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Forging a New Russian Hero: Post-Soviet Science Fiction and Its Moral Objectives

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Forging a New Russian Hero: Post-Soviet Science Fiction and Its Moral Objectives

Elena Mironciuc

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Notes on Transliteration

Throughout my thesis I transliterated Russian names and titles using the Library of Congress System for Transliteration without diacritic marks. However, sometimes the writers chose to spell their names in a different manner (not according to the Library of Congress System). I made a decision to use their self-selected ways of spelling because they were also most popular and widespread. For example, instead of D'iachenko and Luk'ianenko I used Dyachenko and Lukyanenko.

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Introduction

In choosing my unorthodox thesis topic I have no one to blame but myself. My fascination with Russian science fiction began when I was twelve, sneaking my father's leisure reading into my room. At the time, the novels read just as extremely well told stories. They ignited my imagination and made me want to read more. Years later, in conversations with other students or my parents, I realized that I not only remember these novels as if I had read them only yesterday, but also that I have opinions very similar to those propagated by the writers. So the novels I have read as a teenager remained with me through my high school and college years in the United States. Most of those fervent opinions of mine regarded morality, and some — the Russian national past and present. For example, my opinions of the Soviet Union differed very strongly from those of my American professors. I started to wonder how much these novels contributed to my perceptions and whether I was the only one influenced this way.

Armed with literary analysis tools I did not have as a teenager, I went back to those novels. Indeed, I discovered the seeds of my present-day beliefs in those novels. But for the purposes of this thesis, I wanted to look at the devices employed by the writers in an objective way, the way I have studied Russian classics. In addition, one of my goals was to bring literary analysis to bear on these works, widely regarded as entertainment literature only.

But before we dive into these texts, we should familiarize ourselves with the biographies of the writers discussed here. This information will provide invaluable context for their literary works: for example, a major part of my discussion will

refer to the Soviet Union, a time and place where the writers grew up. The sources of the biographical information here are the writers' websites both in English and Russian.

Sergei Lukyanenko was born on April 11th 1968 in Karatau, Kazakhstan, then part of the Soviet Union. His mother was Tatar and his father was Russian-Ukrainian. Later Sergei moved to Alma-Ata and entered Alma-Ata State Medical Institute in 1986 with a major in psychotherapy. After graduating in 1992, he worked in a local hospital but soon abandoned his practice as already poor physician wages plummeted with the fall of the USSR. In 1993 he was appointed as a deputy editor at a local science fiction magazine where he worked until 1996. This period was very challenging for him and his family in terms of finances.

In early 1990s he met his future wife, Sonya, who was a fellow psychologist. She has a Ph. D. in child psychology and was a professor at Russian State University for the Humanities until 2003. Sergei and Sonya have two sons: Artem and Daniil. The entire family currently resides in Moscow.

Sergei Dyachenko was born in Kiev, Ukraine, in 1945. For some time he worked as a scientist and psychiatrist, but later shifted his attention to film. In 1980 he graduated from famous Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography (VGIK) with a degree in screenwriting. In 1983 he became a member of Soviet Union of Writers and in 1987 he joined Soviet Union of Cinematography.

Marina Dyachenko (Shirshova) was born in Kiev in 1968. In 1989 Marina graduated from Kiev Theatre Institute and worked as an actress on stage as well as on screen. In 1998 she joined Ukrainian Union of Writers.

Marina and Sergei were married in 1993 and ever since they write as co-authors. They have a daughter Anastasia.

Chapter One: Sergei Lukyanenko

It is difficult to discuss Russian science fiction of the 1990s up to the present without looking at the great “fathers” of this genre. Arkadii and Boris Strugatsky are essential to our analysis for two main reasons. First, they were two of the first (of the relatively few) writers to “win serious critical credentials”¹ for science fiction. Both in the West and in the USSR, science fiction was regarded as a form of entertainment with little cultural merit.² Unfortunately, this opinion is still prevalent today, and it is one of the factors that prompted my own investigation into the role, objectives, and influence of science fiction by living contemporary writers such as Sergei Lukyanenko, and Marina and Sergei Dyachenko.³

The second, and even more important, reason to look back at the Strugatskys' novels is their influence on generations of Russians. Men and women raised on their works were inspired and challenged by these writers' vision of the future and of technology. According to Vyacheslav Ivanov, their writings even fired the imaginations of Soviet scientists.⁴ The works of Lukyanenko and the Dyachenkos have had a similar degree of influence on teens and adults in modern Russian-speaking territories of the former USSR, Israel, and even the United States. One telling example of more modern literary foresight would be Lukyanenko's trilogy *Labirint otrazhenii*. This series of books is set in *Glubina*, a cyber-world which allows

¹ John Givens, “The Strugatsky Brothers and Russian Science Fiction,” *Russian Studies in Literature*, vol. 47, no. 4, Fall 2011, pp. 3–6.

² John Givens, “The Strugatsky Brothers and Russian Science Fiction,” p. 3-4

³ Here and further on, Russian letter «я» will be transliterated into English as “ya”

⁴ Vyacheslav Vsevolodovich Ivanov, “The Lessons of the Strugatskys,” *Russian Studies in Literature*, vol. 47, no. 4, Fall 2011, pp. 7–30.

anyone with a simple computer to join and perceive the 3D image on the screen as if it were real. This cyber world becomes home for many people who cannot exercise their freedoms and desires in the real world. However, *Glubina* is also highly addictive to the point that people die of starvation and dehydration while plugged in =to their computers, oblivious to the fact that the water and food they are consuming are merely a cluster of pixels on a screen. Lukyanenko typed the first book of this trilogy about what is essentially the Internet on a typewriter:

...когда я писал "Лабиринт отражений" я вообще не знал, что такое "Интернет". Сейчас я это знаю... Я знал, что такое компьютер, что такое FIDO, но об "Интернет" я никакого представления не имел абсолютно. И когда сам оказался в "Интернет", то после этого только понял, что очень многие вещи я радостно придумывал, и они имеют какое-то свое четкое подтверждение в реально существующей жизни.⁵

Labirint Otrazhenii was published in 1997, several years before personal computers became widespread in Russia and across the globe, and the Internet became the ubiquitous method of communication and commerce.

While Lukyanenko might be continuing the tradition of the Soviet and international science fiction writers' augury, his books differ from those of his predecessors in the genre in other ways. The most obvious difference is Lukyanenko's clear preference for the Russia of the past versus the present-day Russia and its deteriorating conditions. As a man, he feels strongly patriotic. As a writer, he almost proselytizes to his audience. In addition, Lukyanenko has a special interest in alternative history. Alternative history became a genre on its own right, and almost always a novel in this genre takes a particular historical event, for

⁵ Встреча читателей с Сергеем Лукьяненко в фирменном магазине издательства АСТ 28 мая 1998 года. Transcribed by M. Goncharenko, A. Christophor, A. Korshikov.
<http://www.rusf.ru/lukian/interv/index.htm>

example the first assassination attempt against Hitler, and tells readers that it was in fact successful. The repercussions of this successful attempt, big and small, are then identified and examined by the writer, allowing him to speculate about how the present we know would be different. But in the *Night Watch* series, Lukyanenko does not alter the history that we all know—instead, he offers a different, fantastical explanation for what happened. In the example above, Lukyanenko, rather than bending the historical truth, would explain the failure to assassinate Hitler the first time by some magic that was protecting the German dictator.

Given Lukyanenko's strong bias about present Russia, I suggest that while some of the Lukyanenko's works were translated into English, German, and many other languages, these novels are simply a novelty for non-Russian speakers, exciting and engaging stories without deep political context. Knowledge of the Russian or Soviet cultural context is essential to uncovering the layers of didactic moral philosophy in which these writers' novels are steeped.

This is especially true of Sergei Lukyanenko's tetralogy: *The Night Watch* (*Nochnoi dozor*), *The Day Watch* (*Dnevnoi dozor*), *The Twilight Watch* (*Sumerechnyi dozor*), and *The Last Watch* (*Poslednii dozor*). The narrative begins in Moscow in the 1990s and continues into the 2000s. The protagonist of the story, Anton Gorodetskii, is one of the Others (*Inye*), or people who can manipulate energy emanated from "regular" people. This means that Anton and the Others can cast spells, "spoil"⁶ humans or objects, and cure terminal illnesses. The Others also have access to the Twilight world (*Sumrak*), a different layer of reality inaccessible to

⁶ Cause damage, curse, inflict injury or bad luck

“regular” people. In the Russian literary tradition of dichotomies (*Crime and Punishment, War and Peace*) there are only two types of Others: *Svetlye* and *Temnye*, Light and Dark. The first time an *Inoï* enters *Sumrak* determines whether he will be *Svetlyï* (Light) or *Temnyï* (Dark) *Inoï*. The two kinds of Others are locked in eternal struggle. The division between these opposing forces seems simple: *Svetlye Inye* — magicians, wizards, and healers—are the positive characters, while *Temnye Inye* — vampires, werewolves, and witches—are the villains.

However, as the narrative progresses, the reader sees how the dividing line between good and evil is blurred by both parties. Light Others plot and scheme to advance Svetlana from a weak enchantress (*volshebnitsa*) to the top of the magical rankings by putting Anton, her husband, in a life-threatening situation.⁷ Alisa Donnikova, a witch from *Day Watch*, falls in love and sacrifices her life, even though this goes against everything she believes in and stands for.⁸ These out-of-character actions reveal one of the essential characteristics of modern Russian sci-fi protagonists: moral flexibility and moral imperfection. Anton, a Light magician, acts as if he were a Dark one when he robs passers-by of their life energy, their happiness, and their *Sila*. He is completely aware that he is harming these people, and that an old woman might die a few months sooner because of him:

Я увидел старушку в окне. Тень смерти была уже где-то рядом с ней, наверное, она сама это чувствовала. И все-таки старушка улыбалась. Сегодня к ней заходил внук. Скорее всего просто проверить, жива ли еще бабка, не освободилась ли дорогая квартира в центре Москвы. Это она тоже понимала. И все-таки была счастлива. Мне было стыдно, нестерпимо стыдно, но я

⁷ Сергей Лукьяненко, "Свой среди своих," *Ночной Дозор*, p. 153-278

⁸ Сергей Лукьяненко, Владимир Васильев, "Посторонним вход разрешен," *Дневной Дозор*, p. 9-134

коснулся ее и взял немного Силы. Увядающий желто-оранжевый букет астр и осенних листьев...⁹

Anton proceeds to take *Sila* from a pregnant woman and her unborn child: "их Сила была подобна бледно-розовому пиону — большой цветок и еще не раскрывшийся шарик бутона" and a young girl who is happy because her father came home sober — "словно обломок ветки шиповника, колючий и хрупкий."¹⁰ These nature similes serve to emphasize the fragility of human happiness and the life energy that Anton decided to take. As he explains, he has to be completely certain that what he is doing is ultimately good, otherwise he will cease to exist and simply dissipate into the *Sumrak*.

Nevertheless, Anton's future wife and a Light enchantress, Svetlana, is confused by the discrepancy between the mission of the Night Watch and the methods they use. In a world where "good" Others might steal and murder several humans for the sake of saving humanity, why is a Dark witch who sacrifices a child for the sake of her kind considered evil? Both sides, Light and Dark, use the same methods despite their different missions. Therefore, how does anyone know how to act and what repercussions each deed will bring? Anton discusses this question with Svetlana:

[Svetlana:] — Почему тогда я не понимаю, где грань, в чем отличие между мной и какой-нибудь ведьмой, посещающей черные мессы? Почему я задаю эти вопросы?

[Anton] — А ты всегда будешь их задавать. Вначале — вслух. Потом — про себя. Это не пройдет, никогда. Если ты хотела избавиться от мучительных вопросов — ты выбрала не ту сторону.

—Я выбрала то, что хотела.

—Знаю. И поэтому — терпи.

—Всю жизнь?

