Romance as an Experimental Form in Polish and Russian Early Modernism

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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In my dissertation I examine a group of modernist novels that attempt to braid together two seemingly divergent literary modes: modernism and popular fiction. I argue that in the field of the novel popular culture was able to educate modernist writers on how to narrate their key ideological positions. The introductory chapter describes the situation of the novel in Polish and Russian early modernism and poses the question of the modernist authors’ need to experiment with popular literature. In this chapter I also develop an argument for the applicability and usefulness of the concept of romance in theorizing the relationship between the two modes. In the first chapter I present Fedor Sologub's novel-trilogy *The Created Legend* as an example of a “modernist romance” by using Northrop Frye’s structural approach. I also argue that the trilogy can be read as a narrativized justification of the author's sudden rise to prominence in the Russian literary field. The second chapter examines Jerzy Żuławski’s science-fictional epic *The Lunar Trilogy*. I look at spatial architecture, the protagonists, and temporality in this work as three loci in which the modernist ideology and romance engage in a dialogue. In order to ground my discussion in particular historical developments, I situate each of these narrative components in the larger cultural context of late-nineteenth-century modernity. Chapter 3
considers Evgeniĭ Zamiatin’s essayistic work and his novel *We* against the background of “the crisis of the novel” in post-revolutionary Russia. Incorporating its author’s reflections on the uses of engaging plots and the fantastic in contemporary literature, *We* enters the dialogue with various forms of romance, most notably gothic and spy fiction, yet without severing its ties to literary modernism. Significantly, the novel presents the figure of the author as the modern incarnation of the romance hero. Thus, I conclude my study by suggesting that the modernist experimentation with popular literature gradually moves towards what Harold Bloom termed “the internalization of romance,” a process whereby modernist authors adapt the imagery and narrative structures of romance to build elaborate allegories of the precarious position of the writer in the modern world.
Acknowledgments

My dissertation is about writers struggling with form and ideas; writers who introduce romance into their plots and visions and who oftentimes imagine their own artistic struggles as quests. In that sense, this work now seems to me to be quite autobiographical. Working on this dissertation was a quest like no other, and I have plenty of people to thank for helping me to complete it.

I owe my very special thanks to Professors Leonid Livak and Tamara Trojanowska for being my mentors throughout both undergraduate and graduate periods of my apprenticeship in Slavic and comparative literary studies at the University of Toronto. Their lectures and seminars have not only built the foundations of my knowledge of Polish and Russian literatures, but also been an inexhaustible source of inspiration for my ever-changing intellectual pursuits. Writing a dissertation under their supervision was a great privilege. The role of their constant guidance, encouragement, personal attention, support, and generosity for my personal and professional maturation cannot be overestimated. Almost eleven years ago, they inspired me – in their individual ways – to embark on a path to become a humanities scholar, which I continue to walk to this day and, hopefully, will continue to walk in the years to come. For that and for countless other things that would be impossible to list here, I will be forever grateful to them.

I would also like to thank Professor Thomas Lahusen, for joining my dissertation committee and providing me with support and lots of valuable suggestions, and Professor Irene Masing-Delic, who acted as my External Appraiser and offered very generous feedback that significantly improved the quality of my dissertation.

Over the years I received encouragement and support from the faculty, administrative staff, and my colleagues at both of my departmental homes at the University of Toronto, the Centre for Comparative Literature and the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures. I would like to thank Professors Veronika Ambros, Eric Cazdyn, Barbara Havercroft, Kate Holland, Eva-Lynn Jagoe, Taras Koznarsky, Christina Kramer, Neil ten Kortenaar, Donna Orwin, Jill Ross, and Joseph Schallert for their advice and ongoing interest in my academic career. I also want to acknowledge Drs. Artur Placzkiewicz and Piotr Kajak, as well as my “comrades-in-arms”: Jonathan Allan, Amber Aulen, Lauren Beard, Ryan Culpepper, Paula Karger, Timothy Ormond, Jeannine Pitas, Natalie Pendergast, Olga Ponichtera, Jan Schallert, Joseph Schlegel, Lyubov Shmygol, Łukasz Siciński, Rachel Stapleton, Olga Tatarenko, Antonio Viselli, and Dmitri Zheltovsy (many of them also PhDs by now). We worked, studied, and partied together, organized and attended conferences, exchanged ideas and experiences, and it all greatly contributed to making my graduate years the most memorable period of my life. I consider myself extremely fortunate to have been part of such vibrant and collegial communities. Two
friends deserve special recognition: Jonathan Haskins, who never failed to infect me with his energy and optimism, and Łukasz Siciński, who was the best intellectual partner one could ever wish for.

I am also grateful to the staff and fellows at the Jackman Humanities Institute for their support and stimulating discussions, which not only helped me refine the ideas presented in this dissertation, but also provided me with new perspectives on the academic profession. Another great stimulus to my thinking on problems of utopia, romance, modernity, and the novel were seminars taught by Dame Gillian Beer as well as Professors Christine Bolus-Reichert and Franco Moretti. Also, this study benefited greatly from the careful editorial work of Jonathan Allan and Kate Brennan.

I wish to thank the University of Toronto, the Centre for Comparative Literature, the Department of Slavic Languages, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Jackman Humanities Institute, the Mickiewicz Foundation in Canada, W. Reymont Foundation, and the Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 3902, for their generous financial support.

Lastly, I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to my other friends and my amazing, ever growing family, both in Canada and Poland (and now also the States) – my parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, stepmother, stepbrothers and their families, my mother-in-law and the rest of my wife’s family – for the love, encouragement, and support they provided me, many of them throughout my entire life. Most importantly, I want to acknowledge and thank my best friend and wife, Kasia, who was with me through all the ups and downs of this turbulent journey and without whose love and patience I would never have finished this dissertation. Whatever the intellectual and professional stakes of my “quest” have been, my wife, our wonderful son Maximilian, and his soon-to-be-born sibling are my true Happily Ever After.
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Introduction

Have you ever heard of parallel streams of time within a two-track time? Yes, there are such branch lines of time, somewhat illegal and suspect, but when (...) one is burdened with contraband of supernumerary events that cannot be registered, one cannot be too fussy. Let us try to find at some point of history such a branch line, a blind track onto which to shunt these illegal events.

Bruno Schulz, “The Age of Genius”¹

In this study I look at one instance of what Bruno Schulz named in the above epigraph “the parallel streams” (and “branch lines”) of time. Namely, I examine the role of popular fiction – “the romance paradigm” – in the history of Polish and Russian modernist novel.

As the literary history has it, once the golden age of classical nineteenth-century realism had come to an end, modernity found a new, more radical and more adequate form of representation through which it could express itself. We call this new artistic idiom “modernism” and although a myriad of competing versions of the concept circulate among scholars, few question the basic narrative of a paradigm shift (i.e. from realism to modernism). Another important aesthetic break that is said to occur at the turn of the century is the rapidly growing gap between the emerging market for popular fiction and so-called “serious” or “artistic” literature. Andreas Huyssen names this second break “the Great Divide” and argues that it created a discourse that had shaped attitudes towards culture pretty much until postmodernism blurred all distinctions between “high” and “low” culture². Since both of these ruptures in the seemingly monolithic nineteenth-century literature and culture took place at the same time – roughly the end of the nineteenth century – it is no surprise that they came to be perceived as products of the same historical dynamic: the dissolution of realism as the dominant aesthetic and the disappointment

of positivist hopes for the future of civilization. Fredric Jameson, for instance, suggests that mass culture and modernism are two antithetical modes that emerged as a reaction to the same social situation, namely the condition of “aesthetic production under late capitalism.” Regardless of whether one agrees with Jameson’s assessment or not, there is enough historical evidence to suggest a deep – if not always transparent – connection between these two modes.

Since the antithesis between modernism and mass culture is as strong – if not stronger – than the one between modernism and realism, various encounters of popular fiction and modernist literature have managed for a long time to avoid academic scrutiny and are only now attracting the attention of scholars. This is the less “official” history of modernism: one that is not sanctioned by the practitioners of modernist art and thought. Hence, such meeting points are like the “illegal and suspect” branches of time that Schulz describes in his short story. One of these points is what I call an early modernist experiment with romance (I further define romance as one of the three major novelistic paradigms).

Why was such an experiment undertaken and of what did it consist? In short, what generally defines modernist novels is their experimental form, which breaks away from what is usually called “realism.” Of course, this is not to say that the so-called modernist novels are not realistic, since many of them represented – to their authors and readers alike - a “realism in the higher sense,” to borrow Dostoevskii’s famous phrase. I only suggest here that their idea of realism is radically different from the realism(s) of the nineteenth century, because they reject the referential illusion as the dominant aesthetic principle and positivist philosophy as the rationale of art. I will return to this question later on. Modernist authors use experimental aesthetics as a way of challenging and subverting the existing master-narratives of Western culture and society. According to these standards, very few of the novels produced in the period known as Young Poland (in the Polish tradition) and “the Silver Age” (in the Russian

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4 In a recent study, Stephen Kern identifies these as: the personal narrative, the courtship narrative, the family narrative, the urban narrative, the imperial narrative, the liberal narrative, the religious narrative, and the artistic narrative. See Kern, *The Modernist Novel: A Critical Introduction*. 
tradition), would fit the definition of the modernist novel. In general, Polish and Russian early modernism did not create a distinct alternative to the realist model, unlike the field of poetry, which was much more revolutionary in both form and spirit.

There is, however, a small group of novels published in the first decade of the twentieth century that radically departs from the realist paradigm of fiction. Their formal departure seems to have more to do with pre-modern and contemporary popular romances than with the experimental prose of Joyce, Woolf, or Proust. My two primary examples of these works are Jerzy Żuławski’s novels known collectively under the name The Lunar Trilogy (Trylogia księżycowa, 1901, 1911, 1912) and Fedor Sologub’s novel-trilogy The Created Legend (Tvorimaia legenda, 1907-13). In many ways, both texts are representative of the early modernist imagination as they reflect modernist visions of history, reality, and the human self. At the same time, they unmistakably refer to scientific romances, utopias, sensation novels and other forms associated with the bourgeoning market of popular literature. This of course creates a series of problems, both philosophical and artistic. It also poses some important questions that need to be asked to gain some insight into the development of the modernist novel in Polish and Russian traditions; questions such as: what did early modernism learn from popular fiction? What kind of aesthetic devices did the romance paradigm offer to the early modernists in their attempts at forging a new type of novel? And what can be learned from this experiment with the romance about the culture of early modernism and its relationship with the bourgeoning literary market? These are the key questions that guide this project.

My research is situated at the intersection of three conceptual areas, of which I must provide an overview before I begin discussing the works themselves. My study deals with the novel and its relationship to the equally complex category of romance. Thus, to properly set the ground for my inquiry, I begin by outlining the history of the modern novel. While certainly not a definitive historical account on the subject, my history of the novel as a history of novelistic paradigms helps to flesh out why the early modernist novels represent an important turning point for the genre. I end my narrative at the moment when the dominant paradigm of the novel (“the realist paradigm” in my terminology) starts to show signs of exhaustion all over the

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5 See, for example, Głowiński, Powieść młodopolska, 88; and Bogomolov, “Prose between Symbolism and Realism,” 26-30.
Western world. At this point I also move to the proper object of my inquiry: the Polish and Russian novel in the early twentieth century. I explain the term “early modernism” and discuss in more detail the problems that emerge when scholars approach the question of modernism and, especially, the modernist novel in the context of Polish and Russian literature. Finally, I define more precisely the term “romance” and its importance for my understanding of the nature of the experiment undertaken by Żuławski, Sologub, and those who have followed in their footsteps.

**Novelistic Paradigms as a Perspective on the History of the Genre**

To say that the novel is a problematic genre is a considerable understatement. Even though most contemporary readers are able to identify a novel, to confidently distinguish it from other forms of literature, and even to offer a neat definition when prompted, critics and literary historians have very divided opinions as to what exactly makes a novel a novel, and, most importantly, how to conceive of its history.

Prevalent opinions can be divided into two camps supporting the “strong” or “weak” conceptions of the novel as a genre. To start with the first, a large group of critics links the history of the novel to the growing social influence of the middle class and the emergence of “formal realism” as a new literary aesthetic. The now classical position representing this view is Ian Watt’s *The Rise of the Novel* (1957). Watt’s theory sees the eighteenth century as the time in which the novel coagulated into a new genre (and hence discriminates against the earlier long forms of fiction). The English critic attributes the pioneering role of creating the new genre to three English novelists: Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding. Their work, the argument goes, breaks away from the earlier forms of storytelling, offering not only new types of stories, protagonists, and the fictional worlds they inhabit, but also creating a new, distinct aesthetic – “formal realism” – as the “lowest common denominator of the novel genre as a whole.”

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As debates about Watt’s key propositions raged on, his theory was expanded and made more complex and comprehensive. Because the break with the poetics and idealism of romance is still considered the key characteristic of the genre, literary historians tend to begin the history of the novel with Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote (El ingenioso hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha*, 1605-1615), one of the first modern texts to make the relationship between fiction (i.e. fantasy) and reality problematic.  

7 English male novelists are still given prominence as the apostles of the new literary form, although their ranks have now been expanded to include women writers, such as Frances Burney. When the emerging genre acquired new audiences and the attention of critics – the story goes – it spread worldwide, to Western Europe at first and then to other parts of the globe.  

8 And before the classically (and Romantic-) minded critics could realize what was happening, the novel became the dominant literary form in the nineteenth century: a position, one may argue, it holds to this day, despite the multiple challenges posed by modernist and postmodernist authors, and in complete disregard of repeated claims about the genre’s crisis and imminent death.

According to the above narrative, there are two key elements of the genre’s definition that distinguish it from the earlier genres like romances, satires, the picaresque, etc. First, there is an insistence on representing life in all its minute and mundane details, which affects the choice of topics (e.g. characters with low social origins) and the manner of writing (e.g. the use of prose, transparent language, creating the illusion of authenticity, etc.). Second, the novel is a genre “whose primary criterion was truth to individual experience – individual experience which is

7 The most influential texts propagating the status of Cervantes’ work as the prototypical novel are Lukács’ *The Theory of the Novel* and Ortega y Gasset’s *Meditations on Don Quixote*. A very good overview of various theories on *Don Quixote’s* position in the history of the genre can be found in Schmidt’s *Forms of Modernity*. See also Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 152, as well as Reed’s *An Exemplary History of the Novel* and Robert’s *Origins of the Novel*. As Robert explains: “*Don Quixote* is certainly the first ‘modern’ novel, if modernity is understood as the self-searching, self-questioning literary movement which uses as subject matter its own doubt and belief in the value of its message. *Robinson Crusoe* can claim another sort of priority: it is ‘modern’ insofar as it expresses very clearly the tendencies of the mercantile middle class which emerged from the English Revolution. Thus it has been possible to assert that the novel is a middle-class genre and that, before it became international and universal it was specifically English.” Robert, 19ff.

8 The continuing influence of this way of thinking about the novel and its history is evidenced for example in the recent introductions and companions to the studies on the novel, for example *The Cambridge Companion to European Novelists*, ed. Michael Bell.
always unique and therefore new." Only life itself – in its multiple and unpredictable manifestations – should be the source of novelistic storytelling, not traditional and pre-designed plots, stock character types, and all the other “inherited” components. To put it more bluntly, “the novel” is at heart always a realist or verisimilar genre, regardless of the type of realism espoused, whether it is the realism of Austen, Stendhal, Balzac, Dickens, Tolstoï, Dostoevskiï, Flaubert or James. Thus, in the light of such a definition (and in the eyes of the earliest critics of the genre), the skill of the novelist is measured by how faithful he or she can be to the truth of the human experience, both external (social, historical) and internal (psychological).

I will now consider the other approach (focused around the “weak” definition of the novel). While many scholars continue to uphold this definition and the historical narrative it generates, the theory as a whole has always been strongly contested. In general, the opposition to treating the modern realist novel as the quintessential form of the genre is based on two observations. First, works that comply with the definition given above can be found in a variety of geographical areas and in very distant historical times. Examples include some Greek and Roman novels, Chinese medieval novels, Icelandic sagas, etc. It seems, therefore, that there is nothing particularly European or “modern” about the genre. In the light of these criticisms, the

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10 As Frye observes, “[i]n every age it has been generally assumed that the function of serious literature is to produce illustrations of the higher truths conveyed by expository prose.” Frye, The Secular Scripture, 24. It follows that in the modern age the human reality became a “higher truth” and a value in itself: at the very least, the only real communicator of such truths. The dialectic of life and art, or truth and fiction, has been a constant element at every stage of literary revolution. It is not difficult to see the emergence of the novel and its antagonizing of less verisimilar prose genres as just another instance of this dialectic at work.

11 Most of the criticisms of Watt’s study have been neatly summarized in Nicholas Seager’s The Rise of the Novel. I am here less interested in challenges posed by feminist or postcolonial critiques than with those concerning chronological and aesthetic aspects of the theory. In recent years the Eurocentric history of the novel underwent a similar revision as the concept of modernism (now almost always appearing in the plural form). See Doody’s The True Story of the Novel, Moretti’s The Novel, and Moore’s The Novel: An Alternative History. Moore’s encyclopaedic study is a work of general interest rather than academic scholarship, but it offers an excellent polemical history of the genre with examples from many non-Western literary traditions.

12 One the earliest and most important attempts to “open up” the history of the novel was the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, especially his two essays: “From the Prehistory of the Novelistic Discourse” and “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel” (both included in The Dialogic Imagination).
notion of the modern origin of the novel becomes highly questionable. Some may suggest that none of the early novelistic forms defined itself as novels in their time, but then again, neither did the works of Defoe, Richardson and Fielding. In the extreme, a continuous re-evaluation of the history of the novel leads some to doubt that there exists such a thing as the history of the novel, at least the history that functions outside of current institutions of literature. “What is clear is that the linear history of the novel as having an ‘origin’ and ‘rise’,,” writes Homer Brown, “with its genealogies, lines of descent and influence, family resemblances, is itself a fictional narrative – a kind of novel about the novel.”

The second major point is that delimiting the genre of the novel by any fixed set of thematic or formal principles simply fails on empirical grounds. As many critics observe, the only consistent features of the novel are its formlessness, openness and indeterminacy, or in other words, novelty. But this is a kind of novelty that, contra Watt, does not remain within the boundaries of the “real life,” not even in the aesthetic boundaries of “formal realism.” In fact, the lack of aesthetic and thematic unity of the novel does not result from mimicking life and its infinite possibilities, as much as from continuous appropriation of all kinds of literary and non-literary forms – not to mention individual plots, characters, themes and motifs. This unprecedented voracity obviously puts a question mark over the “life writing art” dictum claimed for the modern verisimilar novel. Virginia Woolf was certainly right when she famously stated that the novel is a cannibal “which has devoured so many forms of art” and will have “devoured even more.”

The second observation is clearly more theoretical at heart, willing to move aside some of the historical issues troubling genre historians and focusing more on what truly fuels the genre’s engine. Unlike the first approach, the range of definitions on this side of the debate can be very broad, from the minimalist, “common-sense” definitions like that of E.M. Forster (a novel is “any fictitious work over 50,000 words”) to very sophisticated, philosophical ones (e.g.

13 Brown, Institutions of the English Novel, 177.


15 Forster, Aspects of the Novel, 3.
Bakhtin’s theories about the polyphonic and dialogical nature of the novel). The polymorphous qualities of the novel are thus the only true defining characteristic of the genre, as reflected in these approaches. There is no way to delimit the novel to a particular corpus of texts or to produce an ideal type that would somehow capture the essence of the genre, because it is so expansive and adaptable (unless expansiveness and adaptability, or some other synonym for changeability – like Bakhtin’s dialogism – are themselves made into an essence). The past and current innovations in the genre constantly expand the boundaries of what is at a given time understood to be a novel and so our historical and critical perspectives have to become more inclusive. As a result, even the seemingly unquestionable aspects of a simplest possible definition (“a long work of fiction in prose”) can hold for all types of novels. Here, the notion of “fiction” is in itself extremely problematic\(^\text{16}\) and the criterion of prose does not apply to all novels, for example Aleksandr Pushkin’s *Evgenii Onegin* (1825-32) and Adam Mickiewicz’s *Konrad Wallenrod* (1828), both of which are examples of so-called novels in verse. “A genre so comprehensive can have but a weak unitary force,” observes Alistair Fowler. Yet, he adds, “the novel is still a kind, even if one badly in need of subdivision.”\(^\text{17}\)

These are two opposing ends of the spectrum of the existing theories of the novel: on the one hand, a strong definition and relatively short history (“the rise of the novel as inextricably connected to the rise of realism”); and on the other, an open definition and a very long history (“the novel as a kind of universal narrative principle”). Since the focus of the present study is first and foremost historical, my theoretical position has to be situated somewhere in-between these two extremes.

First of all, while I recognize the variety of literary forms that resemble or, arguably, are novels, however we currently understand the term, for the purposes of this study I consider the novel to be a distinctly *modern* genre. What I mean by this is that the history of the novel is closely linked with the history of modernity – its social, cultural and technological advancements and the result they had on the culture of Europe and the rest of the world. In other words, I am

\(^{16}\) For a discussion about the concepts of fictionality and fiction set in the context of the history of the novel see Paige, *Before Fiction*, 1-33.

