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Sex, Death and Nation in the *Strolls with Pushkin* Controversy

Stephanie Sandler

Anton Chekhov wrote a short story in 1886 called “Tina” or, in English, “Muck” that recounts the provincial seduction by a disreputable local woman of an upstanding young Russian man. She incarnates the story’s “muck” and, as a recent essay by Helena Tolstoy argues, her Jewishness anchors the vile character traits that Chekhov assigns her: she is greedy and dishonest, and she disrupts the lives of both this innocent man and his brother.¹ Professor Tolstoy persuasively situates this story in the context of Chekhov’s own conflicting sexual urges and his apparent anti-Semitism; but my interest is in the story’s typicality, not its specificity in Chekhov’s *oeuvre*. “Tina” dramatizes quite repulsively the sexualization of national difference; it makes Jewishness a site not only of fear but also of desire, where the “other” becomes a siren-like force who moves the plot and rivets the attention of both character and reader. Chekhov’s story alerts us (before we turn to a controversy nearly 100 years later involving Andrei Siniavskii’s book about Aleksandr Pushkin) to the deeply resonant associations for Russians between Jewishness and otherness and to the ways in which the danger that the “other” represents might emerge as a sexual danger. “Tina” also offers a lesson about gender arrangements: its heroine is desired by two brothers but, even though they compete for her, she also mediates their bond to each other. In the controversy about Siniavskii’s interpretation of Pushkin, I will also be asking how the woman, the other, the explicitly and dangerously sexual, facilitates a seemingly non-erotic, nation-defining drama between men.²

Such is not, perhaps, an obvious path into an essay about Andrei Siniavskii. When controversy has surrounded him, it has seemed to

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1. Helena Tolstoy, “From Susanna to Sarra: Chekhov in 1886–1887,” *Slavic Review* 50, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 590–600.

2. These sentences about nationalism and sexuality owe much to George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer and Patricia Yaeger, eds. *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1992); and, in the comments about gender and triangular desire, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). On the associations of Jewishness with sexual excess and bodily monstrosity, see Sander Gilman, *The Jew’s Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991). *Slavic Review* 51, no. 2 (Summer 1992)

focus on images of nationhood, not on images of sexuality. Writing as Abram Terts, Siniavskii first scandalized the Soviet elite in the 1960s with his Jewish, low-brow pseudonym and his revisionary opinions. As he was on trial for his anti-Soviet views, the newspapers attacked him with predictable rhetoric and vitriolic name-calling;³ and emigre critics reacted the same way when *Progulki s Pushkinym* (*Strolls With Pushkin*) appeared in 1975.⁴ Roman Gul' and later Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn attacked Siniavskii's originality, integrity and intelligence.⁵ Gul' insinuated that Siniavskii's release a year early from the labor camps was a KGB favor to one of its own and that the very fact that Siniavskii was able to write in the camps made him suspect.⁶ When a fragment of *Progulki s Pushkinym* was published in Moscow in 1989, the result was worse: criticism, defense and counter-attack that has continued ever since.⁷ Siniavskii was portrayed as hating Pushkin and Russian culture. The larger political implications were signaled by Igor' Shafarevich who included a bizarre footnote about Siniavskii in his infamous essay "Rusophobia"; in a piece written the same year, Shafarevich compared

3. The attacks on Siniavskii and Iulii Daniel' and some letters written in their defense can be read in a convenient volume, *Tsena metafory, ili prestuplenie i nakazanie Siniavskogo i Danielia* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Kniga": 1989), 16–56. This is the only publication to date of Siniavskii's writings in book form in Russia.

4. Siniavskii himself called attention to the similarity between these two stages in branding him an "enemy of the people"—first anti-Soviet, then anti-Russian. See Andrei Siniavskii, "Dissidentstvo kak lichnyi opyt," *Sintaksis*, no. 15 (1986): 131–47, esp. 146–47. The essay has been translated into English as "Dissent as a Personal Experience," tr. Maria-Regina Kecht, *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, no. 31 (1982): 21–29.

5. Gul' characterizes Abram Terts generally as an infectious disease, as less talented than Dmitrii Pisarev (from whom Gul' claims that Siniavskii plagiarized his title—compare Pisarev's 1865 "Progulka po sadam rossiiskoi slovesnosti"; one supposes that Gul' has not heard of such common antecedents as Rousseau's "Rêveries d'un Promeneur Solitaire" or the peripatetic teachings of Socrates). Solzhenitsyn writes with sarcasm and wit but his criticisms seem disproportionate and rather thick, particularly when he tediously "proves" that Pushkin's writings were rich in philosophical content despite Siniavskii's claim for their emptiness. See Roman Gul', "Progulki khama s Pushkinym," *Novyi zhurnal*, 124 (1976): 117–29; Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "... Koleblet tvoi trenozhnik," *Vestnik Russkogo Khristianskogo dvizheniia*, 142 (1984): 133–52.

6. The charge of collaboration or switching sides has continued to haunt writing about Siniavskii. This must be behind the pointed question about whether he served his full prison sentence in the interview conducted by Feliks Medvedev, "Besedy s Andreem Siniavskim i Mariei Rozanovoi o Pushkine, i ne tol'ko o nem," *Knizhnoe obozrenie*, no. 4 (26 January 1990): 8–9; see 8.

