as a particular point of view on the world and on oneself, as the position enabling a person to interpret and evaluate his own self and his surrounding reality. What is important to Dostoyevsky is not how the world appears to his hero, but how the hero appears to himself. (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 47)

This is best exemplified in the case of Nikolay Andreyevich, cousin to Ivan Grigoryevich and a moderately successful scientist. There were things about his career of which Nikolay had once felt proud: he had never denounced anyone, had refused to provide compromising information about an arrested colleague, and had 'even shaken the hand of the wife of an exiled colleague and asked after the

health of her children' (*Everything Flows*, p. 29). But Nikolay also has to come terms with his willingness to sign the letter denouncing the Jewish doctors who had 'confessed' to their plot to poison Stalin. When the Party later admitted that the doctors had been tortured, Nikolay experienced:

> A turbid aching feeling that he had never known before … a new, strange, and very particular sense of guilt—guilt with regard to his own moral weakness, to his speech at the meeting, to his having signed the collective letter denouncing the monster doctors, and to his willingness to consent to an obvious lie. (*Everything Flows*, pp. 27-8)

In a human-centred account, Grossman describes Nikolay's mixed feelings on Ivan's return: Ivan who has spent three decades in the camps and never denounced anyone. Initially Nikolay hopes that he will confess everything and Ivan will understand and absolve him. In this imagining, he will say to his cousin, 'Vanya, Vanechka, I envy you because you did not have to sign vile letters in your terrible camp. You never voted for the execution of innocent men, and you never made vile speeches' (pp. 38-9). But in the event Nikolay's need to see himself as a *good* person, indeed, the *better* person, takes over:

> [Nikolay] felt now that Ivan had come to him in order to strike a line through the whole of his life. Any moment now—and Ivan would humiliate him; he would talk down to him, he would treat him with condescension and arrogance. And he desperately wanted … explain to him that everything had changed and come anew, that all the old values had been deleted, that Ivan himself had been vanquished and broken. (*Everything Flows*, p. 39)

In another portrait of subterfuge and deceit, Grossman creates Vitaly Pinegin, the man responsible for Ivan Grigoryevich's arrest in the first place. This is a flatter portrayal than that of Nikolay Andreyevich, in which Grossman draws on the novel's parodic traditions. When Pinegin, now an elderly man in a padded jacket, well-accepted as part of the establishment, unexpectedly meets Ivan on the streets, he is overcome with anxiety that he will be exposed. Ivan, he thinks, will turn on him and say 'you know more than enough already. Yes, you had more than enough to say about me when there were people wanting to know' (p. 57). Shaken by the encounter with the one he has betrayed, Pinegin rushes to the comfort of his club's famous restaurant. Once there, he starts to feel better, cheered by the sight of the 'ash-pink salmon surrounded by small lemon suns' (p. 74).

As well as these representational renderings, Grossman uses an analytical approach to examine issues of culpability, guilt and judgement. This is best illustrated in a stand-alone chapter which opens by asking 'Who is guilty?' and 'Who will be held responsible?' Cautioning that this 'needs thought, we must not answer too quickly' (p. 58), Grossman sets up a trial, with four defendants, all named Judas, placed in the dock. Using a dramatic format, he requires us to think and think again. In the case of the second Judas, the prosecution records that the man had 'conducted heart-to-heart conversations with his friends and then handed in written reports to the authorities' (p. 59). When all seems lost, the narrator interjects and casts a different light on matters:

> But let us not hurry. Let us think before we pass judgement. Ever since childhood he had been frightened out of his mind. … He had lived in terror; terror had inhabited his mind. At school he had trembled before the Secretary of the Party cell… At this point one begins to understand. This man had been hypnotised, enchanted by the might of the new world. He was like a little bird, unable to look away, captivated by the dazzling gaze of something new, brilliant and all-embracing. (*Everything Flows*, p. 60)

At the end of the chapter, and in his strongest move, Grossman has the accused respond to the prosecution *en bloc,* raising the question of collective guilt. Now guilt and innocence become blurred, together with the question of who can judge whom and on what grounds. This is no longer the voice of a single narrator, or an individual judge, but that of the collective accused, speaking to all of us who sit in judgement:

> And please also answer one other thing. Why have you waited till now to ask these questions? … Like us, you participated in the Stalin era. Why must we, who were participants, be judged by you who were also participants? Why must *you* determine *our* guilt? Do you not see here the difficulty lies? Maybe we really are guilty, but there is no judge who has the moral right to discuss the question of guilt. (*Everything Flows*, p. 68)

So how might we read *Everything Flows* with its distinct shifts in narrative style? As a novel? As a political exegesis? Or, as I would urge, an essentially hybrid text? In suggesting this, I cite Morson's (1981, p. 669) point that if, as Bakhtin suggests, the essence of the novel is to violate rules, then authors may also choose to break the novel's *own* rules. Whether or not Grossman does this on purpose is hard to say, given that *Everything Flows* was incomplete at the time of his death. Nevertheless, a measure of literary experimentation may well come into play,

with the latitude offered by the conventions of the novel allowing him to combine the skills he developed as a journalist with his creative talents as a novelist. And this could be a distinct advantage, for, to return to an earlier theme, it strengthens a text's 'internal resistance to all sorts external finalization … and helps it triumph over all sorts of fixed, stable images' (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 78).

Concluding points: the significance of the 'creative space'

I began this chapter with Bakhtin's warning that a socio-ideological thesis can 'stifle' or 'dry' the inner artistic life of the text. In considering this, I have emphasized that Solzhenitsyn and Grossman do not face the situation where 'the world is open and free, everything is still in the future, and will always be in the future' (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 166), but instead have to consider the burden of past and its implications for the present and future of their nation. The issue, then, is how their texts, burdened with such truths, might expand and deepen our understanding of the developments they describe. I have suggested that this depends on a 'creative space' where the different dimensions of the works— themes, characters and historical events—have a degree of separation one from the other, thus prompting us to ask further questions and/or enabling us to see matters in different ways. With this reinforcing my earlier arguments concerning the interplay between the finalizable and unfinalizable, I build on the conclusions of the previous chapters to consider the factors that might contribute to a text's capacity to resonate across time and space.

In the first instance, I reiterate the importance of literary diversity. In relation to Solzhenitsyn's two texts, I have suggested that *Cancer Ward* is better able to extend our political imaginaries than is *In the First Circle,* as its approach is more oblique, its truths more metaphorical and enigmatic, and its characters presented in a more detailed and sympathetic light. The variability within each text is important too: in the case of *In the First Circle*, the parodic and empirically-based descriptions offset the morally-charged discourse; in *Cancer Ward*, the text's combination of the historical/political and moral/spiritual invites different lines of interpretation and response. Similarly, in *Everything Flows,* Grossman's shifts across the interpretive, representational and analytical means that there is a considerable degree of freedom in the text, allowing the narrative to breathe and

expand in a novelistic kind of way. Variations such as these reinforce the all-important point that novel's diversity withstands any one-dimensional reading of the artistic/political relationship.

Second, I emphasize the vital ingredient of imagination. The previous two chapters contrasted the 'expansive' and 'anchored' imaginations of the early Russian authors and Western European writers. Solzhenitsyn and Grossman's works demonstrate something else yet again: what might best be called a 'historical' imagination. On this, I have noted how the pointed use of everyday, apparently ordinary, detail can illuminate the devastations of history: thus, for example, Solzhenitsyn describes the minutiae of laboratories where 'rows of copper sockets gleamed in the black lacquered panel of the central switchboard' *(The First Circle*, p. 19) and Grossman records how the 'steel combs' of trains would seize any escaping prisoner and 'yank him up, and hurl him beneath the wheels' (*Everything Flows*, p. 95). I have also pointed to the poetic force of Grossman's 'horrified imagination' where he describes how starved children's heads came to resemble 'birds with a little beak', and how, at end of the famine, 'the whole village was howling, without mind, without heart' and that it sounded like 'noise like leaves in the wind, or creaking straw' (p. 130 and p. 132). In such ways, the texts allow no escape from the historical reality of events, but also create the space wherein we are able to apprehend horror in our own particular ways.

Third, there is the emotional call of the texts. Here I have argued that the 'heaviness' of a socio-ideological thesis, and the risk that it will stifle the artistic life of a text, can be offset by a sympathetic entry into the consciousness of another. As in the previous texts, the sufferings of the characters extend and deepen our insights. We feel for Aleksei Shulubin, who, along with his colleagues, held 'big strong hands high in the air so that those on the platform would notice' (*Cancer Ward,* p. 464); for Yefrem Podduyev as 'day after day, he marched up and down the old floors, rattling the floor-boards, without getting it any clearer in his mind how to meet death' (*Cancer Ward*, p. 111); and for the foolish Nikolay Andreyevich, who desperately wants his cousin's friendship but ends up patronising him and severing the relationship. This form of sympathetic

invocation is distinctive to the literary powers of the novel, for, as Nussbaum (1990, p. 3) points out, our understandings of human frailty 'cannot be fully and adequately stated in the language of conventional philosophical prose, a style remarkably flat and lacking in wonder—but only in a language and in forms themselves more complex, more allusive, more attentive to the particular'.

Over the past three chapters, I have distinguished between the selected novels on the basis of the artistic/political tasks confronting them, suggesting that for Platonov and Bulgakov this involves countering monolithic ideology in a way that is fundamental yet oblique; that for Silone, Koestler and Orwell, it hinges on producing a literary form of ideological interrogation; and that for Solzhenitsyn and Grossman, it depends on a creative space that speaks to the obduracy of historical facts while also engaging our own imaginative responses. In actuality, and as will be evident from my discussions, these tasks cut across all the texts. Further, I point to the same complex of literary/political qualities in each case: most particularly, the complex interplay between the finalizable and unfinalizable; the resonating calls of imagination; and the power of emotion in conveying the human force of the political. This suggests that the socio-ideological novel is not a separate genre (as Bakhtin's comments might suggest), but rather a set of political and literary representations, which, as illustrated here, may shift *within* as well as *between* different works. Building on these propositions, my next and final chapter on the texts asks how Zamyatin's *We* and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* might be able to preserve their artistic life while at the same time offering a political counterstroke to the forces threatening to destroy the freedoms on which the novel has come to depend.

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Seven

The novel as counterstroke: *We* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

> True literature can only exist when it is created, not by diligent and reliable officials, but by madmen, hermits, heretics, dreamers, rebels and sceptics. (Zamyatin, 1921/1970, p. 57)

> The imaginative writer … cannot misrepresent the scenery of his own mind … [and] if he is forced to do so, the only result is that his creative faculties dry up. (Orwell, 1946c/2000, p. 334)

At core, my thesis argues for the generative potential of the artistic/political relationship. I now put this notion to a further test by considering whether it is possible for a novel to make a directly political case and yet preserve its status as an artistic work. In surmising that this is indeed possible, I draw on Bakhtin's analysis of the traditions of the menippea, for these indicate that there are novelistic features that promote the kind of artistic/political unity I have in mind. I have chosen *We* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as my test cases for this proposition as they are transparently political works, drawing on, and helping to create, the traditions and practices of the dystopian imaginary. Furthermore, Zamyatin and Orwell have truths to tell and do so loudly and clearly, with these truths centred on the integrity of thought, language and literature at a time they seen to be under sustained and serious threat. Hence in the very act of affirming social, political and intellectual freedoms, they guard the conditions on which art and literature have come to depend.