\(^{17}\) Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, 120.
positing a more contextual definition. The novel in my view cannot be defined by a set of formal characteristics, but should rather be recognized as a cultural phenomenon that developed at a particular point in time; its “rise” had to do as much with the advancements in the publishing industry, changing social sensibilities, emergence of new types of readership, etc. as, for example, with new plots and characters, or a particular style.

Hence from now on, whenever I will mention or discuss the novel as a genre, I will refer specifically to the modern novel. I do not want to suggest that there is no historical continuity between the earlier novelistic forms and the modern novel, nor to dismiss the long history of the genre. I simply want to point to the fact that the social and cultural roles of the earlier narratives that can be called “novels” were considerably different even if the form itself was not. As Juriĭ Tynianov argues, literature is a system that undergoes mutations and the function of a given artistic element changes with the change of the system of which it is a part.¹⁸ That said – as will become evident in the next few paragraphs – I do not want to identify the genre with a realist/verisimilar novel.

I propose to view the history of the novel qua the modern novel not as a derivation of a given prototype(s) or a set of aesthetic principles, but rather as a struggle between several competing models or novelistic paradigms.

A paradigm is generally defined as a “pattern,” “model,” or “exemplar.” The term has been made popular by Thomas Kuhn’s famous study The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, in which he proposes to view the history of scientific discoveries not as a progressive, linear movement through time but rather as a series of paradigm shifts. Kuhn defines scientific paradigms as “universally recognized scientific achievements that, for a time, provide model problems and solutions for a community of researchers.”¹⁹ When applied to the field of genre studies, a paradigm can be defined as a particular structural and aesthetic model a given genre may take as a basis for its generic identity, but to which it cannot be reduced. In other words, a paradigm is a variation within a genre. To illustrate this in the context of literature (but not yet


¹⁹ Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, xi.
novels), both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are universally recognized as epics and both are commonly viewed as the most exemplary representatives for the genre. And yet it is obvious that they represent very different types of narratives, both thematically and structurally; they are different models of how an epic genre may be structured. Therefore, they both might be taken to represent two different models or paradigms – significant variations – of a single historical genre, the ancient epic.

The concept of the paradigm can help us represent the development of the modern novel. In the late seventeenth century and the eighteenth century, when the novel as a genre was still in the process of formation, there were several forms or variations that struggled for the approval of general readership and, in retrospect, for the ability to shape the entire genre. In this study I will be primarily interested in three of these forms: *the romance* (in its modern incarnation, for example in adventure novels or Gothic romances), *the realist novel* (as Ian Watt characterizes it; exemplified most fully by the work of Defoe and Richardson), and, finally, the eccentric and playful meta-narratives which I will refer to as *the experimental novel* (such as Lawrence Sterne’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, the Gentleman*, 1759-67 and Denis Diderot’s *Jacques the Fatalist and His Master*, 1765-80, 1796). A more scrupulous study would doubtless reveal other possible models in this formative period. Some will find the three paradigms I selected too arbitrary or simplifying, or propose a different system of novelistic models. However, I believe that, for the purposes of my argument, which is concerned with only a small section of the history of the novel, this division, as well as the new outline of the genre’s history that it generates, will prove both useful and illuminating.

The principle for selecting these particular paradigms has a historical rationale. For the most part, all three are clusters of historical genres that, in a new cultural context, began to merge and coalesce. As the emerging genre, the novel soon started to pull the closest literary forms (such as the romance or the picaresque) into its orbit, obfuscating their generic identity and making

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20 One such classification of forms can be found in Patricia Meyer Spacks’ study *Novel Beginnings: Experiments in Eighteenth-Century English Fiction*. Spacks organizes the novelistic production of eighteenth-century England into eight categories: novels of adventure, the novel of development, novels of consciousness, the novel of sentiment, the novel of manners, Gothic fiction, the political novel and *Tristram Shandy*, which constitutes a category of its own. However, the differences between her categories are mainly thematic and so do not really correspond to my definition of novelistic paradigm.
them into alternative models of its own various narratives. In a way then, once the cultural phenomenon of the novel took off— not yet in its distinct shape— it appropriated a number of kindred literary genres (such as romance and the picaresque) as its building blocks, effectively putting an end to some of these forms. As Michael McKeon argues, “traditional categories do not really ‘persist’ into the realm of the modern as an alien intrusion from without. … [They] are incorporated within the very process of the emergent genre and are vitally functional in the finely articulated mechanism by which it establishes its own domain.”

Romance is a good example here; with the possible exception of William Morris’ reconstruction of historical romance, the romances of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are very different from their ancient, medieval, renaissance and baroque counterparts. Romance simply became a kind of novel. As Moore puts it, “even though Hawthorne labeled some of his book-length fictions ‘romances’ rather than ‘novels’ . . . a critic can hardly be said to commit a literary crime by calling them all novels.”

Moore is both right and wrong in his assertion, but I will come back to that distinction in later parts of this introduction.

It needs to be stressed that the paradigms I mention were not floating freely in cultural space. Neither were they independent of one another as they were all connected by a complex network of intertextual relationships and artistic influences marked by both continuities and discontinuities. Another important point I want to make is that the symbolic competition between the three (and possibly more) major paradigms was never public (i.e. there was no open struggle of “schools” or “movements”) nor were the stakes (the direction of the new genre) ever made explicit. Here, I believe, Franco Moretti’s ideas on literary evolution find their application. In an essay “On Literary Evolution” Moretti breaks Darwin’s evolutionary theory into two forces: generation of variations (determined by chance) and natural selection (determined by necessity). The clash of the two determines the “winner.” When applied to literary history, it is possible to see how new genres, artistic devices, plots, and more are

21 McKeon, 21.


23 For a detailed discussion with plenty of fascinating examples of these connections, see Hunter, Before Novels, McMurran, The Spread of Novels, and Jenny Mander (ed.), Remapping the rise of the European novel.
constantly generated, but they do not necessarily become culturally significant; indeed, in many cases their novelty is simply ignored, due either to the actual or perceived imperfection of the works in question. In other words, the literary field “chooses” the forms that respond to the current cultural episteme, either conforming to it or transgressing it in a permissible way. So what happens in the nineteenth century with the romance, realist, and experimental novelistic paradigms? “Keeping within the trajectory of the English novel,” writes Moretti,

one could claim that the nineteenth century ‘selected’ Fielding, and confined all the others to an obscure peripheral existence. But the process is even clearer on a European scale, where the random proliferation of the eighteenth century was brought to a sudden end by the international success of the new species (so to speak) of the Bildungsroman – which was then to dominate the narrative universe of the following century.24

Whether the subgenre of Bildungsroman is in fact the heart of the nineteenth-century novel is open for debate, but Moretti is right in observing the sudden narrowing of narrative models in the nineteenth century. After the flurry of possible variations of the new genre of the novel – “an explosion of new energies”25 – witnessed by the eighteenth century (not only in England, but across Europe), the realist paradigm (“the novel in the strong sense”, as it is often referred to) had quickly eclipsed all others and dominated the literary field. Although the nineteenth-century novel retained all of its openness and unlimited creative energies – which it occasionally unleashed – it did not stray far away from the poetics of prose in all the meanings of the word. Temporarily gone was the formal experimentation of the former century; in the “serious” age, the novel becomes a study of society and its problems, “a mirror carried along the high road.”26 Consequently, its aesthetic has to be streamlined and made as transparent as possible but with all the staples of the nineteenth century novelistic techniques: the omniscient, third-person narrator, “transparent” language, the choices of “real life” topics and characters,

24 Moretti, Signs Taken For Wonders, 265.

25 Spacks, Novel Beginnings, 2.

and so on. The novel’s essential function of entertaining and amusing soon gives way to an educational vocation: a desire to be the conscience of modern times that “brings the sinner back to the fold, comforts the needy and highlights the horrors of individual and social injustice.”

Histories of the Polish and Russian novelistic tradition largely follow this trajectory of development, yet in each case there are important distinguishing factors that ought to be mentioned. Since the genre’s inception, the Russian novel never developed a stable model to match those emerging in Western Europe, where the application of Ian Watt’s model connecting both “formal realism” and the novel with the rise of the middle class is much more obvious (even if occasionally contested). Likewise, the question of realism in Russian literature is also problematic; despite having developed in parallel with Western “realisms,” the nineteenth-century Russians “c[a]me to realism almost by themselves, in their own way, and partly in advance of their Western colleagues,” points out Hugh McLean. One could make a similar case for Polish literature, where the cultural heritage of Romanticism never lost its dominant position, even after the failed January Uprising of 1863, and the positivist backlash that came in its aftermath. Also, the works of “mature realism,” to borrow from Henryk Markiewicz, such as Eliza Orzeszkowa’s *Nad Niemnem* (1888) or Bolesław Prus’ *Lalka* (1890), began appearing only in the 1880s and largely coincided with the beginnings of early modernism; not to mention the fact that major works of other great “realists,” Stefan Żeromski and Władysław Reymont chronologically belong to the period of Młoda Polska and show clear signs of the early modernist sensibility. However, difficult as it is to provide a fixed number of

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28 In *The Novel in the Age of Disintegration*, Kate Holland characterizes the specificity of the Russian novel thusly: “By contrast [to the European novel], the Russian novel was shaped by the centuries-long alienation of a social estate that knew little of the cultural traditions and practices of its compatriots because its social values and political beliefs were largely inherited from the West. It articulated the political and social aspirations of the alienated nobility and intelligentsia and represented the displacement of these aspirations onto the closed world of the domestic sphere.” Holland, 19.

29 Hugh McLean, “Realism,” 365. Cf. Victor Terras’ article “Novel, the Russian” in the same volume. Both texts, although serving only as general overviews, support my argument about the hegemony of the realist paradigm in Russian literature in the second half of the nineteenth century.

aesthetic and thematic parameters that could serve as a stable model of the Polish or Russian realist novel, I will nonetheless argue for the hegemony of a realist paradigm in both cases. For different social reasons, throughout the nineteenth century Polish and Russian literary traditions developed a particular understanding of the novel – shared by writers, critics, and readers – as an essentially realist medium with an important social mission to perform. Because of this shared cultural code that more than made up for the lack of a single and coherent novelistic model, the reading communities of Nikolaï Gogol,’ Fedor Dostoevskiï, or Ignacy Kraszewski, for example, could still construe their works as realist narratives in a way that was no longer possible with Żuławski’s Trilogy or Sologub’s The Legend. By the end of the nineteenth century, the novel was simply “the realist novel,” even if the early modernists considered the type of realism it espoused a naïve one.

In order to conclude this section of my introduction, I will offer some final reflections on the fate of non-realist paradigms in the development of the novel during the nineteenth century. Because of the evolving nature of the system of literature, where the functionality of its individual elements is subject to various shifts, no resources available to it are being wasted. Instead, they often get recycled in order to change their functionality according to new cultural demands. As Shklovskiï suggests, “in each literary epoch there exists not one but several literary schools. They exist in literature in a state of simultaneity. However, one of them represents a canonized crest in its evolution, while other schools coexist without such canonization in a state of obscurity.”31 The realist novel became the dominant paradigm, one that determined the cultural and social outlook of the entire genre for over a century. Yet its competitors did not disappear from literary history. They continued to manifest themselves in individual works, usually in areas where the novel has not yet fully dominated the literary scene (such as Poland or Russia). Romance is a particularly interesting case of survival and adaptation, as it has found an entirely new ecological niche for itself, away from the pedestal of “serious” literature: the rising market of mass literature.

The Novel in Polish and Russian Early Modernism

Much like the novel, literary modernism is one of those notoriously bewildering concepts in modern literary history that constantly puts critics at odds. However, despite the reluctance and animosity of those infuriated by the inherent vagueness and multifaceted nature of the term, it now seems indispensable to our understanding of twentieth century culture and continues to grow in popularity.\(^{32}\)

In the most general sense, modernism is an umbrella-concept that covers most of the innovative and experimental streams of art and thought that emerged in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. "Innovative" and "experimental," I should add, with respect to classical nineteenth-century realism which by the end of the century was no longer perceived as adequate to deal with the complexities of modern life. When considered to possess a discernible, cultural cohesion, modernism is usually interpreted as a complex artistic and intellectual reaction to scientific advancements, the rapid modernization of all aspects of human activity, a progressing secularization and "disenchantment" of the world, and the effects of the aforementioned on culture and society. This reaction was at first adverse and pessimistic in the "decadent" phase and then more and more ambiguous in the so-called "high modernist" phase. Since the task of forging a synthetic definition of modernism is far beyond the scope of this study (and, perhaps, beyond any one study), in what follows I will adopt this cursory definition and, later on, focus on the particular fragment of the complex mosaic of global modernism that concerns the situation of Polish and Russian literature at the turn of the twentieth century.

One of the biggest problems posed by the concept of modernism (other than the changing meaning of the term across national traditions) is establishing the historical framework of its influence on world literatures. In the Anglo-American context, the birth of the modernist formation is usually dated to the early 1910s, when, according to Virginia Woolf, "the human character changed,"\(^{33}\) and its end to the onset of WWII.\(^{34}\) Elsewhere, a temporal delimitation of

\(^{32}\) The already long list of works of scholarship on modernism gets longer every year. For recent attempts at a comprehensive view of global modernisms, see The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms, ed. Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough, as well as Modernism, ed. Astradur Eysteinsson and Vivian Liska.

\(^{33}\) Woolf, "Character in Fiction," 38.
modernism is much more problematic because of the term’s changing meaning in different cultural contexts. Until recently, Polish criticism considered *modernizm* – after Kazimierz Wyka’s seminal study – to be little more than a short, introductory phase of the period known as “Young Poland” (*Młoda Polska*), a phase that ended with the beginning of the twentieth century and whose basic characteristics roughly correspond to the francophone concepts “decadence” and “symbolism” (both denoting trends almost completely outside the Anglo-American understanding of modernism). To move to another extreme, Marshall Berman – who views modernism as a grouping of “an amazing variety of visions and ideas that aim to make men and women the subjects as well as the objects of modernization, to give them the power to change the world that is changing them”35 – finds Goethe’s *Faust* and post-war New York architecture equally modernist.

Although hardly anyone pushes the boundaries of far as Berman, there is nonetheless a considerable push in literary criticism to globalize the concept. The “process of ‘internationalization’ of the meaning of the term [modernism] and the scope of its inquiry is of a twofold nature,” Edward Możejko observes, “in search of new examples which would support their claims, Anglo-American scholars seem to be inclined to go beyond the confines of English and American literature; on the other hand, other scholarly traditions displays a tendency to adopt the concept of modernism as established by the Anglo-American literary tradition.”36 The scholarship on Polish and Russian literature seems to confirm Możejko’s thesis, as the concept of modernism is slowly pushing out the current critical terminology, such as *Young Poland, the Silver Age*, and *Russian Symbolism*.37

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34 See, for example, Tim Armstrong’s *Modernism: A Cultural History*. According to Armstrong, “[at] its broadest, modernism can be defined as a series of international artistic movements in the period 1900-1940, characterized by their sense of engagement with ideas of the ‘new.’” Armstrong, 24.

35 Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, 16.


37 The most prominent advocate of introducing the Anglo-American understanding of the concept of modernism to the Polish cultural traditions is Ryszard Nycz’s *Język modernizmu: prolegomena historycznoliterackie*, especially
To make my terminology more transparent, I decided to break the concept of modernism into two phases: “early” and “late” modernism. Throughout most of this study I will be concerned with early modernism (from about 1890 to 1914) and only in the last chapter will I touch upon problems emerging in the late phase of modernism (in the early 1920s). I am not interested here in theorizing the phases of modernism. I use both terms only provisionally to reflect the well recognized fact that a significant transformation took place in the modernist ethos after the war, evident in the shift of artistic and philosophical problems preoccupying authors that could be identified as modernist (which is not to say there were no continuities, as my discussion of Zamiatin’s work will demonstrate). To begin with, many of the ideological conflicts, such as that between the old guard of writers and the new generation espousing “the new sensibility,” as well as key turning points (e.g. the failure of the 1905 revolution) are shared across Polish and Russian cultural fields. Thanks to the networking talents of such international activists of modernist sensibility as Stanislaw Przybyszewski one could speak of an actual communication and artistic exchange between the two movements which were, additionally, a part of a larger, European early modernist context. Also, both national traditions witness the same trajectory of early modernism (and within roughly the same time frame): from its humble beginnings in the 1890s to a growth in prominence and a series of revisions throughout 1900s, waning in the early 1910s and, finally, a more or less definite end with the onset of WWI. The shift to “late” modernism is in both cases marked by significant historical turning points: the February and October revolutions that transformed the Russian Empire into a socialist republic and the regaining of independence by Poland after more than a century of geopolitical nonexistence. Finally – and perhaps most importantly – because the ideology and aesthetics of early modernism were for the most part imported from the West wholesale (often collapsing the difference between artistic movements like symbolism, aestheticism, or decadence that
developed as independent phenomena in Western Europe), both Polish and Russian modernisms possess similar key features:

1. A strong sense of anxiety, restlessness and insecurity, often finding expression in apocalyptic visions.

2. Idealistic longing for the metaphysical: the aspect of the human experience that was extinguished in the modern age by rationalism and materialism.

3. A love-hate relationship with respect to urban culture combined with an explicit fear of nature, which is no longer a spiritual home to mankind, but an arena of cruel struggle for survival and a ceaseless, meaningless fermentation of life forms.

4. Themes that focus on the liminal states of the human psyche (such as depression, madness, and passion), taboo subjects (e.g. sex, death) and art as the highest form of human creativity through which mankind can overcome its biological determinism and connect with the transcendental realm, variously imagined.

5. A recurring theme of conflict between the individual, usually in possession of an exceptional, artistic nature, and society, perceived as a mindless mass or mob.

6. A blurring of boundaries between life and art, for example by living one’s life or manipulating the lives of others as if they were works of art.

7. Artistically, a tendency to be expressive (conveying the turbulences of the soul of modern man) and hermetic (i.e. relying on a complex network of symbols and references and hence aimed at a small group of an elite audience).

8. An eschewal of singular generic affiliations, as well as stylistic and compositional decorum. The artist’s imagination alone sets limits on what is and what is not possible in his or her work of art.

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38 My list is a modified version of one offered by Michael Wachtel and Ilya Vinitsky in their companion to Russian Literature (Russian Literature, 158-9). Another major text I consulted in devising this set of characteristics was Nycz’s Język modernizmu.
Of course, the similarities should not obfuscate the significant differences. One must keep in mind that the cultural contexts of Poland and Russia at the turn of the century were dramatically dissimilar (one was, after all, a trans-continental empire, whereas the other – a non-state). The specificity of political, social, cultural and religious pedigree of each movement steered its artistic efforts towards different goals. To offer but the most obvious examples: due to Poland’s long-standing tradition of struggle for political independence and the dominance of culture based on that struggle, the main task for the modernist movement was first and foremost to guarantee a field of autonomy for artistic expression (i.e. to see art in purely aesthetic and not moral or utilitarian terms)\textsuperscript{39}; on the other hand, the importance of religion and theology for the Russian early modernism was responsible for a variety of theurgical and utopian projects that set Russian modernists apart from their Polish and Western counterparts.\textsuperscript{40}

Perhaps one of the central characteristics of Polish and Russian early modernisms – one that complicates the integration of both movements into other European modernisms – is the fact that they were almost entirely dominated by poetic production. Most of the Russian early modernists were first and foremost poets. If some of them did write prose, it was usually situated on the margins of their lyrical work. In fact, before the publication of Andrei Belyĭ’s \textit{Petersburg}, hardly any of the authors affiliated with the modernist circles made an impact with their novelistic writing, and if they did, like Sologub with \textit{The Petty Demon} (\textit{Melkiĭ bes}, published in book form in 1907) or Mikhail Kuzmin with \textit{Wings} (\textit{Kryl’ia}, 1906), the novels were distant echoes of their daring modernist practices in the field of poetry or drama at the time. The same can be said about the Polish literary context, where modernist theories and practices – although formulated for literature as a whole – were mostly focused on poetry (as opposed to naturalism, which dominated in prose). Michał Głowinski, the author of the classical monograph on the novel in Young Poland, suggested that it is practically impossible to speak

\textsuperscript{39} For more information on the ideological and artistic debates around early modernism in Polish culture see \textit{Programy i dyskusje literackie okresu Młodej Polski}, ed. Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska.