7. See "Progulki s Pushkinym. Fragment," *Oktiabr'*, no. 4 (1989): 192–99. The Moscow journal *Voprosy literatury* published the Pushkin book in full in the seventh, eighth and ninth "1990" issues of the journal that appeared late in 1991. For their forum on the book, see "Obsuzhdenie knigi Abrama Tertsia *Progulki s Pushkinym*," no. 10 (1990): 77–153. An excellent account of the journalistic and cultural battles occasioned by the publication of a fragment from *Progulki s Pushkinym* is in Catharine Theimer Nepomnyashchy, "Andrei Sinyavsky's 'Return' to the Soviet Union," *Formations* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 24–44. Gul's essay was partly reprinted by the right-wing *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, no. 26 (30 June 1989): 18–19. For a full listing of essays attacking the book, as well as those in Siniavskii's defense, see Nepomnyashchy.

Siniavskii's blasphemy to that of Salman Rushdie.⁸ Siniavskii responded vigorously to the fascist and anti-Semitic allegations of "Rusophobia" and of *Pamiat'* more generally. He and Mariia Vasil'evna Rozanova have spoken out on a topic that most others have passed over in silence—that Solzhenitsyn's views about Russia and salvation dangerously resemble those of *Pamiat'* and that Solzhenitsyn has not publicly disavowed Russian fascist nationalists nor has he criticized their appropriation of his work.⁹ Siniavskii's conviction that cultural and political tolerance are necessary conditions for free expression, as well as his forthright views of Solzhenitsyn, must be part of the reason for the scandal surrounding *Progulki s Pushkinym* and a reason that he remains one of the least published but most publicized émigré writers in the former Soviet Union.

All of this is familiar, it's what polemic in Russian culture is always about: who counts as Russian, who loves Russia, who merits Russia's hatred. I do not dispute it nor discount its importance. But in everything that follows, I want to offer a reading of the narrative of "us" and "them" that explains why Siniavskii and *Progulki s Pushkinym* are despised with such intensity.¹⁰ This reading focuses on metaphors of sex, death and nation as they appear in the book and in writings about it.

This has been a controversy about figurative language, as much as anything else, and thus my argument begins with the problem of the metaphor, specifically with the problem of sex and trope. Critics of *Progulki s Pushkinym* have treated its observations about sex with a mindless display of literalism that is disproportionate to the actual prominence of sexual themes in the book. In their furor, they have not made the obvious point that the sexual metaphors in *Progulki s Pushkinym* contribute fundamentally to Siniavskii's project of liberating Pushkin from the deadening myth of greatness. What reviewers do instead is to cite sentences out of context; their favorite is the following. "Na tonen'kikh eroticheskikh nozhkakh vbezhal Pushkin v bol'shuiu poeziu i proizvel perepolokh" (Pushkin ran into high poetry on thin erotic legs and produced a commotion).¹¹ Siniavskii's com-

8. Igor' Shafarevich, "Rusofobiia," *Nash sovremennik*, no. 6 (1989): 167–92; the reference to Siniavskii is on 185. For the comparison to Rushdie, see Shafarevich, "Fenomen emigratsii," *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, no. 36 (8 September 1989): 5.

9. See Andrei Siniavskii, "Russkii natsionalizm," *Sintaksis*, no. 26 (1989): 91–110; tr. Dale E. Peterson, "Russian Nationalism," *Massachusetts Review* 31, no. 4 (Winter 1990): 475–94. For the best known instance of Solzhenitsyn's statements against the liberal tolerance that Siniavskii represents, see Solzhenitsyn, "Nashi pluralisty," *Vestnik Russkogo Khristianskogo dvizheniia*, no. 139 (1983): 133–60; tr. into English as "Our Pluralists," *Journal of East and West Studies* 29, no. 2/125 (Summer 1985): 1–28. In "Nashi pluralisty," Solzhenitsyn repeats Gul's insinuation about Siniavskii's release from the labor camps having occurred early (150, Russian text).

10. I will be focusing on the Pushkin book, but it should be noted that Siniavskii's other writings since his emigration have drawn their share of public hostility. For a furious review of his Gogol' book, see R. Pletnev, "O zlom suemudrii knigi Abrama Tertsia," *Novyi zhurnal*, no. 121 (1975): 72–80.

11. Abram Terts, *Progulki s Pushkinym* (London: Overseas Publication Interchange, 1975), 17. Further citations from this book will be indicated in the text with page

ments about Pushkin's vampirism are a close second. The critics read what we must certainly take to be figurative language literally; as Siniavskii told two interviewers, literalization is the core of critics' misreading of his book.¹² In her response to the just-published Moscow roundtable about *Progulki s Pushkinym*, Mariia Vasil'evna Rozanova reiterates the point about figurative meaning,¹³ and one of Siniavskii's defenders, Viacheslav Vozdvizhenskii, has written that the Pushkin book is "charming" precisely because it does not yield to literal readings.¹⁴

All true enough, but the figures should not be effaced because they are not literal. My project is to read some of these figures, by which I mean that I will treat them as revealing in the critical texts a kind of unconscious that provides motivations for apparently disinterested claims, motivations that can help explain the causes of the Siniavskii/Pushkin scandal and perhaps its intense anger. The very figurality of Siniavskii's prose (in addition to the sexual language) has stirred resentment.¹⁵ His tropes are exaggerated and draw attention to the fact that they *are* figures. By writing with language that is so outlandishly metaphorical, Siniavskii has revealed the figurative thinking that is at work in all writing about Pushkin, if not all critical writing.¹⁶ Pushkin is no more the shining sun of Russian culture than he is its vampire.¹⁷

number references only. The translations throughout are my own unless otherwise indicated; in this case, the translation comes from Catharine Nepomnyashchy and Slava Yastremsky's translation in progress of *Strolls With Pushkin*, as cited in Nepomnyashchy, "Strolling with Abram Terts: Space, Time and Culture in *Strolls With Pushkin*," presented at the 1992 Amherst Siniavskii symposium.