⁹ Сергей Лукьяненко, *Ночной Дозор*, р.368

¹⁰ Сергей Лукьяненко, *Ночной Дозор*, р. 371

— Да. Она будет долгой, но ты все равно не избавишься от вопроса, насколько правилен каждый сделанный шаг.¹¹

Anton does not know what makes him right and Dark ones wrong. But he knows that as long as he has doubt, as long as each decision is reached only with difficulty, he is on the right track. Anton doubts himself and this doubt defines him. Pavel, a Dark shape-shifter who could not have seen or understood the inner struggle in Anton's mind, sees him as a fellow Dark Other:

— Да ведь он поступил, как любой из нас! Как самый настоящий Темный!
— Тогда он был бы в Дневном Дозоре.
— Будет, — уверенно сказала Павел. — Куда денется. Жалко ему стало силы, вот он ее и употребил для себя. Потом оправдывался — мол, все для того, чтобы правильное решение принять... А какое было решение? Не вмешиваться! Всего лишь — не вмешиваться! Это наш подход, темный.¹²

Another notable character of the book series, Gesser, the head of the Moscow division of the Night Watch and practically the head of the Others in Russia, reiterates Anton's understanding of right and wrong. The presence of doubt, the presence of conscience, makes a man or a woman stand on the Light side. Limitless self-confidence and silence of the conscience are the traits of a Dark one:

Темная свобода, она ведь не тем плоха, что свобода от других. Это опять же, для детей объяснение. Темная свобода – в первую очередь от себя свобода, от своей совести и души. Почувствуешь, что ничего в груди не болит, -тогда кричи караул. Правда, поздно уже будет.¹³

The process of questioning each decision, no matter how insignificant or obvious it might seem, is what defines not only Anton, but all Light Others. With their actions that constantly transgress the borders of morality, *sovest'* is **the only** thing that makes Light Others different from Dark Others. Light Others suffer the

¹¹ Сергей Лукьяненко, *Ночной Дозор*, р. 195

¹² Сергей Лукьяненко, Владимир Васильев, *Дневной Дозор*, р. 60

¹³ Сергей Лукьяненко, *Ночной Дозор*, р. 315

repercussions; they will remember their wrongdoings for the rest of their long lives. Their adversaries, on the contrary, are free to act without second thoughts; they never had, or have abandoned, their *sovest'* and *dusha*. Later, readers are privy to a conversation that is the mirror of the dialogue above, but this time it is Anton who needs reassurance that he is still on the path of good:

— Света...—одной рукой придерживая руль, спросил я. – Что делать, если не уверен, что поступил правильно? Если мучаешься вопросом, прав или нет?
—Иди в Темные, —без колебаний ответила Светлана. – Они не мучаются.
—И это весь ответ?
—Это единственный ответ. И вся разница между Светлыми и Темными. Ее можно назвать совестью, можно назвать нравственным чувством. Суть одна.¹⁴

This is one of the first times when morality, or moral sense, is mentioned as such. This notion will be explicitly and implicitly cultivated and described by Lukyanenko in all of the books of the *Night Watch* series. This is also a point of connection between Lukyanenko and the Dyachenkos: their strong interest in, almost obsession with, questions of morality.

Here Anton is walking a tightrope between the two primary opposites, Light and Darkness. It seems almost impossible that he is so close to both entities, but one personality trait explains why he is the way he is, why he is the protagonist of the novels, and why readers can't stop following him and agreeing with his thinking. Gorodetskii remains compassionate, forgiving, and free of prejudice even if he has very good reasons to be suspicious. One storyline that spans most of the books of the series is Anton's friendship with his neighbor of the same age, Kostya. What is unusual about this friendship is the fact that Kostya is a vampire. As a child, he was

¹⁴ Лукьяненко, *Сумеречный Дозор*, p. 117

terminally ill, and his father decided to save his son's life by converting him into a vampire. Just like in other books about vampires, Kostya's father could convert a human by biting him. Once bit, his son technically died—no more heartbeat, no more cell division, and no more sickness—but at the same time, Kostya acquired vampire strength, longevity, and speed. Once Anton discovers who his neighbor really is, he continues the unlikely friendship:

Я хотел объяснить, что Костя был самым обыкновенным ребенком, только ему раз в неделю приходилось пить консервированную кровь. Что он обожал играть в футбол, читать сказки и фантастику, а потом решил поступать на биофак, что бы изучить природу вампиризма и научить вампиров, как обходиться без человеческой крови. Но Алишер меня не поймет. Он настоящий дозорный. Он настоящий Светлый. А я пытаюсь понять даже Темных. Даже вампиров. Понять и простить, или хотя бы понять, или хотя бы простить. Последнее — труднее всего. Иногда простить — вообще труднее всего на свете.¹⁵

Forgiveness is also a key theme of the Dyachenkos' *Wanderer* trilogy,¹⁶ in which repercussions of one man's transgressions follow generations of his offspring and the payment for a cruel deed is much bigger than the crime itself. For example, in *Scar*, Ègert Soll' kills an innocent man in a duel. A passing magician casts a spell on Ègert, as a result of which he becomes a pathological coward. The only way to reverse the spell is through the dead man's fiancé and her forgiveness. The plot of another novel by the Dyachenkos, *Skrut* (1997), is very similarly built upon the protagonist's need for compassion and absolution. Amnesty is an important concept for both modern writers. Is there a historical and cultural explanation for this phenomenon? Perhaps the answer is rooted in the Soviet past, and the writers' desire to understand and forgive great and appalling personalities like Stalin, to

¹⁵ Лукьяненко, *Сумеречный Дозор*, p. 587-588

¹⁶ *Gatekeeper (Privratnik, 1994)*; *Scar* (Shram, 1996); *Successor (Preemnik, 1997)*; *Knight of fortune (Avantiurist, 2000)*

justify their actions by bringing up their motivation and goals. To be more precise, perhaps Lukyanenko suggests that communism was created as a way of making life easier and fairer for everyone. Only because of certain obstacles, whether unwilling individuals or Dark Others, communism lost its integrity in practice.

Even the characters who stand on the other side of the barricades from Night Watch experience disillusionment with the Russian nation and its leaders. Here Lukyanenko and Vasil'ev (Lukyanenko's co-author of the *Day Watch*) speak through Alisa Donnikova, a Dark witch in her twenties. As a person who had no moral reservations to begin with, she is disappointed with the present state of Russia. Here again the writers refer to events that would be familiar to any former Soviet citizens, but not necessarily to foreign readers. The author uses nostalgia common to anyone who lived in the USSR as an adult (*pionery, gornisty*) as a tool to elicit dissatisfaction with those intangibles that were irrevocably lost:

Разница в возрасте у нас с ним— лет десять, ну может двенадцать. А даже по именам видно, как все изменилось. Куда исчезли Кэрроловские и Булычевские Алисы? Ушли вслед за гипсовыми горнистами, пионерскими знаменами, утраченными иллюзиями и несбывшимися мечтами. Стройными колоннами ушли, под веселую задорную песню... Девочка, сыгравшая когда-то Алису в телефильме, и влюбившая в себя всех мальчишек страны, теперь мирно трудится биологом, с улыбкой вспоминая свой романтический образ. Пришли другие. Макары, Иваны, Егоры, Маши... Неизменный закон природы — чем хуже живет страна, чем в большую грязь ее втаптывают, тем сильнее тяга к корням. К старым именам, к старым порядкам, к старым ритуалам. Нет, они ничем не хуже, Макары и Иваны. Наоборот, наверное. Серьезнее, целеустремленнее, не связаны идеологией и показушным единством. Они куда ближе к нам, Темным, чем те Алисы, Сережи, Славы...

И все-таки немножко обидно. То ли за то, что мы не были такими, то ли за то, что они такими стали.¹⁷

¹⁷ Сергей Лукьяненко, Владимир Васильев, *Дневной Дозор*, p.69

In this passage, “Булычевские Алисы” refers to a famous Soviet fiction writer, Kir Bulychev, and twelve-year-old Alisa, protagonist of his series “Alisa’s Adventures” (1965-2002). This book series was made into movies and cartoons, and was immensely popular with both children and adults.¹⁸ Kir Bulychev is the perfect example of a Soviet science-fiction writer whose writings laid the groundwork for, and at the same time are drastically different from, Lukyanenko’s fiction.

Lukyanenko’s novels, which are set in the future, are no match for Bulychev’s idyllic future world of 2070. In both futures, science prevails and opens new horizons for humanity. The Soviet Alisa can travel in time while her father is the head of a zoo that contains creatures from many other planets. In Lukyanenko’s future,¹⁹ there is no time travel, that favorite trope of science-fiction writers. On the other hand, there is genetic engineering—which determines one’s future before one is born—as well as colonization, abuse of other planets, and inter-species wars.²⁰

Longing for the past and a sense of disappointment with people, especially contemporary Russians, permeates all four books of the series. Light Others are disappointed with men for not living up to their potential, not doing the good deeds of which they are capable—that’s understandable. But even the Dark Others, like Vitalii Rogoza, sneer at humanity. This is what he thinks when his motorcycle is stolen in the middle of Moscow:

¹⁸ *Гостя из будущего* (1983-1984), *Лиловый шар* (1987), *Остров ржавого генерала* (1988)

¹⁹ Here I am referring to Lukyanenko’s trilogy *Линия грез* (1995), *Императоры иллюзий* (1995), and *Тени снов* (1998)

²⁰ The *Line of Delirium* (*Линия грез*) trilogy deserves much more attention than a passing mention, but I must limit the scope of this study and look only at novels that are set in “modern” Russia or its closest equivalent.

Я не успел даже дойти до ступенек перед входом в метро, а мокик уже сперли... Эх, люди-люди... Заботятся о вас Светлые, защищают, берегут, а вы быдлом были, быдлом и остаетесь. Зверьем без совести и сострадания. Растолкать локтями, украсть, продать, набить брюхо, а там – хоть трава не расти... До чего же противно.²¹

The use of colloquial, even vulgar, pejorative language like «быдло» emphasizes the magnitude of the emotions that Vitaly experiences. This word could have never have been used in Soviet fiction, partially due to censorship, and partially because it was unthinkable for writers to use it in their creative works. But in the post-Soviet environment this concept and this word became fairly widespread. «Быдло» is a way to describe masses of people that behave mindlessly like cattle, acting solely for their own benefit.

Nostalgia for what Russia used to be is an omnipresent theme in the pentalogy, but by the third book of the series, *Twilight Watch*, this theme is communicated through whole passages instead of several dispersed comments characters make. Here we read longer deliberations, this time from Anton himself, about former USSR republics that broke off from Russia and what these newly independent states have gained and lost. Shockingly, his thoughts about the past are quite similar to those of Alisa Donnikova. This is what Anton thinks when he is on a train from Moscow to Almaty, the former capital of Kazakhstan:

...Большинство [казахов] все-таки пока стояли в коридорах, глядя на проплывающие мимо московские пригороды. Интересно, что они испытывают, граждане независимой ныне страны, глядя на свою бывшую столицу? Неужели и впрямь – удовлетворение от независимости? Или все-таки ностальгию?...

Пусть уж лучше радуются и гордятся – своей независимостью, своей государственностью, своей коррупцией...Если внутри единой страны идет размежевание по республикам и городам, то какие могут быть претензии к соседям по бывшей коммунальной квартире? Отделились комнатенки с

²¹ Сергей Лукьяненко, Владимир Васильев, *Дневной Дозор*, p.242

окнами на Балтийское море, отделились гордые грузины и кыргызы со своим единственным в мире высокогорным военно-морским флотом, все радостно отделились. Осталась только большая кухня – Россия, где когда-то варились в одном имперском котле народы. Ну и ладно. Ну и пускай. А у нас в квартире газ – а у вас?

Пусть радуются. Пусть всем будет хорошо...И впервые создавшим свои государства казахам и кыргызам... Впрочем, они, конечно, привели бы массу доказательств своей древней государственности. И братьям-славянам, которых так угнетало существование старшего брата. И нам, русским, так азартно презирающим – Москву из провинции, провинцию – из Москвы. ²²

Anton is skeptical that citizens of the newly independent states are satisfied with the change – «неужели впрямь.»²³ Reluctantly, he submits to the change: “Пусть уж...Ну и ладно. Ну и пускай. Пусть радуются. Пусть всем будет хорошо.”²⁴ But bitterness is palpable in the way Anton dismissively calls Baltic countries “комнатенки,” notes an oxymoronic “high-mountain naval fleet,” and offers dubious proof of “древняя государственность.”²⁵ Anton resigns from the ongoing decomposition of the former USSR and convinces the reader that these changes are detrimental.