In proposing that it is possible for an overtly political novel to be profoundly artistic, I problematize the 'anti-political' position represented by Kundera. As we have seen, he roundly criticizes *Nineteen Eighty-Four* on the basis of its explicitly political form, declaring that it is 'firmly closed to poetry; did I say novel? It is political thought disguised as a novel!' (1996, p. 222). Here and elsewhere, Kundera implies that a political logic is itself inimical to the artistic life of the text: a view I wish to challenge. My suggestion is that Kundera makes the fundamental mistake of equating political *content* with artistic *form*, thus failing to see the interactive relationship between the two, and, more specifically, how an assertive political logic can draw on, and be expressed through, artistic traditions with which he himself is in sympathy. Such is the subject of this chapter. I preface

my analysis with some general observations on Zamyatin and Orwell's novels, concentrating on their contexts, similarities and differences.

On the novels and their authors[1]

Completed in 1921, *We* was the first fictional work to be banned under Lenin's new censorship laws. After being proscribed in the Soviet Union, it was first published in English in New York in 1924, and then in a series of other languages, including French and Czech, in the West. In 1927, the original Russian text was sent to Marc Slonim, the editor of a publishing house based in Prague and, following that, copies made their way back to the Soviet Union, where they were passed from hand to hand (Brown, 1993). Blacklisted from publishing, Zamyatin realized his career as a writer in Russia was finished, and in 1930 he wrote to Stalin requesting permission to emigrate, explaining that his reason was 'my hopeless position here, the death sentence that has been pronounced upon me as a writer here at home' (Zamyatin, 1921/1970, p. xii). Stalin, possibly influenced by Gorky, agreed, and in 1931 Zamyatin 'quit his homeland forever' to live an isolated existence in Paris until his death in 1937 (Brown, 1993, p. xxv).

During his years in Paris, Zamyatin wrote what Clarence Brown (1993, p. xxv) describes as a 'parodic self-interview'. In this interview, Zamyatin describes a Persian fable about a rooster who had its head chopped off because it crowed an hour earlier than the others. Observing that the 'uppermost problem was still that of the individual personality versus the collective', Zamyatin concluded that:

> *We* turned out to be a Persian rooster. It was still too early to raise this problem in such a form. So, after the novel was published (in various language translations) the Soviet critics hacked it about the head rather severely. But I must be solidly built, for my head, as you see, is still on my shoulders. (Cited by Brown, 1993, pp. xxv-xxvi)

Even though *We* caused such profound disquiet in the Party hierarchy, it cannot be read simply as an anti-Soviet text. In his introduction to the novel, Brown (1993) points out that many of its themes echo those of Zamyatin's earlier novel, *The Islanders*, a parody of the English, where the Vicar of Dooley lives a regimented life similar to the formulaic existence of the characters of OneState,

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[1] As noted, there is a large volume of literature on Orwell's work, with the more recent contributions including Bowker 2003; Hitchens 2002, 2007; Lucas 2003; Marks 2015; Rodden and Cushman (eds) 2004; Rodden (ed) 2007a, and Rodden 2003, 2007b, 2010.

likewise setting aside prescribed times for sex and designing a mathematically perfect plan for human salvation. *We* also deals with automation and scientific management, both of which were enthusiastically endorsed by Lenin and his close followers, and, in a broader way, with the problems of scientific utopianism, as reflected in Zamyatin's longstanding critique of the views of H.G. Wells. Commenting on these qualities, Brown observes that:

> Zamyatin's nightmare is a nightmare of the early twenties and it is more specifically the nightmare of a Russian who has spent time in the industrial north of England, and read H. G. Wells, never forgetting his native Dostoevsky nor what he could see out of the window. (Brown, 1993, p. xvii)

Orwell, who reviewed *We* in *Tribune* (January 1946), the democratic socialist weekly magazine, similarly contends that Zamyatin 'did not intend the Soviet regime to be the special target of his satire' for, 'writing at about the time of Lenin's death, he cannot have had the Stalin dictatorship in mind'. Zamyatin's focus, he says, was 'not any particular country' but 'a study of the Machine, the genie that man has thoughtlessly let out of its bottle and cannot put back again' (Orwell, January 1946, np). As part of this review, Orwell suggested that Huxley owed an unacknowledged debt to *We*, for he too dealt with a mechanised, rationalised society, set in an imaginary future:

> Both books deal with the rebellion of the primitive human spirit against a rationalised, mechanised, painless world, and both stories are supposed to take place about six hundred years hence … it is roughly speaking the same kind of society that is being described, though Huxley's book shows less political awareness and is more influenced by recent biological and psychological theories. (Orwell, *Tribune,* January 1946, np)

Orwell admitted his own debt to *We,* telling his publisher that he was considering 'taking it as the model for his next novel' (Bowker, 2003, p. 340). For Brown (1993, pp. xv-xvi), '*We* appears to have been *the* crucial literary experience for George Orwell as author of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and for certain others bent on creating their own dystopias' (original emphasis),[2] However, and as I will illustrate, there are critical differences between the novels, not least the fact that the themes of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are a deal more multilayered than those of

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[2] For discussion of *We* and/or *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as dystopian texts, see Booker 1994a and 1994b, Brown 1976, Gottlieb 2001, and Marks 2015 among many others. Against this, Dickstein (2004, p. 103) suggests that the dystopian tradition is at best 'an interesting minor undercurrent' in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

We. In his commentary on the work, Bernard Crick (2007, p. 148) draws attention to seven such strands: the division of the world at Tehran following the end of the Second World War; the 'dumbing down' of the mass media; the power hungry nature of totalitarianism; the betrayal of intellectuals who fail to challenge ideological orthodoxy; the 'debauching' of language; the destruction of history and objective truth; and the adaption of James Burnham's thesis of convergence, whereby capitalism and communism would coincide under the drive to manage and control their economies and populations.

Over and above their similarities and differences, Zamyatin and Orwell are united in their defence of the freedoms of thought, language and literature. Zamyatin, who always defended the original ideals of the Revolution, actively opposed the dogmatic rationalism of his day. As a leading member of the Serapion Brothers in the 1920s, he pleaded openly for the freedoms of literature. In his essay entitled 'I am Afraid' (1921/1970), he reflects that:

> Proletkult art is at present a step backward to the 1860s … if this sickness is incurable, I am afraid that the only future possible to Russian literature is its past … [for] there can be no genuine literature until we cure ourselves of this new brand of Catholicism, which is as fearful as the old of every heretical word. (Zamyatin, 1921/1970, p. 60)

As with his contemporary Bulgakov, Zamyatin's concerns are metaphysical and philosophical rather than immediately political. In an essay entitled 'On literature, revolution, entropy and other matters' (1923/1970) he formulates the pivotal contrasts between energy and entropy, freedom and unfreedom on which so much of *We* depends. In combining these views with his defence of a literature based on imagination, dissidence and romanticism, he writes that:

> Where the flaming, seething sphere (in science, religion, social life, art) cools, the fiery magma becomes coated with dogma—a rigid, ossified, motionless crust. Dogmatisation in science, religion, social life, or art is the entropy of thought. What has become dogma no longer burns: it only gives off warmth—it is tepid, it is cool. … Harmful literature is more useful than useful literature, for it is antientropic, it is a means of combating calcification, sclerosis, crust, moss, quiescence. (Zamyatin, 1923/1970, p. 109)

Twenty years later, and a continent apart, Orwell's concerns are surprisingly similar. In his essay 'The prevention of literature', he declares that the 'imaginative writer is unfree when he has to falsify his subjective feelings … it

follows that the atmosphere of totalitarianism is deadly to any kind of prose writer' (1946c/2000, p. 334). Complaining that 'political writing in our time consists almost entirely of prefabricated pieces like a child's Meccano set', he ruminates that:

> It would probably not be beyond human ingenuity to write books by machinery. But a sort of mechanizing process can already be seen to be at work in the film and radio, in publicity and propaganda, and in the lower reaches of journalism. The Disney films, for instance, are produced by what is essentially a factory process … so also with the innumerable books and pamphlets commissioned by government departments. (Orwell, 1946c/2000, p. 335)

In short, Orwell and Zamyatin are most evidently partisans, unequivocally on the side of freedoms in thought, language and literature. My question, then, is how—in all of their assertiveness—they might yet draw on the literary practices of the novel in asserting their case in a distinctly artistic way. My argument is that their ability to do so owes itself to the traditions of the menippea as described below.

Bakhtin on the menippea

Bakhtin (1963/1984, p. 11) traces the origins of the menippea to Socratic dialogue, where 'the dialogical means of seeking truth is counterposed to official monologism, which *pretends to possess a ready-made truth'* (original emphasis). However, while Socratic dialogue became confined to particular schools of philosophical thought, the menippea circulated through different periods of belief and religion, penetrated the rituals of carnival, and remains influential to the present:

> Menippean satire exercised a very great influence on old Christian … and Byzantine literature. In diverse variants and under diverse generic labels it also continued its development into the post-classical epochs: into the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and Reformation, and modern times. … This carnivalized genre, extraordinarily flexible and as changeable as Proteus, capable of penetrating other genres, has had an enormous and as yet insufficiently appreciated importance for the development of European Literatures. (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 112)

I acknowledge that Bakhtin (1963/1984, p. 121) notes that 'the ancient menippea is … primitive and pale' in comparison with Dostoevsky for it 'does not yet know polyphony'. Hence I am not suggesting that either *We* or *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are in any way polyphonic—a characteristic that Bakhtin reserves for a minority of works in any event—simply that they put their political case in a distinctly

literary way through their use of the menippean traditions, and more particularly through their combinations of the fantastic and the political.

In a critical observation, Bakhtin (1963/1984, p. 114) insists that the fantastic does not represent 'the positive embodiment of a truth, but as a mode of searching after truth, provoking it, and most important, testing it'. Almost immediately, he reiterates his argument: 'it is essential to emphasize once again that the issue is precisely the testing of an idea, of a truth, and not the testing of a particular human character, whether an individual or a social type' (p. 114). His point, as I understand it, is that the fantastic leads to the *evocation* rather than the declaration of a truth, and that its focus is always on this *search* rather than the qualities of a character. Hence it is not D-503 or Winston that are under evaluation, but rather the ideas evoked in each novel. It on this basis that I proceed, focusing on the following four elements of the menippea: the adoption of an unusual point of view; a sustained use of the parodic and the humorous; a far ranging interest in fundamental philosophical issues; and the notion of the quest, involving the hero's search, return, and, in some instances, downfall.

An unusual point of view

Working within the dystopian tradition, *We* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* can be said to adopt an 'unusual point of view', which allows them to project the tendencies of the present into a shocking future. This prophetic viewpoint is characteristic of the menippea, which Bakhtin describes as exemplified by a 'special type of experimental fantasy … [involving] … observation from some unusual point of view, from on high for example, which results in a radical change in the observed phenomena of life' (p. 116). Bakhtin also observes that this 'bold and unrestrained' development of the 'fantastic' is:

> [A quality] that is internally motivated … justified by and devoted to a purely ideational and philosophical end: the creation of extraordinary situations for the provoking and testing of a philosophical idea, a discourse, a truth, embodied in the image of a wise man. (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 114)

In *We*, Zamyatin's 'unusual point of view' centres on the relationships between the individual and the collective, freedom and unfreedom, and energy and entropy. The novel is set in the twenty-sixth century AD in the (almost) totally controlled OneState, a glass city where the citizens wear identical uniforms and

are known only by numbers. In this transparent place, subjects are scrutinized at every moment, and human emotions are subordinated to a rigid and mechanically controlled structure. The Guardians monitor the citizens; above them stands the Benefactor, who is unanimously re-elected each year by all the citizens. The narrator is D-503, a gifted engineer, who has been placed in charge of the building of INTEGRAL, a space ship designed to destroy the territory beyond the Green Wall. There is a measure of hope when D-503 falls in love with a sharp-eyed woman called 1-330, the leader of the Mephi, a resistance movement that plans to destroy the Green Wall and unite OneState with the natural world. However, by the end of the novel the resistance movement has collapsed, D-503 has agreed to have his imagination excised, and total control is about to be reasserted.