12. See Siniavskii's interviews with T. Putrenko, "Pushkin—nash smeishchiiisia genii," *Literaturnaia gazeta* (8 August 1990): 7; and with Grigorii Nekhoroshev, "'Tam my shchitaemsia krasnymi . . .,'" *Knizhnoe obozrenie*, no. 2 (13 January 1989): 3.

13. M. Rozanova, "K istorii i geografii etoi knigi," *Voprosy literatury*, no. 10 (1990): 159–60. See also her comments in an interview she and Siniavskii did with Samuil Lur'e, "Abrashka Terts, professor iz Sorbonny," *Literator*, no. 20 (25) (1990): 4–5; see esp. 4.

14. Viacheslav Vozdvizhenskii, "Progulki s Shafarevichem i bez . . .," *Strana i mir*, no. 6 (1989): 166–71; see 167 on Siniavskii's preference for figurative and exaggerated expression.

15. Compare Siniavskii's comments that the most important and radical thing about his writing is its style. For example "Dissidentstvo kak lichnyi opyt," 132–33.

16. My argument here draws on Paul de Man's arguments about the philosophical tradition, specifically about Locke, Condillac and others (and his work draws on that of Jacques Derrida). See de Man, "The Epistemology of Metaphor," *On Metaphor*, ed. Sheldon Sacks (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 11–28. De Man's opening sentence gives some sense of how his argument informs my own: "Metaphors, tropes, and figural language in general have been a perennial problem and, at times, a recognized source of embarrassment for philosophical discourse and, by extension, for all discursive uses of language including historiography and literary analysis" (11); his essay discusses the "epistemological damage" that figural language potentially does to philosophy and how philosophy works to contain the damage.

17. Some of Siniavskii's most aggressive attackers have tried to vanquish the vampire with the shining sun, among them Evgenii Sergeev in "Obsuzhdenie knigi Abrama Terts," 85; a letter from multiple Leningrad authors published as "Antikul'tura" in *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, no. 39 (29 September 1989): 20. Others have resorted to reiterating Pushkin's "sainthood": Sergei Nebol'sin, "Obsuzhdenie knigi Abrama Terts,"

Progulki s Pushkinym concludes with an interpretation of Pushkin's death that also depends on a metaphor that proved disturbing, that of the theater. As Siniavskii retells it, Pushkin's death in a duel is not the tragic murder of an innocent victim (which has become paradigmatic since Lermontov's 1837 poem "Smert' poeta" ["Death of the Poet"]) but instead an elaborately theatricalized event where Pushkin played both a directorial and performing role:

It was even more impossible for Pushkin to depart from life quietly and unnoticeably, as he would have wished [. . .]. His photogenic person had already become the subject of gossip. Everyone knew with certainty what was going on from his very words—who, what, where, when—they were in the know and they anxiously awaited what would come next. "The people demand strong impressions, for them even an execution is a spectacle." He had to die in public, in full view. [. . .] The piece of gossip that took him to his grave was first put into motion by the poet. He was the one who organized it all this way, who set it up [. . .]. (164–65)

The metaphor of the theater has produced anxiety, as if Pushkin's death were interpreted by Siniavskii as art and thus not "real."¹⁸ More revealing, though, is the implication of the metaphor. If Pushkin created the setting for his death and thus exercised some agency in it, then this "theater" erodes a crucial idea in the Russian myth of Pushkin as martyr and in twentieth century Russian culture generally: there are those who do evil and those who are its victims, and these are two quite distinct groups. From all political positions, writers and thinkers have had a stake in this belief, including those who perpetrated Stalin's purges through ideas like "enemies of the people" and those who wrote in moving testimony against this lie (for example, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn). Siniavskii subverts this distinction elsewhere, perhaps most memorably in the end of *Spokoinoi nochii* (*Goodnight!*, 1984), when he tells the story of his entrapment as a collaborator of Soviet spies. The refusal to divide all the world into "us" and "them" follows from his political liberalism; but for many Russians, even some who think they share Siniavskii's liberalism, it is quite a shock to extend this thinking to an event like Pushkin's death.

Perhaps more shocking is the larger context for death imagery in Siniavskii's writing. Consider the opening of *V teni Gogolia* (*In Gogol's Shadow*, 1981):

117; the editors' statement in *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, no. 37 (15 September 1989): 16; V. Gusev, "Kraine ser'ezno," *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, no. 38 (22 September 1989): 8.

18. One critic, Dmitrii Urnov, called this the "scandalous posing of a serious question." See his comments in "Obsuzhdenie knigi Abrama Tertsia," 139. Siniavskii uses a similar analysis of the theatrical dimensions of a tragic situation in his essay about Stalin: "Stalin—geroi i khudozhnik stalinskoi epokhi," *Sintaksis*, no. 19 (1987): 106–25.

I walk back and forth and I ask: "You don't happen to know about Gogol's funeral, that is, how he was buried? When and how?" No one knows. Men of letters are few and far between here, there are no books about Gogol', and besides they don't usually write about this sort of thing in books. It all started when an old man remembered something he'd heard from someone and brought it up in conversation with me: was it true that Gogol' was buried alive, too soon, and that this was discovered later, practically in our own day, when they unsealed the grave. It is said that he was lying on his back.¹⁹

Subsequently, Siniavskii turns the factual question of whether Gogol' was actually dead when he was buried into a meditation on what the fear of being buried alive means in Gogol's writing. The metaphor of death, which Siniavskii foregrounds throughout *V teni Gogolia*, is again remarkable: the psychological and metaphysical probings in the book on Gogol' worry the boundary between being dead and being alive.