Another kind of reminiscence suffuses the books and brings me to another topic common in Lukyanenko’s fiction: nostalgia for the pristine state of that one common feature—the Russian language—that united Azerbaijan, Estonia, Georgia, Moldova, and other former Soviet satellites. Language impurities and borrowings, although very common, have come to be viewed as a negative consequence of globalization and Western concepts encroaching upon the Russian psyche:

“Наверное, хорошо тут пить кофе перед приятной прогулкой за покупками,

²² Сергей Лукьяненко, *Сумеречный Дозор*, p. 285-286

²³ Сергей Лукьяненко, *Сумеречный Дозор*, p. 286

²⁴ Сергей Лукьяненко, *Сумеречный Дозор*, p. 286

²⁵ Сергей Лукьяненко, *Сумеречный Дозор*, p. 286

намечая маршрут ‘шоппинга’. Вот ведь ужасное слово, чудовищный англицизм, а вьелось в русский язык, словно клещ в беззащитную добычу!”²⁶ Or, alternatively, it is nostalgia for the way people used to think and speak: “как совершенно верно декларировали в советское время.”²⁷

Comments and observations Lukyanenko’s characters make also inflame the readers’ sense of national identity, through overt comparisons of Russia with other countries, particularly the United States. Frequently for Lukyanenko, America is shorthand for capitalism devoid of spirituality, or simplistic views (as in the “звездно-полосатые идеалы” quotation discussed later). Similarly, the writer pokes fun at the American understanding of the outcome of World War II, and at Americans’ lack of morals (or, perhaps, their immutable confidence in clear black-and-white morals that Anton and other Russians reject): “Но американец был преисполнен добродушия: —Прекрасный город! [Prague] Как хорошо, что мы спасли его во время Второй мировой войны... Антон едва удержался от фразы... не входили американские войска в Прагу. И тут же устыдился своей мысли.”²⁸ Anton decides against arguing about the past and historical accuracy with the US military pilot. He feels slightly embarrassed because of this *melochnost’*: scrupulous attention to insignificant details. After all, the United States was one of the Allies in World War II. Nevertheless, this encounter makes Anton think about this pilot’s confidence and self-righteousness (and, by extension, that of Americans in general):

²⁶ Сергей Лукьяненко, *Сумеречный Дозор*, p. 66-67

²⁷ Сергей Лукьяненко, *Сумеречный Дозор*, p. 199

²⁸ Сергей Лукьяненко, Владимир Васильев, *Дневной Дозор*, p. 301

Ну как он ухитряется делать боевые вылеты, вываливать взрывчатку на человеческие головы и оставаться Светлым? Ведь Светлый же он – сомнений нет! И притом, почти наверняка, на его совести – человеческие жизни. Как ему удастся удерживаться от падения в Сумрак? Это какой же должен быть запас веры в собственную правоту, чтобы совмещать армию, воюющую армию, и дело Света!²⁹

In this distinct way Americans are close to the Russian Dark Others because both have no moral quandaries about their actions, no pangs of conscience. The general implication, of course, is that Americans as a nation have discarded their morals in favor of the belief that they are always right, even when they drop bombs on innocent civilians. But this American faith must be true, otherwise American Light Others would disappear. According to the novel's mythology, a Light Other will cease to exist as soon as he does something that he himself deems immoral.³⁰ In light of this fact, it is especially appalling that the US pilot, a Light magician, has no reservations about fighting in an army.

Finally, Lukyanenko sometimes invokes the United States and the West in order to contrast them with Russian realities and thereby highlight what one side lacks:

- И теперь новая попытка изменить людей?
- Очередная.
- Почему — здесь? — спросил я. — Почему опять у нас?
- Где у нас?
- В России! Сколько она еще должна вынести?
- Сколько потребуется.
- Так почему снова — у нас?

²⁹ Сергей Лукьяненко, Владимир Васильев, *Дневной Дозор*, р.302

³⁰ For example, Igor from *Outsiders Are Welcome (Посторонним вход разрешен)* disappears into nothingness once he realizes that the witch Alisa Donnikova, whom he drowned in a duel, was in fact innocent. Murat, a secondary Light character, disappears after killing human soldiers in self-defense: "Взгляд у него [Мурата] сделался очень спокойным и будто бы сонным. Я заглянул магу в глаза и нашел в них ответ на свой вопрос. Все. Он уже уходил... Мурат истаявал, растворился в Сумраке." (Сергей Лукьяненко, *Последний Дозор*, р.554)

Ольга вздохнула, легким движением отправила меч в ножны. Вернула на стенд.

— Потому, милый мой мальчик, что на этом поле еще можно чего-то добиться. Европа, Северная Америка — эти страны уже отработаны. Что возможно — было опробовано. Кое-что и сейчас отрабатывается. Но они уже в дреме, они уже засыпают. Крепкий пенсионер в шортах и с видеокамерой — вот что такое благополучные западные страны.³¹

Overall well-being, or *blagopoluchie*, is a seemingly desirable quality for any society but here is personified by a stocky retiree with a video camera and wearing shorts, possibly touring other countries. Lukyanenko casts an unfavorable light on the financial prosperity and security that stand behind his retiree. It signifies that the quest for spiritual improvement is over in the West. According to Lukyanenko, Westerners are satisfied with the material goods and other comforts of a bourgeois life. He suggests that Russians, who lack most of these comforts, are more disposed toward introspection and the moral evaluation of each of their actions. It is as if Westerners have a constantly running computer script: if x, then y. Russians do not have such a protasis-apodosis script: if x, then it could be y, z, or any other letter. Russians, Lukyanenko implies, have to evaluate each situation individually and exert moral effort each time they make a decision. Westerners, particularly Americans, do not have to think, but follow a ready-made formula. Lukyanenko does not compare the two cultures in order to arouse negative sentiments against the West, but to exhort readers to be proud of their Russian characteristics and history.

This sense of national pride is not new to the world of Russian sci-fi, but in post-Soviet writers it acquires an overtly comparative value: Russia versus the West. In Soviet sci-fi, the battles were fought on ideological battlefields—which

³¹ Сергей Лукьяненко, *Ночной Дозор*, p. 234

system of government is better? Should people be made equal by the government or should the free market decide? After the Soviet Union fell apart in 1991, the West ceased to be an abstract capitalistic enemy. Now the citizens of the former USSR were free to travel and see for themselves the relative rarity of corruption, nepotism, and crime in the West. The average citizen of the United States was not living just above the poverty line, as was the case with the average Russian: “в Штатах будут большие и сытные кормушки, в которые хочется зарыться с головой.”³² These feeders are the reason behind the Russian brain drain to the West.

Despite the emphasis on America as a hedonistic and jingoistic culture, Lukyanenko does acknowledge some American cultural accomplishments. In this episode Anton and several other Light Others need something high in sugar after their bodies were magically sped up:

—“Колу” будешь?
—Что? —воскликнул Алишер. —“Кола”? Буду! И батончики³³ тоже буду! Боже, благослови Америку!
—Не слишком ли много за изобретение очень сладкого лимонада и очень калорийных шоколадок?
Вместо ответа Алишер ткнул пальцем в кнопку проигрывателя. Через секунду из динамиков донеслись ритмичные аккорды.
—Тогда еще за рок-н-ролл, —невозмутимо ответил он.³⁴

Alisher says “God bless America” as if alluding to the famous song by Irving Berlin that was elevated almost to the status of a prayer. But in this context it seems almost mocking to bless the United States for the Coke and Snickers that it spawned and made ubiquitous. This is not intentional mockery on the part of Alisher or

³² Лукьяненко, *Сумеречный Дозор*, p. 237

³³ In this context, Snickers bars or other candy bar

³⁴ Лукьяненко, *Сумеречный Дозор*, p. 585-586

Lukyanyenko. However silly and unimportant the invention of a soft drink and a candy bar might seem, in a detached way, Alisher notes the cultural contribution of United States to the world. Many historians have wondered how much rock-n-roll music contributed to the eventual fall of the Soviet Union. For example, the KGB called this foreign music “ideological anti-Soviet pollution” and tried to limit its spread among the younger population.³⁵ Despite rock-n-roll’s limited political influence, as noted by Sergei Zhuk³⁶, Alisher, a native of Uzbekistan, thinks differently. To him, this music was important.

Regardless of whether America’s contributions to the world are valuable or worthless, no one can dispute that the past and present discrepancy between the material well-being of Russian citizens and their Western counterparts have prompted frustration among Russians. I believe that this kind of resentment led to more polemics in post-Soviet literature. Why is Russian culture, so rich in history and thought, plagued with poverty, drug addiction, and alcoholism?

Each writer whose narrative takes place after 1991 is forced to address these questions directly or indirectly. Here Anton gets out of Moscow to rest at his *dacha* and encounters a “local alcoholic,” Kolya:

— Помочь вам ничего не надо, по хозяйству или как...—безднадежно спросил Коля. —Иду, думаю, спрошу...
Я закрыл глаза — сквозь веки кроваво светило клонящееся к закату солнце. Ничего я не могу поделать. Ничегошеньки. Хватило бы вмешательства шестого-седьмого уровня [very small intrusion], чтобы у бедолаги Коли пропала тяга к алкоголю, прошел цирроз и появилось желание работать, а не водку пить и жену покалачивать.
И я даже могу, вопреки всем Договорам, тихонько провести это самое вмешательство. Легкое движение руки...

³⁵ Richard Weitz, “Former Soviet Union: What was Rock’s Role in the Collapse of Communism?”, *Euroasianet.org*, March 23, 2011, (<http://www.eurasianet.org/node/63139>)

³⁶ Richard Weitz, “Former Soviet Union: What was Rock’s Role in the Collapse of Communism?”

А что дальше? Нет в селе работы. И в городе бывший механизатор Коля никому не нужен. И денег, что бы начать «свое дело», у Коли нет. Даже поросенка ему не купить.

И пойдет он снова искать самогон, перебиваться случайными заработками и вымещать злость на такой же спивающейся, уставшей от всего жене. *Не человека надо лечить, а всю Землю.*

*Или хотя бы эту одну шестую часть земли. С названием гордым Русь.*³⁷

This sort of desperate situation, in which people's lives are wrecked by a broken system, can be somewhat difficult for foreigners to understand. For example, in the following passage, a Czech vampire makes the following, seemingly positive, comment:

—Хороший знак для вашей страны, —очень вежливо сказал Витезслав. – Когда в качестве рабочей силы используются граждане соседних государств – это признак экономического подъема.

Я мог бы ему объяснить, что думаю по этому поводу. Но не стал.³⁸

The vampire, who incidentally has “slav” as part of his name, tries to pay a compliment without realizing that his observation is far from laudatory. Illegal immigrants from many former Soviet countries come to Moscow to make money and send it to their families. The fact that they come to Russia for work does not mean that the Russian economy is improving: it is simply evidence that other countries are in even worse shape. Anton chooses not to argue with the vampire here, understanding that it will be hard, time-consuming, and not worth the effort to explain the situation to an outsider. The right reader will understand that some things should be experienced, not described.