\textsuperscript{40} For a very good account of the key features of Russian modernist practices, especially their utopianism, see Olga Matich’s \textit{Erotic Utopia: The Decadent Imagination in Russia’s Fin de Siècle} and \textit{Creating Life: The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Modernism}, ed. Irina Paperno and Joan Delaney Grossman.
about the *modernist* theory of the novel as a genre.\(^{41}\) In fact, with the exception of Karol Irzykowski’s original novel *Paluba* (1903) and Stanislaw Przybyszewski’s *Homo Sapiens* (1895-6), hardly any of the Polish novels of the period corresponded to the level of experimentation evident in modernist poetry. Even these two works owe a considerable debt to naturalist aesthetics (each in its own way). Indeed, it seems that the innovative aspect of the early modernist novels in both traditions is limited to novelizations (in the classical, realist fashion) of the popular modernist tropes with only an occasional recourse to more unusual formal devices like replacing continuity with episodic structure, offering fractured narratives, establishing a lack of psychological motivation, or experimenting with language. Hence, although there had been a number of attempts in Polish and Russian criticism to offer a synthetic look at the novelistic output of the period, no unified modernist paradigm of the novel emerged out of those inquiries. Some scholars even consider such constructs of “the modernist novel” or “the symbolist novel” as an oxymoron and suggest focusing on the complex dynamics between modernism and the novel rather than searching for some generic nexus that would correspond to the Anglo-American model built on such works as the novels of James Joyce or Virginia Woolf.\(^{42}\)

So what stood in the way of the modernist generation’s unique model for the novel? A few reasons can be given. The first one is the already-mentioned lyrical predisposition of modernist authors. The return to poetic forms was for them an act of rebellion against the older generations which privileged prose as a medium for expressing ideas and therefore shunned the aesthetic pleasures offered by poetry. It should also be mentioned that poetry and prose were for the modernist mindset associated with questions of artistic integrity; prose and novels were means of capturing an audience, often a non-discriminating audience, and hence of making money. As I will discuss in detail in Chapter 2, there is hardly a more divisive issue in the literary field of early modernism than money. In contrast to prose, poetry, especially hermetic poetry, was a much more demanding and noble (in the spiritual sense) form of art, one that still evoked the Romantic myth of the artist-genius, a purveyor of divine truths. Thus, even when

\(^{41}\) Głowiński, 93.

\(^{42}\) See, for example, Leonid Livak’s “Russian Modernism and the Novel.”
Polish and Russian early modernists used non-lyrical forms, they more often turned to short stories or so-called poetic prose (proza poetycka) which could capture the moodiness and the hermetic qualities of symbolist poetry, as well as the expressiveness of their essays and manifestos.

The second problem was that the realist paradigm continued to be the dominant form, not only as the privileged medium of the older generation but also of those who followed. What this domination of realism meant in cultural terms was that ways of overcoming it were not immediately apparent to those who might have considered overthrowing it (in ways other than simply turning to other media). The modernist view on reality as subjective, fragmented, sensual, and dualistic clearly required new narrative forms, yet it did not suggest any one particular model or direction in which to follow. Hence, the changes introduced to the novel genre over the course of the development of early modernism in both cultures were mostly affecting select aspects of style and narrative and they were incremental rather than total. One should also keep in mind the individual factor: even though the early modernists shared the same cultural and philosophical pedigree and at times fed off of each other’s work, each author possessed his or her own unique aesthetic idiom and, in most cases, a unique artistic and existential philosophy (which was one of the consequences of the modernist cult of originality). This further complicates the picture and explains why the artistic inventions of the period in the field of novel-writing never coalesced into a new paradigm. Also, it explains why it is often difficult to formulate a synthesis of the period’s novelistic output that would not focus on individual artists and their oeuvre. The few attempts at presenting such a synthetic outline generally end up mirroring the gallery of artistic profiles. Let us look at some of the examples.

In the case of Young Poland the main “models” are the naturalist novel (Reymont), the romantic-realist novel (Żeromski), the novel of confession (Dąbrowski), the symbolist-hallucinatory novel (Przybyszewski), Künstlerroman (Przybyszewski, Tetmajer), etc.\(^{43}\)

According to a recent study on Russian early modernist prose by C.A Tuzkov and I.V. Tuzkova

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\(^{43}\) For more details of this division with more examples, see Podraza-Kwiatkowska’s Literatura Młodej Polski, 176-278. A similar classification appears in Artur Hutnikiewicz’s Młoda Polska. Magdalena Popiel proposes a different organization of the main artistic paradigms of the novel in this period based on the underlying aesthetic categories, such as “epic tragedy,” “pathos,” “irony,” “paradox” and “grotesque,” all related to the modernist reworking of the Romantic category of the sublime. See Popiel, Oblicza wzniosłości.
– a study which actually works with the concept of the paradigm – the combinations are named as follows: the impressionistic-naturalistic paradigm (Zaitsev, Kuprin, Artsybashev), the existentialist paradigm (Gor’kiĭ, Andreev, Briusov), the mythological paradigm (Sologub, Remizov, Prishvin), and the fairy-tale-ornamental paradigm [skazochno-ornamentalnaia paradigma] (Belyĭ, Zamiatin, Shmelëv). Significantly, no single group emerges as a dominant trend.

Let me now move on to the heart of the problem: such a wide array of tendencies in the development of the early modernist novel suggests a few things. First of all, experiments in the novel genre were focused either on the form or substance, but in most instances the amount of experimentation was inversely proportional for these two categories. In other words, formally innovative works were often conventional in their subject matter, whereas the new problems and ideas were usually dressed in traditional guise. Secondly, the combinations most often noticed by scholars involve various degrees of merging between the two paradigms I defined as the realist novel and the experimental novel. In other words, the type of modernist experiments that critics seem to be most drawn towards involve the disruption and deconstruction of traditional (i.e. realist) novelistic discourse. Romance, on the other hand, is virtually absent from these taxonomies.

The reasons for this exclusion have as much to do with the status of the literary field (and hierarchies within it) at the time as with the prevailing attitude of past and contemporary criticism. To be more specific: at the turn of the century, romance was no longer perceived as a different type of the novel, but a synonym of popular fiction (a phenomenon that was outside the modernist understanding of “culture”). Generally, the scholarship on both Polish and Russian early modernist literature tends to reflect the taste and opinions of the period’s contemporaries, as a result of which there is not one but two layers of “disregard” for romance. Some of the more notable victims of this treatment are Anastasiia Verbitskaia’s novels (primarily Keys to Happiness – Kl’uchi schastia, 1913), Mikhail Artsybashev’s Sanin (1907), and Stefan Żeromski’s A Story of Sin (Dzieje grzechu, 1906-8). In each case there are justifications for excluding it from the early modernist canon, the most common being that the author did not belong to (i.e. was not considered a part of) the formation of early modernists. Recently, such arguments came under a closer scrutiny and as a consequence are no longer as convincing as they used to be. Yet even if one was to accept them, this still leaves the question
of what is to be done with works like Žuławski’s *On the Silver Globe*, Valerii Briusov’s *Fiery Angel* (*Ognennyi angel*, 1907), *The Mountain of the Star* (*Gora zvezdy*, written 1895-9, published 1975) or stories from *The Axis of the Earth* (*Zemnaia Os’,* 1907), and Sologub’s *The Created Legend?* After all, all of above-mentioned authors belonged to the ranks of early modernists – unequivocally so – and yet they all produced works that reintroduce the romance paradigm, even at the price of flirting with so-called low-brow literature.

Another strong argument against inclusion of the above-mentioned works in the discussions of the modernist novel in Poland and Russia is that their peripheral position in literary histories of their native traditions is due to their lack of artistic merits compared with the more acclaimed novels of the period. Here, once again, the problem is “artistic merits” but according to whose standards? One cannot forget the immense popularity (or ill-fame, which is a matter of value, not of scale) of most of these modern romances nor the fact that their authors attached great significance to them, in some cases considering them their greatest achievements. Even if one was to agree with this accusation and land these works in the trash bin of literary history, one must not forget about their important role in that history. “Innovations are more often than not unsuccessful, and success un-innovative,” writes Moretti. Works that are taken as paradigm-shifting are not necessarily the most inventive ones; the history of literature is full of half-forgotten, innovative experiments that did not “catch on” at the given moment, and yet offered excellent solutions for the future. Does it matter today to anyone but the most scrupulous literary historian what was the first work of literature to use “the stream of consciousness” technique before Joyce did in *Ulysses*? Or how many genius detectives populated European literature before Sherlock Holmes entered the scene? This is why literary history built on the “great canon” resembles a history built on the figures of great leaders. It tends to obscure the complexity of historical processes responsible for the sudden, paradigm-shifting, and “history-making” changes. What it suggests to us is that alternatives to the realist paradigm should not be necessarily sought in first-rank works (the canon of the period), but rather among the less recognized texts: the “minor characters” of literary history.

44 Moretti, *Signs*, 267.
I have covered two of the three major contexts of this study: the history of the European novel and the literature of Polish and Russian early modernism. I will now move to the last one, the history of the romance paradigm as part of the history of the nineteenth-century novel.

**The Romance Paradigm**

Romance, although in terms of complexity falls nowhere near such conceptual giants as “the novel,” “realism,” or “modernism,” is still a problematic term; like with the other two, scholars see it as either futile or impossible to define precisely, at the same time asserting that most have a clear idea of what it is. The opinions are divided on whether romance should be considered a “mode,” “genre,” or a proto-narrative (a *mythos*, as Northrop Frye defines it in *Anatomy*), and in each case there is even more disagreement as to the historical range of the term. For example, Doody argues that romances are simply novels and hence we should abolish the distinction altogether.

The least contentious version of the history of this form of fiction has it that romances emerged as early as late antiquity (the most famous of the classical romances being Longus’ *Daphnis and Chloe*). The form then resurfaced in the medieval period as chivalric romances, perhaps the most vivid and “complete” form the genre has ever assumed. The leading examples here are works by Chretien de Troyes (e.g. *Perceval, Lancelot*) and, in England, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Sir Thomas Malory’s Morte D’Arthur*. Romances continued to be written and re-written and their popularity spread to all of medieval Europe: Germany, Spain, etc. The generic elements also found their way into other medieval and Renaissance genres, such as sermons and legends. Altogether, there is a wide array of generic variations of romance in pre-

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45 This assertion opens Derek Brewer’s essay on the subject. Barbara Fuchs first calls romance a “slippery category,” although, as she notes, even despite the vagueness, “readers are often able to identify romance almost tacitly.” In a similar vein, Margaret Bruzelius suggests that perhaps “only medievalists know exactly what they mean when they use the word “romance.”” In an introduction to Blackwell’s *A Companion to Romance*, Corinne Saunders goes even further and states that “the genre of romance is impossible to adequately define.” See Brewer, “The Nature of Romance,” 9; Fuchs, *Romance*, 1; Bruzelius, *Romancing the Novel*, 14; and Corinne Saunders, introduction to *A Companion to Romance*, 1-2.

46 Doody, 16.
modern and early modern history: classical Greek romances, Latin romances, chivalric romances (in verse and in prose), Renaissance romances, baroque romances, and others.

The watershed moment for the form, as Gillian Beer suggests, was the publication of Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*: a work that can still be classified as a romance, but goes far beyond what the genre had to offer until then.47 Perhaps the most important – and innovative – aspect of the book is the introduction of the conflict between two opposing forces of human psyche disillusionment and a transfiguring imagination (this conflict will become a staple of modern romances). From that point on, not only does the appeal of traditional forms of romance decline (as it no longer corresponds to ordinary experience), but also a new – and crucial – theme appears in the types of romance still written: the longing for a re-enchantment of the world, a world that – with the advent of modernity – becomes gradually more and more disillusioned with itself. At this point, romance ceases to function as an independent genre and over the course of the eighteenth century becomes one of several possible models of the novel, as a kind of alternative to the slowly consolidating realist paradigm. Its central motifs venture into the “canonical” realist novels (e.g. adventures in *Robinson Crusoe* or the picaresque wanderings in *Tom Jones*). It also spins a new subgenre in the form of Gothic romance, which becomes immensely popular at the end of the eighteenth century and continues to appeal even today.

Given the turbulent history of the romance paradigm and the plurality of its forms, one better understands the disagreements between critics about the generic status of this category. What makes romance “romance”? Fortunately, unlike with the novel, there are some fairly constant and easily identifiable features of this form, regardless of the cultural context in which they occur and regardless of whether we consider it as a genre or a novelistic paradigm. The simplest definitions characterize romances as fantastic tales of love and adventure, usually focused on the hero’s quest. The latter usually ends with a happy end, although in some cases (e.g. *Tristan and Isolde*) the protagonists die, but the values they fought for triumph. The fictional universe of romance narratives is strongly polarized: there is light, darkness and very few shades of grey in between. On the one hand there is the world that the human consciousness finds desirable: an idealized world based on such eternal values as beauty, love, and wisdom. On the other, there is

a world of negative projections: “the world of the nightmare and the scapegoat, of bondage and pain and confusion . . . of perverted or wasted work, ruins and catacombs, instruments of torture and monuments of folly.” These two forces are in perpetual conflict and find embodiment in the struggle between the hero and the anti-hero (who can be a human or a monster). Romances, unlike realist novels, have a strong “fairy tale” feeling about them, for these two forms share similar plot-structures and what Alastair Fowler calls a mood (“an emotional coloration”).

Traditionally, romance is a secular genre, but there are strong symbolic and religious overtones to its plots, characters, and places. Romances may be more or less realistic, but as a rule, everything is possible within the boundaries of their narrative, regardless of whether the fate of the protagonists is steered by the gods, magic, or simply chance. This last characteristic strongly differentiates between romance and the novel in the Anglo-American tradition from the eighteenth century onwards. The novel is usually identified by the aesthetic of formal realism as defined by Watt, whereas romance is found in the fantastic subversion of realism. Let us take a closer look at this opposition, because it is one of the key differences between what I call the romance paradigm and the realist paradigm.

Here is how Nathaniel Hawthorne, author of several works unapologetically subtitled “a romance,” viewed the difference:

> When a writer calls his work a Romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume, had he professed

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49 Fowler, 67.

50 For an excellent source of documents on the development of this opposition, see *Novel and Romance, 1700-1800: A Documentary Record*, ed. Ioan Williams. It is not difficult to see that the reason for such a strong antagonism towards the romance, especially among those who approved of the work of the English eighteenth-century novelists, was a desire to elevate the new genre by stressing its grounding in reality and “seriousness” (as distinguished from the lofty fantasies of old). The same could be said about some modern approaches to the relationship between the novel and the romance. Writing about what she calls a historic vein (which includes such influential critics as Eric Auerbach, Ian Watt, and Michael McKeon), Bruzelius observes that it tends to valorize realist narratives over romance traditions and dismisses the latter “as part of the aristocratic baggage the novel attempts to escape.” Bruzelius, 15.
to writing a Novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man’s experience. The former – while, as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws and while it sins unpardonably, so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart – has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer’s own choosing or creation. If he think fit, he may so manage his atmospherical medium as to bring out or mellow the lights and deepen and enrich the shadows of the picture.  

According to the author of *The House of the Seven Gables*, the work called a “romance” is obliged to keep fidelity to the “truth of the human heart” (regardless of how this truth is presented), not to “the probable” and to the “ordinary course of man’s experience.” In other words, if that inner type of truth requires a manipulation of “lights” and “shadows” in “the picture,” then so be it. Hawthorne presents romance as a type of storytelling where the signs do not present themselves as fragments of reality (as they do, at least nominally, in the novel), but function for the most part on an allegorical level (e.g. dramatizing the conflict between the past and the present). They can therefore be manipulated precisely because they do not possess a value in themselves; they point to some other, spiritual realm. Now, whether the spiritual should be situated on the metaphysical or merely to the psychological level of human experience depends wholly on the intention of the author.

Here is yet another take on the opposition between the two paradigms, this time from one of the foremost theoreticians of romance in the twentieth century:

> The essential difference between novel and romance lies in the conception of characterization. The romancer does not attempt to create ‘real people’ so much as stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes . . . . That is why the romance so often radiates a glow of subjective intensity that the novel lacks, and why a suggestion of allegory is constantly creeping in around its fringes . . . .

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51 Hawthorne, “Preface to *House of the Seven Gables*,” 243.
novelist deals with personality, with characters wearing their *persona* or social masks. He needs the framework of a stable society, and many of our best novelists have been conventional to the verge of fussiness. The romancer deals with individuality, with characters *in vacuo* idealized by reverie, and, however conservative he may be, something nihilistic and untamable is likely to keep breaking out of his pages.\(^{52}\)

Frye introduces new elements to the opposition. What transpires through this passage – reflective of the way writers and critics from the eighteenth century onwards perceived the distinction – is a series of oppositions: real/stylized, objective/subjective, social/individual, stable/"untamable", conventional/idealistic. These binaries form a certain thematic axis that, even though it pertains to what I referred to as paradigms of a particular genre, has strong anthropological connotations. “Romance” and the “novel” are not simply sets of formal rules, but rather creative philosophies: the writer’s and reader’s “assumptions about man’s nature and situation.”\(^{53}\) As such, the antagonism can be easily translated into other sets of oppositions that dominated the literary debates of the nineteenth century up to and including the early modernist period, such as poetry/prose, fantasy/realism, and idealism/materialism. Hence, on the one hand, critics could have accused romance of being an idle and escapist form of entertainment at best – pulling one away from reality – and at worst of having a harmful effect on the reading public by feeding it with lies and fantasies of a violent and sexual nature, lies and fantasies that might be emulated.\(^{54}\) On the other hand, romance presents itself as a remedy to the stifling effects of literary realism, which – especially in the guise of the realist novel – sought to depict and reflect on rather than to change the status quo, to socialize or reject protagonists from the unchangeable social order rather than to let their desires have any real transformative power. Of course, it needs to be remembered that these distinctions both idealize and generalize the categories I defined as paradigms: they revolve around what Max Weber would call “ideal


\(^{53}\) Alper, “Mode in Narrative Poetry,” 25.

\(^{54}\) Northrop Frye dedicates an entire chapter in his *The Secular Scripture* to the discussion of the criticism of the romance. See *The Secular Scripture*, 25-43.
types” rather than actual works of fiction. However, they are helpful in that they help us to better understand the artistic politics behind each form.

The above distinction between the two types of fiction – romance and the novel – is a product of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the new genre had to justify itself by vilifying the fantasies of romance and pointing to its own footing in reality. Before moving on to the modern history of romance (as a novelistic paradigm), I want to consider the question of how this distinction holds in Polish and Russian literary traditions: traditions that, after all, present a very different literary-historical context from that of Western Europe.

In Polish, the term *romans* initially designated both traditional romance, for instance Medieval and baroque chivalric romances, and the emerging genre of the novel functioned as synonyms of one another in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, with the rise of the novel Polish writers and intellectuals began to distinguish between “good” and “bad” romances. The former, characterized by adherence to norms of probability and morality as well as educational value, were more often than not modern novels, for instance works by Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding. The latter included traditional romances as well as modern novels focused on themes of love and adventure.\(^5\) The term *powieść* initially designated a simpler type of romance, focused on a single “scene” or situation, somewhat similarly to how the term *povest’* functions in the Russian literary tradition). Throughout the nineteenth century *powieść* gradually came to be associated with the kind of writing that had an aura of seriousness about it, precisely because it was concerned with the “here and now” of everyday life, as opposed to imaginary eras, adventures and love affairs. As such, it eventually displaced *romans*, especially since the latter retained pejorative connotations of improbable, outlandish, and essentially escapist type of fiction.\(^6\)

As a novelistic paradigm, romance was almost entirely absent from early nineteenth century Polish literature. Anna Mostowska, the author of *Fear in the Castle* (*Strach w zameczku*, 1806) is one of the very few writers of the period who anashamedly embraced romance and the idea of

\(^5\) Sinko, “Romans.”

\(^6\) See Bachórz, “Powieść;” Bartoszewicz, *O głównych terminach…*; Markiewicz, *Polskie teorie powieści*; Sinko, “Powieść” and “Romans.”
fiction serving no other purpose than to entertain.\textsuperscript{57} After the defeat of the 1831 uprising, the Polish readership in the partitioned territories developed a much more down-to-earth attitude towards literature and started to demand more prose and less poetry. Romantic idealism slowly gave way and soon the realist novel – and other prosaic forms of fiction (e.g. stories and novellas) dominated the literary market.\textsuperscript{58} All of this left little room for romance: at least until the upsurge of the market for popular fiction towards the end of the century.\textsuperscript{59}

With Russia the case is even more complex because, like in French and, for a long time, Polish, the Russian term \textit{roman} covers both romance and the (realist) novel. I should note here that, for the majority of critical accounts, the history of the novel in Russia is the history of the realist novel; romance as a genre or a model generally does not enter the picture.\textsuperscript{60} The situation, however, is slightly more complicated. Under Catherine the Great Russia was in the process of adapting and appropriating Western literary models, in particular French neoclassicism. The wave of Anglomania soon added the novel to the list of accepted models. These were mostly realist novels (the Defoe-Richardson-Fielding trio), but Sterne’s work was also introduced to Russian readers (although it was with \textit{A Sentimental Journey} rather than \textit{Shandy}).\textsuperscript{61} However, the success of the realist novel, at least in the beginning, was limited and the popularity of the English novelists was short-lived. Andrew Kahn convincingly demonstrates that in late seventeenth-century Russia romance was indeed the more popular kind of fiction. The first reason for this is that Western models of romance were compatible with the local, mostly pre-Petrine tales of roguery. The second reason, and perhaps more important one, was the fact that romance – especially in its traditional form – reflected key aspects of the Russian nobility’s

\textsuperscript{57} Markiewicz, \textit{Polskie teorie powieści}, 14.

\textsuperscript{58} For a more detailed account of the history of the novel in Poland in the Romantic period, see Bachórz \textit{Romantyzm a romanse}.

\textsuperscript{59} See Kolbuszewski, \textit{Od Pigalle po Kresy}, 20.

\textsuperscript{60} For some recent examples, see Emerson, \textit{The Cambridge Introduction to Russian Literature}; as well as Jones and Miller (eds.), \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Classic Russian Novel}.