In setting One-State in the twenty-sixth century AD, Zamyatin positions it 'outside time', a glass city of an imaginary future. It is this that gives the text its 'unusual point of view', 'as it were from on high', allowing it to throw its ideas and truths into sharp relief. With his focus on the relationship between the individual and the collective, Zamyatin keeps returning to the notion of 'unfreedom'. Recreation is restricted to an hour's march each day to be taken to the tune of the national anthem, with every thought and every step of the citizens trained to coincide: 'we were walking the same as always,' D-503 recounts, 'a thousand heads with *two fused, integrated* legs, with *two integrated* arms, swinging wide' (*We*, p. 121, my emphasis). Another time, when D-503 watches INTEGRAL take shape 'under the beat of some unheard music', he marvels at the 'whole beauty of this grandiose mechanical ballet' and asks himself, 'why beautiful? Why is this dance beautiful?' (p. 6). Answering his own question, he says 'because it is *nonfree* movement, because all the fundamental significance of the dance lies precisely in its subjection, its ideal nonfreedom' (p. 6, original emphasis).

In its invocation of a wide range of imaginative and philosophical possibilities, *We* exemplifies the menippea's 'extraordinary philosophical universalism and capacity to contemplate the world on the broadest possible scale' (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 115). The same holds true of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. From its opening lines—'it was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking

thirteen'—it creates an unsettling combination of familiarity and unfamiliarity, reality and unreality, possibility and impossibility. Unlike *We*, it is situated in the 'nearly now' in an 'almost recognizable' place. Its physical setting, it is 'this place' but 'not quite this place', with the newly created Ministries of Truth, Peace, Plenty and Love towering over the shattered buildings, slums and poverty of a post-war London. As Winston looks out over the city, he asks himself:

> Were there always these vistas of rotting nineteenth-century houses, their sides shored up with baulks of timber, their windows patched with cardboard and their roofs with corrugated iron, their crazy gardens sagging in all directions? And the bombed sites where the plaster dust swirled in the air and the willowherb straggled over the heaps of rubble; and the places where the bombs had cleared a larger patch and there had sprung up sordid colonies of wooden dwellings like chicken houses? (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p. 5)

He searches his memory and cannot find an answer, for 'nothing remained of his childhood except a series of brightly-lit tableaux, occurring against no background and mostly unintelligible' (p. 5). So there is nothing to tell him that the Ministry of Truth, 'an enormous pyramidal structure of glittering white concrete, soaring up terrace after terrace, three hundred metres into the air' (p. 5), has only recently dominated the skyline. Later, when Winston goes to Mr Charrington's antique shop on the other side of the city where the Proles live, he sees a picture of an oval building, the Church of St Clements. He recognizes the street, but the Church is no longer there, for it has since been bombed and the Palace of Justice now stands in its place. When 'Mr Charrington' (in fact, a member of the Thought Police) recalls the rhyme, *'Oranges and lemons', say the bells of St Clement's/'You owe me three farthings,' say the bells of St Martin's,* Winston finds he cannot get the words out his head. 'It is curious,' he reflects, 'that when you say those lines to yourself, [you have] the illusion of a lost London that still existed somewhere or other, disguised and forgotten' (p. 103).

Here and elsewhere, much of the poignancy of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* depends on its evocation of memories that have almost vanished and whose loss now seems inevitable. When Winston visits the old parts of city, he watches children playing on the streets and broad-shouldered women hanging out the washing; when he dreams, he remembers his mother struggling to cope with post-war conditions; when he is happiest, it is with Julia in a woodland where the bluebells bloom. In

thinking about these lost traditions, he reflects that 'what mattered were individual relationships, and the completely helpless gesture, an embrace, a tear, a word spoken to a dying man, could have value in themselves' (p. 269). If Zamyatin's dystopia evokes a truncated civilization stripped of diversity and imagination, Orwell's depends in large part on images of irreversible loss.[3]

Humour and irony

In contrast to this melancholic drift, let me turn to the humorous and ironic qualities of the menippea. Bakhtin (1963/1984, p. 109) describes the genre as rejecting the stylistic unity of 'the epic, the tragedy, high rhetoric, and the lyric' and adopting instead a 'multi-toned narration, a mixing of high and low, serious and comic' involving 'a mixing of poetic and prosaic speech, living dialects and jargons'. In an observation equally relevant to *We* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, he stresses that the menippea has a 'deep bond with carnivalistic folklore', where despite its 'strong rhetorical element' there is a 'weakening of its one-sided rhetorical seriousness, its rationality, its singularity, its dogmatism' (p. 109).

Commenting on the humorous irony that pervades *We*, Brown (1993, p. xvi) suggests that it is 'perhaps better not be too solemn about Zamyatin's wonderfully appealing novel'. The book's description of sexual regulation is among its most light-hearted sections. Here we read that the Guardians make a concession to primal human impulses through a prescribed 'sex hour', where the assignations are organized by pink tickets and citizens can draw the curtains of their apartments for a short time. Matters are determined algebraically, with the 'Sexual Bureau Labs' determining the 'exact content' of a person's hormonal impulses and his or her 'correct Table of Sex Days' (*We*, p. 22). The humour is deepened by the text's wordplay. D-503's assigned sexual partner is O-90, where the shape of her numbers matches her body: 'Dear O!' proclaims D-503, 'it always strikes me that she looks like her name: about ten centimetres shorter than the Maternal

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[3] Crick (2007) and Dickstein (2004) both comment on the significance of trust, tradition and memory in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Crick observes that Orwell believed that 'a good and decent life already existed in tradition' (2007, p. 153); Dickstein describes Orwell's evocative use of lyrics, and the symbolic importance of the smashing of the crystal paperweight.

Norm, and therefore sort of rounded all over, and the pink O of her mouth, open to every word I say!' (p. 6).

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, a sense of carnival similarly offsets any 'one-sided rhetorical seriousness' (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 109). In illustration, I cite its final paragraph, which describes how Winston finally succumbs to Big Brother:

> He gazed at the enormous face. Forty years it had taken him to learn what kind of smile was hidden beneath the dark moustache. O cruel, needless, misunderstanding! O stubborn, self-willed exile from the loving breast! Two gin scented tears trickled down his nose. But it was all right, everything was all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother.
>
> **THE END**

In commenting on this passage, Crick (2000, p. xiii) maintains that it is either 'grotesquely and incompetently overwritten' or 'broad satire all the way'. Arguing in favour of the latter—and against those who read it as indicative of a 'terrible black pessimism', which is then referred back to the novel as a whole—he underscores its essentially comic elements. He points to its parody of popular, romantic novels ('O cruel' … 'O stubborn') and of British soap box, street corner evangelists ('He had won the victory over himself') (p. xiii). Even the capitalized THE END, he contends, 'is another bit of *Galeghumor*' for it appears nowhere else in Orwell's works, but resembles 'popular novelettes at the end of Hollywood B movies' (p. xiii). The thing is, Crick wants us to choose between a darkly pessimistic and a comic or satirical account. But surely the point is that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is both, and both simultaneously. It is, one might say, seriously comic that we should treat the integrity of language, on which our ability to understand and communicate depends, so carelessly.

Humour and irony allow the two novels to breathe, celebrate ambiguity, and become subject to multiple interpretations, with this creating the dialogic space so important for the 'living concrete life' of the text. As earlier cited, Bakhtin (1940/1981 p. 61 and p. 59) describes how the novel's parodic traditions 'free consciousness from the tyranny of its own language and its own myth of language', thus 'forcing men to experience beneath these categories a different and contradictory reality that is otherwise not captured within them'. At the same time, serious issues are brought to the fore and minutely examined, for laughter is

able to 'deliver an object into the fearless hands of investigative experiment—both artistic and scientific—and into the hands of free experimental fantasy' (Bakhtin 1941/1981, p. 23). I come then to the serious side of the menippea.

Contemporary yet ultimate questions

Bakhtin (1963/1984, p. 108) proposes that the 'starting point' for the menippea is 'the living present, often the very day', where it represents 'the "journalistic" genre of antiquity, accurately echoing the ideological issues of the times'. With this, the genre focuses on 'ultimate questions', which it poses a particularly 'naked' way:

> Under menippean conditions the very nature and process of posing philosophical problems, as compared with Socratic dialogue, had to change abruptly: all problems that were in the least 'academic' (gnoseological and aesthetic) fell by the wayside, complex and extensive modes of argumentation also fell away, and there remained essentially only naked 'ultimate questions' with an ethical and practical bias. (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 115)

In *We* this 'ethical and practical bias' is exemplified in its contemporary focus on mechanization, automation and scientific management underpinned by the 'ultimate' questions of entropy and energy, freedom and unfreedom. In line with the menippea's multi-layered inclusions of 'moral confessions' and 'political manifestos' (Bakhtin, 1941/1981, p. 33), these matters are illuminated through the Records of D-503, which, as the diary of a highly educated man, are full of contemporary and classical allusions. In the following entry, for example, a reference to the 'Table of Hours' (where each hour of the day is ruled by a planet) combines with an allusion to Frederick Taylor and his principles of scientific management:

> The Table of Hours … turns each one of us right there in broad daylight into a six-wheeled epic hero. Every morning, with six-wheeled precision, at the very same hour and the very same minute, we get up millions of us, as though we were one. … And at one and the same second we leave for a stroll and go to the auditorium, to the hall for the Taylor exercises, and then go to bed. (*We*, p. 13)

Elsewhere, the Records allude to the eighteenth-century mathematician, Brook Taylor (1685-1731), known for his 'Taylor Theorem' and 'calculus of finite differences'. Here Zamyatin describes how mathematical precision becomes a force for prediction and control:

No doubt about it, that Taylor was the genius of antiquity. True, it never occurred to him to extend his method over the whole of life, over every step you take right around the clock. He wasn't able to integrate into his system the whole spread from hour 1.00 to 24.00. But still how could they write whole libraries about someone like Kant and hardly even notice Taylor—the prophet who could see ten centuries ahead? (*We*, p. 34)

As well as relying on D-503's records to reveal the truths of his text, Zamyatin invokes the views of his two major protagonists: I-033 and the Benefactor. Because I-033 stands for courage, determination and honesty, we come to care about the views she so bravely asserts. In a core philosophical passage of the novel, she and D-503 enter into a discussion on the nature and finality of revolutions. At the start of this exchange, D-503 follows Party orthodoxy in telling I-033 that 'our revolution was the final one. And there can't be any further revolutions of any kind. Everyone knows that' (p. 168). 1-330, her eyes 'a sharp mocking triangle', then challenges him:

'My dear, you are a mathematician. You're even more, you're a philosopher of mathematics. So do this for me. Tell me the final number.'
'The what? I don't understand. What final number?'
'You know—the last one, the top, the absolute biggest.'
'But, I-330, that's stupid. Since numbers are infinite, how can there be a final one?'
'There is no final one. The number of revolutions is infinite. There is no final one. The number of revolutions is infinite. The last one—that's for children. Infinity frightens children, and it's essential that children get a good night's sleep.' (*We*, p. 168)[4]

Hearing this, D-503 is distraught. He pleads that children will always keep asking; that all the citizens of OneState are happy; that their ancestors fought long and hard in the 200-Years War; and that theirs has to be the final revolution. Unperturbed, his lover remarks that 'bold philosophers will always be children', and continues:

They [our ancestors] made only one mistake … they got the notion that they were the final number—something that doesn't exist in nature. Their mistake was the mistake of Galileo. He was right about the earth moving round the sun, but he didn't know that the entire solar system revolves around yet another center; he didn't know that the real orbit of the earth, as opposed to the relative orbit, is by no means the same circle. (*We*, p. 169)

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[4] Compare I-330's views with Zamyatin's own: 'Revolution is everywhere, in everything. It is infinite. There is no final revolution, no final number. The social revolution is only one of an infinite number of numbers: the law of revolution is not a social law, but an immeasurably greater one. It is a cosmic, universal law—like the laws of the conservation of energy and of the dissipation of energy (entropy)' (Zamyatin, 1923/1970, p. 112).