Despite his obvious national pride and his critique of Western morality, Lukyanenko's patriotism is not completely blind. He realizes that many of his and

³⁷ Лукьяненко, *Сумеречный Дозор*, p. 127

³⁸ Лукьяненко, *Сумеречный Дозор*, p.62

his protagonists' beliefs can be justifiably contested. Stalin, who is strongly vilified in the West for the mass atrocities he committed, is viewed by some Russians as doing the right thing in fighting Nazism:

— Как ты думаешь, кто был прав во Второй мировой войне? – спросил я...
— Наши были правы, — патриотично сказал Костя...
— А почему правы именно наши? Сталин ведь тоже не прочь был поглотить Европу. И мирные города мы бомбили, и музеи грабили, и дезертиров расстреливали...
— Да потому что они наши! Потому и правы!³⁹

A few lines later, Lukyanenko then calls for a «разумный довод»⁴⁰ on this matter, emphasizing that “наши всегда правы” is not a valid historical or moral argument. Even Others, who live for centuries and can transform anything into everything, still carry the prejudices and stereotypes of their nationality.⁴¹ So while Dark Others do not care about people or impute value to their lives, they still feel like citizens of the Russian nation: “—Людишек мне не жалко, не думай лишнего, —процедила ведьма. — А вот страну — да, жалко. Моя это страна, какая есть, а вся моя!”⁴²

Returning to Kolya, the alcoholic, we see again that Lukyanenko is not blindly nostalgic for all things Soviet, but, even with all the negative aspects of communist rule, life used to be better back then:

—Я в эту деревеньку с детства езжу, —сказала Светлана. — Я дядю Колю еще нормальным помню. Молодой, веселый. На тракторе меня, соплюху, катал. Трезвый. И песни пел. Представляешь?
—Раньше было лучше? —спросил я.
—Пили меньше, —кратко ответила Светлана.⁴³

Mikhail Gorbachev, who is widely praised in the West for dissolving the USSR and giving all Soviet nationalities independence, is not a positive figure for Lukyanenko.

³⁹ Лукьяненко, *Сумеречный Дозор*, p. 110-111

⁴⁰ Лукьяненко, *Сумеречный Дозор*, p.111

⁴¹ Лукьяненко, *Дневной Дозор*, p. 311

⁴² Лукьяненко, *Сумеречный Дозор*, p. 230

⁴³ Лукьяненко, *Сумеречный Дозор*, p. 129

With a bit of humor the author conveys his unenthusiastic opinion of Gorbachev through Anton's encounter with a Frenchman in a Scotland. The Frenchman, knowing that Anton is Russian, yells out the only Russian words he knows: "Товарищ! Спутник, водка, перестройка! Горбачев!" Gorodetskii responds that the last word could surely get the foreigner killed in Russia.⁴⁴

In the mythology of Lukyanenko's Russia, communism itself, successfully ended by Gorbachev, was a failed attempt to make people's lives better:

—Ночной и Дневной Дозоры тогда боролись за право социального эксперимента... —рассказывал Эдгар. — Коммунизм, как известно, был придуман Светлыми...
—А Темными — извращен, — не удержался я.⁴⁵

Communism, which appeared so right on paper but failed in practice, was naturally invented by Light Others with the best intentions but had sorrowful repercussions. This seems to be a rule in Lukyanenko's universe—each positive action by an Other or a regular human is matched by a negative one. The Night Watch and the Day Watch themselves are designed to balance each other out, so that the world constantly hangs in a state of stasis, only temporarily departing from the middle. No matter what intrigues are conceived and executed by the two most powerful others of Russia, Gesser and Zavulon, the material and magical world resists any drastic change. For example, once Moscow's Night Watch acquires Svetlana and a few other powerful Others, the *Sumrak* creates an equally powerful Dark Other out of nowhere.⁴⁶ This Other is called a *Zerkalo* ("mirror") and once he lowers the magical power of the Night Watch, he disappears. His entire mission is to even out the

⁴⁴ Лукьяненко, *Сумеречный Дозор*, p. 420

⁴⁵ Лукьяненко, *Сумеречный Дозор*, p. 182

⁴⁶ This story is described in detail in *Day Watch*, «Чужой для иных», p. 343. The Dark Other who was created to maintain the balance, was Vitaly Rogoza.

forces. Eventually Anton realizes that no matter what he does or any other Light others do, they cannot prevent human suffering:

На каждого президента находится свой киллер. На каждого пророка — тысяча толкователей, что извратят суть религии, заменят светлый огонь жаром инквизиторских костров. Каждая книга когда-нибудь полетит в огонь, из симфонии сделают шлягер и станут играть по кабакам. Под любую гадость подведут прочный философский базис.⁴⁷

Anton is fighting in a war that he cannot ever win—each good thing he does will be followed by an equally bad action by a Dark Other. Moreover, humans, whom Night Watch is bound to protect, are the source of their own plagues:

Чем мы, Ночной Дозор, занимаемся? Разделять и защищать? Чушь! Ни один Темный, ни один Дневной Дозор не приносит людям столько зла, сколько они сами себе доставляют. Чего стоит голодный вампир по сравнению с абсолютно обычным маньяком, насилующим и убивающим девочек в лифтах? Чего стоит бесчувственная ведьма, насылающая за деньги порчу, по сравнению с гуманным президентом, посылающим ради нефти высокоточные ракеты?⁴⁸

Disappointment and disillusionment take over Anton Gorodetskii . He thinks back to his first days in the Night Watch, laughing at his own naiveté: “Я засмеялся. Я смотрел в ночное небо и смеялся – вспоминая себя самого, чуть-чуть моложе, идущего по темной улице навстречу вампирам. С горячим сердцем, чистыми руками и пустой, холодной головой...”⁴⁹ He had a cool head, as the saying goes, but it was also empty of real-life experiences and disappointments. Eventually, Anton's goal and calling in life switches from doing good for others to not giving up. Even with all of his extraordinary abilities (and by the end of the *Twilight Watch* he is a wizard "vne kategorii"), too strong to categorize, the same level as Gesser and Zavulon, his main goal is not leaving the fight altogether.

⁴⁷ Лукьяненко, *Ночной Дозор*, p. 192

⁴⁸ Лукьяненко, *Сумеречный Дозор*, p. 286

⁴⁹ Лукьяненко, *Сумеречный Дозор*, p. 236

With power comes experience and wisdom to know that no single person can tip the scale towards Light. Anton Gorodetskii describes himself as a tired former human,⁵⁰ a spider trapped in a glass jar. A veteran of intrigues, investigations, and trials, he wants to escape from the crossfire that had started long before his birth and will continue after his death. As I have stated before, Anton is an atypical hero who wants to resign from the conflict that drives the entire series. Anton's boss and advisor Gesser, who has been in Gorodetskii's shoes, advises against his early withdrawal from life:

...Хранить в себе все то человеческое, что еще осталось. Не упасть в экстаз и умиление, навязывая людям ненужный им Свет. Не свалиться в цинизм и презрение, возмнив себя чистым и совершенным. А самое трудное – не разочароваться, не разувериться, не стать равнодушным.⁵¹

But something, perhaps this advice, perhaps something else, keeps Anton in the fight. He does not join the Inquisition, the neutral organization that supervises both Watches and is home to both Dark and Light Others who realize the pointlessness of their struggle. When faced with a choice of whether or not to punish humans who tried to poison him, Gorodetskii is still human enough to understand what drove them to this action and compassionate enough to forgive:

...Что эти люди не виноваты. Им велели, и они не могли воспротивиться. Что эта небогатая чайхана — все, что у них есть. Что с нее кормится две-три большие семьи с детишками и стариками... В данном случае я был в праве устроить маленький пожар. Человек, пытающийся отравить трех Светлых магов, заслуживает воспитательных мер... Мы Светлые, а не святые.⁵²

The alliteration in this last sentence is almost poetic. While having the right to punish these humans, Anton chooses to be a saint for the moment and leave the

⁵⁰ Лукьяненко, *Сумеречный Дозор*, p.287

⁵¹ Лукьяненко, *Сумеречный Дозор*, p.331

⁵² Лукьяненко, *Сумеречный Дозор*, p.575

place and its owners untouched. His ability to understand and forgive is what sets Anton apart from the other fictional protagonists in the series.

Other sci-fi heroes typically fight life or death battles against aliens, robots, or genetically engineered creatures. Anton's main battle is internal; it lacks explosions, lasers, and battleships. In an endearing scene, his little daughter Nadya tries to comprehend exactly what her father does for a living. Her mother explains:

—Ты же знаешь, он борется с темными силами.

—Как Гарри Поттер, —с некоторым сомнением произнесла Надя, глядя на меня. Наверное, мне не хватало очков и шрама на лбу чтобы соответствовать этому высокому образу.

—Да, как Гарри Поттер, Фэт Фрумос, и Люк Скайуокер.

—Как Скайуокер, —решила Надя и улыбнулась мне. Видимо, этому персонажу я в ее глазах соответствовал сильнее всего. Что ж, и то хлеб.⁵³

This exchange is notable for two reasons: first, the fact that Anton does not really fit into a heroic mold even in the eyes of his precocious daughter. Harry Potter fought Lord Voldemort, Făt Frumos fought *zmeu*, an evil dragon, and Luke Skywalker fought against the Galactic Empire. Each enemy was absolutely and irredeemably evil. Unlike all of them, Gorodetskii does not have an absolute enemy, a person or a group of people against whom he must struggle and eventually defeat. The only enemy Anton is constantly fighting is self-doubt. It follows Anton and seems to be a sign of his moral imperfection.⁵⁴

Anton's story is one of disillusionment with his ideals: what should be good and pure turns out to be just the opposite. Heroism, as the reader and Anton see it, becomes a dysfunctional vestige of an anachronistic morality, an outdated notion

⁵³ Лукьяненко, *Сумеречный Дозор*, p. 642

⁵⁴ To clarify, even when I use this term —“moral imperfection” —I am not using it in a negative sense. This is rather a comparative term and the measure I am comparing it against is the Strugatskys' protagonist who has firm, and for the most part, unchanging beliefs.

that *has* to change: “Как хочется иметь руки чистыми, сердце горячим, а голову холодной. Но почему-то эти три фактора не уживаются вместе. Никогда. Волк, коза, и капуста – где безумный перевозчик, что запихнет их всех в одну лодку?”⁵⁵ This is one of the many instances in which a reader familiar with Russian history would know that Iron Felix is talking about an ideal *chekist*—an ideal policeman—who must have clean hands, a hot heart, and a cool head. Anton is saying that he cannot be the perfect policeman, the ideal fighter against all that is wrong. He rejects the Soviet conception of heroism in favor of a more fallible, contemporary version:

Охранять закон. Преследовать Зло. Защищать невинных. Как было бы здорово, оставайся все и всегда таким простым и ясным, как в двенадцать или двадцать лет. Если бы в мире и впрямь было два цвета: черный и белый. Вот только самый честный и простодушный полицейский, воспитанный на громких звездно-полосатых идеалах, рано или поздно поймет: на улицах есть не только Тьма и Свет. Есть еще договоренности, уступки, соглашения. Информаторы, ловушки, провокации. Рано или поздно приходится сдавать своих, подбрасывать в чужие карманы пакетики с героином, бить по почкам, аккуратно, что бы не оставалась следов.⁵⁶

The analogies of planting cocaine or kicking someone’s kidneys are real and comprehensible for people who lived through the civil chaos of the 1990s and the corruption of present-day Russia. These are not the analogies a Soviet writer would ever use. This is where Lukyanenko’s fiction departs from the literary tradition and comes closer to gritty reality. “Звездно-полосатые идеалы” of American

⁵⁵ Лукьяненко, *Ночной Дозор*, p.241. Clean hands, hot heart, and cool head —here Lukyanenko refers to a famous formulation by Felix Dzerzhinsky, the founder of the Soviet security forces, Cheka (ЧК). Also, the problem with a wolf, a goat, and a cabbage needing transportation to the other shore of a river in Russian was changed in English to a wolf, a chicken, and grain.