\textsuperscript{61} See Gasparetti, \textit{The Rise of the Russian Novel}. 
self-image – virtue, service, and courage – at the time when Catherine’s reforms were raising questions about the historical role and social status of the nobleman. Later on, just as in the case of Polish literature, romance functioned merely as a set of themes rather than a novelistic paradigm, especially since prior to 1840s Russian authors were much more comfortable with shorter prose works (povest’ or novella, and short story) than longer narratives. One literary phenomenon that needs to be mentioned in the context of the early nineteenth century is the Caucasus tales by Aleksandr Bestuzhev-Marlinskiĭ from the 1820s and 1830s; their style and popularity fit very well into the category of romance, even though they are not novels per se. I should also note the peculiar case of Fedor Dostoevskiĭ, who not only structured his plots on sensational sources, both fictional and non-fictional, but was also more than keen on embedding romantic themes and tropes into his works. In his seminal study of Dostoevskiĭ’s novels, Donald Fanger calls this poetic “romantic realism” and even though the keyword here is “realism,” it is worth keeping in mind given the importance of the author of Crime and Punishment for early modernists. Other than that, the romance tradition manifested itself in full bloom only at the turn of the century in the form commercial fiction, dime novels, and sensational literature based on Western models.

It is thus fair to say that the romance paradigm was – with a few noteworthy exceptions – an alien concept to both traditions, even if Polish and Russian novels regularly used its themes, motifs, and narrative structures to “colour” reality. The situation changed significantly when the realist paradigm (surrounded by an aura of social validation as a “useful” type of fiction) had to face the challenge of the rapidly growing market of commercial fiction: fiction written not to


63 See Fanger, Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism. Fanger’s adjective “romantic” refers to Romanticism rather than “romance,” yet there are clear correspondences between these two concepts. For more on that, see, for example, Bloom, “The Internalization of Quest Romance”; Felperin, “Romance and romanticism”; and Dolzani’s introduction to Frye’s Notebooks on Romance.

64 See Stites, Russian Popular Culture (especially the first chapter, “In Old Russia 1900-1917”); Brooks, “Readers and Reading at the End of the Tsarist Era” as well as When Russia Learned to Read (especially the chapter “Periodicals, Installment Adventures, and Potboilers”); and Holmgren, Rewriting Capitalism.
educate or ennoble its audiences, but to entertain them (and to profit from large sales in the process). This is when the romance paradigm comes back with a vengeance, although hardly anyone associates the new popular fiction with the romances of old.

From the historical point of view, the relationship between the two paradigms derives from the dialectics of the Enlightenment, or – more broadly – the encroachment of modernity. As I already mentioned the realist novel – with the aesthetic, epistemological, and moral values attached to this form – was closely aligned with the secular ideologies of rationalism, empiricism, and positivism. More than any other genre (or a competing paradigm, for that matter), the realist novel embodied the doctrine of progress, which Matei Calinescu defined in his study as:

- the confidence in the beneficial possibilities of science and technology,
- the concern with time (a measurable time, a time that can be bought and sold and therefore has, like any other commodity, a calculable equivalent in money), the cult of reason, and the ideal of freedom defined within the framework of an abstract humanism, but also the orientation toward pragmatism and the cult of action and success.  

As I mentioned, those wanting to validate the novel initially used romance as a straw man, yet very quickly it owned up to its bad reputation and found a niche for itself in the new literary ecosystem. What made up that niche were all the values, fears, anxieties and nostalgias that the idea of progress and its cultural politics were trying to wipe out. The Gothic romance was the first to open that treasure chest, producing gloomy and terrifying narratives that revolved around supernatural forces, monstrosities, death, madness, evil, corruption, and most other taboo subjects in the modern world order. Soon enough, the historical romance brought back the idealized images of the feudal past, whereas the scientific romance vividly allegorized the anxieties and hopes of the future. Whatever regions of creative imagination were left out by the realist paradigm, romance was eager to explore and exploit for its narrative purposes.

65 Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, 41.
Yet it would be wrong to say that romance was shadowing the progressive modernity by producing counter-narratives. In fact, for a long time the modern romance – even though focusing on all that was alien to the enlightened mindset – was serving as a propaganda tool for the ideas and narratives associated with “the doctrine of progress”. Suffice it to look at the most popular romancers of the first half of the nineteenth century, such as the extremely popular works of Anne Radcliffe; after enduring countless terrors, threats and supernatural forces, the protagonists are always brought back to the “civilized” world and the ghostly apparitions (like those that haunt Emily St. Aubertin’s castle Udolpho) are all given a rational explanation; the romances of Walter Scott and his many followers, even if they evoke the brutal worlds of the feudal past, have the tendency to justify violence and injustice as a necessary pre-condition for the modern, just, and democratic society; the scientific romances of Jules Verne glorify the new possibilities of locomotion in a fully charted-out world, just as the imperial romances, such as the bestselling novels by H. Rider Haggard, acclaim Western exploration, conquest, and colonialism in non-Western (and hence wild and exotic) lands. Even the emerging subgenre of detective fiction – for all its interest in criminality and pathology – celebrates the new, scientific mindset and its rational quantification of the social universe by allegorizing them in the figure of the detective and the work of detection. Up to a certain point, one might argue, romance was exploring the imaginative possibilities that were too extravagant and out of decorum for the realist novel, and yet, ideologically it did not represent an alternative to the politics of the novel, if one may call it that. Even if it touched upon the anti-realistic sentiments, it did so to bring up the contrast between them and the rationalizing forces that were the true protagonists of nineteenth-century romances.

The Romance Paradigm and Early Modernism

I will now discuss the situation of the romance paradigm at the fin de siècle and its troubled relationship with early modernism.

Towards the end of the century, the idea of progress had lost its grip on European culture. The romance paradigm, now more often than not identified with low-brow popular fiction, was picking up on those changes much faster than the realist novel. Thus, to limit ourselves to Victorian popular literature – which largely served as the model for its East-European
counterpart – instead of the “secular” romances of Anne Radcliffe, there is Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, a tale whose world-famous antagonist is an actual vampire threatening to undermine the Victorian social order. Instead of Haggard’s enthusiastic endorsements of British colonialism, there is Conrad’s *The Heart of Darkness*. But perhaps the most visible change took place in the field of the scientific romance. Towards the end of his life, Verne’s work displayed increasingly darker overtones, for example in *The Purchase of the North Pole* (*Sans dessus dessous*, 1889) or *The Master of the World* (*Maître du monde*, 1904). In those late works little is left from the utopian visions of a vastly accessible world: instead of such wondrous means of transportation like “Columbiad” or “Nautilus” one sees potentially destructive inventions like the villain Robur’s super-vehicle “Terror.” H.G. Wells, who continued and further developed the form of scientific romance, is even more straightforward about presenting the wondrous element as a disrupting force that undermines (rather than enhances) the civilized world.

If Verne’s work shares many traits with imperial romance, the author of *The Time Machine* leans more towards the tradition of Gothic romance. In his work, “the vast, menacing, stupid powers of nature as they appear to a technologically undeveloped society” once again come to haunt the civilized metropolis. Wells’ world, unlike that of the early Verne, is no longer a rational universe filled with exciting possibilities for adventurous exploits, but a world surrounded by darkness, filled with anxieties about what may lurk in the distant (*The Time Machine*, 1895) and not-too-distant (*The War of the Worlds*, 1897) future. Reason and morality, the terms according to which Victorian culture wanted to see itself, turn out to be made of a very thin fabric. Just as one of his protagonists returns to England after experiencing the horrors of Dr. Moreau’s experimental island, he comes to realize that he is surrounded by “faces keen and bright, others dull or dangerous, others unsteady, insincere, none that have the calm authority of a reasonable soul” and immediately, unsettling thoughts come to mind, “I feel as though the animal was surging up through them; that presently the degradation of the Islanders will be played over again on a larger scale.” The optimism of the nineteenth century romances – the belief in reconciling the past with the present, in bringing about a better tomorrow, and

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exorcising the darkness and superstition that creep about the world (either domestically or in distant colonies) – was irrevocably lost. Hence, popular romance was just as well attuned to the social anxieties of the late industrial age as early modernism, if not better.

Another important reason why the romance paradigm is so close to early modernist fiction is the politics of the publishing market. Along with the processes of industrialization and urbanization, especially in such hitherto underdeveloped territories like those of Poland and Russia, literacy levels increased. Since populations were themselves rapidly increasing, there were thousands, if not millions, of potential new readers including, of course, readers of fiction. Publishing houses were rushing to satisfy the demand of the new readership. Forms of popular fiction – both of the local type (e.g. the lubok books in Russia) and imported from the West (such as “pinkertons” or translations of Western romances) were an ideal product for first-generation literary audiences: romance was engaging, contemporary, and, most importantly, abundant. Yet the popular – or “boulevard” literature, as it was often referred to at the time – was not a monolith. It included a vast offering of works that were not on par – aesthetically and philosophically – with the “serious” literature of the period, even though they engaged with the romance paradigm and early modernism in a much more complex way than the “dime novels” and other forms of pulp fiction.

Scholars such as Kolbuszewski, Brooks, and Holmgren observe that in this particular period in the history of Polish and Russian literature the literary market witnessed the birth of a new class of readership: the middlebrow audience (which is different from “the middle class” audience). This audience consisted of people who would rather not get into the intricacies of Przybyszewski’s or Bely’s philosophies, but who would nonetheless like to be up to date with the fashionable artistic topics of the day; they were unsophisticated readers who did not lack intellectual aspirations. Soon enough, there appeared professional authors who specialized in adapting and simplifying the topoi of the early modernist imagination – steadily gaining prominence and recognition among the cultured elites –to the intellectual level of the

68 See Kolbuszewski, “Oswajanie modernizmu”; Brooks, “Readers and Reading at the End of the Tsarist Russia”; and Holmgren, Rewriting Capitalism.
Authors such as Helena Mniszek, Mikhail Artsybashev, and Anastasiia Verbitskaia produced best-selling works that incorporated the modernist themes within accessible – and often purposefully scandalizing – narratives. The controversial quality of some of these themes (e.g. decadent lifestyles, sexual transgressions, homosexuality, etc.), especially when stripped of their metaphysical significance, had an enormous appeal for readers hungry for new and unconventional experiences. The impact of this phenomenon on the literature of early modernism is problematic. On the one hand, the popularization of modernist topoi helped to promote the movement beyond the elite circles of writers and consumers of the new art. On the other hand, the “popular modernist novel” was largely responsible for the trivialization and de-mystification of the movement’s artistic repertoire and, in the long run – its eventual demise. Nonetheless, it testifies to the fact that the romance paradigm was an active force in the shaping of the early modernist movement, both in Polish and Russian culture.

By offering examples of the correspondences between the romance paradigm and early modernism I want to suggest a strong, albeit elusive, affinity between them. Yet in the examples I have given thus far, the development of the romance paradigm either parallels the development in “serious” literature – early modernism– or is parasitical with respect to it (borrowing modernist themes and turning them into a sensational pulp). This is how the situation presents itself in various studies of the period that involve the phenomena of popular fiction and the literary market. At this point I will return to the key question of this research project: what did early modernism learn from popular fiction? In other words, what kind of aesthetic devices did the romance paradigm offer to the early modernists in their attempts to forge a new type of novel? And what can be learned from this experiment with the romance about the culture of early modernism and the modernist novel?

I begin answering these questions in Chapter 1 with an analysis of Fedor Sologub’s *The Created Legend*, which can be classified either as a three-part novel or a trilogy. Scholars of early modernism in Russia have largely neglected this unique work; however, as I argue, Sologub’s failed magnum opus offers an excellent illustration of the complex dynamics

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Kolbuszewski calls this phenomenon “the taming of modernism.” The critics of the time, however, were less poetic: they referred to the practice of simplifying the modernist topoi as “vulgarization” or “boulevardization.”
between the romance paradigm and early modernist aesthetics. It not only demonstrates how the romance paradigm can give a narrative structure to the early modernist worldview, but also how its capacious and malleable form (in thematic and aesthetic terms) approximates the Wagnerian ideal of early modernism: the total work of art. Most importantly, however, applying this generic perspective allows me to uncover a hidden subtext in this unique work, one that moves beyond the realm of aesthetics and into the plane of the literary field.

What makes *The Created Legend* a unique document in the history of Russian and European literature, I argue, is the fact that it gives a narrative form to a conflict between two images of the writer: the successful professional who achieves money and success through his work, and the writer-genius for whom art is a form of communication with the absolute and hence a sacred craft. Through an elaborate patterning of the narrative, Sologub emplots in his grand narrative his problematic position in the literary field as both a modernist figure and a successful and well-paid author, a position in which he found himself due to the staggering popularity of his novel *The Petty Demon* and the success of his theatrical plays. I will demonstrate that the protagonist of *The Created Legend*, his authorial alter-ego Georgii Trirodov, the king of a distant, troubled kingdom, is Sologub’s thickly veiled justification for his sudden rise to fame and, as such, an attempt to find a symbolic solution to the ideological conflict embedded in the author’s new status as a literary celebrity.

In Chapter 2 I look at Jerzy Żuławski’s *The Lunar Trilogy*, the first work of science fiction with philosophical ambitions in Polish literature. In this unique and understudied work Żuławski attempts to use the romance paradigm – especially in its imperial and science-fictional invariants – to give a narrative form to his version of the early modernist philosophy of history: a philosophy built on such key oppositions as science and metaphysics, technology and culture, exceptional individuals and the crowd, psychology and mythology, and the opposition of utopia and dystopia/catastrophe. In his engagement with Frye’s theories of romance, Fredric Jameson, argues that “form is immanently and intrinsically an ideology of its own right. When such forms [genres, etc.] are reappropriated and refashioned in quite different social and cultural contexts, [their socio-symbolic] message persists and must be functionally reckoned into the new
The form (in this case, a novelistic paradigm) is not merely a structural vessel for content (new “raw materials” and ideologies), but possesses a generic memory of its own: a memory that affects any new type of content. Following Jameson’s suggestion, in my analysis of Żuławski’s novels I investigate how certain archetypal components of the romance narrative – such as space, the protagonist, and time – are used to accommodate the early modernist system of values and what kind of conflicts such a merger produces.

Chapter 3 concludes my study of romance as an experimental form in early modernism. It discusses the work of Evgeniĭ Zamiatin, whose novel *We* constitutes the apex of this experiment. Although Zamiatin belongs to a younger generation (which may put into question my characterization of him as an “early modernist”), he considered himself a descendant of both the tradition of scientific romance (originating in the work of H.G. Wells) and early modernism (in both of which Sologub counts as one of the most important influences). I start my discussion on Zamiatin’s work by juxtaposing his aesthetic program with the basic tenets of modernist experimentation with romance to show a number of correspondences between the two. I then contextualize Zamiatin’s theories by situating him amid the debates surrounding the significance of the plot (and novels as a form) for the early Soviet literature. The following sections of the chapter deal with Zamiatin’s magnum opus *We* (*My*, 1920–1, published 1924). In my reading of the novel I argue that dystopian (or “anti-utopian”) fiction, as the novel is most often classified as, has its roots in the romance paradigm. Next, I look at *We* from two generic perspectives, reading it as Gothic romance and a Hunted Man adventure story. Each of these perspectives reveals a different form of engagement with the narrative patterns of romance. My goal is to demonstrate how these two modes shape the “external” plot of *We* and provide a semantic space in which the relationship between modernism and popular literature can be negotiated.

By reading the situation of the novel’s narrator-protagonist through the prism of romance, I arrive at the metafictional level of the text and its central problem: the status of the author in modern society. Here I adapt Harold Bloom’s theory of the internalization of the quest-romance to argue that *We* can be read – similarly to Sologub’s *The Legend* and, it turns out, *The Lunar*...

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Trilogy – as a romantic allegorization of the modern writer’s strife with the “demons” of modernity and his or her own spiritual and creative shortcomings.
Chapter 1

“Pure Fame”: Fedor Sologub’s *The Created Legend*

Fedor Sologub’s *The Created Legend* (*Tvorimaia Legenda*)\(^{71}\), in further parts of the text: *The Legend*)\(^{72}\) is a work that aptly illustrates the transition that Russian modernist writing underwent in the late 1900s. The novel’s structure and the convoluted history of its creation and reception testify to the changing sensibilities among authors and readers alike. Picking up this novel right after reading Sologub’s *The Petty Demon*, one of the most acclaimed novels published in the heyday of early modernism in Russia, one is immediately struck by the difference between these two narratives. Despite Vladislav Khodasevich’s claim that Sologub’s style never underwent any significant evolution\(^{73}\), in this case a radical change seems to have affected all levels of artistic composition, from style to major themes and narrative structure; a change that goes as far as to alter the author’s seemingly unchangeable pessimistic outlook. An even greater surprise was experienced by the author’s contemporaries, who got hold of the first installments of *The Legend* in less than a year after putting down the first complete book edition of *The Petty Demon*. The new novel and the artistic model it presented took readers by surprise, even those well acquainted with Sologub’s style. The surprise was not welcome and provoked an almost univocal negative reaction, as Henryk Baran describes in detail in his study of *The Legend’s* critical reception.\(^{74}\) Today, Sologub’s novel-trilogy can claim to have generated a modest but

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\(^{72}\) Due to its use of the passive participal adjective (*tvorimaia*), the title of the trilogy has many different translations. A literal one would be “A Legend – or the Legend - Being Created” or “A Legend in the Process of Creation.” For that reason some critics, e.g. Masing-Delic, prefer “A Legend in the Making”. However, since the two major English translations of the novel have both been titled *The Created Legend*, this is the version I adopt in my study. Cf. Cioran’s “Translator’s Forward,” 9-10.

\(^{73}\) Khodasevich, *Nekropol’*, 163-4.

\(^{74}\) See Baran, “Fedor Sologub and the Critics: The Case of *Nav’i chary.*”
respectable body of scholarship. However, in terms of a number of editions and translations it comes nowhere near its predecessor, *The Petty Demon* (it has not appeared as a stand-alone text since 1991\(^\text{75}\)). Also, in spite of its author’s grandiose ambitions, hardly anyone would place it today next to such a masterpiece of Russian modernism as Belyi’s *Petersburg*. Yet even as a failed experiment the novel is still a fascinating document: an intricate textual construction that maps out the philosophical and cultural conflicts of the time and, most importantly, the complex interactions between early modernist ideology and the burgeoning literary market.

It is hard to determine when exactly Sologub started working on *The Legend*. Some of the motifs he introduced in the novel began to appear in his writings as early as 1902 (for instance the character of Elisaveta or the motif of Lilith). The first mention of the planned new major work of fiction, however, happened only at the end of 1906 when Sologub read drafts of the first few chapters to his fellow literati. In the spring of 1907 on the occasion of the first publication of *The Petty Demon*, a press note was released. It informed readers that the author was currently working on a “semi-fantastic novel about the Russian revolution.”\(^\text{76}\) The first installment of the new novel, titled *Phantom Spells* (*Nav’i chary*), came out in December 1907 in the new popular miscellany [*almanakh*] published by Shipovnik. This publication met with fierce criticism, which can only partly be blamed on the raging culture wars about “pornography” in contemporary literature. The novel’s chaotic plot, stylistic and thematic hybridity, strong sexual content and, most importantly, its controversial depiction of sensitive themes, such as the abortive revolution of 1905, brought on a storm of negative reviews and public outrage, which quickly gave way to silent indifference. Despite such violent reaction (or perhaps because of it), *Phantom Spells* continued to appear in Shipovnik until 1909, when it was cancelled due to a conflict between Sologub and the publisher. It was later picked up by the journal *Zemlia*. As the new venue did not want to begin its relationship with the artist by taking on a publication abandoned by another publisher, the remaining parts of the work were edited and advertised as a new novel (*Smoke and Ashes*, 1911-13) that was a continuation of *Phantom Spells*.


\(^{76}\) Baran, “Fedor Sologub and the Critics,” 26.
Spells which at that time was a trilogy consisting of the books published by Shipovnik: Drops of Blood (Kapli krovi), The Created Legend, and Queen Ortruda (Koroleva Ortruda).

In 1914 the novel in its entirety was republished in Sologub’s collected works prepared by Sirin. The new edition was considerably changed and revised. Some chapters were expanded, some reorganized, and the final product, now titled The Created Legend, was a new trilogy consisting of three novels: Drops of Blood, Queen Ortruda, and Smoke and Ashes. This reorganized version served as the basis for all further editions of the novel. Even though the new edition made this work more coherent and comprehensible, by the time it reached the market new literary developments and a changed political context made The Legend obsolete, both artistically and politically. As a kind of coda to the novel’s long and erratic publication history, in 1916 Sologub started working on a film script based on The Legend, to be directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold. However, the project never saw the light of day and the script was lost. Given all of the above, The Legend cannot be considered otherwise than a commercial and artistic failure: a novel that missed its mark, a novel that can be said to have arrived too early to be properly understood, and, at the same time, arrived too late.