Then, throwing her own position into doubt, I-330 says 'it's even probable that we will forget this, when we get old, the way everything inevitably gets old. By that time, we too will inevitably go down, just as leaves fall from trees in the autumn' (p. 169). She departs, and D-503 invites us to imagine what it might be like if 'they blindfolded you, forced you to walk by feeling your way along, stumbling and knowing that right there, inches away, was the edge' (p. 169). Zamyatin offers his hero no relief, but leaves him, stumbling along, on the brink of an existential precipice. The reader too is left hanging in the balance, wishing to comfort D-503 and relieve him of his angst, while at the same time knowing that his only resolution is to live with the uncertainty I-330 so bravely asserts. The force of the text is thus experienced emotionally as well as intellectually, with our affection for Zamyatin's truncated hero—who speaks so directly to us, and whose angst cannot be resolved—persisting in a kind of unresolved distress.

In invoking the views of his other key protagonist, the Benefactor, Zamyatin joins the long-standing critique of the intelligentsia's 'materialism, atheism, socialism, and revolutionalism' (Morson, 2010, p. 143). In a critical episode toward the end of the book, D-503 is summoned before the Benefactor to explain his attempt to thwart the launch of INTEGRAL. In his sometimes funny and always pathos-ridden account, D-503 recalls that the only reason the Benefactor's voice 'didn't roar like thunder' was that it 'reached me from such a height' (p. 206). Invoking Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor, the Benefactor declares (or roars):

> A true algebraic love of mankind will inevitably be inhuman, and the inevitable sign of its truth is its cruelty. Just as the inevitable sign of fire is that it burns. Can you show me a fire that does not burn? Well? Prove it! Put up an argument! (*We*, p. 206)

And when D-503 cannot find a reason, is cowed into silence, the Benefactor assumes the voice of the authoritarian parent, pronouncing that:

> If this means you agree with me, then let's talk like grownups after the children have gone to bed, holding nothing back. I ask this question. What is it that people beg for, dream about, torment themselves for, from the time they leave their swaddling clothes? They want someone to tell them, once and for all, what happiness is—and then to bind them to that happiness with a chain. (*We*, p. 207)

The satire is all-important, for in assuming and ironizing the voice of the Grand Inquisitor, Zamyatin puts us on notice that we are indeed being 'educated', while

at the same time leaving a 'free zone' for our own interpretations, objections and responses, thus exemplifying the complementary relationship between the artistic and directly political.

How does this combination of contemporary yet ultimate issues play out in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*? As noted, this is a denser and more multi-layered novel than *We*, with its concerns extending well beyond the 'Big Brother' theme that has so effectively lodged itself in our political imaginaries. In the following comments, I draw attention to Orwell's deep concerns with the threats to language and literature; the possible destruction of history and objective truth; and his adaption of James Burnham's thesis of convergence. Like Zamyatin, Orwell uses a variety of literary means to convey his ideas, including the views and voices of his protagonists, written documents and parodic representation.

I start with the protagonists, and more particularly, the clever, likeable Syme, a major source of information on the formative bonds between language and thought. He informs Winston that the aim is to 'narrow the range of thought' ensuring that 'every year there will be 'fewer and fewer words' with 'the range of consciousness always a little smaller' (p. 55). This will make 'thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it'; further, in time, 'there will *be* no thought as we understand it now' for 'orthodoxy means not thinking—not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness' (p. 56). Then, 'with a sort of mystical satisfaction,' he says:

> Has it ever occurred to you, Winston, that by the year 2050, at the very latest, not a single human being will be alive who could understand such a conversation as we are having now? (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p. 55)

Orwell also uses poetic imagery to reinforce the fundamental nature of his language/thought connection. My favourite example is his portrayal of a 'lesser official from the Fiction Department', who is addressing the outer party in the language of 'pure orthodoxy, pure Ingsoc' (p. 57). Because this man had his head 'thrown back a little', his spectacles caught the light and presented 'two blank disks instead of eyes'. As Winston watched the 'eyeless face with the jaw moving rapidly up and down', he had 'the curious feeling that this was not a real human

being but a dummy. It was not the man's brain that was speaking, it was his larynx' (p. 57).

In making the density of his arguments accessible to readers, Orwell makes use of what Bakhtin (1963/1984, p. 118) calls 'inserted genres' (that is, written and other documents), which are 'always presented at various distances from the ultimate authorial position—that is, with varying degrees of parodying and objectification'. One such is the Appendix to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* where Orwell deals with the debauching of language. Here he sets out the principles of Newspeak, offering a full description of the etymology of meaning-less words, including 'joycamp' (labour camp); 'undark' (light); 'sexcrime' (all sexual misdeeds whatsoever); and 'unperson' (dead; non-existent; never existed). In a wonderfully ironic conclusion, he postpones the full and final adoption of Newspeak to as 'late a date as 2050', as there was so much work to be done to bring 'Shakespeare, Milton, Swift, Byron, and Dickens' into line with the philosophy of Ingsoc, and because 'large qualities of merely utilitarian literature' also had to be adapted' (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, pp. 325-6).

The other critical 'inserted genre' is the banned thesis of Emmanuel Goldstein, where Orwell parodies the doctrinaire character of official orthodoxy while also setting out his own arguments in a readable fashion. This document, which constitutes a substantial part of the book, works like an instruction manual, or 'info dump', covering the nature of totalizing power, the destruction of language, the failure of the intellectuals, and the reconstruction of Burnham's theory of convergence.[5] Here we have the clearest evidence that Orwell is dealing with a post-totalitarian society and not just the Stalinist epoch, for the Goldstein thesis explains that the current developments in political thought had been 'foreshadowed by the various systems, generally called totalitarian, which have emerged earlier in the century', but only emerged as 'fully worked-out political

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[5] Orwell was critical of the Burnham thesis, writing two lengthy reviews on it. Crick comments that Orwell never fully resolved whether he was 'satirising Burnham's view of the primacy of pure power as an impossibility … or whether he thinks that it is all too possible that party leaders and civil servants who begin as civilized men simply end up as a regime of office-holders, brutally interested in nothing but power for the sake of power' (Crick, 2007, p. 136).

theories' after 'a decade of national wars, civil wars, revolutions and counter-revolutions in all parts of the world' (*Nineteen Eighty Four*, p. 213).

In explaining the destruction of history and objective truth, the Goldstein thesis offers a series of closely reasoned propositions. Ingsoc, it explains, has come to rest on the 'mutability of the past', whereby 'past events have no objective existence and survive only in written records and human memories' (p. 222). Doublethink, on which Ingsoc depends, involves 'the power of holding two contradictory ideas in one's mind and accepting both of them', and the ability to lie, knowing that one lies, while also believing in those lies. Here we have Orwell's deep concern with the destruction of history as objective record. As Goldstein elaborates:

> To tell deliberate lies while genuinely believing in them, to forget any fact that has become inconvenient, and then when it becomes necessary, to draw back from oblivion for just so long as it is needed, to deny the existence of objective reality and all the while take account of the reality which one denies—all this is indispensably necessary. (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p. 223)

In a move resembling Zamyatin's parodic use of the Benefactor, Orwell creates O'Brien. It is from O'Brien that we learn that 'the Party seeks power entirely for its own sake', that it is not interested in 'wealth or luxury or long life or happiness, but power, pure power', and that 'the more the Party is powerful, the less it will be tolerant; the weaker the opposition, the tighter the despotism' (p. 275 and p. 281). These assertions are reasonably measured. But at other times, O'Brien really lets fly, declaring that power is all about inflicting pain and humiliation … tearing human minds to pieces and then putting them together in new shapes of your own choosing' (p. 279). In the future:

> There will be no art, no literature, no science. … There will be no distinction between beauty and ugliness. … There will be no curiosity, no enjoyment of the process of life. But always, do not forget this Winston – always there will be the intoxication of power, constantly increasing and constantly growing subtler. (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p. 280)

O'Brien gives voice to some of the novel's most widely quoted lines, but in what ways does he 'test' the 'truths' that Orwell is so keen to expose? For some critics he is superfluous, adding nothing to what has already been revealed in the Goldstein thesis. Dickstein (2004, p. 103), for example, queries whether 'we really need the diabolical O'Brien to tell us yet again about doublethink …

doctoring reality, abolishing memory, and consigning opponents to oblivion'. Qualifying this, I suggest that in the traditions of the menippea, O'Brien is both real and legendary, and essentially represents a *warning* about the future. Here I refer to a note Orwell wrote for his publishers:

> It has been suggested by some reviewers ... that it is the author's view that this, or something like this, is what will happen in the next forty years in the Western World. This is not correct. I think that, allowing for the book being a parody, something like *Nineteen Eighty-Four* could happen. This is the direction in which the world is going at the present time, and the trend lies deep in the political, social and economic foundations of the contemporary world situation. (Cited by Crick, 2007, p. 154, original emphasis) [6]

Reinforcing this notion of O'Brien as a historical warning, Richard Rorty proposes that O'Brien is not designed to convince us as in a polemical or historic sense, but to signify an empirical possibility:

> Orwell did not invent O'Brien to serve as a dialectic foil, as a modern counterpart to Thrasymachus. He invented him to warn us against him, as one might warn against a typhoon or rogue elephant. … He does not view him as crazy, misguided, seduced by a mistaken theory, or blind to the moral facts. He simply views him as *dangerous* and *possible*. (Rorty, 1989, p. 176, original emphasis)

As Rorty stresses, Winston's trust in O'Brien is essential to his construction as 'dangerous and possible' and thus to our own gullibility in the face of political threats. This confidence is inspired by O'Brien's appearance. Winston describes him as 'a large, burly man with a thick neck and a coarse, humorous, brutal face', and 'a certain charm of manner … (and) … a trick of re-settling his spectacles on his face which was curiously disarming—in some indefinable way, curiously civilised' (p. 12). When the two finally meet up in the Ministry of Love, Winston leaps to his feet, still believing O'Brien to be his ally:

> 'They've got you too!' he cried.
> 'They got me a long time ago,' said O'Brien with a mild almost regretful irony. (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p. 52)

We never know who 'they' are, or whether O'Brien went over to 'them' willingly, or was pushed. All we *do* know is that he is now credible and dangerous, a

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[6] In his comparison of the epic and the novel, Bakhtin (1941/1981, p. 31) proposes that 'prophecy is characteristic for the epic, prediction for the novel. Epic prophecy is realized wholly within the limits of an absolute past … it does not touch the reader and his real time … the novel has a new and quite specific problematicalness: characteristic for it is an eternal re-thinking and re-evaluating. That center of activity that ponders and justifies the past is transferred to the future'.

product of the new ruling class so fully described in the Goldstein thesis. That there are real contradictions in O'Brien's appearance has to be significant, for the image of the O'Brien who re-settles his spectacles in a 'curiously civilised' way and who speaks with a 'mild almost regretful irony', never quite gels with the one who predicts a future where there will be 'no art, no literature, no science … no distinction between beauty and ugliness', a time that will resemble 'a boot stamping on the human face—for ever' (p. 280). This combination of the ordinary and the horrific is surely Orwell's point, for it lies at the core of the mid-twentieth century disaster whereby ideologues and henchman alike colluded in horrific acts.

Critically, O'Brien is also the instrument of Winston's downfall. So let me turn to my final theme: the failure of the resistance movement and the downfalls of D-503 and Winston Smith. This is not so directly attributable to the traditions of the menippea as the matters considered so far, except in so far as the menippea deals with the notion of the quest and the potential transformation of the hero. I return to these matters in the course of the discussion, first setting them within a broader context.