⁵⁶ Сергей Лукьяненко, *Ночной Дозор*, p. 258

blockbusters, characterized by their simplicity and improbability, are rejected. Even the way in which a hero is traditionally described is ridiculed by Anton:

Ведь каждый день у нас – это какая-то битва. То большая, то маленькая. Со спятившим оборотнем, с Темным магом, со всеми силами тьмы разом. Напряжение сил, выпяченные подбородки, выпученный глаза, готовность прыгнуть грудью на амбразуру или голой жопой на ежа.⁵⁷

«Броситься грудью на амбразуру, коня на скаку остановить, в горящую избу войти» —all of these are clichés of heroism. But using the vulgar “голой жопой на ежа” makes the reader understand how self-aware Anton is about his flaws as a "hero" and how he does not take himself too seriously. Nevertheless, in later books of the *Night Watch* series Anton starts to think that normal people are second-class citizens compared to the Others. He does, though, recognize and detest his own extremely pragmatic thinking and views it as a loss of humanity: “Мне не потребовалось и десятка лет, чтобы окончательно перестать быть человеком.”⁵⁸ Even if the Dark Others seem to be Anton’s archenemy at the beginning of the narrative, once we read Alisa’s account in the *Night Watch*, it quickly becomes clear that is not the case. Even Zavulon cannot take that nemesis spot.

Secondly, Svetlana’s description of Anton’s role stands out because of the international cast of heroes she mentions: British magician Harry Potter, Moldovan fairytale hero Făt Frumos, and American star-warrior Luke Skywalker. It is a telling sign of Russia’s closer integration with the West. Globalization has left its imprint on Russian heroic mythology. Svetlana does not compare her husband to *Ilya Muromets*

⁵⁷ Сергей Лукьяненко, *Ночной Дозор*, p. 296

⁵⁸ Сергей Лукьяненко, *Сумеречный Дозор*, p.50

or other Russian fairytale personages, but to a cast of international and even obscure heroes like Făt Frumos. This reference hints at the deeper connection between former Soviet republics that merged their folklore and continued to exist despite new political borders.

Folklore, writing, and story-telling as such do not come up often in the series, but when they do, they are very significant. They seem to be Lukyanenko's direct voicing of his opinions. For example, he thinks that children's writers have an obligation and a responsibility to write good stories as this will be the child's first introduction to the written word and all the world's literature later:

—Писатель тоже имеет право на хандру, — сказал я.
—Если пишет детские книги – то не имеет! – сурово ответила Светлана. – Детские книги должны быть добрыми. А иначе —это как тракторист, который криво вспашет поле и скажет: ‘Да у меня хандра, мне было интереснее ездить кругами’. Или врач, который пропишет больному слабительного со снотворным и объяснит: ‘Настроение плохое, решил развлечься’”.⁵⁹

Here writers and doctors are made equal—the doctors might heal the body and physical ailments, but writers are doctors who treat the human conscience. This is a powerful analogy that represents to some extent how Lukyanenko views himself in contemporary Russian society. He is a teacher, a prophet, a whistle-blower, and a storyteller. His fictional Russia suffers from the same problems as real Russia. In fact, besides the presence of Others, his descriptions of contemporary Russia are extremely accurate. This is a characteristic of Russian *fantastika* that I cannot praise enough: an element of the writer's imagination illuminates the rest of the story that is quite real.

⁵⁹ Лукьяненко, *Сумеречный Дозор*, p. 201

The characters are given options that they would not have in a non-fiction novel and the choices they make in *fantastika* are sometimes far more revealing of the writer's intentions. Lukyanenko started his writing career with predominantly typical science-fiction novels like those in the *Lord from the Planet Earth* trilogy (1992-1994), which constituted a "space opera" (*kosmicheskaia opera*), as publishers advertised it. The *Night Watch* series on which I focus here was categorized by Lukyanenko as "city fantasy."⁶⁰ Only in 2009 he finally moved to a more typical medieval fantasy setting for his young adult novels *Harlequin* (2009) and *Gadabout* (2010). I believe that his reluctance to create a fantasy novel is explained well in this passage:

...— Ты никогда не читал фэнтези?
—Чего?
—Книжки не читал? Всех этих "Властелинов Колец," "Конанов", "Волшебников Земноморья", "Гарри Поттеров"?
—Читал кое-что, — сказал я. — Ну...Что-то наивно, а что-то любопытно. Как развлекательная литература вполне сносно даже для нас.
—А среди людей куда популярнее чем научная фантастика, —уверенно сказал Эдгар. — Вот ведь парадокс — читать про освоение Марса или полеты к звездам, про то, чего люди действительно могут добиться, а мы — никак, людям неинтересно. Зато они мечтают стать магами, кидаться в сражение с большим острым мечом... Если-бы хоть кто-то из них знал, как выглядят раны от настоящего меча... Что это значит? Что средневековый мир, в котором существует магия, для людей наиболее привлекателен!
—Ну да, — сказал я. — Конечно... Потому что герои книжек не страдают насморком, несварением, аппендицитом и малярией, а если уж и страдают — то сразу под рукой оказывается Светлый целитель. Потому что все видят себя на королевском троне, в плаще могучего мага или, на худой конец, в дружине веселого и отважного барона. А никак не на высохшем поле с деревянной мотыгой в руках, глядящим вслед дружине, только что потоптавшей твой жалкий урожай, наполовину принадлежащий веселому отважному барону.⁶¹

Lukyanenko is not a proponent of escapism, a flight from unsatisfying reality to dream-fulfilling medieval fantasy. However, he makes an exception for his two

⁶⁰ Встреча читателей с Сергеем Лукьяненко в фирменном магазине издательства АСТ 28 мая 1998 года.

⁶¹ Сергей Лукьяненко, *Последний Дозор*, p. 652-653

novels in which children are the main protagonists, as if trying to tap into the young adult market with didactic stories—not necessarily for profit, but to replace and update authors like Vladislav Krapivin (1938) and Kir Bulychev (1934-2003). If young adults today are no longer dreaming of conquering galaxies, then Lukyanenko will create stories akin to Tolkien's if that will draw young readers in. It seems that Sergei Lukyanenko understands his role as a writer in a broader context, as a moral compass for his audience. Sometimes he preaches more vociferously than at other times, but the flawed, realistic depictions of his characters soften the moralizing contained in his novels. When the protagonist notes the bleak and sad condition of present-day Russia, his thoughts about improving the situation read more like suggestions or advice, not directives. Furthermore, more often than not, Anton and other major characters don't even have a solution for the problems they see. Forced to remain in stalemate, they communicate the frustration Lukyanenko feels.

Chapter Two: Marina and Sergei Dyachenko

On November 19, 2012, Boris Natanovich Strugatsky died at the age of eighty. Shortly thereafter, two writers who called him their mentor gave an interview to a Ukrainian newspaper. These two writers—Marina and Sergei Dyachenko—believed that without the Strugatskys' books they would not have become writers or even human beings in a moral sense.¹ The Dyachenkos are a husband and wife team, another successful partnership in the world of modern Russian fiction. They are recipients of numerous prestigious awards in the territories of the former USSR. Most notably, they were named the best science-fiction writers of Europe at the 2005 Eurocon convention, an annual science fiction convention organized by the European Science Fiction Society since 1972. But in their interview with *Ukrinform*, they mentioned the Bronze Snail, an award given out personally by Boris Strugatsky for best novel, short story, or criticism of the year, as one of their proudest achievements. They are the only writers who have received this award five times, and their first work to earn the Bronze Snail was *Armaged-Home* (1999).

Like Lukyanenko's work, their fiction does not neatly fit into the genres of "fantasy" or "sci-fi." They developed their own genre, which they named "M-realism" (M possibly signifies magic or meta-realism).² While the settings of their novels vary dramatically, they always emphasize the humanity of their protagonists. The Dyachenkos are much more interested in the human psyche and human morale than

¹"Марина и Сергей Дяченко: Мудрость —не в покорении вершин, а в восхождение на них," *Слово*, 2002, (<http://www.rusf.ru/marser/avtor/intrv/int06.htm>)

in elaborate imaginary worlds. That does not mean that the settings of their novels are not elaborate, but their only role is to put the protagonist under extreme pressure, to force him or her make painful decisions and then live with the repercussions. Like anthropologists and sociologists of the literary world, the Dyachenkos set up complex social experiments and watch the outcome together with their readers. Once their novel unfolds, some aspect of the human experience—love, jealousy, forgiveness, selflessness—is given flesh and blood. Not being proponents of any particular philosophy, they convince the reader that actions driven by love are essentially good. But unlike other great Russian writers such as Turgenev and Tolstoy, the Dyachenkos do not equate what is natural and instinctual with being right. Happiness and bliss are also not necessarily related to the natural world. Sometimes overcoming instinctual fear of death is a path to happiness, but in a different situation giving into instinctual motherly love is what makes a protagonist happy. Essentially their characters either follow or deviate from norms that they consider to be morally acceptable, and the consequences of their actions suggest a certain ethical standard. Viewed in a very simplified way, characters who act selflessly, for the benefit of others, achieve happiness, however fleeting it might be.

Like the Strugatsky brothers, the Dyachenkos study large group dynamics, human societies and systems. On one level, readers see what inter-personal decisions lead to, what role an individual's morality plays. At the same time, on a different level, they see how individuals conceive of and form a society. An idea of one man or woman grows, gets supporters and opponents, and inevitably changes.

Each participant alters the design of the original intent, a process beautifully described in *Armaged-Home*. The political situation in the novel closely mimics that of the Russian past. The regime of General Stuzha, with noble goals akin to those of communism, becomes altered beyond recognition by individuals with generally good intentions. One of the overarching goals of this parallel political setting was to revisit Russian history: to revisit the country that was once considered a superpower, in order to understand what went wrong with its “perfect” plan for a system of government.

In this novel the narrative takes place in an unnamed country that has access to the ocean. It could be Russia, based on the characters’ Slavic names, but it could also be any other locale. The only element of the narrative that requires the reader’s suspension of disbelief is the catastrophe that wipes out all living things every twenty years. Earthquakes, poisonous gases, volcanoes, and *glefy*³ would have completely destroyed the population were it not for *Vorota*—gates that randomly appear in densely populated areas, offering people shelter from the apocalypse. This aspect of life dramatically alters the way the protagonist, Lidiia Sotova, and everyone around her, think and live. This novel, however, is *not* about the catastrophe itself, colloquially called *mryga*.⁴ It is not a *roman-katastrofa* like the popular *Metro 2033* by Dmitry Glukhovsky, nor does it bear much similarity to *Earth Abides* (1949) by George R. Stewart, *I am Legend* (1954) by Richard Matheson, or the apocalyptic movie blockbuster *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), familiar to

³ Larvae of *dal'finy*, large sea-dwelling creatures that come out of the ocean at the start of the apocalypse in search of food.

⁴ *Мрыга* seems to be derived from Russian verb *умереть* (die) or adjective *мертвый* (dead).

American audiences. This novel is about the people who live in these unusual and extreme circumstances.

Like the sword of Damocles, this unavoidable apocalypse exposes people's true characters and priorities. The Dyachenkos introduce the apocalypse plot through excerpts from Lidka's early school essays: «Конец света по-научному называется апока...(зачеркнуто)...сисом. Тогда случаются большие беды. Идут дожди из огня. Нечем дышать. Все люди погибли бы, если бы не Ворота.»⁵

This device allows for the smooth introduction of the only fantastical element of the narrative and at the same time invites the reader to experience growing up with this knowledge. In the fourth grade, instead of writing essays on how they spend their summers, children write on topics such as "Where people hide" or "Young adults in the new cycle."⁶ We become acquainted with a reality in which people systematically, and at the same time randomly, die every twenty years or so. In order to compensate for the human losses, immediately after *mryga*, former children are now considered adults and enter a childbirth period, which will last only a few years so that the newborns will be old enough to survive the next apocalypse on their own.

Lidka herself was born at the very end of the childbirth period; her mother had the option of having an abortion, but chose not to. From the beginning, Lidka is more childlike than her peers, more impressionable, and thus at a disadvantage:

Он любил лезть учителям в глаза — а Лидка, напротив, не любила, но выбора у нее не было, потому что ее недаром прозвали Пигалицей. Она была самой младшей и самой маленькой в классе, в группе, иногда ей

⁵ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 15

⁶ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р.15, 63

казалось что она самая маленькая на свете. «Поздний ребенок», «дитя на грани риска», «последний ребенок цикла»... В первый же день учебы ее запихали на эту первую парту, под ноги пришлось подставлять скамеечку, а под зад класть подушку. «Лида маленькая», не обижайте ее. «Лида младше вас, оставьте ее в покое»... С тех пор прошло девять лет, но мало что изменилось.⁷

As the omniscient narrator tells us, the first apocalypse is the hardest one because most of the casualties are youngsters who are not as tall or strong as adults. In the all-encompassing panic that ensues during *mryga*, they die not because they did not make it to the *Vorota*, but because they are trampled by the crazed crowd. In theory, there should be enough *Vorota* and enough time to save the whole human population, yet deaths are common. Later in the novel, we find out that this discrepancy is partially caused by *uslovlennoe vremia*, or the pre-arranged time between the appearance of the *Vorota* and when everyone is told where the gates are. In that period of time, all government officials and their families are taken to the *Vorota*, thereby avoiding the deadly stampede.