Although never an object of high-profile studies, a number of distinguished researchers were drawn to the complexity and idiosyncratic nature of The Legend. Their criticism did a lot in terms of building a coherent model of the novel’s structure (Holthusen, Field, Kalbouss, Christensen, Heller, and Masing-Delic) as well as elucidating its individual aspects, such as prominent subtexts, themes and motifs (Rabinowitz, Ronen, and Connolly). Also, two excellent articles by Henryk Baran and a recent study by Anastasiia Sysoeva provide a lot of useful information about the writing process of The Legend and the novel’s turbulent reception.77

In this chapter I hope to contribute to the growing body of criticism by focusing on aspects of *The Legend* that have not yet been fully investigated. Namely, I will look at its structural and thematic correspondence to popular romances and hence to the universal model I call the romance paradigm. As I argue here, this generic category gives Sologub’s narrative a semantic coherence that many critics found lacking in the novel. At the same time, *The Legend* does not entirely correspond to the definition of romance and for a rather perplexing reason: the passivity of its protagonist. By evoking the socio-cultural context in which *The Legend* was conceived, I want to suggest that the trilogy interweaves two stories: a utopian romance that more or less complies with the basic tenets of romance narratives and gives body and shape to Sologub’s theurgical project, and a kind of *Künstlerroman* that attempts to negotiate a compromise between two antagonistic images of the author. On the one hand, there is the modernist ideal of the writer as an uncompromising genius-outcast whose divine art opens windows and passages into the transcendental realm; on the other hand, there is the commercially successful writer who enjoys a prominent social position and receives lucrative payments for his literary output.

**The Legend as a Modern Romance**

To begin, I want to consider the larger plot of *The Legend* that proved so baffling to Sologub’s contemporaries and, in the end, discredited this work on the Russian cultural scene as mere “nonsense.” Sologub places at the centre of his mythopoetical universe his mouthpiece, Georgiĭ Trirdov – an eccentric chemist, philosopher, and poet, in short, a renaissance man – who recently purchased an estate near the town of Skorodozh. At the heart of the estate stands a paradigmatic Gothic artefact: a gloomy mansion complete with towers, underground passages, and strange rooms full of secrets. Trirdov’s personal history and his current plans are veiled in mystery. On his property he maintains an idyllic school-colony of children, among which there is a special group of ghostly “quiet children” (as we learn later, these are dead children resurrected by Trirdov). All of this naturally attracts the interest and suspicion of the local community. Early on Trirdov is befriended by a neighboring family, the Rameevs, and he falls in love with one of the owner's daughters, the liberal-minded Elisaveta. Trirdov turns out to be a modest artist and philosopher, yet as we learn from various episodes, he constantly crosses the border between the real and the fantastic, between life and death.
The events in the novel take place in the aftermath of the 1905 revolution, and Skorodozh is on the brink of social upheaval. In a series of episodes, readers learn that Trirodov, although himself not a socialist, is sympathetic to revolutionary goals. However, things take a bad turn once Cossack squadrons and local police begin to brutally persecute the revolutionaries and their sympathizers, while at the same time turning a blind eye to brutal crimes committed by emboldened criminals, revolted peasants, and members of the reactionary Black Hundreds. The first part of the trilogy, *Drops of Blood (Kapli krovi)*, owes its title to a considerable number of scenes where protesters, casual citizens, Jews, and local intelligentsia fall victim to violent policing and brutal hate crimes. In this turbulent time Trirodov's school finds itself under the scrutiny of the government inspectors, who make repeated attempts to find a suitable pretext to close it. In the meantime, Elisaveta is almost raped by a pair of bandits but is saved at the last minute by the quiet children from Trirodov's school. Recovering from this traumatic event, she begins to imagine herself as Queen Ortruda ruling over a distant and exotic land.

The second part of the trilogy, *Queen Ortruda* breaks off from the previous narrative, *de facto* becoming an autonomous novel. It takes place in an imaginary kingdom of the United Islands situated somewhere on the Mediterranean Sea. Both the plot and setup much more openly allude to fairy tales and chivalric romances. It is the story of a young queen Ortruda who has just ascended to the throne and married a German prince by the name of Tankred. On the day of her coronation dark clouds of dust coming out of a volcano on one of the Islands herald a catastrophe, metaphorically and literally. Ortruda’s consort turns out to be a gambler and a despot in the making, who carries on multiple extra-marital affairs and is obsessed with the idea of turning the Islands into a colonial empire. In order to improve his threatened position in the kingdom, Tankred, together with several conservative factions, begins to plot a seizure of power by overthrowing his contemplative and pacifistic wife. Ortruda, with a handful of loyal friends, attempts to solidify her power in the kingdom, while at the same time, being disillusioned with her husband, she begins to experiment with her sexuality and to indulge in religious and sexual fantasies. After a series of violent deaths among the people from her closest circle she develops an unhealthy fascination with death. In the meantime, the situation in the kingdom worsens, leading to an open and bloody conflict between the proletariat, the bourgeoisie, and the royalists. When the volcano finally erupts, Ortruda, convinced of a link between herself and the fiery mountain, attempts to command it to calm down. The novel ends
with Ortruda's death in the eruption of a volcano and with her Kingdom in a state of complete disarray.

In the last book, *Smoke and Ashes (Dym i pelel’)*, Sologub connects the two plotlines. In the United Islands various revolutionary and political factions continue to struggle for power after Ortruda’s death. Meanwhile in Russia, Trirodov writes a letter offering himself as a candidate for the vacant throne. Through a succession of chance happenings and heated political conflicts, his neutral candidacy is finally accepted and Trirodov is elected as the new king of the United Islands. At the novel's end, Trirodov leaves strife-torn Russia in a self-devised flying vessel and arrives in the Islands to begin building a new kingdom as Georgiĭ I.  

This summary draws our attention to a number of easily recognizable generic topoi. There is an undeniable thematic association between *The Legend* and such historical genres as medieval and renaissance romance (mostly in *Queen Ortruda*) and modern genres, such as Gothic romance, utopia, sensational/political novel, and even crime fiction (in both Ortruda and Trirodov sections). In and of itself, this generic heterogeneity is a clear sign that we are far removed from the stable social framework of a typical realist novel. Apart from the occasional intrusions of the narrator, the illusion of realism in this work is constantly undermined by the presence of such “unrealistic” devices as science-fictional novum (like Trirodov’s alchemy or his plans of colonizing the moon), elements of the fantastic (e.g. hypnosis, resurrecting the dead, and the quiet children), or a series of unexpected and sensational plot twists (e.g. the theft of the holy icon, intrigues at Ortruda’s court). It is equally important to note that the generic hybridity of this work reflects the multiplicity of often-disjoined episodes and subplots that fill

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78 This summary refers to modern editions of Sologub’s *The Legend in Creation*, based on the Sirin edition. When the work originally appeared as *Phantom Spells* in 1907, the chapters involving Queen Ortruda and the United Islands were not as neatly separated. In the new edition the composition was altered to make *The Legend* more comprehensible and, after the inclusion of *Smoke and Ash*, to evoke the thesis-antithesis-synthesis triad as the model for narrative progression. See Sysoeva, “Roman F. Sologuba Tvorimaia Legenda: istoria teksta i principy izdania.”

79 I use the term as it is defined in Darko Suvin’s *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*: a fictional novelty that is validated by being continuous with the existing state of technology and cognition, or in other words, a fantastic technology or space that, even though non-existent, could be at least to some extent probable. See Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*. 
the narrative. Many of them barely involve the main protagonists, who, if present, function as a mere pretext to include a given story in the text. Others, like the famous Dmitrii Matov episode that sheds some light on Trirodov’s past (where a revolutionary traitor is turned into a prism-like object by Trirodov’s alchemy), never get developed in the later portions of the narrative, despite their dramatic potential. One may also find here lengthy sections about the Russian educational system, the philosophy of history, and theology, as well as instructions on how to read poetry. This lack of unity and the episodic nature of this novel evoke the encyclopedic composition of classical forms of romance, such as Greek and chivalric romances that incorporated in their narrative texture virtually all genres known to their authors. We find further confirmation of that in Sologub’s attitude to fragments of his text, which he treated as “self-enclosed and autonomous elements of a larger structure.” This particular quality (i.e. encyclopedic collage) also characterizes – to a certain extent - the nineteenth-century Russian novel, oftentimes described by Fanger’s term “romantic realism,” originally applied to the work of Gogol’ and Dostoevskiǐ (both of whom were important influences for Sologub and early modernism in general, as I mentioned earlier).

Given the syncretic character of The Legend it almost seems as if a more appropriate title would have been “Legends in Creation.” The original title of the novel-trilogy – Phantom Spells – hinted at this pluralistic and heterogeneous aspect of the work. Such a proliferation of genres and plotlines may indeed seem chaotic and “inorganic,” as some critics have pointed out. It uses a very specific type of narrative model: one where events are not arranged chronologically or causally, but rather concentrate in clusters or concentric circles around the key figures, like Trirodov, Elisaveta, and Ortruda. In fact, even Elisaveta and Ortruda episodes

80 One example could be the episode in which Trirodov and Elisaveta go to town to gather rumors. They witness a ruse stirred by a drunken investigator (syshchik), whose aggressiveness and abuse of power result in him being lynched by an angry mob. The presence of Trirodov and Elisaveta – even in the role of passive witnesses – is not even once mentioned throughout this whole ordeal. Like in many other cases of such inserted episodes, the presence of the protagonists or relevance to the plot is merely superficial.

81 This aspect has been noted by Omry Ronen. See Ronen, “Toponyms of Fedor Sologub’s Tvorimaja Legenda.”

82 See Sysoeva, 56-73.

83 See Baran, “Fedor Sologub and His Critics.”
orbit around Trirodov as significant milestones on his path from a melancholic recluse to a utopian king. It is his fate that, ultimately, constitutes the titular “legend.” In the following section I elaborate on the structural characteristics of Sologub’s novel that can be identified as belonging to the romance paradigm.

So in what way does Trirodov’s story correspond to romance as I define it? To begin with, the fictional universe of the trilogy shows signs of a very strong polarization into the two basic moral categories of good and evil. What distinguishes The Legend from typical works of realism which generally problematize rather than simplify the issues of morality and from works such as The Petty Demon which show mostly one side of the opposition, is that here one has a very clear scale of comparing various characters and their actions. This universal scale conflates the ideological, political, and mythical aspects of characters, making them all-around positive or negative figures. The Black Hundreds and their supporters, for instance, on top of being ideologically and politically on the “wrong” side of the conflict, display a vast range of negative traits: stupidity, malice, pettiness, cowardice, gluttony, and so on. On the other hand, positive characters, such as Trirodov and Elisaveta, apart from representing the highest humanitarian values, possess great charisma, intelligence, courage, and compassion. The same goes for organizations and attitudes. There is a strong contrast between such institutions as Trirodov’s school or private tutoring organized by some of the worker activists, and the dysfunctional provincial educational system, where a character like Peredonov (referred to as Ardalion Borysych) enjoys the highest authority. Trirodov’s calm and rational daydreaming clearly contrasts the raging intolerance, cruelty, and malice displayed by the members of the Black Hundreds. The entire trilogy is built on such polarities. However, one has to keep in mind that “good” and “evil” are inherently ambiguous categories in a fictional universe such as Sologub’s. Following Friedrich Nietzsche’s imperative of going beyond “good” and “evil,” the author devises his own moral scale in which gaining mastery over life and reality is rendered as

84 As Kate Holland notes, in Russian culture the “legend is a hybrid genre that exists at the meeting point of official hagiography, the saints’ lives of the Orthodox collections of the Prolog and the Chet’i Minei, apocryphal literature, and folklore.” Holland, 165-6. The three basic kinds of legends are official hagiographies, apocrypha, and folk legends. From the generic point of view, Sologub’s text is closest to the folk legend, due to its stress on the fantastic and pagan elements, although it would be interesting to read it as a form of apocryphal narrative or a theurgical hagiography (indeed, Masing-Delic’s reading approximates the latter).
the supreme form of good, whereas the lack of creative imagination or attempts at stifling it are supreme evil. Irene Masing-Delic identifies the capacity for transformative dreaming as the primary criterion for Sologub’s moral universe.85

In other words, what constitutes the two moral categories is entirely dependent on Sologub’s personal system of valorization, and it is a radical one, to say the least. “In his work […] there is not a single positive hero who would not be a spell-caster; who would not dream of Oile and be simply a good man. There is also not a single repulsive character that, in the end, would not turn out to be a petty demon,”86 notes Chukovskiĭ. In some cases this polarization is not immediately apparent and can be discerned only when characters are considered within the “grand scheme” of Sologub’s narrative. At first glance, the moral spectrum of this fictional universe seems to include various shades of grey: Pyotr Matov, Philippo Meccio, and most importantly, Queen Ortruda, are figures that have good intentions and definitely stand above the “evil crowds” and their petty and malicious representatives, even as their ways turn out to be either irrelevant (Matov) or merely transitory (Meccio, Ortruda). Masing-Delic applies a Gnostic framework to the trilogy and suggests that this third group – especially Ortruda – might be referred to as “the psychics”: “flawed but redeemable when guided by the highly conscious pneumatics [e.g. Trirodov].”87 But there is also another – more narratological88 – explanation of the transitory and auxiliary role that these characters play in the narrative of The Legend, one suggested by a narrative model devised by Vladimir Propp and elaborated by A.S. Greimas. Namely, the function of Ortruda, Meccio, Rameevs, and others is that of “helpers” in the quest of the central protagonist. Their misguided principles make them act in a way that effectively sets the stage for the hero to emerge and take over. Pyotr Matov’s misguided love for Elisaveta creates a context in which her true affection towards Trirodov can flourish; Ortruda’s tragic life

85 Masing-Delic 158-68.


87 Masing-Delic 32.

88 I consider Masing-Delic’s reading of The Legend to be a romantic one at the root, as I see very close correspondences between what she defines as “the Salvation program” informing Sologub’s work and Northrop Frye’s formulation of romance as one of four archetypal mythoi of literature (in types of imagery, the nature of the quest, the characterization of the “hero” and “anti-hero”, etc.)
and death set the stage for Trirodov’s succession; Meccio’s socialism, as Trirodov himself believes, is a transitory step towards his vision of unionism, and so forth. In the end, the neutrality of these characters is but an illusion.

To return to the question of romance: the moral dialectic that Chukovskii identifies in Sologub’s oeuvre (i.e. peredonivschina-trirodovshina) acquires a different function in longer novelistic forms than it does in lyric poetry, short stories, or drama. It signals to the reader that the logic at work in the narrative is that of a fairy-tale and not of the realistic type, so he or she is dealing with romance rather than the realist novel and, thus, expectations should be set accordingly. In his study “Sologub and Myth” George Kalbouss defines the moral dualism of Sologub’s universe in terms of a conflict between what he calls the “high-level” world with the “low-level world.” The first one of these is where “the visions of the eternal world become transfigured into recognizable ‘earthly’ images and vice-versa, where temporal images are transformed into their eternal potential.”89 It is a domain of daydreams and fantasies that create temporary utopian pockets within the low-level (our) world. “The low level,” writes Kalbouss, “totally separated from the eternal world, creates its own human suffering, perverse behavior, sadism, and self deception. This world, devoid of ecstasy, is populated by joyless, cruel, and dull characters whose minds have been twisted by having turned inwardly and away from the beauties of the universe.”90 Sologub gave the most elaborate rendition of this gloomy realm in The Petty Demon. The above division clearly corresponds to the moral polarization of romance: the conflict between the good and the evil permeating all aspects of the fictional world, from settings to characters.

In The Legend, however, Sologub introduces some complicating factors to this structural opposition. On the surface of things, the spatial hierarchy in The Legend seems to be horizontal, divided between provincial Russia sometime in 1904-5 (the conflict mentioned in Smoke and Ashes is most likely the Russo-Japanese war) and the fictional kingdom of the United Islands situated somewhere in the western half of the Mediterranean Sea. A lot of the imagery associated


90 Ibid. 445.
with provincial Russia and its inhabitants evokes the gloomy setting of *The Petty Demon*, making some critics identify these two settings.\(^91\) Conversely, the exotic United Islands are introduced as a land that is not grey and misty, not our sweet homeland [Russia] where the commonplace becomes terrifying and the terrifying commonplace, but another land, a distant realm where exist the blue sea, the azure sky, emerald grass, dark hair and passionate eyes. In this brilliant land fantasy unites with the commonplace and dreams of utopia seek fulfillment.\(^92\)

This suggests that one should associate the Islands with the high-level world, as defined by Kalbouss. However, the contrast between the two settings is quickly blurred as the narrative progresses. The narrator himself notes of the Kingdom of the United Islands: “the path is still darkened and that land still knows no joy.”\(^93\) As it quickly turns out, both worlds share many similarities and face similar problems: they each have a great utopian potential, yet they both face social turmoils and possibly a civil war, and, most importantly, both seem to be under the destructive influence of the satanic Dragon/Serpent (orig. Žmiĭ), an evil entity that in Sologub’s mythopoetics is the ruler of the grey, dusty, and sun-scorched world of the everyday. In fact, towards the end of Queen Ortruda one begins to realize that the only aspect that differentiates the two worlds – other than geography – is their trajectories of spiritual development that nonetheless cross at the same historical moment.

“In Skorodozh,” writes Masing-Delic, “dreams have been held in contempt since time immemorial. Its inhabitants are barbarians who despise dreamers, artists, and other ‘madmen’ and relegate them to the position of outcasts. Skorodozh is committed to solid byt, and visions of ideal beauty do not stir its dead souls, who are quite happy in base reality.”\(^94\) The most emblematic sign of that perpetual barbarism is cruelty towards children. As one of the local

\(^91\) Omry Ronen convincingly argues against such identification. See Ronen, “Toponyms,” 309.

\(^92\) Sologub, *Queen Ortruda* (further as QO), 9.

\(^93\) Ibid.

\(^94\) Masing-Delic, 158-9.
bishops explains to Trirodux: “in corporeal punishment, a person is shown the convincing limits of his powers. It is proven that one is not allowed to do everything one wishes.”\(^95\) Any attempts at freethinking and imagining a better life are forcefully uprooted. At the same time, it is in Russia that people whose lofty daydreams are matched by their determination and practical sense (like Trirodux and his bride Elizaveta) can emerge. Also, unlike in the Kingdom where all “magical occurrences” turn out to be merely illusory\(^96\), Russia is filled with enchanted zones, where one can encounter river pixies, laughing witches, and jinns.\(^97\)

The situation in the United Islands is opposite to that of Russia. Traditions of progress and utopianism have a long and admirable history on the United Islands. Yet at the current moment, this small, albeit glorious, country is entering a stage of decadence. The working masses are starting to demand political rights, the court and the parliament are paralyzed by webs of conspiracy, and the smoke coming from the awakened volcano slowly drives the insular population mad, whilst announcing a major cataclysm: all of these are portents of a dying civilization. The only person who can make a difference, the young and bright queen Ortruda, becomes bitterly disenchanted with life and gradually turns away from the problems of her land into her own world of erotic fantasies.

The two settings, thus, in Sologub’s fictional world are constructed out of fragments of both the idealized high-level world of fantasy and the low-level world of the everyday. The ultimate quest in the trilogy is to use these fragments to (re)construct a more beautiful, enchanted world than the one in which we live (or rather: in which the characters in the trilogy live). Another

\(^95\) Sologub, *Smoke and Ashes* (further as *SA*), 60.

\(^96\) Much like the Gothic romances of Anne Radcliffe, on which the Ortruda chapters were doubtlessly modeled, all supernatural occurrences (perhaps with the exception of the collective madness caused by the fumes coming out of the volcano and “demons” of smoke that Ortruda sees before her death) are revealed to have rational explanations: ghostly figures, legends, etc. are all products of the superstitious imagination of the Islanders, an imagination accidentally stimulated by the uncanny behavior of people associated with the court (e.g. Ortruda’s disguised field trips, appearances on the rocks, dances on the beach, etc.).

\(^97\) Sologub embellishes his descriptions of nature with fantastic elements that evoke the world of the fairy hidden from human view. Here is an example: “By the low, shadowy dam a green-haired and green-eyed rusalka was swimming, and splashed about like some fragiley melodious wave and laughed ringingly in harmony with the lapping of the current.” Sologub, *Drops of Blood* (further as: *DB*), 126.
way of looking at Sologub’s peculiar spatial architecture would be to view it in the form of concentric circles. The innermost circle is the world of imagination, the private space of creative individuals. Sometimes, as in the case of Trirodov’s school, this private realm can radiate influence onto the next circle, which is the domain of man, but unlike in traditional mythical narratives where it is depicted as the site of struggle between the angelic and demonic forces (a “middle world”), here it is mostly identified with hell.

Exceptional individuals live surrounded by a dull, unimaginative, and cruel society, as well as the world this society creates. The typical imagery associated with the demonic world, such as winter, darkness, confusion, sterility, moribund life, and old age are here embodied by the dusty landscape of the Russian province: “The town began, grey, murky, monotonous, like some ruined and impotent thing. Dirty backyards, run-down orchards, broken fences, bathhouses and barns, rising up ugly and cheerless like scruffy hedgehogs.” The reason why society and civilization are the way they are is that the realm they occupy is itself under pressure (from above and below) from a powerful and influential demonic force called the Serpent or Dragon (“Life was completely enveloped in a cold terror and cast a burdensome hatred over their souls for all of earthly life languishing beneath the power of the evil Serpent who was aflame in the sky and rejoicing about something”). This evil entity that deadens human souls and turns people into beasts is represented in The Legend by the scorching sun (openly referred to by the narrator as “the fiery Serpent”) and the erupting volcano on the island Dragonera, whose fumes poison the minds of the Islanders and whose eruption threatens the entire archipelago. Finally, what in typical mythical universe corresponds to heaven (or the eternal world) is here removed to the cosmic level: the distant planet Oile revolving around the planet Mair. In one of the episodic chapters of Smoke and Ashes Trirodov is able to transmigrate together with Elisaveta to this distant world and a lifetime of innocence there, before returning to the “dark earth”:

A sweet, azure light spilled over them from Mair, the blessed sun of this

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98 DB, 168.