Resistance and capitulation

As well as the forces of order and control, schism and resistance are vital to *We*, for if OneState were totally impermeable, there would be nothing left to ponder and no countervailing truth to offer. Equally, if D-503 were totally impervious to change, there would be nothing to hope for and no loss to mourn. Throughout his records, we detect the fissure in his consciousness, the hope for his redemption. After he falls in love with 1-330, he starts to dream and this worries him, for he knows that 'dreams point to a serious mental illness' and 'up to now, my brain has checked out chronometrically perfect, a mechanism without a speck of dust to dull its shine' (p. 33). Using an intimate, conversational style, he owns that:

> What I feel there in my brain is just like … some kind of foreign body … like having a very thin little eyelash in your eye. You feel generally okay, but that eye with the lash in it—you can't get if off your mind for a second. (*We*, p. 33).

In making the transformation of his hero possible, Zamyatin adapts the threshold experience of the menippea, where 'the hero goes and returns from either a heavenly place, or, more often the 'nether world', and is thereby moved 'beyond

the bounds of his fate and his character' (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 115). D-503's first assignation with 1-330 takes place at the Ancient House, a relic of the past, left standing beside the Green Wall: 'a strange, rickety, godforsaken structure clad all about in a glass shell' (*We*, p. 26). D-503 is fearful and suspicious, but when he accompanies I-330 down the old tunnels to glimpse the ancient world beyond the Green Wall, he looks around with wonder and sees that:

> The sun, it wasn't our sun, evenly distributed over the mirrored surface of our sidewalks. The sun was all sharp fragments, alive somehow, leaping spots, that blinded the eyes and made the head spin. And the trees were like candles sticking right up into the sky, or like spiders squatting on the ground with crooked legs, or like silent green fountains. (*We*, p. 148)

Having opened up the possibility for the transformation of his hero, Zamyatin closes it down. In the menippea, the 'threshold experience' is associated with 'unusual, abnormal, moral and psychic states … split personality, unrestrained daydreaming, unusual dreams, passions bordering on madness and so forth' (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 116). In adapting this, Zamyatin portrays both the hope of the threshold and the tragedy of its closure. On the side of hope, D-503 comes to see the world totally anew:

> Somehow this never entered my head before, but this is how it really is: we on this earth are walking above a crimson sea of fire, hidden down there in the bowels of the earth. (*We*, p. 56)

On the side of closure, D-503 comes to feel that there are two persons within him, each radically at war one with the other, creating an unbearable tension:

> One was the old me, D-503, Number D-503, and the other … the other used to just stick his hairy paws out of his shell, but now all of him came out, the shell burst open, and the pieces were just about to fly in all directions … and then what? (*We*, p. 56)

This internal splitting would be hard for even the toughest hero, and D-503 is not tough. He might have weathered the storm, held the pieces together, were it not for his anguish over I-033. Here Zamyatin introduces a truly pathetic moment, getting the Benefactor to jeer at D-503, telling him that I-330 has seduced him for her own ends; he'd been taken for a ride and hadn't had the sense to realize it. D-503, who has learned to love 1-330, and to believe that she too loves him, is torn apart. From that point on, his emotional and imaginative extinction is a foregone conclusion. As he struggles to resurrect his old sense of self, the Guardians announce that they have discovered how to excise imagination from the human

brain. It is, they say, a disease, responsible for all the unrest and suffering. Unable to live with his anguish, D-503 decides to confess his collusion in the resistance movement and undergo the operation. In recounting his decision, he says:

> All this was like the final grain of salt added to a saturated solution. The crystals, bristling with needles, begin to appear, harden and set. It is clear to me that everything has been decided. Tomorrow morning, *I would do it*. It was the same thing as killing myself—but maybe that's the only way for me to be resurrected. Because you can't resurrect something unless it's been killed. (*We,* p. 218, original emphasis)

After the operation, D-503 is perfectly calm, recording that there is now 'no delirium, no ridiculous metaphors, no feelings. Just the facts'. He is 'completely, absolutely well … [and] … can't help smiling', for they have 'extracted a kind of splinter from my head, and now my head is empty and easy' (p. 224). And so he watches with equanimity while I-330 ('that woman') is tortured under the Gas Bell. In a short concluding note, he records that 'at this very moment' the authorities are safeguarding the city by building 'a temporary wall of high-voltage waves on Fortieth Avenue, which runs across town', and ends by saying 'I hope we'll win. More—I'm certain we'll win. Because reason has to win in the end' (p. 225). But I-330 has already told him that no such certainty is possible and that resistance can disturb the rationalities of any 'final revolution'.

So the book's nadir, its single most tragic moment, remains with D-503's loss of imagination—lose it, Zamyatin intimates, and we lose all that is human within us. Retain it, and we have the capacity to envisage a world radically other than our own. To make such a point directly would be to kill it, a literary/political oxymoron. So Zamyatin instead relies on metaphor, leaving us with the shocking image of how the 'now completely well' D-503 is able to watch the torture and death of his courageous lover.

I turn finally to the nadir of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, its single most tragic moment—namely, Winston's betrayal of Julia. The emotional/political impact of this is the more devastating because Winston is potentially a critic from the outset. Amazingly, he scrawls 'DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER' in big schoolboy capitals in his diary and contrives to leave the page open on his office desk; bravely he scribbles that 'freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two is four

… if that is granted, all else follows' (p. 84). But all of this is to be crushed, and with it that which is most human in Winston. Early in the interrogation, O'Brien puts him on notice by saying:

> Do not imagine that you will save yourself, Winston, however completely you surrender to us. … We shall crush you down to the point from which there is no coming back. Never again will you be capable of ordinary human feelings. Everything will be dead inside you. Never again will you be capable of love, of friendship, or joy of living, or laughter, or curiosity, or courage, or integrity. You will be hollow. (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p. 269)

So it was foolish of Winston to say to O'Brien, 'I have not betrayed Julia' (p. 286). O'Brien 'looks at him thoughtfully' and says 'no, that is perfectly true. You have not betrayed Julia' (p. 286). Soon after his loyal assertion, Winston is subjected to the threat of torture through rats. As the creatures advance on his mouth, he hears himself shouting frantically, over and over: 'Do it to Julia! Do it to Julia! I don't care what you do to her. Tear her face off, strip her to the bones. Not me! Julia! Not me!' (p. 300). Rorty (1989, p. 170) points out that once Winston had wished this, willed his torment to be transferred to Julia, he experienced the 'point of no return' when a person is forced to realize that:

> The story that I have been telling about myself—my picture of myself as honest, or loyal or devout—no longer makes sense. I no longer have a self to make sense of. There is no world in which I can picture myself as living, because there is no vocabulary in which I can tell a coherent story about myself. (Rorty, 1989, p. 179)

Winston's betrayal of Julia is an empirical *fact*: it has happened and nothing can undo it, and Winston can no longer think of himself as he used to do. Just as D-503 loses the quality that allows him to perceive the world differently, so Winston suffers the extinction of that which is most human within him.

Concluding points: 'speaking truth through the fantastic'

In this chapter, I have put my thesis to a 'final test' by considering whether it is possible for a novel to make a directly political case and yet preserve its status as an artistic work. As indicated, in arguing in the affirmative, I problematize Kundera's contention that a political logic is itself inimical to the artistic life of the text, suggesting that he makes the mistake of equating political content with artistic form, thus failing to see the interactive relationship between the two—and, more specifically, how an assertive political logic can draw on, and be expressed

through, artistic traditions with which he himself is in sympathy: namely the fantastic, the curious, the exploratory, and the comic.

Returning now to my defence of the explicitly political novel, I propose that political assertion, even in its most transparent and *'roman à thèse'* form, can still inspire deep reflection across time and space, provided, and always provided, it has the spaciousness of a poetic imagination and the emotional resonance of a human telling. In each of the novels considered here, it is this imaginative/emotional combination, underpinned by the fantastic, that creates the close and compelling fusion of literary form and political content. Zamyatin's affirmation of the infinitude and unknowability of our existence is symbolically reproduced in the creation of an imaginary glass city; Orwell's intimations of the imminent threats to thought, language and literature are replicated in a constellation of images that are at one and the same time real and unreal, comprehensible and non-comprehensible. In each instance, there is an onomatopoeic type relationship between political idea and artistic expression, allowing the works to appeal to us intellectually, emotionally and imaginatively.

With this, I stress the works' capacity to speak to the present. Zamyatin's binaries have a timeless quality, reproducing the basic Self/Other split and allowing the novel to speak across time and place. As Bullock (2011, p. 85) observes, 'OneState is sealed off from the imperfect, unreconstructed world by a glass wall that serves to defend utopia from infection, destruction and alternative ways of being'. Hence Zamyatin does more than create an illusory city hanging in space, for when he surrounds OneState with the Green Wall, protecting it against the forces of Hunger and Love, he represents the world as we know it today, where rich nations barricade themselves from poor ones, border patrols safeguard national boundaries, and naval ships send refugees back to sea to die. Similarly, Orwell does more than create the imagined world of Big Brother, for he shows how the subversion of language can 'narrow the range of thought' so that eventually 'there will *be* no thought as we understand it now' for 'orthodoxy means not thinking—not needing to think' (p. 56) and how:

> Being in a minority, even a minority of one, did not make you mad … there was truth and there was untruth, and if you clung to the truth even against the whole world you were not mad. (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p. 226)

In relating these arguments to those of the previous chapters, I reaffirm the central importance of the texts' poetic imagery. Booker (1994b, p. 19) makes the important point that in dystopian fiction, the use of 'spatially or temporally distant settings' can provide 'fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural and inevitable'. But this strategy could deteriorate into didacticism if simply deployed as an instructional device. Hence I insist on the *poetic* qualities of Zamyatin and Orwell's representations, with these creating a greatly enlarged sense of space, time, meaning and relationships: something that is also true of *The Foundation Pit* and *The Master and Margarita*. In commenting on this imaginative force in relation to *We*, Brown suggests that:

> Zamyatin's great merit … is not to have made the highly questionable if only metaphorical leap across the boundary from physical science to human social organization. His merit was and remains to have turned the idea into an enduring fable that immediately caught the imagination of the world and gave rise to others, like *1984*. (Brown, 1993, p. xxiii)

As in all the previous novels, the texts' deeper resonating notes owe themselves to their emotional calls, with the downfall of their heroes speaking to the loss of all that is most important in our social and political relationships. Here we have a deep sense of pathos for the passing of something vitally important to our human-ness. This is particularly striking in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* with its evocation of the erosion of the social traditions that bind and hold. One of the most compelling tributes to the work in this respect comes from Dickstein who comments that:

> By investing his own feelings in Winston's fate, and by making his England one that his readers would recognize, Orwell rescues *Nineteen Eighty-Four* from the merely speculative horizon of most futuristic writing; he lends an emotional unity, an authentic immediacy, to an otherwise eclectic and sometimes contradictory piece of work. (Dickstein, 2004, p. 109)

Let me turn last to the finalizable/unfinalizable conjuncture. When earlier discussing the novels of Platonov and Bulgakov, I suggested that they deal in shadows and ambiguity, being actively engaged with the dualistic elements of utopian thought. In *We* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* a different but parallel dynamic operates, whereby the texts aim to parody, fantasize and/or render absurd the

binaries of utopian thought, while, at the same time, rendering their own didactic assertions subject to ambiguity and doubt through the force of the fantastic. With this, they utilize an artistic form that both complements and mediates their political content, and, equally, are committed to a political content that complements and mediates their artistic form. In such ways, they traverse and contradict many of the traditional boundaries associated with the artistic and the political, and prompt further questions about the relationship between the two. In my concluding chapter, I look across the texts as a whole and further consider our understanding of the artistic/political relationship.