These probings have direct links to the approach to Pushkin in *Progulki s Pushkinym*, particularly in passages that were deemed sensational and provocative. *Progulki s Pushkinym* and *V teni Gogolia* are companion volumes and Gogol' walks with Pushkin and Abram Terts on those strolls.²⁰ The evidence for this claim is apparent in the passage just cited, where the first sentence repeats the walking motion that defines *Progulki s Pushkinym*.²¹ The absence of books and scholars here signals that the provenance of *V teni Gogolia* is also the labor camps.²² Gogol's presence in *Progulki s Pushkinym* is also noteworthy: the hero of Gogol's play *Revizor* (*The Inspector General*, 1834) is frequently com-

19. Abram Terts, *V teni Gogolia* (Paris: "Sintaksis," 1981), 7.

20. Compare the argument of Grigorii Pomerants that *V teni Gogolia*, *Progulki s Pushkinym* and *Golos iz khora* (*A Voice from the Chorus*, 1973) form a trilogy. He makes this point in "Strastnaia odnostoronnost' i besstrastie dukha. Stat'ia pervaiia," *Strana i mir*, no. 1 (1984): 101–14, esp. 106. In a revised version, this essay appeared as "Diaspora i Abrashka Terts," *Iskusstvo kino*, no. 2 (1990): 20–26. A different trilogy (the books on Pushkin, Gogol', and Rozanov) was suggested by Sara W. Fenander's presentation at the 1991 AATSEEL meetings, "The Rozanov Line of Terts/Siniavskii's Literary Genealogy."

21. The restless pacing motion is also used strikingly to characterize *Golos iz khora* (London: Stenvalley Press, 1973), again in the very beginning of the book, its epigraph (7). While *Golos iz khora* is also a kind of companion to the book on Pushkin, composed as it was from letters from the camp and formally exaggerating the structure of *Progulki s Pushkinym*, my own sense is that the link between the books on Pushkin and Gogol' is more complex and more telling. The beginning of the latter picks up on the ending of the former. This linkage suggests their continuity but Siniavskii further plays on the possible reversals between endings and beginnings in *V teni Gogolia*. Thus the first chapter is called an epilogue, the last entitled "The Dead Are Risen: Forward—To the Sources" ("Mertvye voskresaiut. Vpered—k istokam!").

22. *V teni Gogolia* was, of course, completed after Siniavskii's release. But the question of whether *Progulki s Pushkinym* was actually written in the camps has recurred in attacks on the book since the first insinuations among emigre writers. See the trenchant response of M. Rozanova, "K istorii i geografii etoi knigi," 155–56.

pared to Pushkin's characters who are pretenders.²³ Siniavskii in effect suggests that Pushkin—Russia's light-filled, clear, harmonious national genius—deeply resembles Gogol'—that darker, murkier, more disturbing alternative. His version of the Pushkin canon centers on works like *Boris Godunov* (1825) and *Kamennyi gost'* (*The Stone Guest*, 1830) and he stresses the frightening or grotesque side of *Eugenii Onegin* (*Eugene Onegin*, 1823–1831). To be sure, he often suggests stark differences between Gogol' and Pushkin²⁴ but even in these moments the effect is to make one the measure of the other. It's one thing to let Pushkin be the standard for Gogol' but Siniavskii (in a typical reversal and paradox) does the opposite as well. In the chapter on *Revizor* in *V teni Gogolia*, he asks whether Gogol's work is fundamentally tragic or comic; in *Progulki s Pushkinym*, he suggests a similar juxtaposition by writing about how jolly things become in Pushkin's texts whenever there are corpses around. How Gogolian, we should think.

Asking whether Gogol' was alive in his coffin lets Siniavskii raise a ghoulish possibility: Gogol', we're invited to imagine, might have pushed open the coffin lid and returned to walk among the living. When Siniavskii notes Pushkin's apparent pleasure in describing "unburied bodies" (67), he offers the inverse of the Gogol' fantasy: not a live body returning from its grave but a dead body lying around among the living. Even sympathetic critics like Leonid Batkin have found this claim about Pushkin's writings to be shocking and false.²⁵ Certainly, Siniavskii meant to shock: dead bodies don't just energize Pushkin's fiction and drama, he writes, they are a necessary sustenance of Pushkin's own body and soul. He compares Pushkin's creative energies to those of Don Juan, both suck life from their victims just like a vampire:

[...] passion turned Juan into an angel and Pushkin into Pushkinian creation. But don't get too carried away here: before us stands a vampire.

This heightened capacity to absorb concealed something vampirical. That's why the Pushkinian image is so glossy with eternal youth, with fresh blood, with high color. That's why the present moment is made manifest in his work with unheard-of force: all the fullness of existence went into the moment of transfusing the blood of chance victims into the empty shell of one who in essence wasn't anyone, remembered nothing, loved no one, and only as he filled with blood, said instantaneously, before he fell away: 'You are beauty! (You are full of blood!) Stay!' (66)

One predictable objection to this passage has involved taking it literally, as if an adequate response would be that Aleksandr Pushkin was not, in fact, a vampire. Others have tried, instead, to paraphrase Sin-

23. See Gul', "Progulki khama s Pushkinym," 124–25, for the assertion that it is "Terts," not Pushkin, who resembles Khlestakov.