Before every apocalypse, rumors circulate that the *Vorota* will not open at all this time as a form of divine punishment for humanity's sins. People try to predict the exact date of the catastrophe, but to no avail. Lidka takes these grim predictions to heart, ostensibly because of her age, but looking ahead to how the rest of the narrative unfolds, we can see that the pattern of her pessimistic credulity starts here. While Anton Gorodetskii tries hard not to give up on humanity, Lidka lacks something, perhaps a strong core that would keep her away from despair:

Из двоек Лидка вылезла, но из троек выбраться не удавалось. Интерес к учебе сгинул напрочь — впрочем, как и у большей части Лидкиных одноклассников. Все эти колбочки, уравнения и диктанты казались

⁷ Дяченко Сергей и Мария, *Армагед-Дом*, p. 14

такими мелкими, такими ненужными, такими незначительными на фоне надвигающейся катастрофы.⁸

Slowly, the reader is introduced to Lidka and her moral flaws. As if she were the antithesis of Kir Bulychev's Alisa, Lidka is somewhat cowardly and selfish, not a typical heroine of Soviet fiction: "Я плохая, поняла она с удивлением. Я плохая девочка! Я уж-жасная девочка, и как это здорово — быть плохой"⁹;

Они стояли посреди поля. Стояли и сидели. Лидка хлебала из жестяной кружки, а отец, когда она отворачивалась, доливал ей в термос свой чай. А Лидка, малодушная, делала вид, будто бы не видит...¹⁰

Nevertheless, she has redeeming qualities and the bulk of the novel is dedicated to her moral development, and the conflict between her flaws and her ability to love with her whole being. While Alisa stays a perpetual teenager, the novel charts Lidka's entire life with an almost Tolstoyan scope of narration. Alisa never becomes a woman, whereas Lidka falls in love, develops sexually, and gives birth to a child.

The kind of self-doubt that I have discussed in Lukyanenko's protagonist Anton is much broader and darker in Lidka, who doubts not only her decisions, but the whole world:

Тоска оказалось такой властной, что Лидка едва не повернула назад... Рядом с Рысюком, который уже почти студент... Который верит, дурачок, что будет студентом! Который пеплом будет, а не студентом, золой он будет под развалинами лица...¹¹

This all-consuming dread and pessimism make Lidka self-destructive. The topic of suicide was taboo for Soviet fiction writers, especially for writers like Bulychev

⁸ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 43

⁹ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 31

¹⁰ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 90

¹¹ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 37

whose novels were didactic and adventurous stories for young adults. But Lidka comes close to ending her life not once, but twice:

Она навалилась на перила и посмотрела вниз. Под самым домом лежала темная полоска асфальта. Если упасть головой вниз...
В какой-то момент ей поверилось, что она не просто может это сделать, а не сумеет этого избежать. Перелезет через перила и прыгнет, как учили в бассейне, головой вниз. Раз — и нету ничего...¹²

Принять одну таблетку — и сразу наступит позднее утро.
Принять все таблетки...
Ничего не наступит.¹³

These suicidal tendencies do not signify that Lidka is a weak character; instead, they make her seem human, vulnerable, and real. Unfortunately, as the novel progresses, she becomes more and more disillusioned, cynical, and rough. Lidka is a loner who is capable of extraordinary love, but whose trust is inevitably betrayed sooner or later. Exacerbating Lidka's pain is her awareness of her own imperfections: "Лидка чувствовала себя черствым обрезком хлеба, лежащим на столе рядом со стопкой румяных, ароматных булочек."¹⁴

At the same time, the Dyachenkos do not invite us to judge Lidka, but to understand her and maybe even sympathize with her. The complex social experiment at the core of *Armaged-Home* makes Lidka Sotova the person she is at the end of the novel: not a hero, but not a villain either. All her life she strives to achieve reciprocal love and salvation for others, but repeatedly fails and eventually stops fighting: « —Я тубик, — сказала Лидка. — Тубик с пастой. Я сама себя выдавила. Теперь я

¹² Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 60

¹³ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 302

¹⁴ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 187

просто жестяная оболочка.»¹⁵ The reader receives the impression that Lidka's store of perseverance is finite, and it runs out as life delivers blow after blow.

The novel spans several cycles of *mryga*, which dictate the ebb and flow of the narration. The Dyachenkos masterfully describe the build-up to the day of the apocalypse and how it brings about progressively worsening social disorder. Crime, theft, and murders become almost acceptable, or at least not surprising to people who would have been horrified if these crimes had happened a few years earlier:

Математичка явилась, звеня ключами, как тюремный сторож, — под ее занятие выделили кабинет гражданской обороны, обычно запиравшийся на три замка. Там хранились противогазы, акваланги, ракетницы, и прочие пособия, дорогие и привлекательные для воря. А уж воря в последнее время развелось не в меру, даже в лицее, даже несмотря на круглосуточное дежурство милиции...¹⁶

The whole society suspends its normal moral statutes and accepts new, savage codes of conduct. Tested by extraordinary circumstances, people act differently. Even when a new cycle starts, and there is time left until the fateful moment, a countdown clock keeps ticking in the minds of all the characters. The way they respond to the danger, whether they cower and run, or face it straight on, determines their fate. For example, Lidka would rather die than constantly live in terror:

Впрочем, она и без того мерзла. Вот заболеть бы и умереть. Лидкин день рождения прошел буднично и безрадостно. Четырнадцатое октября, снова среда. До назначенного срока осталось семь месяцев и три недели... Полвечера она проплакала, забравшись под одеяло, — не то из-за лица, не то из-за скорой и неотвратимой смерти.¹⁷

¹⁵ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 429

¹⁶ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 17

¹⁷ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 22

Lidka Sotova demands control over her life, something that most humans instinctively want. In the Dyachenkos' chaotic universe, this need for control and security becomes particularly acute. The following passage is an especially striking example of the way the world of *Armaged-Home* drastically fluctuates in response to the cycles of catastrophe:

Весна выдалась затяжная. Улицы существовали на правах сточных канав... В подворотне компания парней чуть старше Лидки гоняла ногами пустую бутылку. Лидка плотнее прижала к себе сумку. В толчее ничего не стоит вытащить кошелек, а то и вовсе вырвать имущество из рук — Лидка сама знала мальчишек из двести пятой, промышляющих таким образом. Правда, одного из них поймали и избili в милиции, и теперь он, говорят, не доживет до *мрыги*...¹⁸

The bonds that hold society together rapidly disintegrate. Civilization becomes an obsolete concept: it cannot be sustained under such circumstances. The violence and brutality escalate. Teenagers get into fights over absurd arguments and die. What would have been outrageous in the past becomes normal. Lidka is appalled by these changes:

После схватки на берегу пятеро оказались в реанимации. По паре мальчишек из двести пятой и из лица. И еще Инга, которая на другой день умерла... Ей казалось, весь город должен встать на уши, что все газеты должны выйти в траурных рамках; ничего подобного. Соседка Светка сообщила, что в двести пятой уже были подобные жертвы. Что в большой потасовке с семьдесят седьмой, например, троих мальчишек забили ногами.¹⁹

People are their own worst enemies. As Andrey Zarudnyi, Lidka's mentor and hero, says: "Самое страшное, Лида, не твари из моря, не метеоритный дождь... Самое

¹⁸ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 39

¹⁹ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 52-53

страшное — толпа на подступах к Воротам.”²⁰ The crowd, this faceless, mindless entity, is what murders individuals, not the natural disasters:

До дня окончательного апокалипсиса, вычисленного по методу Бродовского-Фильке, осталось сорок пять дней.... В семьдесят седьмой какой-то кретин притащил на уроки пистолет и перестрелял четверых одноклассников.

В двести пятой грохнули под чьей-то партой самодельный взрывпакет. Кого-то судили, кого-то упекли в колонию; все равно не дня не проходило без стычки. Сломанные носы считать перестали — считали только проломленные черепа. И мертвецов, а их по всему городу было уже изрядно.²¹

It almost seems that *mryga* is merely an excuse for individuals to come together into a conglomerate of non-thinking animals, with no accountability either to themselves or to society. This crowd will do anything to survive. Lidka is initially a good character with an awareness of which actions are morally right and which are not. Her faith in people diminishes, however, when people whom she loves are taken away. The first loved one taken from her is Andrey Zarudnyi. Being much younger than Andrey, she never dares to act on her desire to be close to him. Andrey is an influential politician who is about to expose a pre-arranged time to the public in an effort to give everyone a fair chance to survive and enter *Vorota* at the same time. Lidka swears to find his killers and finish the scientific work that he has started. But her noble goals are not matched by noble methods. The murder of Andrey Zarudnyi hardens her and brings out the worst in her. She speaks to Andrey’s son Slava: “Мне ведь плевать на тебя, Слав. И всегда было плевать. Твой отец — вот это человек был. А ты... в хоккее играешь хорошо. В настольный. И бываешь

²⁰ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 70

²¹ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 58

похож на Андрея Игоревича... Когда молчишь.”²² With a strange mixture of cruelty and honesty, she tells the boy who loves her that she has no feelings for him. Moreover, she tells him that she is intending to use him, as well as his father’s memory, to advance her search for truth. Inevitably the reader begins to ask: are her goals worth the moral fall that she is taking? Should we accept the Machiavellian notion that “the ends justify the means”? The question of whether or not the end truly justifies the means will persist until the novel concludes; readers must ultimately decide for themselves.

Lidka calculatingly offers to marry Slava, knowing that he has feelings for her. As the new *molodezh* (young people), they facing societal pressure to get married, so this plan seems perfect to her:

—Тебе ведь все равно придется жениться, так? Не на девочке же припевочке, верно? Ну так женись на мне. Я хочу поступить в универ. Если буду твоей женой — меня возьмут.
Славка по-детски хлопнул глазами. И сказал неожиданно тихо и жалобно:
—Всем от меня чего-то нужно. Им — дети. Тебе — фамилия...
Она криво улыбнулась:
—От тебя не убудет. Будешь жить, как жил. Водись со своими девчонками, мне-то что. Детей мне не надо. Это джентельменское соглашение, а не супружеский союз, потом, если хочешь, разведемся, понял?²³

But this seemingly ideal plan quickly turns sour for both of them. Slava’s hope that Lidka will fall in love with him over time turns out to be false. At the same time, Lidka retains remnants of her former conscience, and thus feels a vague sense of guilt for treating her husband cruelly:

²² Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 125

²³ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 128

Он посмотрел так, *будто она его ударила*. Так, что она сочла возможным оправдаться:

— Ну что ты, Слав, мы ведь договаривались... Джентельменское соглашение...

Он поднялся и вышел.²⁴

But these rare instances of guilt do not prevent her from continuing with her plan.

While being repulsed by Slava, she wants his attention: «К вечеру она почти оклемалась, но ради Славки продолжала симулировать хворь.»²⁵ Once Lidka achieves her desired position in the scientific community, she considers her husband «отработанным материалом».²⁶ When Lidka is an old woman, now respectfully called Professor Sotova, she meets Slava once again—he is now a bitter old man, who refuses to give her a photograph of his father who survived the apocalypse. Seeing what she has done to this man, she feels a pang of pain, which she calls thankfully short-lived:

Славка, Славка, что они с тобой сделали...

Кто «они»?