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Eight

Reflections from the base camp

It is much easier to study the *given* in what is created (for example, language, ready-made and general elements of world view, reflected phenomena of reality, and so forth) than to study what is *created*. (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 120; original emphasis)

What we call the beginning is often the end/And to make an end is to make a beginning/The end is where we start from. (T. S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding', *The Four Quartets*, 1943)

Over the course of this study, I have attempted to understand the multifaceted nature of the artistic/political relationship, both as it arises in the selected texts and a more general level of conceptualization as it pertains to the traditions and practices of the novel. My observations point to a common but highly differentiated enterprise, with the selected novels illustrating the contrasting and at times contradictory ways in which the artistic and the political can combine in any given instance. That there is a fundamental tension between the artistic and the political as contrasting epistemologies (van Delden and Grenier, 2012), I have accepted; that this can emerge in unexpected ways, with generative as well as limiting effects, is what I have tried to illustrate. As I see it, the risks to the artistic life of the text arise not from the assertiveness of a political critique, but rather from a moralizing discourse where the reader is to be 'educated' rather than 'argued with' or even 'shouted at'; from the conflation between author and hero, where we are encouraged to admire or affirm rather than question or speculate; and from a lack of transparency, where a purportedly realistic character is in fact a mouthpiece for an author's moral and/or political convictions.

In all these considerations, my emphasis has been on the density of the texts' literary/political combinations and their resistance to any single line of theorization. In this final chapter, I retain this accent, now focusing on the qualities contributing to the resonating potential of the novels. As Felski (2011, p. 580 and p. 583) points out, 'texts are objects that do a lot of traveling; moving across time, they run into new semantic networks, new ways of imputing meaning'; further, in this process, they are 'participants in chains of events [and]

help shape outcomes and influence actions'. It is on the nature of this carrying power that I reflect here: what contributes to it, and how we might better understand these contributory factors.

At each point of the analysis, I reflect on what my conclusions might suggest for our interpretations of the artistic/political relationship. As earlier argued, this is a critical matter, for our readings influence how we approach texts, the kinds of questions we ask, and the nature of the conclusions we reach. When, to return to a much rehearsed example, Kundera takes issue with *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, he reads the work through a particular lens, where to be 'true' to itself the novel must rule out 'any identification with any politics, any religion, any ideology, any moral doctrine, any group' (Kundera, 1995, p. 156). In repeating this example, I acknowledge that we necessarily interpret the artistic/political relationship through our own particular templates, for the artistic and the political are subjective phenomena rather than objective categories. Hence in making my case for a grounded understanding, I simply contend that such an approach is better able to reveal the evolving and often contradictory nature of the artistic and the political relationship than is one based on abstracted theorization. By the same token, I recognize that my preferred perspective will not promote definitive propositions, but rather invite new lines of speculation and inquiry.

My discussion is built around the three main themes that have consistently surfaced in my analyses of the texts: first, the dense intersections between finalizability and unfinalizability, where I query a central element of the artistic/political binary; second, the carrying power of imagination, where I reflect on the imagery of the texts and its experiential potential; third, the impact of the texts' emotional calls, where I look closely at the poetics of the texts, and suggest that they take us well beyond the cognitive emphasis of the dialogical/monological binary. These reflections do not lead to any neat or systematic tying up of ends, but rather to a series of speculations and suggestions about how we—the ordinary readers—might conceptualize the artistic/political relationship in the first instance.

Finalizability and unfinalizability

In dualistic readings of the artistic/political relationship, finalizability and unfinalizability are positioned in fundamentally oppositional terms, with the one achieving its ends at the cost of the other. This is reflected in Kundera's critique of the politicized novel, which, as noted by Grenier (2006, p. 6), relies on an axiomatic distinction between 'uncertainty, polyphony, and perpetual quest', on the one hand, and 'truth, dogma, and final judgment', on the other. It is also deeply embedded in Bakhtin's view, which, as noted by Clark and Holquist (1984, p. 291), positions the history of the novel as 'a long contest between two stylistic lines of development' according to 'which side they take in the struggle in language between centripetal and centrifugal forces'. On the one side, Bakhtin places Tolstoy, classicism, the sonnet and poetry; on the other, Dostoevsky, romanticism, the novel and prose (Clark and Holquist, 1984, pp. 292-3).

Against such divisions, my reading of the texts argues for the interactive relationship between finalizability and unfinalizability, where fundamental values and/or obdurate historical facts set the tone and direction of a text, and the silences and ambiguities of the works provide the 'space' within which we are free to speculate and imagine. Take, for example, the scene in *Darkness at Noon* when Rubashov and Ivanov discuss *Crime and Punishment* as night turns into early dawn in the seclusion of a confined Moscow cell. As earlier noted, Rubashov observes that 'twice two are not four when mathematical units are human beings', and Ivanov retorts 'history is *a priori* amoral; it has no conscience … to want to conduct history according to the maxims of a Sunday school means to leave everything unchanged' (*Darkness at Noon*, p. 127). In literary/political terms something quite dense and tricky happens here, whereby the exchange combines the elusiveness of the unfinalizable, as it spins out to a great range of literary and political suppositions, with the logic of the finalizable, as it ties together the events that will inexorably carry Rubashov to a meaningless execution. Each of these elements takes its meaning from the other; neither can stand on its own. We are, at one and the same time, convinced and at a loss.

In earlier discussing the significance of the creative space, I stressed that I was not making a plea for unfinalizability, but for the combination of political coherence

and artistic creativity. Let me now elaborate on this point with reference to Romeo Castellucci's statement that:

> The theatre which tries to produce a sense of resolution is unacceptable. It gives me the impression of being back at school. It's worse actually because this type of theatre would like us to believe that it's telling the truth. Even Brecht makes the mistake of dogmatic presentation. It is much more accurate for the theatre to convey anxiety. It's preferable because then we ask the people who are watching to continue the story, *to produce the missing part*. (Castellucci, 2001, my emphasis)

My submission is that Castellucci's 'missing part' only makes sense within a wider narrative wherein we look for sense or coherence in the first instance. This is particularly significant in the context of the mid-twentieth century, where the need to account for the trauma, terror, and killings is coupled with a recognition that the nature of such developments withstands the attempt to render them comprehensible. There is thus a simultaneous sense of *knowing* what the search is about and an *unknowing* in the recognition that our search cannot be brought to any satisfactory conclusion. One of the most haunting examples of this comes in *Everything Flows*, when Anna Sergeyevna, having spent the night describing the events leading to the Ukraine famine, turns exhausted to Ivan Grigoryevich in the early morning and says:

> 'And nothing is left of all that. Where can all that life have gone? And that suffering, that terrible suffering? Can there really be nothing left? Is it really true that no one will be held to account for it? That it will all be forgotten without a trace?'
> 'Grass has grown over it.'
> 'How can this be—I ask you.'
> 'Look—it's getting light. Our night's over now. It's time we both got ready to go out to work'. (*Everything Flows*, p. 138)

Here Ivan's silence signifies Castellucci's 'missing part', leaving us to resolve the dilemma that Anna has raised: that is, how it is possible that 'a group of ordinary muddle-headed people' can assist in the death by famine of thousands of others (p. 117). This silence achieves its significance from *within* the totality of Anna's narrative, which describes how the kulaks were taken to the railway station, 'where trains of empty freight wagons were waiting in the sidings' (p. 121) and how during the journey, many were 'put down in the middle of nowhere … left to fend for themselves in the middle of the snow' with the result that 'the weak froze to death' (p. 122). The passage is compelling not just because it enables us to see

how history's trauma both demand and withstand explanation, but also because it reflects the phenomenon whereby, in our everyday lives, we both search for coherent meaning and know that something pivotal will almost invariably escape us.

To better understand how search and silence combine, I compare Ricoeur's notion of 'narrative', which emphasizes explication and resolution, with Bakhtin's notion of the 'idea', which stresses obliqueness and unsettlement. While narrative does not imply causality in any mechanical sense, it does entail the essential *connection* between phenomena whether we are referring to emotion and motivation or the outcome of events and actions. For Ricoeur, it 'grasps together and integrates into one whole and complete story multiple and scattered events, thereby schematizing the intelligible signification attached to the narrative as a whole' (1984, p. x). Under this interpretation, there is meaning to be found in the world, a form of meaning that can be expressed in the temporal, relational form of the narrative. The trouble is that this cannot deal with those moments where the meaning of a passage lies precisely in the fact that there is no 'meaning' (conclusion, enduring sense, human value) to be drawn from developments. As, for example, when Voshchev comes to believe that:

> Like it or not there was no truth in the world – or maybe there had been once, in some plant or heroic creature, but then a wandering beggar had come by and eaten the plant, or trampled this creature there on the ground in lowliness, and then the beggar had died in an autumn gully and the wind had blown his body clean into nothing. (*The Foundation Pit*, pp. 102-3)

In contrast to the rationalities of the narrative stand the indeterminacies of Bakhtin's 'idea'. As we have seen, Bakhtin maintains that the Dostoevskian hero is not a carrier of some 'pre-planned plot', but rather 'an idea-hero', who represents within him- or herself the unstable and always contested nature of the idea (Emerson, 1997, p. 127). To understand the significance of the idea, Bakhtin (1963/1984, p. 28) insists, is to think in terms of space rather than time: the 'fundamental category' in Dostoevsky's poetics is that he thought 'not in terms of evolution, but coexistence and interaction' and 'saw and conceived his world primarily in terms of space, not time'. On this basis, Bakhtin's 'idea', with its emphasis on spaciousness and indeterminacy, can illustrate what narrative cannot,

illuminating how texts such as *The Foundation Pit* can extend our insights precisely through their lack of resolution and the dissolution of their heroes. [1]

But there are problems with Bakhtin's account too. Just as the notion of narrative does not deal adequately with the fragmentary nature of our recollections, so Bakhtin's idea can provide little or no clue as to how events unfold over time. As Emerson comments:

> As a rule, Bakhtin does not do beginnings or ends. Wholly committed to process and to the dynamics of response, he concerns himself very little with how something starts (a personality, a responsibility) or how it might be brought to an effective well-shaped end. This neglect of genesis and overall indifference to closure left a profound trace on his thought, imparting to his literary readings their strange, aerated, often fragmented nature. (Emerson, 1997, p. 157)

There is also the difficulty that in sacrificing 'plot' for 'idea', Bakhtin may bypass the political and ethical concerns of the texts. Natalia Reed, who concentrates specifically on this issue, contends that any 'refusal to finalize any judgement' would represent 'an escape from the consequences of authentic residence in the world' (cited by Emerson, 1997, p. 143). Further, the desire to make sense of life, to have a set of durable commitments, is central to the struggles of the heroes of the selected texts, with this holding for characters as different as Kostoglotov in *Cancer Ward* and Winston Smith in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In a reflection bearing on this, Emerson (1997, p. 143) observes that Dostoevsky's heroes 'want desperately to believe and to be believed', and quotes Alexei Kirillov in *The Demons*, as saying:

> 'All my life, I did not want it to be only words. This is why I lived, because I kept on not wanting it. And now, too, every day I want it not to be words'. (*The Demons*, 2008, p. 615, cited by Emerson, 1997, p. 145)

The point is that Kirillov wants to be committed to something—and something quite definite and durable. And so too may we, for Ricoeur (1984a) is surely right when he contends that as humans we desire to make the reason for our existence intelligible to ourselves.

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[1] W. G. Sebald's novels—most particularly, *Austerlitz* (2001) and *The Emigrants* (2002)—illustrate the failures of narrative and provide a poetic alternative to it. As Eric Homberger notes, Sebald distances himself from the 'grinding noises of the plot', and searches instead 'for a literary form responsive to the waves of human tragedy, which spread out across generations and nations, yet which began in his childhood' (Homberger, 2001, np).