24. For example, in arguing how differently their egos worked, 64–65.

25. Leonid Batkin, "Siniavskii, Pushkin—i my," *Oktiabr'*, no. 1 (1991): 177.

iavskii's argument, avoiding the metaphor as much as possible. This tack, it should be said, once again calls up the specter of Gogol', at least it should, since Gogol' noted in a well-known passage from *Vybrannye mesta iz perepiski s druž'iami* (*Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends*, 1847) that Pushkin's presentation of self is devoid of any actual self.²⁶ But nothing so interesting in fact has happened in the Siniavskii controversy.²⁷ Vladimir Vozdvizhenskii, a sympathetic critic, glossed the vampire passage this way:

"Emptiness" or "vampirism" are just metaphors for conveying paradoxically, provocatively, exaggeratedly that Pushkin was unusually able to place all the fullness of existence into himself, into his lines of verse. Still alive, with flesh and blood, the people he met, the phenomena, events and things around him were drawn into his artistic world.

When he adds that Pushkin asserts "the fullness of existence precisely because he senses so sharply its fleetingness, he recognizes that all living things are consigned to perish,"²⁸ I think that Vozdvizhenskii has brought us so close to the clichés of humanistic criticism that he loses the force of any insight Siniavskii's metaphor might have contained.²⁹ The metaphor has been rendered innocuous, the vampire has lost its bite.³⁰

To understand why critics have worked hard to eliminate the vampire metaphor, we might ask what is so objectionable about the trope of vampirism? One anthropologically inclined argument has it that the vampire emerges in folklore as a way for cultures to reflect over the physiological processes of death, to establish narratives about what happens to dead people and, I would add, what happens after death to human desires for nourishment and for connection to others.³¹ This point might be useful in reading Siniavskii's vampire metaphor: it

26. Gogol' writes: "It was only Pushkin's lot to manifest in himself this independent sense of being, this resonant echo that responds to every single sound in the air. When we think of any poet, we get some sort of idea of what his sense of self is like. [. . .] Only Pushkin has nothing of the kind. What can you grasp about Pushkin himself in his writings? Try to catch hold of his disposition as a person! In its stead the same wonderful image appears, an image responsive to everything except itself." Cited from N. V. Gogol', *Sobranie sochinenii*, 7 vols. (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1986), 6: 333-34.

27. In fact, a recent essay about Pushkin did make this comparison by way of introduction: L. Rassovskaia and S. Agranovich, "Vokrug Pushkina," *Oktiabr'*, no. 6 (1990): 189-96, comparison on 189.

28. Vozdvizhenskii, "Progulki s Shafarevichem i bez . . .," 169.

29. Compare M. Rozanova's literalizing paraphrase of the passage on erotic legs in "Abrashka Terts, professor iz Sorbonny," 4.

30. When Vozdvizhenskii cited these lines, he showed his discomfort with the image in adding that he had no idea what it meant and he introduced the quotation as an example of Siniavskii writing the impermissible ("nepozvolitel'nye veshchi"). See Vozdvizhenskii, "Progulki s Shafarevichem i bez . . .," 168.

31. I am adding a bit to the intriguing argument found in Paul Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death: Folklore and Reality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

recalls his interrogation of Gogol's death and it echoes his treatment of dead bodies in Pushkin as catalysts, thus animators of the action. But these insights have not been brought into the controversy over *Progulki s Pushkinym*; to understand why it centered on the vampire metaphor, we need to consider another aspect of the cultural history of vampires.

Using a similarly anthropological but also rigorously linguistic approach, the Slavist Jan Perkowski has argued that the vampire becomes a receptacle for all that a culture imagines as evil. He has meticulously traced the origins of the vampire myth to specifically Slavic cultures (note the Russian *vampir*, *upyr*).³² Not only is the word Slavic, but Pushkin's writings contribute to the vampire vocabulary (his word is *vur-dalak*).³³ These etymologies may provide an insight into why this metaphor so enraged Siniavskii's critics: he hit a vein, so to speak, in his nationalist critics. He associated Pushkin not just with the specific behavior of a vampire (parasitically imbibing nourishment and life itself from another) but with all the evil a vampire symbolizes. And because the myth has Slavic roots and links to Pushkin himself, it is all the harder to cast it out as foreign, western, other. Siniavskii chooses a different "other" from the Jew chosen by Chekhov in the story with which I began. And his relation to that "other" is different. Chekhov published his story in a notorious anti-Semitic newspaper during a time of pogroms and brought out every stereotype of the Jew as foul-smelling, sexually rapacious, dishonest and avaricious. Siniavskii, by comparison, makes the "other," the vampire, attractive.

Critics of *Progulki s Pushkinym* might have attacked the vampire metaphor by rethinking its meaning—by resisting the association of the figure of the vampire with an ultimate and terrifying evil. What they did instead was to relocate the evil in Siniavskii himself: they attacked him as an all-engulfing incarnation of dark and virtually unrepresentable evil. Solzhenitsyn's essay thus reaches the highest pitch and its most dense metaphorical mix when it introduces the moment of the bite.

This strange . . . let's call it an essay, I would label "the gnawing worm" as the most accurate way to describe its moves. It has no substantive structure, it is precisely structured to begin from a sweet spot, then gnaw its way through the labyrinth through the sweet pulpiness and where there are hard little bones that won't go past its [toothless] jaws, it skips them. The critic offers us neither inductive nor deductive method, he leads us along deliberately tangled winding paths.³⁴

32. Jan L. Perkowski, *The Darkling: A Treatise on Slavic Vampirism* (Columbus, OH: Slavica, 1989), esp. 18–36.

33. Pushkin's *Pesni zapadnykh slavian* (*Songs of the Western Slavs*, 1834) translates and transforms a vampire tale—no. 13, "Vurdalak"; Pushkin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 10 vols. (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1977–1979), 3: 282–83. For the Russian folktale version of a vampire tale, see "Upyr'," in *Biblioteka russkogo fol'klora, Skazki*, (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1989), 2: 421–24.