Чувство вины было маленькое, мучительное и, по счастью, короткоживущее.²⁷

There was a brief moment in her life when she thought she loved Slava, but the infertility of the couple embittered her. In a sense, Slava Zarudnyi was the second man who betrayed her trust, however unintentionally. Then there was her school classmate Rysiuk, who campaigned with her and succeeded in getting general Stuzha²⁸ elected as a president. But she and Rysiuk disagreed on an ideological level:

²⁴ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 135

²⁵ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 155

²⁶ Used material, Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 173

²⁷ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р.362

²⁸ A speaking name that means “severe cold.”

he was trying to limit the freedom of individuals for their own good, while Lidka was pathologically freedom-loving.²⁹

What he and Lidka worked so hard for became a terrible, tyrannical regime in which any second of any day people could be ordered to show their documents or be forced to undertake a practice cross-country run, imitating the day of the apocalypse. There is a remarkable parallel between communism, as it is portrayed in Lukyanenko's novels (as an invention of Light Others), and the regime of General Stuzha in the Dyachenkos' novel. Both systems had the best intentions and both systems crashed. The theme of the implausibility of a perfect governing system is developed in much more detail in Lukyanenko's other works.³⁰

Briefly, Lidka seems to find a man who will not betray her, a man who loves freedom as much as she does. It is one of her students, Maksimov. Despite the difference in age, they gravitate to each other and start seeing each other despite the danger of being caught, ostracized, and fired. With Maksimov, "ее жизнь обрела смысл. Снова и, как ей казалось, теперь уже навсегда."³¹ Her quiet rebellion against the totalitarian regime of Rysiuk and Stuzha finds an ally in him, a like-minded co-conspirator: "— Понимаю. Не продолжай. Но ведь нас топчут уже сейчас! Мы уже затоптанные, Лида. Еще не настал апокалипсис, а мы — уже..."³² But time passes, they survive another *tryga* together, and the age difference becomes a burden for Maksimov. Eventually he signs up to be a

²⁹ "Патологически свободолюбивая," a description the Dyachenkos used in their novel *Age of Witches* (1999) to describe the main heroine, Ivga.

³⁰ *Звезды — холодные игрушки* (1997); *Звездная тень* (1998).

³¹ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, p. 267

³² Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, p.268

construction worker in a foreign country and leaves Lidka. She is not naïve: she knew that this would happen sooner or later, but the betrayal leaves a mark on her soul. By this time, she is almost resigned to the fact that the men in her life will betray her in some way. She does not consider him a scoundrel because deeds like this are the norm to her: “Почему она должна думать о Максимове плохо? Почему сами собой приходят эти мысли, ведь Артем никогда не был подлецом?... ”³³

Tracing this pattern of disappointments, we can understand Lidiia Sotova better. The sacrifices she makes at the end of the novel are all dedicated to the last man who truly matters: her son. Named after her first love, Andrey, he is smart and sensitive, but also very idealistic. He has not gone through what his mother has gone through; he lacks the tough outer layer she had to develop. Lidka feels that her foremost responsibility is not to let life embitter him as well. She would literally do anything for her son:

Если мне скажут, что спасение моего сына означает гибель нескольких человек, которые иначе не погибли бы... я сделаю все, чтобы Андрюша об этом не узнал. Да. Но я не откажусь... от затеи. Вот такая я стерва, Виталик. ³⁴

To make sure her son will survive the apocalypse, she sacrifices everything: her work, her dignity, her self-respect, and Kostya, the only friend who believed in her from the very beginning when her theory seemed absurd to everyone:

С упорством, достойным лучшего применения, профессор Сотова билась в обшитые кожей двери. Увольняла своих сотрудников — лучших, перспективнейших, преданных. Сворачивала интереснейшие исследования и разворачивала совсем другие, невнятные и ужасно

³³ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р.380

³⁴ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 399

секретные; некоторое время институт находился в шоке — да как же!
Да ведь она порядочная, она не *такая*! Она никогда прежде...
Одно время она даже радовалась, что Костя Воронов не пошел с ней под
крышу ГО. Не стал свидетелем Лидкиного падения; впрочем, радость ее
была недолгой. Костя спился...
Говорят, именно Костя первый произнес это слово: «скурвилась». И
после емкого, точного слова надобность в объяснениях отпала сама
собой. Скурвилась профессор Сотова.³⁵

Ей казалось, что ее облепили клейкой вонючей массой. Окатили мочой,
унизили, низвели, изнасиловали, уронили на дорогу дымящейся
коровьей лепешкой.
Всему есть свой предел.
Она профессор... да что там. Она просто порядочный человек. Была.³⁶

The repetition of the word *poriadochnaia* in both passages invites us to analyze its significance. People think of Lidka as a decent person and she thought of herself as a decent human being. At least, she maintained the illusion of being decent. But if we think about her relationship with Slava, Rysiuk, and Maksimov, we see a pattern: once hurt, she never trusted these men and when they came to her for help or to ask forgiveness, she refused them. Her decency was a mirage, an echo of her younger self before the murder of Andrey Zarudnyi and the death of her sister: these two events have spiritually crushed her.

In the following scene, Lidka meets a young man from the provinces who has just arrived in the city right after the apocalypse, looking for a new start. Like any young man in the Dyachenkos' world, he is looking for a woman who does not belong to anyone yet. Lidka lets him take her to a museum, where she breaks down and frightens the provincial youth. Her sudden emotional outburst signifies the

³⁵ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 389

³⁶ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 398

death of young, impressionable Lidka, whose morals were trampled into the ground by the people around her, just like the physical body of her sister Iana:

— Прости... прости. Ты тут ни при чем. Прости меня. С этих сволочей станется... Они первые узнали о Воротах... и никому ничего не сказали. Сами влезли, вразвалочку, с поварами и денщиками, с женами и внуками, так между собой условились, потому и «условленное время»... А потом уже, потом — сказали нам. И мы побежали... И я не успела. Меня затоптали насмерть. Меня нет.³⁷

In this context it is almost surprising that later Lidka is able to open herself up once more and fall in love with Maksimov. Her motherly, all-consuming love for her son is not a surprise, but is unusual in its extremism. When the Little Gray Man, one of the many bureaucrats she has met, refuses to add Andrey to the pre-arranged list of people to be saved first, Lidka shows just how far she is prepared to go:

—Вы, крыса... Вы думаете, для меня имеют значение Академия, работа? Даже честное имя? Если мой сын не окажется в «условленном списке», то все остальное теряет смысл! Если вы не выполните обещания, мне нечего будет терять.³⁸

At the end of the novel and at the end of her life, Lidka is disillusioned with the very idea of her mentor. After many years of scientific inquiry, his kind and appealing theory remains just a theory:

Андрей Игоревич хотел верить, что Ворота изначально добры к людям. Что эта функция — спасать — основная. Что только от человечества зависит, будут жертвы во время кризиса или не будут. «С гордо поднятой головой...» Красивая гипотеза.³⁹

Anton Gorodetskii, with his moral musings, is an atypical hero, and Lidka departs from the canonical literary hero even further. Readers see her cruelty and disregard for others. We see her stubbornness and cynicism. But we also *understand* how she

³⁷ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 106-107

³⁸ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 419

³⁹ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 342

came to be that way, and see her affinity for truth, justice, and forthrightness: “А вторых, потому, что честнее один раз закатить девчонке пощечину, чем месяц за месяцем морщиться и презирать.”⁴⁰

One of the Lidka’s most salient, heroic characteristics is her affinity for personal freedom. She insists on making her own decisions instead of letting the mind of the crowd decide for her. Even when the other option is death, she would rather die than be trained like an animal without an intellect:

Научить. Натренировать. Довести для автоматизма. Так, чтобы настоящий апокалипсис и настоящая эвакуация показались прогулкой, едва ли не развлечением. Эти регулировщики перед муляжами Ворот. Эти знаки, жесты, команды, снящиеся Лидке в красноватых бредовых снах, и не только Лидке, наверное, снящиеся. Колонна построилась — пошла — стала. Пошла — стала. Пошла — стала... Никакой толкотни. Автоматные очереди поверх голов. Принудительные психиатрические обследования саботажников...

Лучше уж *мрыга*.⁴¹

The ruling regime that makes practice runs to the *Vorota* mandatory for the sick and old alike at any time of the day has a seemingly worthwhile goal—saving these people’s lives. In practice, however, this regime becomes a greedy beast, a way for some to accumulate power and exercise it. The regime described during Lidka’s second cycle, the regime that she helped to establish, has an uncanny similarity to communism: equal distribution of goods and services and the *ravenstvo*⁴² of all Soviet citizens on paper, but in reality, a complex system of nepotism, false accusations, and arrests. In an analogous fashion, training people to go through the

⁴⁰ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 30

⁴¹ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 249

⁴² Equality

Vorota in an organized way, without stampedes, has the result of treating people like a herd of animals:

Почему?! Что, иначе — никак? Иначе — не пройти? «Апокалипсис — намордник, надетый на человечество...» «Толпа подобна амебе... простейшие рефлексы... простейшие раздражители...»
Рефлекс. Но рефлекс сложный. Всю жизнь положить на его отработку. Поколение за поколением. Может быть, со временем послушание инструктору делается врожденным?
Нет. Приобретенные свойства не передаются по наследству. А значит — с рождения до смерти, тренировка и тренировка, а придет наш час — войдем в Ворота с гордо поднятой головой... Рефлекторно поднятой головой. Альтернатива? Давка. Куча-мала. Ад, где осталась Яна...⁴³

In this new regime of General Stuzha, pre-arranged time and other privileges are denounced by the state: equality for all. But in practice, Stuzha cannot follow the ideals that brought him to power: he adds his family and friends to the pre-arranged list. The system cracked and broke down because its initiator could not stay faithful to the principles of his own system.

Meanwhile, Lidka's notion of happiness cannot be achieved without very basic personal freedom. Like Anton, she refuses to be defined by the circumstances around her. Guided by his sense of right and wrong, Anton crosses the boundaries of Light, the side he was assigned to. Lidka fights to maintain a similar kind of freedom: "Я спокойна. С меня хватит. Я не крыса, я не желаю! Я не поддаюсь дрессировке. Я имею право сдохнуть! Я... имею право... любить тебя, когда хочю! Я свободный человек!"⁴⁴ Lidka's other heroic qualities are her perseverance and complete dedication to her son. While a mother's love is dictated by instinct to some degree, Lidka surpasses the limits of traditional motherly care. She loathes

⁴³ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 257

⁴⁴ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р.271

herself for not being able to protect her son from everything that might ever hurt him:

Время подкрасить виски, успокоить рвущуюся наружу седину.
Успокоить рвущуюся наружу истерику, инстинктивный слепой порыв — схватить сына и заключить его в кокон, в банку, в непроницаемую сферу, да хоть обратно в утробу, туда, где ему не будут грозить ежедневные опасности. Туда, где не достанет его неотвратимый апокалипсис... ;⁴⁵

But even in this situation, Lidka resists reverting to animal instincts. She chooses sensible reasoning even in situations where it is much easier to give in to the instinctual panic: “Столько сил ей стоит убить в себе хлопотливую курицу. Сколько сил уже потрачено, а апокалипсис все ближе, и как ни кудахтай, как ни приседай вокруг птенца, как ни мечись — ничего не изменить...”⁴⁶

This metaphor of a mindless chicken is repeated later in the novel: «Курица. Всполошенная курица внутри Лидки... Глупая курица.»⁴⁷ Here Lidka must ignore the instinctual impulse, and her ability to do so does her credit. However, controlling one’s natural impulses is not an action that the Dyachenkos want their protagonists to take as a universal rule. On the contrary, Lidka's biologically programmed love for her son is one of her redeeming qualities. Allowed to blossom, her motherly love gives her temporary bliss. In this passage, she has just given birth to Andrey, and is living in a small apartment with her parents, her newborn sister, her brother, and his wife:

Если бы несколько лет назад Лидке сказали, как и в каких условиях она будет жить, — она либо не поверила бы, либо побежала топиться.