I acknowledge that the notion of narrative is implicit in Bakhtin's idea, just as the notion of idea is implicit in Ricoeur's narrative; the 'shadow theme' that underlies the dominant concept. It is, one could say, all a matter of emphasis. But the difficulty is that the strength of the emphasis in binary thinking systematically obscures what happens at the interface. The implications are clear: if we are to better understand the density of the artistic/political relationship, we should cease once and for all in positioning finalizability and unfinalizability in oppositional terms, and instead give detailed and careful consideration to their points of intersection. With these considerations challenging a central distinction in the artistic/political binary, let me turn to the carrying power of imagination and its implications for the resonating potential of the texts.

Imagination: 'beyond words'

Imagination is the most fundamental of my considerations, for each of Bakhtin's major literary practices depend on it. It is imagination that anticipates responses and intuits meaning; imagination that creates a character that 'is evolving and developing, who learns from life' (Bakhtin, 1941/1981, p. 75 and p. 10); and imagination that creates the time/space configurations of chronotope where 'time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh' and space 'becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history' (Bakhtin, 1937/1981, p. 84). But how does imagination do its work? Can we ever understand it? I turn to the classics for assistance.

Early on, Aristotle observed that 'the soul never thinks without a mental image' and attributed this image-forming ability to imagination (*De Anima*. 431/1957, cited by Thomas 2002, p. 2). In expanding on this, Hume (1739-1740/1978) distinguishes between impressions and ideas (impressions being the immediate sensation of events, and ideas the later recollection of those sensations), and argues that imagination underlies the idea-forming capacity, which, through association, allows us to produce general categories such as 'power' or 'ideology'. In a more specific rendering, he contrasts imagination with memory, suggesting that while memory is 'tied to the production of ideas, joined as they were and in the order in which they originally came as impressions', imagination is able to 'transpose and change (those) ideas' (Warnock, 1976, p. 135). In both instances,

imagination represents something not materially or actually present. As Arendt summarizes it:

> Re-presentation, making present what is actually absent, is the mind's unique gift, and since our whole mental terminology is based on metaphors drawn from the vision's experience, this gift is called imagination, defined by Kant as "the faculty of intuition without the presence of the object". (Arendt, 1978, p. 76)

In an observation directly relevant to the selected texts, Kant (1781-1787/1933, p. 181) proposes that imagination has a transcendental power through which phenomena are commonly recognized and understood. It is to this quality that Coleridge refers when he proposes that imagination is able to 'conjure up an image' and 'make us see that image as universally significant' (cited by Warnock 1976, p. 82). An important qualifying point arises: namely, that while the Romantics have phenomena such as creativity, wonder and joy in mind, imagination can also serve a directly political purpose in illuminating the dark and dystopian (see, Booker 1994a, 1994b; Booker & Juraga 1995; Gottlieb 2001; Marks 2015). This is well illustrated in the texts, where, for example, Grossman portrays the devastations of history in describing how on her death in the prison camp, the young mother Masha was placed in a box 'that the timber inspectors had rejected for any other use' (*Everything Flows,* p. 14).

This illustrates how imagination can move us beyond the formal structure of words to create an image that is *experienced* (visualized, heard, felt in the body) rather than a proposition that is simply *thought*. This is vital because words are in so many ways the sticking point in the art/politics problematic. On the one hand, everything depends on them; on the other, it is they that embody the pedagogical/didactic qualities seen to be so antithetical to the artistic. Imagination takes us well beyond this, reflecting Bakhtin's observation that 'the author's creative consciousness is not a language', but an almost sculptural ability to carve certain moments deeply into our consciousness (cited by Emerson, 1997, p. 211, original emphasis). To illustrate, let me compare two passages, the first dependent on the analytical thrust of words and the second on the evocative power of the image. Both deal with freedom, and both are taken from Grossman's *Everything Flows*. In the first, Grossman declares:

> The State without freedom, the State built by Stalin, still lives. The apparatus of power—heavy industry, the armed forces, the security organs—is still in the hands of the Party … the State without freedom has now entered its third phase. It was founded by Lenin. It was constructed by Stalin. And now phase three has begun. The State, as an engineer might say, has been put into construction. (*Everything Flows*, p. 198)

There is imagery here but it is almost entirely overwhelmed by the pedagogical force of the text. In the second example, the balance is reversed. Here Grossman describes how Ivan Grigoryevich, on his return to Moscow after three decades in the Gulag, experiences a sense of 'irredeemable loneliness', for to him it appears that:

> The whole city was like a single great mechanism, schooled to freeze on the red light and move again on the green … During the thousand years of her history, Russia had seen many great things … [but] has there was only one thing that Russia had not seen during these thousand years: freedom. (*Everything Flows*, p. 49)

I submit that the resonating potential of the text, its power to linger somewhere deep in one's consciousness, lies in the imagery of the second passage, with the 'irredeemable loneliness' of Ivan Grigoryevich and 'whole city schooled to freeze on the red light and move again on the green'. Some of the most sustained examples of this kind of poetic/political evocation come in *The Foundation Pit,* where Platonov's 'fluid form of consciousness' (Bullock, 2011, p. 82) resists any single sticking point and instead pervades our own consciousness as readers. Thus, for example, we read how the bodies of the diggers are 'thin, as if they had died', with the 'cramped space between each man's skin and his bones … occupied by veins …[showing] … how much blood they must let pass during the tension of labour' (p. 10). On another memorable occasion, the peasant Yelisey walks over the hill to reclaim the hundred coffins earlier stockpiled by his community and we read how, in dragging them back over the hill, he:

> Took the end of the front rope of the coffins over his shoulders, ... leaned forward and, like a barge hauler, began to heave these objects across the dry ups and downs of life's everyday sea. (*The Foundation Pit*, p. 63)

This fragment has so much invested within it: the unexpectedness of Yelisey's appearance; the metaphor of the coffins; the image of Yelisey as he crosses the 'dry ups and downs of life's everyday sea'; and the fact that these coffins are later used to make the raft that drowns the kulaks. It is not possible to explain how this

imaginative joining of the artistic and the political occurs. It simply does, and the effect is pervasive and enduring. In such instances, the political is simply there, and in its 'there-ness' is so closely woven into the artistic that their separation only makes sense at an analytic level.

When authors rely on imagery, they have to leave their texts open, subject to our imaginative re-creations as readers. And here they take a risk, for our responses may or may not correspond with their own concerns and intentions. In illustration, I turn to Platonov's description of the death and burial of the child Nastya. On Platonov's account, the 'little girl's death' represented his own 'excessive alarm on behalf of something beloved, whose loss is tantamount to the destruction not only of all the past but also of the future' (*The Foundation Pit,* p. 150). But as a western reader in the early part of the twenty-first century, and sharing none of Platonov's dreams and aspirations, I am almost entirely moved by the death of the child and the thought that she might be mine. Chiklin, Platonov records, dug a grave so wide and deep that neither a worm nor the root of a plant, nor warmth nor cold should be able to penetrate it' and so that 'the child should never be disturbed by the noise of life from the earth's surface' (p. 149). I have no idea what it is like to be Chiklin, separated as we are by time, nation, history, class, gender, age and belief. He lives in the pages of a book; I make a claim to walk the streets of my neighbourhood. All my children are alive; his only adopted one is dead. But I imagine that it is one of my own that has died and start to cry for that child, for both Chiklin and myself, and for sadness in all its innumerable manifestations.

These considerations have important implications for how a work might resonate across time and space. In a comment bearing on this, Rorty (1989, p. 169) contends that 'Orwell's best novels will be widely read only as long as we describe the politics of the twentieth century as he did'. In saying this, he also refers to Howe's suggestion that Orwell and Silone's novels:

> May not survive their time, for what makes them so valuable and so enduring to their contemporaries—that mixture of desperate topicality and desperate tenderness—is not likely to be a quality conducive to the greatest art. (1957/2002, p. 251)

I am uneasy with both proposals. Rorty's appears to privilege a particular form of political reading over and above the manifold reasons a text might attract our attention, while Howe's begs the question of whether the notion of 'the greatest art' sits at all comfortably with the novel given its anti-genre qualities. In my view, literature shapes our consciousness more obliquely, where it is not any particular work in its entirety that is important, but rather certain literary 'fragments' or 'memories' that resonate across time and space. There is such a moment, for example, when Winston Smith leaves Mr Charrington's shop reflecting on 'the illusion of a lost London that still existed somewhere or other, disguised and forgotten' (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p. 103). Or, to give another example, when Rubashov betrays the stammering Richard under the *Pietà* with her ageless, folded hands, and a Nazi officer stands guard at the door. If asked what binds these moments together, I would find it difficult to explain, pointing, perhaps, to the inexorable passage of time and the fact that there are actions and events that cannot be undone. But even in beginning such an explanation, I lose what it is that I had in mind, for the process, by its very nature, escapes theoretical analysis.

I have proposed that imagination can move us beyond words and that its resonating potential lies in particular fragments or moments rather than the interpretation of particular events or axioms. What are the implications for our understandings of the artistic/political relationship? In his article, 'Beautiful truth and truthful beauty', Henry Jansen (2015, p. 64) maintains that when we assent to the 'truths' of a text, 'we interiorize them and are influenced by them in our life and the choices we make'. In adapting this insight, I submit that the same happens when we interiorize a poetic image. When, for example, we absorb the image of Masha's dead body being placed in a box that 'the timber inspectors had rejected for any other use', and know that this is the only way that she can 'return to freedom' (*Everything Flows*, p. 14), we can undergo a shift in our internal worlds with real implications for our political choices and social relationships. This brings me to my final theme: the literary representation of distress and suffering.

Suffering: portrayal and response

The texts' intimations of suffering are core to their poetics. True to the traditions of the novel, it is the characters that carry the burden of trauma, reminding us that politics matters because people matter. It matters when Rubashov is shot in the back and 'memories carried him, like streaks of mist on the water' into eternity (*Darkness at Noon*, p. 211); when Ivan the Homeless is left adrift with nothing but his disappearing memories to comfort him; and when Yefrem Podduyev has no idea how to face death for 'the whole of his life had prepared him for living not for dying' (*Cancer Ward*, p. 107). In all such instances, something happens to a living being we have come to care about, and something about their suffering resonates in our consciousness.[2]

But what exactly is involved here? Is it just a matter of the texts invoking our empathy, and thus getting us to confront the devastations of the political? It certainly is this, but I argue that something else is also at work, whereby the images of the texts speak to the nature of suffering itself. This proposal hinges on *the basis on which* suffering is artistically represented and to which we, as readers, respond. In explaining what I have in mind, I draw an approximate distinction between a largely western tradition, which suggests that the sufferings of others can be intuited through an act of imaginative self-identification, and Bakhtin's 'outsideness', where the artist is required to acknowledge the absolute otherness of the other, and to view his or her suffering from a position of compassionate distance, with this corresponding more closely to the 'eastern' notion of respectful withdrawal. Building on this, I suggest that something else is involved yet again: namely, the texts' power to evoke the 'qualia' of grief and suffering.

As the issues are complex, I ground my discussion in Platonov's portrayal of the sufferings of Prushevsky, the site engineer in *The Foundation Pit*. Prushevsky, it will be remembered, had once trusted that the 'all-proletarian home' would stand

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[2] In making this suggestion, I put to one side the longstanding debate concerning the 'paradox' of our emotional responses to imaginary others, as originally voiced by Colin Radford (1975), when he asks how we can be 'rationally' moved by the fate of Anna Karenina, and simply assume that we, the potential readers, do so respond.

in the place of the old town, where people lived 'by fencing themselves off into households', hoping that 'the walls of his architecture would not be in vain' and 'the building would be inhabited by people … who were filled by that surplus of warmth called the soul' (*The Foundation Pit,* p. 19). As his hopes for the project dwindle, he contemplates suicide, and is only comforted by receiving a card from his sister, which he would 'carry around in his pocket for a long time, and on re-reading it, he would sometimes cry' (p. 60). In one of the most evocative passages of the text, we read that he cannot bear the sight of 'some peaceful white buildings that shone with more light than there was in the air around them', for 'an alien and distant happiness awoke shame and alarm in him—what he would have liked, without admitting it, was for the whole world, forever under construction but never constructed, to be like his own destroyed life' (p. 60).