34. Solzhenitsyn, "... Koleblet tvoi trenochnik," 137.

The image of a serpentine shape biting through a labyrinth, a labyrinth with a soft starting point that gives way to sweet softness until the biting worm comes to a hard little bone that won't go down its throat—this is a remarkably sexual passage of writing, not typical of Solzhenitsyn's style. I will consider the implications of these sexual metaphors in a moment, but we might first note that Solzhenitsyn attributes the evil of the bite to the “critic” who seeks to lead us all astray. I think Solzhenitsyn's essay is actually an attempt to rescue Pushkin from the deadly bite of Siniavskii: as Valentin Nepomniashchii boldly asserted, the vampire in *Progulki s Pushkinym* isn't Pushkin, it's Siniavskii.³⁵ Given the logic of vampire kisses spreading the contagion of vampirism,³⁶ the proliferation of vampires should come as no surprise, but I think that Solzhenitsyn gets drawn into the labyrinth (his metaphor) himself; perhaps he finds it as pleasurable as the “victims” in any number of Dracula films who anxiously wait to be vamped.

One could find evidence of the same contamination by association in another passage where Solzhenitsyn's topic is, not surprisingly, the logic of association. “I kak zhe stykaetsia khod s khodom? Po asso-tsiatsiiam, chasto iskusstvennym, khotia iskusnym, pereskoki s siuzheta na siuzhet” (And how are the moves joined one to another? By association, often artificially if artfully, jumping from one topic to another).³⁷ Here he criticizes Siniavskii for using associative logic—a description with which one might not disagree but to whose negative connotations one might object.³⁸ Solzhenitsyn's own prose, in any case, equally obeys the rules of associative logic: *iskusstvennym* leads him to *iskusnym* and the *kus* sound leads him in the next paragraph to the bite of the vampire (in the biting through the labyrinth passage). The vampire bite has drawn (perhaps pleasurable) blood from Solzhenitsyn's own writing hand; he's been infected by the contagious ideas he's trying to contain. Certainly that would explain why his own writing grows richer as he plays with the vampire imagery. He finally produces the bizarre image of “the burst of the vampire bubble” (*lopnul vurdalachnyi puzyr'*) at the climax of his argument.³⁹ The only bubble that has really

35. “Obsuzhdenie knigi Abrama Tertsa,” 150.

36. Note the representation of sexual danger as contagion and thus as disease in the comments of Roman Gul' (see footnote 5 above); in Iurii Davydov's contribution to “Obsuzhdenie knigi Abrama Tertsa,” 135–37; compare Nepomniashchii's contribution to “Obsuzhdenie knigi Abrama Tertsa,” 144–45, where he uses metaphors of filth and dirt.

37. Solzhenitsyn, “... Koleblet tvoi trenochnik,” 137.

38. In his recent study of Russian folk culture, Siniavskii writes eloquently of the power of associative logic (he calls it *sviazyvanie*) in the *skazka*, drawing examples from both the language of *skazki*, where verbal repetitions and transformations can motivate the plot and the images of the tales, including bridges, roads and weaving. Siniavskii locates the aesthetic pleasure of the tales in part in these connections and linkages. See A. Siniavskii, *Ivan-durak: Ocherk russkoi narodnoi very* (Paris: “Sintaksis,” 1991), 89–100.

39. It may be relevant here that camp slang includes provocations with decidedly homosexual implications using imagery of blowing, bursting, etc. See Vladimir Ko-

burst here is probably the illusion of Solzhenitsyn's distance from the writing and thinking that he disdains in Siniavskii. Instead of rescuing Pushkin from the clutches of a monster, he has resorted to imitating the vampire's style (which, according to Siniavskii, is the only measure of dissidence).

I am hardly the first to see how sexual a trope the vampire can be. Theorists working from the perspectives of feminism and gay studies have identified vampires as figures for forbidden sexual acts;⁴⁰ Christopher Craft has read Bram Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula* as instantiating "anxiety over the potential fluidity of gender roles" as well as resembling many other "late Victorian accounts of same sex eroticism."⁴¹ *Progulki s Pushkinym*, I suggest, sparked both these currents of nervousness in his critics; in part, the response is not just to this one book, but also to Siniavskii more generally. One can argue that, from the beginning of his career, Siniavskii has written about sexuality with the same freedom and spirited playfulness with which he writes about everything else. His views of sexual difference make it just another distinction to be subverted, another straight line waiting to be bent; and the erotic freedom of his characters' desires is notable. In his early stories of fantastic realism like "Ty i ia" ("You and I," 1959) or "Pkhents" (1966), and in *Golos iz khora* (*A Voice from the Chorus*, 1973) erotic desire is not repressed or judged, as is suggested by one critic who sees in Terts's work a general revulsion at the body.⁴² She misreads, I think, the exaggerations and fragmentations of Siniavskii's representations of the body, and sees these apparently negative images as requiring a negation of erotic and other desire. His perceptions about how desire works are in fact as remarkable as those of Gogol' and Dostoevskii, to whose heroes his own are often compared. Siniavskii's heroes' desires are not stripped of their violent, terrifying aspects,

zlovskii, *Argo russkoi gomoseksual'noi subkul'tury* (New York: Chalidze, 1986), 98. Kozlovskii defines one other term that may explain the imagery of Solzhenitsyn's "labyrinth" passage: he gives *kostochka* as another term for male member (51). I comment below on how homophobic taunts are used in the *Progulki s Pushkinym* controversy.