99 DB, 107.
joyful land. All the impressions of being were fresh and sweet once again, and the innocent elements embraced the innocence of their bodies. In mighty sensations of a joyful life all earthly things were forgotten in an instant. Everything in this world was harmonious and beautiful. People were like gods and knew no idols. Life was radiant and full. 100

Unlike the fragmented reality of Western Europe and Russia that slowly approaches chaos and annihilation, the land of Oile is filled with joy, “radiant” and “full.” It is an eternal blueprint for what life on earth could become if the shackles of “the fiery Serpent” could be thrown away and imagination was allowed to rule the minds and hearts of men. Hence, the goal here is for the individual consciousness to break free from the encirclement and to reconnect with the eternal world of Oile. As Frye notes of the mythological symbolism in romance narratives, “if leviathan is the whole fallen world of sin and death and tyranny into which Adam fell, it follows that Adam’s children are born, live and die inside his belly. Hence if the Messiah is to deliver us by killing the leviathan, he releases us.” 101 These are precisely the stakes of Trirodov’s socio-political experiment: the liberation of mankind.

There is also an additional aspect of this model that ought to be mentioned here. Since distant stars are most visible on the starry sky, in Sologub’s fictional world the night imagery and the symbolism associated with it (the moon, Lilith, etc.) acquire special significance. This adds yet another layer to the already quite complex model of Sologub’s universe, the dialectic of night and day. Let us consider the following fragment in which the narrator describes the nighttime setting:

Night came, soft, gentle. It brought enchantment, and muffled the tedious noise of life under a subtle cloud of forgetfulness. The moon rose quietly in the sky, bright, calm, as though it were ill, yet so radiant and all-enveloped in its own aura, so radiant even for itself. . . . Solitude shrouded the earth, the water, embraced every tree, every bush and every blade of

100 SA, 29.

101 Frye, Anatomy, 176.
glass in the fields.\textsuperscript{102}

Enchantment, silence, solitude: these are all key words in Sologub’s private mythology that posits withdrawal from the bright and noisy life, burdened “beneath the evil arrowlike eyes of the fierce Dragon.”\textsuperscript{103} Unlike the calmness of the lunar light, the burning heat of the sun, its blinding brightness, and dust are motifs that in Sologub’s entire oeuvre are associated with suffering, cruelty, and madness.\textsuperscript{104} One may contrast here the above description of a nightly serenity with the typically Sologubian (and Gogolian) image of a dust- ridden provincial Russia:

The dusty road stretched out beneath the swift wheels, revealing the deserted vistas of a dull tedium. A fine dust, floating through the scorching air, rose beneath the wheels, and straggled out behind the carriage like a long snake. The fiery Dragon, high in the infinite sky, gazed with brilliant eyes at the barren earth and in the scorching gleam of his rays was a thirsting for blood, the gleam of a boundless joy over the drops of precious living wine which had been spilled by mankind.\textsuperscript{105}

The key words here are “dull,” “tedium,” “dust,” “scorching,” “barren,” and, of course, “blood.” Thus, the typical juxtaposition of winter and summer imagery (with roots in rituals of agricultural and natural cycles) that one finds in romance narratives is preserved almost intact in the trilogy, although it is transposed onto the semantic opposition of the symbolism of day and night. All of this goes to show that even though Sologub’s universe is much more complex and elaborate than the standard vertical model inherent in typical romance narratives (divided into heaven, the world of man, and hell), its constitutive elements are nonetheless organized around the same principle of polar oppositions.

\textsuperscript{102} DB, 55.

\textsuperscript{103} DB, 64.

\textsuperscript{104} We may trace the sources of this peculiar symbolism to the decadent imagination, which associates sun with life and life with biological determinism. See Bernheimer, Decadent Subjects, 56-8.

\textsuperscript{105} DB, 114.
In an attempt to show the extent to which the semantic structure of *The Legend* corresponds to the romance paradigm, I have so far analyzed the ethics and spatial architecture of Sologub’s trilogy. The analysis shows the extent to which binary oppositions organize the logic of this narrative. All this leads to the fundamental antagonism on which every romance narrative rests and which symbolically expresses all the other oppositions, namely the conflict between the hero and the enemy. As Frye writes, “the central form of romance is dialectical: everything is focused on a conflict between the hero and his enemy, and all the reader’s values are bound up with the hero. Hence the hero of romance is analogous to the mythical Messiah or deliverer who comes from an upper world, and his enemy is analogous to the demonic powers of the lower world.”\(^ {106}\) From the very beginning, the narrative of *The Legend* signals the onset of this conflict. The hero is unambiguously identified as Trirodov (I will return to this character later on), whereas the enemy is the evil Serpent. Sologub’s demonology mirrors here the symbolism of the Bible, replacing a leviathan, Edenic serpent and Satan with the Beast, the Serpent/Dragon (which refer both to the blazing Sun and the smoking volcano on Dragonera), and the Radiant One. All of these entities share the same symbols (like the color crimson) and evoke similar associations, and so can be identified as manifestations of the same Satanic presence.

The conflict is announced early on in *Drops of Blood*: the third paragraph of the first chapter already mentions the “burdensome gaze of the fiery serpent.”\(^ {107}\) Later in the chapter, one of Trirodov’s schoolteachers says that “[p]eople built cities to get away from the beast. But they themselves have become beasts and turned savage.” She adds that “the beast must be killed.” Elisaveta then questions this objective: “But how can you kill the beast who has grown himself iron and steel claws and has made his lair in the cities?” The teacher reacts and exclaims, “We will kill him, we will kill him!” In this early passage the beast is identified with the forces of modernity and advanced civilization, for which the city has become the most characteristic icon. However, since the plot of *The Legend* unfolds away from the urban centers (even in the United Islands chapters), the other two manifestations come to the fore.

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107 *DB*, 27.
The name of “the fiery Serpent,” which stands simply for the sun in Sologub’s language, appears in almost every other chapter, constantly reminding readers about its brooding presence. As Fredric Jameson observes about Frye’s conception of romance as a process of transforming the ordinary according to the dictates of the desiring self, “if it is possible for the lineaments of the earthly paradise to emerge from ordinary life, then the latter must have been conceived, not as some humdrum place of secular contingency and ‘normal’ existence, but rather as the end product of curse and enchantment, black magic, baleful spells, and ritual desolation.” Sologub continues to remind his readers about that connection, on several occasions indicating that our natural, solar cycle is a cosmic fraud: “The ancient Serpent is not our sun.”

As I have already mentioned, the Sun blinds one to the starry sky where one can see other worlds in their magnificent multiplicity, including the distant utopian world of Oile revolving around the star Mair. Therefore, instead of illuminating and stimulating the imagination, the sun conceals possibilities and extinguishes high aspirations; it turns our attention to its own overwhelming light. When at the beginning of *Drops of Blood* Elena rejoices in the brightness and clarity of the day, Elisaveta exclaims, “Is it really so clear here? . . . The sun blinds your eyes, the water is all aflame and sparkling, and in this madly brilliant world we don’t even know whether there isn’t anyone spying on us only a few steps away.” They are spied on, as a matter of fact, by a lusting gymnasium student, which is only one out of many instances in the text where daily brightness and the presence of the sun are associated with blindness, invigilation, and basic sexual desire. Another effect produced by the thusly conceived demonic presence is the burdensome heat that in Sologub’s narratives relentlessly scorches human beings – weakening minds and bodies, boiling people’s blood to ignite violent and cruel behavior, and covering everything in clouds of ever-present dust (a metaphor for mediocrity and pettiness). Only during the night do people get a chance to repose, but by that time they are too exhausted to appreciate night’s gifts. In a psychoanalytic reading, one can see the


109 *DB*, 112.

110 *DB*, 28.
Sologubian solar Serpent as a symbol indicating an excess of enjoyment: a life-propelling drive that moves beyond natural limits and becomes an unnatural, all-consuming force, or a death drive to use Freud’s own terminology.

In *Queen Ortruda* the figure of the Serpent-Sun as an evil and ancient deity – one that that rejoices in the sufferings of its subjects, the sacrifice of innocent lives, and spilled blood – splits into two seemingly unrelated images: the sun and the volcano. The “ancient Dragon” is still present as the malicious overseer, the Serpent-Sun, but its power over the people is more pronounced than in the Russian setting, at least as far as narrator is concerned. “He” or “it” figures chiefly as a “Radiant One” or “Morningstar” (one of Satan’s aliases): an object of cult-like fascination for Ortruda and her increasingly strange incantations and rituals. Significantly, Ortruda’s obsession with the “eternal lover, the Radiant One” goes hand in hand with her progressing fascination with death. The following passage is one of many descriptions of Ortruda’s descent into a religious frenzy: “The image of the Radiant One floated the whole day before Queen Ortruda’s eyes which were enchanted by the sinister beauty of nature. Mounting the tower in the royal castle she opened her breast to the Radiant One and prayed to him for a fiery and beautiful death. Then Ortruda descended into the subterranean chamber of Aramita and steeping her naked legs in the darkness and cold of the underground cavern waters she prayed to the spirit of the mountains for a death that was fiery and beautiful.”

Ortruda’s dreams about a “fiery and beautiful” death point to the connection between the Serpent/Sun God from the Russian chapters, the Satanic Radiant One from *Queen Ortruda*, and the active volcano on Dragonera. The volcano begins to smoke on the day of Ortruda’s coronation. It is also the day when she meets her traitorous husband Tankred (who plays the role of Trirodov’s evil double), who will be one of the main reasons for her disenchantment with life. I already hinted at the coincidence between Ortruda’s private cult of the Radiant One and her developing death wish. Both are also closely linked to volcano’s activity:

> More and more often the volcano on the island of Dragonera was smoking,

111 *QO*, 132.

112 *QO*, 146.
thicker and thicker became the smoky, violet gray clouds above its bluntly split, greenish brown peak. . . . In these days people’s affairs in face of the elemental catastrophe were even more insane and more malevolent than ever. Over the entire country there were suspended, like threatening clouds, enmity and malice. They infected the designs and desires of the people and directed their poor will to cruel deeds. . . . Many strange fanatical sects appeared. Their dogmas and rituals were sometimes so unusual that Satanists and luciferians felt themselves to be almost faithful children of the universal church before these new sectarians. Queen Ortruda’s life in those days was painfully enveloped in a smoky haze.\textsuperscript{113}

The leitmotifs of the “smoky haze” and dust are in this fictional world always associated with the scorching effects of the Serpent-Sun and symbolize the veil of illusion and evil influence that is spun around mankind. There are more of these shared characteristics: both entities are referred to as the Dragon – “celestial Dragon,” “heavenly Dragon” (Drakon), and Dragonera – and are surrounded by the same group of motifs (dust, smoke, fire, blood, and the colour crimson). Such a diversification of the demonic facets in \textit{The Legend} has two consequences for the narrative. Firstly, it reinforces the concentric model of the universe I described earlier. Secondly, it adds an epic dimension to the narrative by linking Sologub’s mythology with Manichaeism, on the one hand, with its stress on the dynamic struggle between spirits of light and darkness here reversed, and medieval romances on the other hand, with their quest structure focused around the dragon-slaying theme.

Addressing the issue of the lack of organic unity between various generic aspects of \textit{The Legend}, Kornei Chukovskii’s observes that in \textit{The Legend} Sologub made all of his lyrical mythology explicit, turning his magnum opus into “a museum of past experiences” (\textit{muzei davnikh perezhivani}i\textsuperscript{114}). One can see from the above analysis that such disambiguation has a severe impact on the genre of \textit{The Legend}: the battle between the forces of good and evil is no

\textsuperscript{113} QO, 126.

\textsuperscript{114} Chukovskii, “Nav‘i chary,” 77.
longer constrained to the metaphysical plane and alluded to by what Bogomolov described as the symbolist double-coding; it happens “here and now” and this conflict is at once given urgency and materiality that gives it a truly epic scope.

By comparing *The Legend* with Sologub’s earlier novel, *The Petty Demon* and discussing the later novel’s adherence to the binary oppositions that govern fairy tales and romances – oppositions that define the ethical dimension of the novel, its spatial and narrative structures and the central “antagonist,” the solar Serpent-Dragon – I want to demonstrate that the central artistic idea behind *The Legend* can only be understood if one applies to it the structural framework that Frye and other scholars defined as the mode of romance. As with most romances, Sologub’s tale is an attempt at what Jameson calls a symbolic act: a narrative resolution of objective contradictions (in this case, the flourishing of aesthetic and intellectual activity in Russia and the grim realities of the post-revolutionary period). No matter how distant the worlds of poetic fantasy and grey, dull, everyday life are, the promise is that, towards the end, the two will be united into a utopian whole – a modernist project of a perfect merger between life and art undertaken on a social scale. The arrival of Trirodov to the United Island symbolically represents the beginning of this utopian possibility.

However, at the end of the trilogy one cannot help but feel that something is amiss: the promised fusion between artistic imagination and the everyday does not take place after all. Rather than bring the United Islands to its full potential as “this brilliant land [where] fantasy unites with the commonplace and dreams of utopia seek fulfillment,” Trirodov starts from the same position as his hapless predecessor, Ortruda. Utopia remains just a future promise, one all the more doubtful because it looks like a well-known émigré fantasy-narrative: an outcast at home, a hero abroad. The symbolic triumph of the last scene feels doubly disappointing because one feels Trirodov’s enormous creative potential is somewhat wasted. For all his uncanny powers, what gets him the throne in the end is a political stalemate, an unthinkable happenstance rather than a result of willful action or a comedy of errors rather than an epic.

Nadezhda Teffi, one of Sologub’s friends and admirers, expressed this disappointment in unequivocal terms: “The end, written already after fate has elevated him [Sologub], did not realize what was promised. And that, which he imagined in his silent room with a lamp,
remained unfulfilled. I remember what he said about the further developments in the novel and I did not find it in the published work. The spirit abandoned him. One can only speculate as to what Sologub’s initial design for the ending of what became *The Legend* was like. I focus on the ending of this novel because its unsatisfying character hints at another possibility: another story that the novel wants to tell in the guise of a romance is a story whose origin is to be found in Sologub’s ambiguous position in the literary field, as holder of cultural, economic, and social capital. In order to decode this other story, in the following section I will focus on the category that I have not yet fully addressed in my reading of the trilogy from the perspective of romance form, namely the figure of the protagonist.

**A Romance Without a Hero**

Already in the early romance narratives – *Aethiopica* by Heliodorus, *Daphnis and Chloe* by Longus, *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius, etc. – there is a clear tendency towards what may be called an encyclopedic functionality: an attempt at a panoramic sweep of the world (in the geographical and socio-cultural senses) and the inclusion of almost every motif, plot-pattern, and genre known to the authors of these early romances. “All these elements,” writes Bakhtin, “are fused and consolidated into a new – specifically novelistic – unity, of which the constitutive element is adventure-novel-time.” One can observe the same phenomenon in Sologub’s *The Created Legend*. I already discussed how the plurality of elements is structurally arranged according to the dialectic of romance. Here I would like to start by analyzing yet another type of semantic convergence this plurality undergoes. Namely, I want to demonstrate how it reflects on (and thus, in a way, creates) the protagonist of Sologub’s trilogy.

As I mentioned when I introduced the plot of the three novels, the sheer number of various subplots and generic themes derived from all kinds of modern (and some not so modern) genres – from chivalric romances and Shakespearian sensational plots to German, French and English Gothic stories and scientific romances by Verne and Wells – can indeed be quite overwhelming and this raises questions about the structural unity of *The Legend* as a singular narrative. Omry

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115 Teffi, 427.

116 Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 89.
Ronen proposes to define this work as “an episodic novel.”\textsuperscript{117} Indeed, the fragmentary and episodic nature of the narrative is yet another feature of Sologub’s trilogy that evokes the poetics of romance, which, as Frye notes, can be an “endless” string of one adventure after another “until the author himself collapses.”\textsuperscript{118} Just like classical romances, so in this case elements borrowed from other genres are pulled into the orbit of Sologub’s mythology, where they acquire a new functionality yet retain their allusive and evocative power; for example, Wellsian devices that enable travels to the Moon are used by Trirodov to build his spherical spaceship, in addition to the myth of the Atlantis in the final chapters of \textit{Queen Ortruda}. Sologub’s incorporation of Manichean symbolism, pagan cults and Christian imagery into his representation of the Sun as the face of cosmic evil discussed earlier is another example of such appropriation.

I may now pose the question about the function of such a proliferation of episodes, plots, and motifs. One possibility would be to describe Sologub’s narrator as a Levi-Straussian \textit{bricoleur}: a storyteller who composes his tale of “the beautiful and the enchanted,” piecing together stories and anecdotes borrowed from history and contemporary press (the so-called “reality”) as well as myths, fables, and other modern genres of imaginative fiction (the fantasy). In this case it is not so much the ending that matters but the process of storytelling itself: weaving together a rich tapestry of seemingly unrelated tales, mixing genres, styles and languages. Because one of the central arguments of the trilogy is that, in the modern age more than ever, only a poet can be a messianic figure; therefore the very act of creation is the subject of the story.

There are numerous examples in the three novels that reinforce this metafictional aspect. The narrator’s opening statement is the first and most important clue in this regard: readers are promised “life as it should be” instead of “life as it is.” Such auto-referential intrusions continue throughout the trilogy. At one point, the narrator points to authorial design as a force that undermines all deterministic outcomes perceived by the Sologubian Serpent, a symbol of the stifling “reality principle” shrouding mankind: “The heavenly Dragon was laughing in the

\textsuperscript{117} Ronen, 307.

\textsuperscript{118} Frye, \textit{Anatomy}, 173.
crimson pale blue heights as though he knew what would happen. But he did not know. Only the creative phantasy of the poet was beginning to discern vaguely the horizons of unfinished creation.\textsuperscript{119} These remarks constantly remind readers about the artificiality of Sologub’s tale, its anti-realist quality (“realist” in Watt’s sense, as in “formal realism”). Also, the theme of storytelling and the aesthetic nature of existence constantly occupy Trirodov. For one, he is a reader of early modernist prose (such as Oscar Wilde’s \textit{The Portrait of Dorian Grey} he holds in his hands when first introduced) and poetry (which he introduces to Elisaveta as their relationship develops), which indicates that both reality – in the empirical sense – and fiction are for him liquid categories. More importantly, however, he continues to question the supposed irreconcilability of life and art: “And even we love utopias. We read Wells. Life itself, which we create, now appears as a combination of elements of real existence with elements that are fantastic and utopian.”\textsuperscript{120} Finally, just like his spiritual opposite from \textit{The Petty Demon}, Ardal’on Borisych Peredonov, Trirodov suspects that he is but a character in a novel rather than a real person:

\begin{quote}
But perhaps you and I are not at all living people, but only the acting personages of a novel, and the author of this novel is not at all inhibited by any concern with external verisimilitude. He transfigures his capricious imagination into this dark earth and out of this dark, sinful earth he grows these strange maples, and these mighty poplars, and these chirping birds in the bushes, and us.\textsuperscript{121}
\end{quote}

\textit{The Created Legend}, thus, is as much a story about what could be if mankind had enough will to break free from the mental shackles of conventional thinking and unimaginative everyday life as it is about the escapist pleasures of literature and the reviving nature of imaginative storytelling.

\textsuperscript{119} \textit{QO}, 185-6.

\textsuperscript{120} \textit{DB}, 84.

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 132.
There is also a more functional justification for this collage of mini-narratives. They offer a vast gallery of portraits, encompassing social and psychological types as well as ideological positions. It is a very diverse gallery, which includes characters based on real-life figures, such as Merezhkovskii (Pyotr Matov) or Lenin (Philippo Meccio),

stock characters of genre narratives such as adventure novels by Alexandre Dumas (the scheming aristocrats in *Queen Otruda*), not to mention religious symbols (Jesus Christ as Prince Emmanuel Ïopsipovich Davidov) and characters incorporated from Sologub’s earlier fiction (Ardalion Borysych Peredonov).

The only feature that seems to be connecting this medley – other than the confirmation of the epic scope and all-encompassing power of imaginative storytelling – is the creation of a contrast for the only true hero of *The Legend*: Georgii Trirodov. One quickly observes that many of the characters, such as Pyotr Matov, Prince Davidov, Peredonov, and various functionaries of the local school administration, representatives of local clergy, etc. serve merely as ideological opponents to Trirodov; they polemically engage the recluse poet-alchemist, which allows him to find flaws and blind spots in their ideologies and, in turn, to unravel his own worldview. Others, like Ortruda, Tankred, and the socialist leaders in both Russia and the United Islands, present approaches to the issues of governance and social planning that are doomed to failure for ideological as well as personal reasons (for example, Tankred’s ambition or Ortruda’s lack of willpower). Finally, there are the masses which are shown to be malleable and easily manipulated by malicious individuals (such as Ostrov) and established institutions (the Church), masses that can easily be brought to animalistic frenzy, like the Skorodozhans, or to superstitious irrationality and passivity, like the citizens of the United Islands.