How far can we apprehend Prushevsky's grief? On what basis do we come to know him? Do we come to know him at all? In a discussion embodying many aspects of the western tradition, James Wood (2008, p. 169) suggests that 'from Samuel Johnson on', it is 'a commonplace that sympathetic identification with characters is in some way dependent on fiction's true mimesis'. In elaborating on this, he proposes that we come to understand the nature of the suffering of another by *identifying with them*, where he refers to Adam Smith's notion that 'the source of our fellow-feeling' for the sufferings of another relies on our 'changing places in fancy with the sufferer' (p. 170). Under this line of interpretation, we come to feel for Prushevsky because drawing on our own experiences, we are able to imagine what it might be like to be him.[3]

Bakhtin's contrasting interpretation derives from his 'bedrock supposition' that there is a fundamental difference in the way we experience another ('the other for me') and how we experience one's self ('an I-for-myself') (Emerson, 2005, pp. 642-3). On this basis, the artistic representation of suffering involves the author's 'loving removal of himself … from the field of his hero's life, his clearing of the

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[3] A note on terms: I understand 'sympathy' to mean a sense of distress on behalf of another; 'empathy' the capacity to intuit what another might be feeling; 'compassion' to involve suffering with or on behalf of another.

whole field of life for the hero and his existence' (Bakhtin, 1990, p, 97, cited by Emerson, 2005, p. 641). Under this construction:

> Only the act of getting outside will guarantee an author the excess or surplus of vision … that is essential to conceptualize—however provisionally—the whole of another person. Since artists must always work with some approximation of a whole, this distancing gesture is mandatory for the coming-into-being of any aesthetic image. (Emerson, 2005, p. 642)

Thus we have a distinction between a view that emphasizes the importance of the shared elements of human experience and one that stresses the importance of removing oneself altogether so as to be open to the other, with these views crossing the boundaries between 'literature' and 'real life'.[4] In responding to these contending perspectives, let me return to the passage in *The Foundation Pit* where Platonov describes how Prushevsky cannot bear the sight of 'the peaceful white buildings that shone with more light than there was in the air around them', for:

> On an earthly extinct star, it was more comfortable for [Prushevsky] to feel sadness; an alien and distant happiness awoke shame and alarm in him – what he would have liked, without admitting it, was for the whole world, forever under construction but never constructed, to be like his own destroyed life. (*The Foundation Pit*, p. 60)

It will be remembered that in his sorrow, Prushevsky walks *away* from his fellow-workers; he cannot explain his grief and estrangement and needs to be alone. So perhaps neither should we, the readers, advance too close to him, pretending to understand his situation and offering him our sympathy. In this respect, we come to see Prushevsky in the manner that Bakhtin might wish: at a distance, sitting on a hill, looking 'quietly into all of nature's misty old age' (p. 60). But is this all that can be said? Is there nothing about the nature of Prushevsky's predicament that we can glimpse? I suggest that there is, and that to understand it we need to turn to Shklovsky's (1917/1988, p. 20) proposal that art 'returns sensation to life … to make a stone feel stony'. In the passage cited above, where Platonov sits aloof, bewildered and alone, we intuit something about the 'estrangement of estrangement', deepening and confirming something about the human condition

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[4] I note that the issue has wider ramifications in philosophy where Iris Marion Young's (1977) case for an 'asymmetrical reciprocity' based on respectful distance has been challenged by Lorenzo Simpson's (2001, p. 105) call for a 'reversibility of perspectives' grounded in 'the back and forth of hermeneutic dialogue', and Paul Healy's (2011, p. 163) request that we demonstrate our 'willingness to embark on a mutual dialectic of recognition, whereby each side strives to attain an understanding of what the other takes herself to be doing'.

that, at some level, we do indeed already 'know'. On this basis, I suggest that the most compelling moments of the texts depend neither on self-identification, nor the moral respect of distancing, nor even the interaction between the two, but on the poetic evocation of qualia.

In another poetic example, Bulgakov portrays something of the 'loneliness of loneliness' when he describes how Pilate sits hunched in his stone chair, enframed against a moonlit sky, unapproachable in his anguish. As in Prushevsky's case, we cannot approach too close, but see Pilate at a distance, enframed against a moonlight sky. We also hear Woland explain that:

> He says one and the same thing, that even the moon gives him no peace, and that his is a bad job. That is what he always says when he is not asleep, and when he is asleep, he dreams one and the same thing: there is a path of moonlight, and he wants to walk down it and talk with the prisoner Yeshua Ha-Nozri, because, as he insists he never finished what he was saying that time, long ago, on the fourteenth day of the spring month of Nisan. (*The Master and Margarita*, p. 381)

My point is that in listening to Woland, we come to see how Pilate so desperately wishes for that last meeting with Yeshua—a meeting that we know will never take place. This does not mean that we identify with Pilate, but rather that we *recognize* the nature of his suffering—it makes sense to us, emotionally and experientially—and we start to understand something in a way that we did not before. And this brings with it an awareness of the breadth and depth of suffering: sorrow for suffering, sorrow for all those who suffer, sorrow for the human condition, and sorrow for the whole tragic mess of things. It also gives way to a sense of longing, of longing that things might be better, of regret for the past and a desire (but not necessarily an optimism) for a more just and humane future.

So we come again to the carrying power of imagination and its ability to move us beyond words. In making this point, I underscore the indirect and pervasive nature of the texts' imaginative/emotive calls. In *The Company We Keep*, Booth (1988, p. 211) suggests that 'if genuine "literature" should be read as offering no unequivocal advice about "real life" ... then centuries of informed witnesses have deceived us—or they have been deliberately self-deceived'. I agree entirely. But I also propose that in their evocations the texts may shape the whole trajectory of our political imaginaries, the lens through which we come to see our social,

political and personal worlds, hence again emphasizing the importance of Bullock's (2011) notion of the *fluidity* of consciousness.

Concluding reflections: reading at the interface

I suggest that we 'read at the interface' at numerous levels: in the junctures between the centripetal and centrifugal qualities of languages, the dialogical and monological, and finalizability and unfinalizability. We also read through the crossways of our intellectual, emotional and imaginative understandings, producing new ways of responding to and apprehending our personal, social and political worlds. Critically too, we read in a liminal space, a place wherein we both arrive and depart, a threshold, signifying unsettlement, change and ambiguity as well as stability, conviction and coherence.

In building on the insights of van Delden and Grenier (2012), I have suggested that the artistic and the political represent two imperatives, with the artistic exemplifying the creative and open-ended, and the political pressing toward coherence and commitment. Under this configuration, each element is fundamental to the other: creativity allows commitment to be expressed in original and striking ways, while commitment gives creativity its shape and direction. Each also stands to be impoverished without the other: without creativity, commitment can become impervious to alternatives and the opportunities for change, and without commitment, creativity can become formless, an aesthetic end in itself. Importantly too, there is a productive tension between the two elements, with the 'in-itself' of creativity pulling in an opposite direction to the 'for something else' of commitment.

To think in terms of creativity and commitment is to acknowledge that texts are produced, often at cost, by living beings. For all the authors considered here, there is the obstinate courage of the creative artist: the determination to get words right, to create images that work, and to return to a piece again and again until it says what it is meant to say in the way that it is meant to say it. As noted, Silone (1949/2001, p. 81) records that 'writing has not been, and never could be, except in a few favoured moments of grace, a serene aesthetic enjoyment, but rather the painful and lonely continuation of a struggle'. For the Russian authors, the costs

of artistic integrity included isolation, persecution, and fundamental risks to freedom and ultimately to life itself. On this, I recall that having at one time burned his own manuscript, Bulgakov continued to work on it through the worst of the 1930s, inscribing 'Lord, help me to finish my novel' in the upper right hand corner of his notebook (Pevear, 2007, p. xv). The seriousness of the literary/political enterprise is sobering and awe inspiring: when Woland drily observed that 'manuscripts don't burn' (*The Master and Margarita,* p. 287), he described how Russian authors committed the entirety of their works to memory in order to preserve them.

I was in the process of putting these thoughts on paper, when a friend sent me a copy of Charlotte Wood's Stella Prize acceptance speech, awarded for her novel *The Natural Way of Things*.[5] It was one of those moments when the ideas one struggles to express, appear, as it were, complete and fresh before one. So let me quote freely from Wood's speech. She starts by reflecting on the hard labour involved in writing and the intellectual freedom that the opportunity represents:

> Showing up to that blank space with curiosity and courage is an exercise in the greatest freedom we can know – intellectual freedom, to explore your obsession with something nobody but you cares about, to pursue your own strange thoughts and dreams, to climb right inside your own dark wormhole of fascination and stay there. (Wood, 2016, np)

Wood also recounts that, 'on one very bad day', she thought about giving up on her novel, but came up with five reasons to continue:

> To make something beautiful. Beauty does not have to mean prettiness, but can emerge from the scope of one's imagination, the precision of one's words, the steadiness and honesty of one's gaze.
>
> To make something truthful. 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty.'
>
> To make use of what you have and who you are. Even a limited talent brings an obligation to explore it, develop it, exercise it, be grateful for it.
>
> To make, at all. To create is to defy emptiness. It is generous, it affirms. To make is to add to the world, not subtract from it. It enlarges, does not diminish.
>
> Because as Iris Murdoch said, paying attention is a moral act. To write truthfully is to honour the luck and intricate detail of being alive. (Wood, 2016, np)

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[5] The Stella Prize is a major literary award to celebrate Australian women's writing.

In such ways, Wood identifies something that I have found difficult to express: quite simply, the energy of the whole literary/political enterprise. When authors put words to paper, and when we respond to their works and re-create them in our minds and hearts, there is a *happening*. New images and ideas float across our horizons, hastening across time and space. I remember that at his 1966 trial, Daniel said that his greatest concern in writing his novel *This is Moscow Speaking* was to show that:

> A human being should remain a human being, no matter in what circumstances he may find himself, no matter under what pressure and from what quarter. He should remain true to himself, to himself alone, and have nothing to do with anything that his conscience rejects and that goes against human instinct. (Labedz and Hayward, 1966, p. 62)

So above all, I stress that we owe the counter-totalitarian literature a debt of gratitude for helping preserve the space on which our political imaginations depend and in enlarging the horizons through which we come to perceive and experience our worlds. In such ways, and as Helena Grehan (2015, p. 2) proposes in relation to theatre, literature offers us something of a 'gift' or a 'space' in which we may come 'to see and feel things differently, to engage or re-engage, to reflect and ultimately to take responsibility for people, events and things'. In the manner of gifts, this is not something that can be directly repaid. But it means that we should respond to works as living things, as subjects invoking and meriting a response, rather than objects exposed to the force of a disengaged critic. On all these grounds a key notion is *respect*: respect for the literary/political project, and respect for the sustained effort involved in the creation of the works contributing to it. Most critically, the nature of the gift asks us that we *receive*, and in receiving we *listen*, really *listen,* as we read.

Writing this thesis has been much like following a track bounded by two cliffs, whose shape is determined by the time of day, the direction in which one walks, the travellers one meets, the instructions carried in one's pack, and most important, the reading one does along the way. From the outset I sensed the complementarity between the artistic and the political as distinct fields of creative/committed energy, and I simply reiterate this in my conclusion. This fusion of my beginnings and ends is something that Bakhtin, the guide who has

been with me every step of the way, would undoubtedly have foreseen. So my severance from him now seems strange and unsettled. I search for a word and find it—unfinalized.

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