40. See, for example, Ellis Hanson, "Undead," *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), 324–40, who notes the frequent appearance of the vampire in writing about AIDS; and Sue-Ellen Case, "Tracking the Vampire," *Differences* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 1–20 for a meditation on lesbian subjectivity and a desire that is imagined as wounding. Christopher Craft takes as his premise that "vampirism both expresses and distorts an originally sexual energy," it represents desire "under the defensive mask of monstrosity"; he cites a formulation that seems especially relevant to Solzhenitsyn—"the identity of desire and fear." See Christopher Craft, "'Kiss Me with Those Red Lips': Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," *Speaking of Gender*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Routledge, 1989), 216; Craft cites Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders* (London: Verso, 1983), 100.

41. Craft, "'Kiss Me with Those Red Lips,'" 220.

42. See Margaret Dalton, *Andrei Siniavskii and Julii Daniel': Two Soviet 'Heretical' Writers* (Würzburg: Jal-Verlag, 1973), 130–31. Dalton offers acute observations about the modernist body represented in "Pkhents" and links them to Siniavskii's knowledge of modern art (95), but this point is subsequently lost.

nor are they despised by their creator. He suffers little discomfort from difference and instead has a tendency to see a bit of himself in whatever seems different. Siniavskii's general identification as a dissenter, as one who defines himself as marginalized, other, pushed to the side, extends far enough for him to use a trope like the vampire without separating himself from it in hatred and fear. The vampire is not a figure of all-encompassing evil for Siniavskii, nor do we find in his writings the condemnation of "deviant" desires for which the vampire was a figure so often in nineteenth and twentieth century western culture.

Perhaps it is to be expected that, as a result, the label "deviant" would be attached to Siniavskii himself. I have suggested above that that is Solzhenitsyn's implicit suggestion and the explicit claim of others. This sort of attack is, alas, not new. As early as the 1960s, he and Iulii Daniel' were described as sexual deviants: "Both rummage around in sexual and psycho-pathological 'problems' with sick voluptuousness. Both demonstrate extreme moral downfall. Both splash out onto the page the vilest, the filthiest things."⁴³ In this article called "Perevertyshi" (which we might translate as "The Changelings") is an image not only of the traitor, the one who turns against (compare the English "turncoat"), but also of one who is twisted, perverted (compare the English "invert," a preferred nineteenth century term for homosexual). Like the passages quoted from Solzhenitsyn, these words ring out as a sexual taunt.⁴⁴

As a final way to explain what Siniavskii did in *Progulki s Pushkinym* to merit this taunt, I return to the other quotation that enraged his critics: "Pushkin ran into high poetry on thin erotic legs and produced a commotion." Here, Siniavskii feminizes Pushkin. When Pushkin runs charmingly onto the scene of Russian literature and turns everything upside down, Siniavskii echoes the memorable entrance of Natasha Rostova in *Voina i mir* (*War and Peace*, 1863-1866). Siniavskii has committed one transgression by implying a resemblance between Russia's great national poet and one of its most richly symbolic cultural heroines (symbolic, I stress, because of her "feminine" traits, from girlish

43. Dmitrii Eremin, "Perevertyshi," *Izvestiia* (13 January 1966), reprinted in *Tsena metafory*, 22.

44. The example of homophobic language in the controversy over *Progulki s Pushkinym* deserves further study in the fuller context of representations of homosexuality in Russian culture. I have given examples from two cultural contexts that one would otherwise presume to be different: in "Perevertyshi" the context is official, Soviet and backed by legal sanctions that made (and make) male homosexual acts illegal; in the Solzhenitsyn quotations, the context is presumably a conversation among dissident activists, but also the labor camps (see footnote 39 above) where "being queer" is one of the sharpest insults aimed by prisoners at each other. (For political prisoners, the charge of being complicit with the authorities would also be powerfully insulting and it, too, is used by Solzhenitsyn and others in their attacks on Siniavskii, as discussed above.) On the disdainful attitudes of some former political prisoners toward homosexuality, see Kozlovskii, *Argo russkoi gomoseksual'noi subkul'tury*, 110.

innocence to fierce motherhood); but perhaps a still more disturbing violation of gender norms occurs when those little feet that Pushkin's male narrator praised in *Eugenii Onegin* suddenly attach themselves to Pushkin's own legs.

Is it a coincidence that the first attack on Siniavskii focused on another description of women's legs? Also from the newspaper article "Perevertyshi," the attack quoted Siniavskii's own words as if they were damning enough: "You see women walking along the streets, looking like eunuchs—waddling like pregnant dachshunds or as scrawny as ostriches, with swollen bodies, varicose veins, padded breasts or tight stays hidden under their clothes."⁴⁵ These sentences were misread by journalists according to the same logic by which lawyers attacked Siniavskii at his trial with evidence from his fictional writings. The description of women as castrated men, with dachshund-like legs and cotton-waddling stuffed into their clothing to replicate breasts, comes from a vain and manipulating woman, Marina, not Siniavskii himself (or even "Terts"). The passage is remarkable, however, in its revelation that even Marina has no use for the masquerade of femininity as costume. A fairly unsentimental scene ensues in which Marina looks at herself in the mirror, naked, and positions her body so that her husband watching her through the slit in the door can see her fully. In this brilliant bit of description Siniavskii exposes femininity as mask and masquerade, and exposes masculine desire as a glance staged by women. Siniavskii's representations of gender difference deserve more study, to be sure, but I would provisionally suggest that, just as he refuses to reiterate the view of Russians who hate erotic and national others, he does not unthinkingly re-enact their misogyny. He might exaggerate and call attention to the common habit of ridiculing of women's bodies, as in the passage just quoted or in the well known description in "Pkhents," but such exaggerations serve the same subversive purposes that abound in Siniavskii's prose.⁴⁶