The inclusion of the aristocrats, the socialists, and the bourgeoisie as classes in the narrative indicates one more important fact: *The Legend* makes a wider argument about the course of Western Europe (and, by analogy, Imperial Russia), namely the inability of any of the three major

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122 Andrew Field suggests such an interpretation. See Field, “*The Created Legend*,” 343. Regardless of whether one agrees with this attribution or not (it has been contested by Henryk Baran, among others), there is no question that characters like Meccio were modeled on historical figures of revolutionary and strike leaders, and so are a part of the “realistic” scaffolding of Sologub’s fictional universe.
social classes to take control over historical processes. The old aristocracies are all but degenerating and their attempts to breathe some life into the decaying civilization can result only in chasing ghosts of past glories (e.g. Tankred’s colonial projects and imaginary conquests) or self-indulgent detachment (e.g. Ortruda’s fantasies and fascination with death). Like the grotesquely aged Marquis Teliatnikov, who lived for over a hundred years and wants an elixir of immortality to live even longer, they seek to prolong their artificial, hollow existence, yet their attempts are futile. As a class the bourgeoisie, represented mostly by the manipulative prime minister of the United Islands, Victor Lorena, is far too conservative and ideologically unstable to offer any radical change to the status quo. The proletarian masses, on the other hand, seem to be too narrow-minded and uncertain about their historical role to be able to offer any viable alternatives to the existing order. All of the three classes and the characters who represent them and their social ideologies are shown as suffering from a lack of imagination, open-mindedness and, most importantly, the inability to daydream. Lastly, representatives of these classes create what Yuri Lotman defined as semantic fields: social milieus whose interests and goals are seemingly irreconcilable, yet which collectively define the hero as someone capable of transgressing their boundaries, of moving freely from one environment to another and capable of finding allies in each group.

By introducing his positive hero Trirodov, Sologub offers his solution to the political, social, and spiritual malaise that is encroaching upon Russia and Western Europe. His central protagonist is a retired professor of chemistry, an amateur engineer, a progressive educator, and a poet. Georgii Trirodov, as the name itself suggests, has diverse origins. As far as literary genealogy is concerned, he seems to belong to two traditions: the idealized “holy men” of Russian literature, such as Dostoevskii’s Myshkin or Chernyshevskii’s “New Men” like Rakhmetov, who seem to be almost inhuman in their capacity to identify with their ideological positions, and the troubled genius creators such as Merezhkovskii’s Leonardo da Vinci, all modeled on Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s Faust (who is the archetype of the modern hero according to Marshall Berman^{123}).

Throughout the narrative of *The Legend* Trirodov demonstrates an array of skills and capabilities that definitely make his “power of action” greater than that of an average man. As

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^{123} See Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, 37-86.
with all romances, the mental landscape of the protagonist is reflected in his environment, in this case the dark estate at Millet Glades (Iasnje Poliany). As readers learn in the course of the narrative, the land was purchased in order to set up a progressive school-colony for children, where Trirodov’s (and Sologub’s) educational theories can be put to practice. It is removed from the harmful effects of modern civilization and its demonic overlord, the Serpent.

Trirodov’s house itself is a marvel of technical ingenuity and design. It is, in a way, an architectural embodiment of its creator’s psyche: the place is aloof and evokes all kinds of eerie feelings in the visitors; the underground passage filled with “a melancholy, foreign scent” corresponds to Trirodov’s dark and mysterious past; the orangerie on the other side that is a wonder of science is protected from the “vulgar, fiery Serpent” by a glass ceiling and when needed can be turned into a spherical, planetoid spacecraft; the rooms are full of wonders and mysterious objects that exert a peculiar effect on visitors (“Such is the nature of this place,” says Trirodov to Elisaveta and Elena. He might as well have been talking about himself, “Horror and ecstasy abide here together”); finally, there is the lookout tower in which Trirodov performs his strange magic and dreams about travels to the moon and the distant planet Oile.

Trirodov’s estate is thus a mixed type of space. It combines the gloomy, haunting imagery of Gothic settings, in which hapless humans are haunted by demons of the past and where unimaginable horrors loom behind every corner, within the fantastic and utopian “houses of glass” like the one dreamt of by Vera Pavlovna in Nikolaï Chernyshevskii’s What Is to Be Done? The same can be said of the host: he has a melancholy disposition, lives in seclusion, and, although he

124 A more accurate translation than the one proposed by Cioran would be “Bright Glades.” The original name – Iasnje Poliany – is a clear allusion to Lev Tolstoi’s estate Iasnaia Poliana. It may be an indication of Sologub’s satirical intent, but also it suggests that Trirodov, with his seclusion, educational utopianism, etc., was at least to some extent inspired by the life and work of Tolstoi.

125 DB, 39.

126 Ibid., 41.

127 Ibid., 42.
is in charge of a robust educational colony, shies away from other people. He likes to dwell in his mysterious and shadowy past, filled with memories of his dead first wife (identified later on as the mythical Lilith). At the same, he is an active dreamer, whose imagination knows no boundaries: “Trirodov liked to be alone. Solitude and silence were like holiday for him. His solitary experiences were, apparently, of great significance for him and his love of reverie was so exquisite [takaia sladkaia byla vliublennost’ v mechtu]. Someone would come, something would appear. These wondrous visions were neither dream nor waking. They consumed all melancholy.”128 One of the biggest transformations of this character is his abandonment of melancholy (symbolized by the haunting presence of his first wife) for the sake of empowering his imagination with a strong willpower and joy of life (symbolized by his newfound love for Elisaveta).

Frye writes that, unlike myths, the heroes of romance are human yet their humanity is qualitatively superior to those of the average man or woman. The degree to which this superiority manifests itself in the narrative can vary, especially in modern (i.e. nineteenth-century) romances. Here one can recognize this heroic superiority in the impressive number of skills that Trirodov displays throughout the trilogy. He has the power to hypnotize others, either by the power of his gaze (as he did with a Cossack soldier in the Phantom Spells version of the trilogy129) or with the help of his silent children (as he does with the petty villain Ostrov). We learn from his reminiscences that, as a member of a revolutionary circle, instead of killing a traitor who happened to be Matov Senior, Trirodov drained his body instead and turned him into a decorative prism: a process that could be reversed when circumstances are right. In Smoke and Ashes he unleashes his transformative alchemy on a police search team that arrives at his house, disappearing in a cloud of smoke and turning the intruders into gigantic bugs that run back into town. As already mentioned, he managed to transform the menagerie of his house into a spacecraft thanks to a fantastic technology that can resist gravitational pull, a spacecraft that can move freely in the earth atmosphere as well as beyond it. His alchemy enables him to devise an elixir of immortality for his aristocratic protector, Marquis Teliatnikov, as well as to

128 Ibid., 84.

129 The episode appears in the version of the novel published by Shipovnik, but not in modern editions, all of which are based on the revised Sirin edition. Cioran decided to include the episode in his translation.
temporarily transport himself and his bride Elisaveta to the distant planet Oile. Most importantly, however, he has the unique capability to ressurrect dead children, who later become a part of the peculiar group of quiet children, leading a life “devoid of superfluous passions and desires.” Although it is never quite clear whether Trirodov himself possesses these powers or whether he merely channels the dark energies of the quiet children, he is nonetheless the central figure orchestrating all of the phantom spells that take place in the vicinity of the estate, a Prospero in his own right and a dark version of the enchanted island from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*.

Complementing these uncanny abilities is the already-mentioned capability to transgress physical as well as social boundaries. This is an especially important characteristic in a fictional universe as diverse and metaphysically charged as Sologub’s. Whether it is the exotic Kingdom of the United Islands (the equivalent of purgatory), the distant planet Oile (heaven), or the underworld (represented, for example, by the processions of the dead on the “phantom path” witnessed by Trirodov and his son, or by Skorodozh as the town inhabited by “dead souls”), Trirodov can move freely in-between all these geographical as well as semantic spaces. This ability likens him to a hero on a quest in classical romance, but also as a demonic presence, since in Russian and European folklore uninhibited social and physical mobility is a mark of the devil, yet another ambiguous characteristic Sologub endowes his protagonist with. As Anastasiia Sysoeva documents in her thesis, the initial image of Trirodov was to be much darker and more ambiguous in the earlier versions of the manuscript, but even the “polished” final version of this character is internally conflicted.

If Trirodov is like Faust, he is a Faust without a need of a Mephistopheles: the two have become one and the same persona. Trirodov’s physical mobility is matched by his ability to make friends in unlikely places. Already during the first encounter, he makes a very positive impression on the sisters: “They were relaxed with Trirodov. The friendly and quiet manner of Trirodov removed all awkwardness from the sisters’ thoughts.” He has the same effect on

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130 Sysoeva, 87-97. Sysoeva points to the gradual de-mystification of Trirodov from the earliest version of the draft to the late Sirin edition as one of the main trends in the trilogy’s creative evolution.

131 *DB*, 41.
most other members of local landowners and intelligentsia, who, despite the initial distrust, learn to respect and like him. Trirodov also attends socialist rallies and negotiates with authorities on behalf of the workers, when the situation requires it. Marquis Teliatnikov’s protection, on the other hand, means that he can easily cross social barriers on the other end, making him friends with the most powerful aristocrats in the country, not to mention that he is almost unanimously elected as a king in a foreign land – the most vivid demonstration of Trirodov’s ability to find rapport with almost every class-related ideological position.

This last accomplishment confirms something else, namely that Sologub’s protagonist embodies the narrator’s (and arguably the author’s\(^\text{132}\)) creative will which is clearly authoritarian in character. We find in the initial statement (“I, the poet…”), as well as in occasional statements that only the thought of a poet can discern future of events, the kind of artistic solipsism and desire for control that characterizes many an early modernist work (especially poetry) but is somewhat alien to the highly conventionalized form of the novel (or romance, for that matter). The words of the poet-narrator echo the words of Sologub himself in an already mentioned article on the “theater of one will”: “I, the poet, create a drama in order to recreate the world according to My intentions. As My will alone rules in the wide world, so only one will – the will of the poet – should rule in the small circle of the theatrical spectacle.”\(^\text{133}\) What it means is that the author of the work assumes the position of god and every turn of the events is guided by his desire rather than any narrative logic, conventionalized or not. Whether this is fully true is a questionable matter, but whatever the degree to which the plot of the trilogy follows the fancy of the author, it is clear that Trirodov is a character most attuned to the authorial will. When stricken with the thought of becoming a new king of the United Islands he justifies his decision before Elisaveta thusly: “Acting in this fashion I am not acting willfully but I am merging my will with the will of the majority and with the Single Will that rules the world.”\(^\text{134}\) In other words, he allies himself with the will of the narrator.

\(^{132}\) Holthusen observes that in The Legend the difference between the two personas (the author and the narrator) is purposely effaced. See Holthusen, Fëdor Sologubs Roman-Trilogie.

\(^{133}\) Sologub, “The Theater of One Will,” 111.

\(^{134}\) S.4, 11.
There is more to this identification, given the resemblance between Trirodov and his creator, as well as the former’s self-recognition as a poet, which I address in my closing arguments. For now, I will conclude this part of my discussion by observing that in a fictional world where passivity and indifference constitute the source of all evil, a strong willpower – let alone one reflecting the narrator’s will – almost by default makes him hero material, one whose individuality becomes blurred in his identification with the cosmic forces on whose behalf he acts.

A mysterious past, uncanny abilities, physical and social mobility, and a strong sense of mission are features that make Trirodov resemble the heroes of romance, even to some extent the heroes of epics. Yet, as I mentioned earlier, there is a problem with his role in The Legend: for all his enormous potential, he remains essentially a passive character, much like Goethe’s Faust (although, unlike the German tragic hero, he does not have a demonic agent to justify his own inaction). The nature of this passivity is problematic, because on the surface he is an extraordinarily active character, as evidenced by all kinds of interventions he makes over the course of the story; he participates in discussions and rallies, helps the few good people of Skorodozh with small acts of support, courts Elisaveta, defends his school against the hostile local officials, and, last but not least, does miraculous things with his uncanny magic. However, there is no direction, no far-reaching goal that would guide any of his actions. In each case his participation seems accidental or forced and his overall attitude towards larger social issues – unlike in the case of Elisaveta – is rather disinterested and focused more on preventing an escalation of violence and suffering than going after the root of the evil. Hence, the call for transformative action proclaimed by the narrator-poet is for the most part unanswered. There is, of course, a long tradition of protagonists who are pulled into the storm of events unwillingly or

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135 My reading of both Faust and Trirodov as passive heroes is influenced by Franco Moretti’s argument in The Modern Epic. Considering Goethe’s credo, “in the beginning was the Deed” (rather than “Word”), Moretti writes: “Goethe wants an active hero, he gives him marvelous and fitting words to pronounce, he lends him the aid of infernal powers, and yet – nothing. For scene after scene . . . Faust remains ever more enmired in a kind of idle contemplation.” Moretti, 16. The critic’s explanation of Faust’s inaction through what he calls the invention of “the rhetoric of innocence” finds a fitting equivalent in Sologub’s “pure fame,” which I discuss at the end of this chapter. Moretti, 25.
while feeling inadequate. The motif of the refusal of the call is a popular one in myths and folktales. As Joseph Campbell writes,

Refusal of the summons converts the adventure into its negative. Walled in boredom, hard work, or ‘culture,’ the subject loses the power of significant affirmative action and becomes a wasteland of dry stones and his life feels meaningless – even though, like King Minos, he may through titanic effort succeed in building an empire of renown. Whatever house he builds, it will be a house of death: a labyrinth of cyclopean walls to hide from him his Minotaur. All he can do is create new problems for himself and await the gradual approach of his disintegration.\footnote{Campbell, \textit{The Hero With a Thousand Faces}, 49.}

The above situation corresponds to Trirodov’s on several counts. Sologub’s hero, despite developing his utopian school project and surrounding himself with ever more sophisticated miraculous technology, is utterly reluctant to expand his dreaming and his creative potential beyond the borders of his domain. As he admits to Elisaveta,

\begin{quote}
Sometimes I feel that people bother me . . . they annoy me, both they themselves and their ordinary, insignificant affairs. And what are they to me? Only one thing is for certain – only I myself. It’s burdensome to be with people. They give me so little and for this they drink up my entire soul. They are greedy, evil. How often have I left their company, tortured, humiliated, trampled upon. Oh, what a holiday solitude is for me – sweet solitude!\footnote{DB, 128.}
\end{quote}

Tranquility and personal peace – a withdrawal from the noisy world – take precedence over utopian quests. From this perspective, Trirodov’s impressive estate that mirrors his melancholic psyche can be viewed as yet another version of Minos’s labyrinth (as well as, perhaps, the openly exhibited motifs of Sologub’s artistic imagination pointed out by Chukovskii): a monument of past experiences, now dead and buried.
With respect to the plot, the only truly meaningful act committed by Trirodov is his letter to the prime minister of the United Islands, in which he proposes his candidacy for the vacant throne. And here is yet another troubling aspect of Trirodov’s passivity, namely the tongue-in-cheek triviality of the exploit. In traditional romances the climax of the quest is the struggle to the death between the protagonist and the forces of evil, represented either by the antagonist (the repressed or negative side of the psyche) or the dragon (the sterility and decay of the land). In Sologub’s tale, the quest occurs through a sleepless night of letter writing and an argument with a clerk at the post office. Such irony undercuts the lofty atmosphere of romance surrounding the death of Queen Ortruda as well as Trirodov’s own sudden conversion to the cause of social transformation. What follows this action reminds one more of a comedy of errors and satire on the absurdity of politics and the media rather than the result of the kind of logic-bending magical union between the self-healing of the world and the determination of the hero characteristic of romance narratives. In other words, here is an oddly dysfunctional romance, in which the individual wish-fulfillment fantasy and the recovery of the fictional world are not connected by deed. Moreover, unlike in the classical romances, neither luck, coincidence, or fate operate on the protagonist; rather they play with the world around him, leaving him for the most part unchanged and unmoved, until the stage is set, and even then the change and movement are provoked from the outside, as it were, by an alignment of coincidences and forces beyond the hero’s control.

The question thus becomes: how is this possible? As Maurice Blanchot suggests, “Heroism is revelation, the marvelous brilliance of deed that joins essence and appearance. Heroism is the act’s luminous sovereignty. Only the act is heroic, and the hero is nothing if he does not act.”\(^\text{138}\) Thus, an inactive hero is a dangerous paradox in narratives where action is centrally functional, such as in epics or romances; it threatens to undermine all rationality of the form. There is, of course, the suspicion that such an irresolute, open form of storytelling as presented by The Legend was a part of Sologub’s intention to begin with. After all, eclecticism and the undermining of conventions were the staples of early modernist writing. One may recall Aleksandr Blok’s play The Fairground Booth [Balaganchik] (1906) as an example of a work of

\(^{138}\) Blanchot, The Infinite Conversation, 370.
art dedicated to undermining its formal as well as thematic “seriousness.” Another possibility would be that a weak central character allows for a more diverse form of storytelling; Trirodov may simply be a point of reference for the various stories that are told in the course of the narrative, a pretext that allows them to coexist within a single work. However, neither the tone of *The Legend* nor Sologub’s own remarks about his work support that; on the contrary, the author seems to be entirely dedicated to the idea of creating a “total work of art” in the style of Wagnerian opera. So there must be some reason for arranging the main plot of the novel-trilogy in such a curious way, even if such a reason was not there from the start.

Up until this point I have been trying to map out the characteristics of *The Legend* using the romance paradigm as a blueprint for my structural analysis. In so doing, I am following other critics who assume a correspondence of means and goals in Sologub’s trilogy, namely that, whatever it is, the outcome of the plot directly responds to the problems signaled throughout the narrative (the progressing degeneration of modern society due to passivity and a lack of imaginative thinking). However, the oddly inconclusive ending of *The Legend* and the potent yet ultimately non-heroic heroism of its main protagonist seem to point in a different direction. Rather than looking at the things that do not get accomplished or fall short of our generic expectations, one may ask instead what does get accomplished in the novel. The answer to this question opens up a new and interesting vista in the reading of the work, namely that the fantasy and “raw materials” of reality out of which the plot is constructed are not means of resolving a social, metaphysical, or political problem, but rather present a very complex narrative of success. For this is really what the plot of *The Legend* amounts to in the end: the recognition of Trirodov’s artistic and intellectual potential and his sudden elevation to the status of celebrity (and from there, to that of the king).

To gain a better understanding of the significance of this underlying plot, I need to introduce a larger social and biographical context into my discussion. Hence, I now sidestep from my main line of argument to present an outline of the Russian field of literary production at the time of the publication of *The Legend*. Once it is in place, I will discuss Sologub’s status within this field and conclude my argument.

**Early Modernism, the Russian Literary Field, and the Case of Fedor Sologub**
Both modernism and the avant-garde, writes Andreas Huyssen, “always defined their identity in relation to two cultural phenomena: traditional bourgeois high culture (especially the traditions of romantic idealism and of enlightened realism and representation), but also vernacular and popular culture as it was increasingly transformed into modern commercial mass culture.”

Huyssen’s concept of “the great divide” can be applied, with some restrictions, to the phenomenon of Russian symbolism, which from the outset defined itself against the positivism and utilitarianism of the older generation as well as against any forms of market-driven literature. The former opposition took the form of a series of polemics between the symbolists and the writers who considered themselves continuators of the Russian tradition of realism, such as the group that formed around the publishing house Knowledge [Znanie]. The latter opposition – between the culture of early modernism and the literary market at large – is more elusive and remains in the distant background of the studies of the period. This is in large part due to the fact that in contrast to the socially-minded, progressive intelligentsia or the moralizing conservative critics, the world of literary commerce for a longer time had neither an official voice of its own nor a desire to acquire one and was entirely satisfied with taking the backseat in the cultural debates at the turn of the century. This made it easier for modernist authors to perpetuate a self-serving Romantic myth of the artist as a genius outcast who communicates his vision directly to his readers. The above-mentioned myth effectively tabooed the entire socio-economic apparatus enabling the contact between the author and his readers. To understand the stakes involved in Sologub’s tripartite tale – its underlying narrative of cultural change – one needs to scrutinize the nature of this troubled relationship between modernist culture and the wider “market of symbolic goods.”

Dmitrii Merezhkovskii’s essay “On the Reasons of the Decline, and the New Currents in Contemporary Russian Literature”140 – one of the first theoretical explications of symbolism for a Russian audience – was extremely particular about the importance of maintaining a division

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139 Huyssen, After the Great Divide, viii-ix.