⁴⁵ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 358

⁴⁶ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 358-359

⁴⁷ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 363

Теснота, нищета и бесконечный детский гвалт — тем не менее Лидка была безмятежна, как никогда. Почти счастлива.⁴⁸

She is *almost* happy. But what will make her happiness complete? At Andrey's graduation night, after she has gone through all the humiliation of getting his name on the pre-arranged list, Lidka dances with him and finally achieves a state of perfect bliss:

Сын принадлежал ей. Только ей. Нет на свете ни апокалипсисов, ни смерти, ни девочек Саш.
И тогда Лидка поняла, что путь ее пройден до конца, что она исполнила свой долг, что она счастлива.⁴⁹

The fact that her son *belongs* to her makes her exultant. Unlike other people and other men specifically, Andrey is her flesh and blood, a person who will not abandon or betray her. A certain aspect of her happiness derives from a sense of possession and permanence. Another aspect of her happiness is, of course, the knowledge that she has done everything possible to protect her son; in particular, that her morally transgressive actions were not in vain. This story would have been completely different if Lidka did not have a conscience to begin with; instead, she had to ignore the decency inside of her more and more as she got older. While she is clearly flawed, she nonetheless retains the reader's sympathy and involvement.

As I have mentioned before, there is a parallel between Russia's historical past and the scenarios presented in this novel. There are no direct references to the USSR, but certain descriptions are definitely derived from the past. For example, the deficit of all consumer products forced most Soviet citizens to stand in line for many

⁴⁸ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р.308

⁴⁹ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р.430

hours just to buy basics like shoes or food. Sergei and Marina Dyachenko lived through that period, and they transplant it to the world of *Armaged-Home*:

Очередь была длинная, как зима. Прошел почти час, прежде чем медленным человеческим конвейером Лидку втянуло в магазин...Что же, еще минут пятьдесят...

Еще вчера очередь ругалась, скверно и зло. Сегодня люди молчали. Смотрели в пол.

За прилавком стояли двое — взрослая женщина и молодая; младшая была Светкой с четвертого этажа...Старшая женщина принимала деньги и отсчитывала сдачу; она посмотрела сквозь Лидку, и Светка тоже посмотрела сквозь Лидку, не узнавая, но Лидка не обиделась, потому что Светка работает здесь уже месяц, ей платят, как ученице, она стоит за прилавком по двенадцать часов каждый день, у нее отекают ноги и слипаются глаза, и все равно ее собираются уволить на будущей неделе, что бы освободить место кому-то по знакомству.⁵⁰

Another chilling similarity to the USSR comes in the description of General Stuzha's reign. Like Stalin, he organizes camps for dissidents and so-called «enemies of the state». Similar to the Nazi cleansings of 1930s, the mentally challenged, alcoholics, and dissidents are sent to special camps:

Граждане, способные дестабилизировать эвакуацию, подлежали тайной изоляции, причем круг таких граждан все время ширился. Сперва это были психически больные, алкоголики и рецидивисты; уже в те времена широко распространился термин «общественная недееспособность». На двадцатом году цикла одной «недейки» было вполне достаточно, чтобы загромоздить «на изолят».⁵¹

In Lidka's geographically ambiguous world, these people are not sent to Siberia, but to a fleet of old boats moored off-shore: «На старых баржах, выведенных далеко в море, устроены были изоляционные лагеря...»⁵² A reference to some cold and remote place as a destination for undesirables may have made this parallel too

⁵⁰ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 74-75

⁵¹ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 289

⁵² Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 290

obvious. Instead of relying on the historical past, the Dyachenkos have crafted their own world with a political resemblance to the USSR.

One more similarity suggests that the writers were re-living and re-visiting their Soviet past in this novel. The abbreviation of the special government department that is responsible for public safety and the isolation camps is GD, Government Defense.⁵³ Later it is renamed to DPS, Department of Public Safety⁵⁴:

Ее знаменитый отдел больше не был украшением института Зарудного. Сокращенный на половину, он перебрался под крышу ООБ... Строжайшая секретность, подписки, вертушки на входе и выходе — все атрибуты гнилой секретности, которую Лидка с давних пор ненавидела.⁵⁵

Such abbreviations were extremely common in the Soviet Union, and characteristic of each party and department: for example, *ЦК КПСС* instead of *Центральный комитет Коммунистической партии Советского Союза*. The “mystical powers of the Soviet mania for abbreviations”⁵⁶ continue to hold sway in present-day Russia as well.

After the Soviet Union fell apart, debt negotiations between the former USSR republics thwarted the energy and gas trade. As the Dyachenkos’ world gets closer to the apocalypse, the same problems arise: “Как рано похолодало в этом году. Обещают отключить свет. Говорят, что для отопления не хватает денег, газа, нефти, еще чего-то, только недавно все было — и вдруг оказалось, что ничего

⁵³ ГО, Гражданская Оборона

⁵⁴ ООБ, Отдел Общественной Безопасности

⁵⁵ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 387

⁵⁶ McCausland, Gerald. "Victor Pelevin." *Russian Writers Since 1980*. Ed. Marina Balina and Mark Naumovich Lipovetsky. Detroit: Gale, 2004. Dictionary of Literary Biography Vol. 285. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 12 Apr. 2013.

нет...”⁵⁷ The financial uncertainty of the early 1990s and the devaluation of the ruble paved the way for opportunists who made money, often illegally, and newly impoverished people whose savings evaporated overnight. The following description from the novel seems to refer to that concrete period in Russian history:

Ветер носил отвратительный запах — так пахнет в зале ожидания, так пахнет в той подземной кишке где плечом к плечу стоят пожилые женщины и продают носки и хлеб, домашние тапки и трикотажные свитера.⁵⁸

Setting up a political situation analogous to the Soviet Union's is the authors' way of examining the past without the biases or prejudices of a historian. The novel contains an independent experiment, a literary speculation about what could have happened—or did in fact happen—when individuals, driven by a constructive idea, institute a new social regime. The passages quoted above lead me to believe that the authors intended to comment upon the Soviet Union superpower in particular. Through a fantastical setting, the Dyachenkos study the past of one nation and the inner nature of the individuals who compose this nation.

While the Dyachenkos can be labeled anthropologists of their novels, they are also masterful storytellers. They do not impose their own ethics on the reader. They show, but don't tell. Readers are free to form their own opinions—we can sympathize with Lidka or not. We are free to decide for ourselves whether faulty human nature was the reason behind General Stuzha's regime, with its initially philanthropic goals, turning into an inhumane dictatorship. Similarly, can human nature or just certain individuals be held responsible for the labor camps in Siberia

⁵⁷ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 76

⁵⁸ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 79

and the disappearance of thousands of Soviet “enemies of the state”? To reiterate a famous Russian question, who is to blame? Human nature certainly played a part in this downfall: “Никому ни до чего не было дела. Все торопились урвать от жизни свой кусок радости, урвать, пока можно, пока дают.”⁵⁹ But does that mean that any regime is doomed to fall short of its own ideals? This novel prompts many more complex social, political, and philosophical questions. Foreign readers would also appreciate these themes and questions, even if they miss the allusions to the USSR. This is one of the ways in which the Dyachenkos’ fiction differs from Lukyanenko’s: Lukyanenko directly calls upon the reader to recall certain events, while the Dyachenkos build analogous situations in their newly created universe.

The Dyachenkos’ treatment of the author’s role in the novel is more subtle than Lukyanenko’s. In *Armaged-Home* we have a fictional stand-in for the Dyachenkos: the science-fiction writer Velikov. A close friend of Lidka, and the *only* friend she has left after her disgraceful descent, he serves as an oracle of truth. He writes a novel called *Last Sacrifice*. This novel becomes popular, especially among young adults like Lidka’s son Andrey. In the novel, a young man sacrifices himself and stops the apocalypses from ever occurring. Andrey is mature enough to take a similar step, but he realizes that this theory is somewhat far-fetched. His mother makes him promise not to tell anyone that he is on the pre-arranged list. When the day of the catastrophe comes, Lidka and Andrey run to the evacuation point for the people on the list. They both get into a van, but then a woman with a bloodied face struggles to join them. Andrey steps out of the car to help, and then decides not to

⁵⁹ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, p. 50

come back to the van, his only transport to safety. He gives up his guaranteed chance of surviving *mryga*; his mother's efforts are in vain. Lidka screams for Andrey to come back, but all she can see is his guilty eyes. At this emotional climax of the story, the Dyachenkos cut to the epilogue, a scene many years later. The contrast is staggering: from the chaos of a world falling apart, we suddenly are transported to a quiet sunny beach. This transition is very cinematic, a precursor to the many screenplays they would subsequently work on.

We no longer see the Lidka with whom we have become acquainted, but instead a very old woman with a cane, making her way closer to the water. Not once in the epilogue is she called by name, as if the old Lidka died back in that van. She sits on the beach, looking at waves. We learn that Andrey is dead, but he did not die in that apocalypse. That apocalypse never happened:

Вулканы, уже начавшие извержение, заткнули глотки и поперхнулись собственной лавой.
Земная кора, уже вздыбившаяся перед очередным катаклизмом, замерла и успокоилась.
Гигантские волны смиренно улеглись обратно в океан, метеоритные дожди так и не достигли земной поверхности, глефы вернулись в море, клубы ядовитого газа рассеялись на безопасной для человечества высоте.
И человечество пришло в ужас.⁶⁰

Lidka is convinced that the apocalypse will never occur again. She wonders whether her son's actions stopped the *mryga*. Or maybe her love and despair stopped the catastrophe? No one knows. But without these nature-imposed deaths, humanity waged several wars with itself. Andrey died during one of these wars while serving as a combat medic. The Dyachenkos do not make this ending a didactic conclusion to the novel, nor do they glorify self-sacrifice as Soviet literature would; they simply

⁶⁰ Дяченко С. и М., *Армагед-Дом*, р. 437

place the facts before us and allow us to judge. Contemporary fiction writers do not break their bond with the past altogether. The same questions stream from the Dyachenkos' pages, but because the genre is science-fiction, they are now presented through the medium of unfamiliar, magical worlds.

Conclusion: Russian *Fantastika* Writers as Moral Compasses

Unfortunately my analysis of modern Russian science fiction is limited to three writers, and even within their wide repertoire of works, I looked closely only at five novels. Nevertheless, I believe that this scope is sufficient to understand the objectives of these writers, because the Dyachenkos and Lukyanenko have a distinct style and purpose of narration that characterizes all of their works, including the *Night Watch* series and *Armaged-Home*. These three writers are engaged in a dialogue with Russian history and human moral dilemmas at large. These two topics are essentially intertwined, each one being the progenitor of the other. Lukyanenko bluntly describes the Russia of the 2000s and how much Russia's cultural, artistic, and moral heritage has deteriorated since the Soviet Union fell apart. At the same time, the Dyachenkos take readers into the mindset of a character who makes appalling, morally repulsive decisions, akin to those that led to the fall of the Soviet Union both as a communist ideal and as a nation. Readers observe both sides of Russian history and any significant historical event in general, and see the motivations of the people who made those events happen. Portraying the ethics and the humanity of the protagonists is Lukyanenko's and the Dyachenkos' primary concern. When there are no black-and-white precepts, no clear rights and wrongs, how does one make a decision? How does one bear the repercussions of one's actions? How can one forgive, not knowing or understanding one's adversary? Despite the complex and fantastical settings of each story, the reader's attention remains focused on the inner moral struggle of the protagonists. Good intentions, bad circumstances, or vice-versa—all that forms the backdrop against which the

hero makes a choice, and this choice permits us to see the hero's true colors. Always imperfect, the heroes created by Lukyanenko and the Dyachenkos inspire readers to consider the same moral dilemmas and to make their own ethical decisions. The *Night Watch* books and *Armaged-Home* are not escapist fiction, designed to impart pleasure or to allow us to feel better about our own limitations. If anything, these novels are unsettling; they make us think and give us the chance to experience lives that are vastly different from ours externally, and yet internally just the same. We are compelled to hope that we will never be in Lidka's desperate situation, trying to save the one person whom she loves, or bear the great responsibility that comes with Anton's magical power, but if by some strange chance we find ourselves in analogous circumstances, Lukyanenko and the Dyachenkos have prepared us well. We will be ready; we will make the decision that is right for us, given the world in which we live, however morally ambiguous that decision may be.

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