To return to *Progulki s Pushkinym*, I would note that the little feet, and the larger implication about gender roles, were indeed read as if they were subversive. That they disturbed Solzhenitsyn is apparent from the way he repeatedly derides Siniavskii's prose as "dancing"

45. Cited from Eremin, "Perevertyshi," in *Tsena metafor*, 22. The passage comes from Siniavskii's "Sud idet," also reprinted in *Tsena metafor*, 288. The English translation is from Abram Tertz [Andrei Sinyavsky], *The Trial Begins and On Socialist Realism*, tr. George Dennis (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 25.

46. This is quite the opposite of what is argued by Margaret Dalton who reads Siniavskii's characters' views as his own. In *Andrei Siniavskii and Julii Daniel*, Dalton also notes the "absence of convincing, three-dimensional, sympathetic feminine characters in his fiction" (131). Her judgment requires an inappropriate realism in the psychology of characters in Siniavskii's fantastic tales and makes it seem as if the only feminist judgments to be made are those of locating "positive" or "negative" women characters.

through its argument.⁴⁷ A typical and telling instance of his derision is the following: "This sequence of moves does not in fact pretend to harmoniousness, it even avoids it; this is a well thought-out dance around Pushkin that does not penetrate to his core; a part of the *pas* [step] is an accurate imitation, with all the essential signs, and a part of it is just an empty skip."⁴⁸ Siniavskii's argument, Solzhenitsyn says, can't penetrate to Pushkin's core, it's a pointed imitation, an empty dance. These are metaphors long used to trivialize the feminine, in particular to demean women's sexuality. The emptiness that Siniavskii attributes to Pushkin in the vampire passages, much commented on by his detractors, in a sense comes back to haunt criticisms of the metaphor of Pushkin's slender little feet. Both subvert gender norms that associate the powerful male with fullness and presence, the lesser female with emptiness and lack.⁴⁹ When Siniavskii associates Pushkin with emptiness, in other words, he is presenting yet another metaphor that produces anxieties about gender hierarchy.⁵⁰ But the inability to penetrate mentioned by Solzhenitsyn is an insulting provocation meant to suggest male inadequacy as well.

Fears of difference have been appropriated in the *Progulki s Pushkinym* scandal to ridicule a writer perceived as deviant. In the same way, the absence of pieties about Pushkin's death has drawn shocked condemnation from Siniavskii's readers. Enforcement of standard views is typical fare in Pushkin controversies, probably more generally in twentieth century Russian culture, too. The reception of *Progulki s Pushkinym* marks an extreme and thus more telling instance of this cultural habit: by treating the book as scandalous, the critical reception itself became a scandal.⁵¹ Those who have brought shame on themselves, I

47. By the end of the essay Solzhenitsyn has come up with a dance form more acceptable to his image of Pushkin, not surprisingly the traditional Slavic round dance known as the "khorovod."

48. Solzhenitsyn, "... Koleblet tvoi trenozhnik," 136.

49. These metaphors have been studied well by feminist theorists who have read Freud's essay on "Femininity" critically; see, for example, Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, tr. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 112–29.

50. While I know of no essays about gender written by the actual authors of attacks against Siniavskii, there are vivid writings by similarly-minded conservative, nationalist thinkers. See, for example, Valentin Rasputin, "Cherchez la femme," *Nash sovremennik*, no. 3 (1990): 168–72; and, in the same issue, Tat'iana Okulova, "Nam dobrye zheny i dobrye materi nuzhny . . . : Razmyshleniia o zhenshchine i zhenskoi teme v sovremennoi masskul'ture," 173–87, for a more pointed linkage between patriotic nationalism and conservative views about gender.

51. See the intelligent comments about this scandal by Petr Vail' and Aleksandr Genis in "Obsuzhdenie knigi Abrama Tertsia," 124. I am also sympathetic to the observations of Natal'ia Popova about the paucity of Pushkin scholars and Pushkin scholarship in Russia, despite all appearances to the contrary, in "Gall'skii petukh i rusofobiia," *Knizhnoe obozrenie*, no. 46 (17 November 1989): 16.

suggest, are those who have distorted Siniavskii's views, questioned his love for Russia and displaced all serious, productive conversation about Siniavskii's work and the place of *Progulki s Pushkinym* in his work. The real scandal of the reception of *Progulki s Pushkinym* is the paucity of productive, creative, useful commentary about it.⁵² We have yet to take up the challenge of *Progulki s Pushkinym*: how it rethinks the clichés of the Pushkin cult, invents a new language for reading Pushkin and transforms what has become a nearly predictable topic of Russian literary criticism into a source of surprise and pleasure.

52. An exception is Catharine Nepomnyashchy, "Strolling with Abram Tertz." See also one of the first published pieces on *Progulki s Pushkinym*: Natal'ia Rubinshtein, "Abram Terts i Aleksandr Pushkin," *Vremia i my*, no. 9 (June 1976): 118–33.