140 I use the version of this essay included in Merezhkovskii’s Polnoe sobranie sochinenii published in 1914. A translation of a small fragment (mostly of the fourth section) has been included in the anthology The Russian Symbolists: Anthology of Critical and Theoretical Writings. Unless otherwise stated, I will be referring to this translation. Merezhkovskii’s essay was originally a lecture delivered in 1892.
between popular and “serious” literature. In order to flesh out the difference between these two literary cultures, Merezhkovskii compares Emile Zola, the foremost representative of naturalism who by the 1890s was among the most celebrated French authors, and Paul Verlaine, a symbolist poet who at that time was living a life of poverty in Parisian slums:

The author of Rougon Macquart has a right to exult. It seems that none of the past works of genius has enjoyed a material success, or had a halo of thunderous acclaim in the newspapers, like that of the positivistic novel. Journalists recount with reverence and envy how high a pyramid could be made of the yellow tomes of Nana and Pot-Bouille. Zola’s last novel has been translated with astounding zeal five or six times into Russian, and even the greatest works of world literature have not been translated in a similar manner into our language. The same inquisitive Huret [the author of the interview with Zola that Merezhkovskii quotes] searched out the chief poet-Symbolist, Paul Verlaine, in his favorite cheap café on the Boulevard Saint-Michel. Before the reporter stood a man no longer young, crumpled by life with a sensual “face of a fawn,” with a dreamy and tender gaze, and a huge, bald skull. Paul Verlaine is poor. Not without the pride characteristic of “the insulted and humiliated,” he names as his only mother “l’assistance publique” – welfare. Of course, his person is far from the Academic chairs next to P. Loti that Zola dreams of so ardently and joyously.141

This vivid juxtaposition serves Merezhkovskii as an illustration of his thesis that the world of culture is an arena of two conflicted worldviews: materialism and idealism. Zola’s work is popular, he suggests, because it celebrates the material world and so gathers material rewards (“the vanity of the literary moment”). In contrast, Verlaine is poor because his poetry is “a return to the ancient, eternal, never-dying”; it represents a spiritual odyssey into the “dark ocean that lies beyond the limits of our own condition.” Merezhkovskii blends here the Romantic ideal of a poet-genius who shares his divine visions with the rest of mankind with a more recent model, that of the poètes maudits (propagated by Verlaine himself, among others): the accursed poet-outcast who lives a life of poverty and depravity, rejected by a society that fears the truth

of his artistic insight. Merezhkovskii’s argument has little to do with biographical actualities and a lot to do with competing models of authorship. The author suggests that a close relationship exists between the artistic and, by extension, spiritual quality of a work of art and the modes of its production, distribution, and reception (an aura, as Walter Benjamin would say). In doing so, Merezhkovskii introduces in his writing the dual structure of inverse hierarchies that Pierre Bourdieu discusses in his *The Rules of Art*: Bourdieu writes that “the hierarchy among genres (and authors) according to specific criteria of peer judgment is almost exactly the inverse of the hierarchy according to commercial success.”\(^1\) Hence, in a series of binary clashes, “the lord of literature” Zola is contrasted with the beggar Verlaine, a “pyramid of yellow tomes” with “four lyrical verses,” “suffocating, deadly positivism” with the elusive beauty of symbolic art, and present-day “civilized barbarism” with “a higher idealistic culture.”

In the second chapter of his essay, Merezhkovskii launches an attack against a system of honoraria, depicting it as one of the main causes for the poor state of Russian (and world) literature. “In essence,” he writes, “every writer offers his work as a gift to the public”\(^2\) and this generosity is generally rewarded by the appreciative public, but the author himself remains largely oblivious towards his material sustenance. By institutionalizing this relationship and establishing a system of monetary compensations for artistic work, the modern literary market undermines the very foundation of literature and its unique role in society, argues Merezhkovskii. “When the contemporary public gets insight into the vulgar simony of the literary market and finally loses its naïve faith in the disinterestedness of its spiritual leaders, its writers, literature will lose its moral significance, like the medieval church before,” he warns, once again drawing a parallel between literature and religion. In this uncannily candid claim the figure of the writer as a free and independent agent of “the kingdom of ideals” is presented as a necessary fiction for the proper functioning of literature in the cultural life of a nation. The figure of the artist must be free from social and economic determinism that ensnares the rest of the society; his intentions must be “pure” and untainted by greed or desire for self-aggrandizement. In other words, the society should at all times believe in the direct contact that


exists between it and the writer, because otherwise literature becomes just a profession like any other. If this is allowed to happen, the writer and the reader enter a vicious circle in which both parties gradually impoverish one another: the writer abandons his higher calling due to continuous incentives to satisfy the “vulgar demands of the crowd,” to “sell out” his talent, whereas the public deprives itself of the chance for cultural and spiritual improvement (which only a “true” literature can offer).

Merezhkovskiĭ connects the phenomenon of the “literary bazaar” in modern literature with the “all-consuming Moloch, the present-day capitalism.” He observes that Russia never had (and never will have) cultural institutions like the “cultured aristocracy” in Western Europe that would protect literature from the corrosive influence of the market. Therefore, the practices he derides are far more prevalent in Russia than anywhere else. Towards the end of the chapter, the future author of *The Romance of Leonardo DaVinci* alerts his readers to that

haughty disdain of critics and readers of thick journals has not interfered with, but helped the cunning literary manufacturers for decades to poison 200-300 thousand people . . . with artistic lack of taste and ignorance, cheap tabloids and vulgar boulevard novels. These small street publications display a terrifying fertility of lower organisms. Separately, they are insignificant, but together they are a terrible force. Even now it is sometimes hard to draw a line, to clearly demarcate, where the petty periodicals [*melkaia pressa*] end and “serious” newspapers and “thick” journals begin. In petty periodicals, in this incomprehensible literature, like in a drop of water decomposing under a microscope, you can find the germs of all diseases, all vices, and moral decay.144

This assessment shows a keen awareness of the growing cultural influence of the rapidly expanding and commercializing market for symbolic goods. Merezhkovskiĭ’s observations concerning increasing literacy, the booming market for popular fiction, and the growing statistical and cultural insignificance of “serious literature” were quite perceptive, a fact that only reinforces the more mythmaking aspects of his argument. The essay and the lectures which

144 Ibid., 529.
preceded it played a crucial role in introducing the culture of modernism to Russia and set the tone of early Russian modernists’ perception of the literary market and their own position in it.

Interestingly, Merezhkovskii’s views and this moral indignation could be seen as somewhat hypocritical. As Ronald E. Peterson notes, the author of *Julian the Apostate* had an independent source of income from his family and did not have to rely solely on honoraria.\(^{145}\) Also, as Ïuriï Zobnin, one of Merezhkovskii’s biographers informs, in the late 1880s, during the crisis within the editorial board of *Severnyi Vestnik* when the journal had to lower its honoraria to contributors, the writer quickly turned to other venues. Aside from *Vestnik* he started to contribute to *Trud* (*Labour*), *Russkaia mys’* (*Russian Thought*), *Russkoe obozrenie* (*The Russian Review*), *Vestnik Evropy* (*European Herald*), and *Nabliudatel’* (*The Observer*). “The list, as we see, is colorful,” comments Zobnin, “and is explicable only by the fact that Merezhkovskii at this time is not up to the literary ‘politics’: he publishes wherever they publish.”\(^{146}\) Avril Pyman, another literary historian of *fin-de-siècle* Russia tells a similar story: having scant hope of publishing in the more prestigious journals, Merezhkovskii was forced to peddle his work to such magazines as *Mir Bozhiï*, “a literary and popular-scientific journal for self-education,” *Zhurnal dla vsekh* (literally the Russian *Everybody’s*), a monthly illustrated publication with dim sepia photographs of famous paintings and shiny pen-and-ink drawings depicting scenes of high melodrama or lachrymose sentimentality in the spirit of the age; *Niva* (almost indistinguishable from *Zhurnal dla vsekh*, and *Trud*), a publication, on outward appearance at least, as uninspiring as its name [“Field”]. Hippius, with characteristic detached amusement, followed suit.\(^{147}\)

Indeed, when Merezhkovskii started working on his first major historical romance, *Julian the Apostate [Otvverzhenyi]*, the burden of maintaining the household budget fell on his wife, Zinaida Gippius. In years 1890 and 1891 she fervently produced and published works of fiction


\(^{146}\) Zobnin, *Dmitrii Merezhkovskii*, 92 (my translation).

that in retrospect possess rather small artistic value. As she candidly admitted: “I don’t remember these novels, even their titles with the exception of one called *Small Waves* [*Melkie volny*]. What these ‘waves’ were, I have no idea and I take no responsibility for it. Yet we both rejoiced in the necessary patching up of our budget and it gave Dmitry Sergeevich the freedom required to work on *Julian*.”\(^{148}\) Hence, both Merezhkovskiĭ and his wife were at least to some extent guilty of succumbing to the practice he so vehemently criticizes in his essay.

Rather than an indication of some kind of double standard or a failure to live up to the self-professed ideal, the example of the Merezhkovskiĭs points to the fact that the situation of the modernist writer at the turn of the century Russia was highly ambiguous. On the one hand, he (or she) had to fight a battle with publishers and critics for the validity of his or her worldview, as well as for creative space. Facing the scorn of the publishing industry and public opinion was an unavoidable part of that ideological struggle. This entrenched the negative view among the modernists towards the publishers, press, critics and the reading masses, of which Merezhkovskiĭ’s essay is a good example. On the other hand, taking the path of Verlaine and other *poètes maudits* was out of the question; without any support from the industry or peers their voice would not be heard. In the social world of literature there is but a thin line separating the writer whose works are too daring or innovative to be appreciated and the writer whose works are simply not good enough. Thus, the task of winning over the literary market and securing one’s position within it became of utmost importance. Only in this way one could achieve the desired autonomy of a “man of letters”: being able to sustain oneself solely by writing and even allowing oneself the comfort of not worrying about one’s material conditions. Such a position guaranteed social authority and made it possible to retain what Merezhkovskiĭ characterized as a necessary fiction, one on which the entire social position of literature supposedly rested: that of the disinterested artist-genius communicating his ideas directly to the people. In order to enjoy that symbolic independence, some compromises had to be made. After all, “[if] seeking money was a temptation, failing to earn it was worse. It was hard to distinguish a starving artist from an unpublished amateur” suggests Joyce Piell Wexler in *Who Paid for Modernism*?:

\(^{148}\) Zobnin, 93.
Modernists could escape this dilemma by disclaiming interest in money and addressing a minority audience who could not be expected to provide large income. Making their art difficult, they could not be mistaken for hacks. Since they ostentatiously refused to court a popular audience, they could accept any profits their work brought them. This shift from writing for a public to addressing a coterie was possible because an avant-garde audience eager to distinguish itself from the popular audience emerged.\footnote{149}

In the case of early Russian modernism, however, it took a long time, as well as a lot of determination and organizational talent, for this kind of audience to emerge. The struggle for recognition and a position of authority within the literary field was fierce and left its mark on the first generation of Symbolists. Their victory, however, brought about some serious and unanticipated complications.

The situation of Russian modernism in the 1890s was indeed difficult. As evidenced by the case of the Merezhkovskiis, producers and advocates of the new art faced considerable challenges while trying to get their work published. Merezhkovskiis and Gippius managed to find a way into \textit{Northern Herald} and various other journals (“serious” as well as popular) but there were limits to what could be accepted as publishable material. This meant that early modernists had to use their own financial resources to publish their books and collections. These early print runs hardly exceeded 600 copies (compared to the tens of thousands of copies for established literary publications and the hundreds of thousands for popular magazines).\footnote{150} However, in only a few years, thanks to the determination of authors and organizational talents of people like Valeri\textsc{i} Briusov, early Russian modernism was slowly but surely gaining ground on the cultural turf. Gippius’ diplomatic talents and contacts in intellectual circles enabled the Merezhkovskiis couple to create their own salon that famously brought together an array of writers, intellectuals, and priests, and thus inserted modernist art into current debates about religious and philosophical issues. With the founding of Scorpio publishing house, sponsored by Sergey

\footnote{149} Wexler, \textit{Who Paid for Modernism?}, xv.

Poliakov and run by Briusov, early modernists were finally able to consolidate and regularly publish their works and opinions. Despite the numerical disadvantage vis-à-vis other (serious, not to mention popular) publications, Scales became an influential and important journal.

The movement’s increasingly strong position in the Russian literary field was achieved not simply by a successful dissemination of ideas or the artistic quality of early modernists’ output, but also, significantly, by clever marketing. There are a number of factors that elevated early Russian modernism to a dominant position in the field of culture in the 1900s:

1. **Promotion of modernism as the leading direction of art.** By assuming the position of superiority with respect to other schools of writing and to the market of popular fiction and journalism, early modernists could appeal to those segments of the population who wanted to distinguish themselves from “the newcomers,” the growing number of readers among the lower strata of society. Increased literacy not only opened new possibilities for social advancement, but also created demand for high culture among vast numbers of people. Since “symbolic art” was by definition difficult, being able to engage with it (or at least pretend to do so) presented a useful index of one’s cultural and intellectual standards. In addition, the hermetic nature of symbolist writings helped the modernists distinguish themselves from authors who were simply not good enough to get their work published in major journals. The newly acquired halo of elite art made it possible to use scarce supply as a strategy for self-promotion: modernist publications were all of a sudden becoming sought-after goods among aspiring writers and intellectuals.

2. **The aura of scandal and sensation around early modernist themes.** Due to its links with a decadent imagination, a considerable portion of early modernist literature touches on topics considered taboo, such as perversion, eroticism, homosexuality, and various forms of aberrant psychology. With the advent of widespread literacy, a host of publications dedicated to new and controversial discoveries in science and medicine as well as the sensationalism of penny magazines fostered general interest in hitherto forbidden subjects. Negative reviews and outcries of established critics concerned with morality and/or social progress had the reverse effect of further stimulating interest and curiosity among the general audiences (thus providing free advertising). This became a common phenomenon after 1905, when state censorship had temporarily abated, allowing a
number of symbolist and pseudo-symbolist novels dealing with erotic issues (such as Kuzmin’s *Wings* or Artsybashev’s *Sanin*) to appear in print.

3. *The effects of the war and revolution.* The general feeling of pessimism in Russian society in the aftermath of the revolution of 1905 may explain why many started to relate to decadent overtones in early modernist writing and rediscover these works for themselves. What made it possible were re-editions and reprints of the previously published work as part of new collections of poetry and prose. The general change of attitude towards Russian modernism was also connected to the fact that many leading modernist authors actively responded to the unfolding historic events. As Pyman notes, “in 1904-5 [during the Russo-Japanese war and the revolution] the Symbolists, whose gaze had hitherto been fixed on the riddles of the skies . . . felt the earth move under their feet.”\(^{151}\) It was not uncommon at that time to have a “decadent” like Fedor Sologub to write sharp, political fairy-tales. Voicing support for the revolutionary cause and commenting on the current situation enabled the public to perceive modernists as “national” writers rather than imitators of foreign trends, as they were often represented in the earlier days.

4. *Canon-formation.* Another very important factor that helped to establish modernism as the major artistic force in the 1900s was that the luminaries of the movement (Merezhkovskii, Bryusov, and others) worked very hard to legitimize early modernism by establishing its distinct literary genealogy and creating a modernist tradition (which sounds like a paradox). This was done mostly through translations and discussions of Western figures whose significance was already widely recognized, such as Baudelaire, Nietzsche, Wilde, and the increasingly popular Edgar Allan Poe. Various centennials and anniversaries (for example that of Gogol and Dostoevskii) were used to establish connections and continuities between past and present “symbolisms.” These strategies were partially driven by the desire to legitimize and strengthen the movement, but they also had an ulterior motive, namely to secure one’s own place in the canon and thus guarantee recognition and literary significance. The early modernists were also eager to appropriate some contemporary authors into their ranks. Chekhov’s plays were

\(^{151}\) Pyman, 245.
recognized as symbolist by the early modernists, even though he himself would probably have disagreed with their interpretations of his art (let alone their classification of him as a “symbolist”).

5. The “taming” of modernism. As mentioned in my introductory chapter, once the modernist aesthetic and ideology became a literary and cultural fashion, the literary market rushed to supply readers with an “eased up” version of the notoriously hermetic and difficult modernist philosophical and aesthetic “systems.” Works such as Verbitskaia’s Keys to Happiness or Artsybashev’s Sanin played a key role in popularizing the more recognizable topoi of modernist fiction through much more accessible narratives than those by the early modernists, narratives that did not suggest secondary or tertiary levels of meaning.\textsuperscript{152} They were adapting modernist themes to the standards of popular culture. Whether these were purely commercial ventures or whether they had some pretension (like Verbitskaia’s romances), they made modernism a recognizable cultural phenomenon, increasing the demand for more serious works and promoting modernist authors among larger groups of readership.

6. The power of the theater. In the 1900s (unlike half of a century earlier), the theatre was one of the surest and fastest ways to get an author’s name widely recognized. It also brought significant sums of money to successful playwrights. Stage productions of symbolist plays paved the way to a wider recognition among the general audience and the avant-garde form of these plays attracted the curious. Sologub’s career as a playwright is one instance of this role of theater.

This change in the reception of modernism and the “movement’s” growing popularity further complicated the relationship between modernist writers and the literary market. The so-called second wave of Russian Symbolists, consisting of such authors as Blok, Belyï, etc., remained highly idealistic and, already having a publishing platform to launch their poetic and intellectual

\textsuperscript{152} On the early modernist double-coding, see Bogomolov, “Prose between Symbolism and Realism.” For the phenomenon of Verbitskaia’s and Artsybashev’s bestselling novels, see Holmgren and Goscilo’s introduction to Keys to Happiness by Anastasia Verbitskaya; Boele, Erotic Nihilism in Late Imperial Russia; and Brooks, When Russia Learned to Read, 269-94.
projects, thought little about questions of popularity. At the same time, a marked shift took place with respect to previously held opinions. Around the time that the imperial censorship, lobbied by the church, shut down the chief publication of Merezhkovskii’s circle (Put’), he was already complaining about not receiving enough money for his contributions: a fact that directly contradicted the lofty statements made in “On the Reasons…” of 1893. Briusov underwent similar transformation as evidenced by the contrast between his early essays (“The Keys to Mysteries”) and the later polemics with representatives of the new generation. Shifts of that kind abounded in the culture of early modernism in Russia during the 1900s. Quite interesting is, for example, the fact that, as Abram Reitblat notes, from the mid-1900s on many first rate modernists began publishing prose (not to mention reviews, articles, etc. written for mainstream presses) which became the main source of their income. “Being innovators in the sphere of aesthetics, in literary mores [v sfere literaturnogo byta] the symbolists held on to archaic . . . and romantic attitude towards the literary market,” writes Reitblat. However, “in real life . . . to make a living with such an attitude was impossible. Therefore, as their readership grew, the symbolist writers were starting to enter into the literary system [v obshchiiu literaturniiu sistemu] and follow the rules of the market, regardless of any open declarations.”

Sologub’s literary career had a very peculiar trajectory in the context of the shifts and transformations within the field of Russian cultural production. His writings and persona were from the outset very strongly linked to the stereotypical image of a decadent (rather than Symbolist) author. Some even stated that if there was ever one true decadent among the Russian Symbolists, it was Sologub. His contemporaries referred to him as “the Russian Schopenhauer” and “the death’s advocate.” The typical topics of his writings were death, poverty and the misery of the everyday world, visions of transcendental beauty, and the image of humanity as “animals in the stuffy cage,” cruel to one another and unable to break free. His quiet and distanced manner of being, as well as the oddly subdued, morose quality of his poetry and prose

153 Peterson, 41.


155 Ibid., 606.

156 Sologub, “My – pl’ennyie zver’i…”
usually made a strong – and often not very positive – impression on others. All of the above made him an unlikely candidate for popularity, even among the Symbolists. And yet, interestingly he soon became one of the most recognizable – and most well paid – of his colleagues.

The successful performance of Sologub’s play *The Triumph of Death (Pobeda smerti)* in November 1906 and the publication of his drama *The Gift of Wise Bees (Dar mudrykh pchēl)* in the prestigious journal *The Golden Fleece (Zolotoe Runo)* associated the author’s name with theater, which brought him both wide recognition and money. His novel *The Petty Demon*, published for the first time in book form in 1907, was a great literary success. It put Sologub’s name in all the respectable literary journals of the time. The novel had record sales and by the end of the 1900s it went through several editions. Sologub’s successes and fame made him the first modernist author to have his oeuvre published in a collected works edition. In 1908 he married Anastasiia Chebotarev skaia, who actively and aggressively promoted her husband’s work, often to the point of excess. Sologub’s honorarium at that time was one of the largest in the country, leaving far behind most of his modernist colleagues (he trailed only behind Gor’kiǐ, Andreev, Chekhov, Bunin, and Kuprin157). He could now leave his position as a school inspector and dedicate himself full time to his writing. All of this brought some significant changes to his public persona. “When I met him in a theater, I couldn’t recognize him,” writes Korneǐ Chukovskiǐ, “he had cut his beard, looked younger, more dignified, a colorful tie adorned his chest. The poet-hermit that I knew from the Vasilevskiǐ Island had become one of the most notable literary figures.”158

Sologub was a very unlikely candidate for wider literary popularity, and yet he managed to achieve success with a general audience, at least relative to the period before the anti-modernist campaign in the popular press begun after 1910.159 This sudden rise to fame and relative wealth potentially put him in a precarious position with respect to his own views on the spiritual

157 *Kniga v Rossii*, 444.


159 See Brooks, “Popular Philistinism and the Course of Russian Modernism.”
poverty of material existence and the sacred character of art. To be true, Sologub never took as
decisive stance against literary economy as Merezhkovskii did, nor was his view of art as
influenced with Solov’iev’s idealism as was the case with Aleksandr Blok and Andrei Belyi.
Some recollections of his contemporaries may even suggest that the author of *The Legend* was
quite capable of an ironic attitude towards his writing, for example by comparing himself to a
graphomaniac or confessing to plagiarism. Nevertheless, some factors give reason to
believe that he was indeed discomforted about becoming a “fashionable” author, at least on
some level.

Sologub was highly sensitive to how his work was being received. As T.V. Misnikevich notes,
the author oftentimes complained to his acquaintances about the critics’ indifference to his work
and obsessively collected every piece of information about himself he could find in press and
literature journals (in at least four different languages). Sologub’s biographer Margarita
Pavlova suggests that for Sologub the myth of being an underappreciated and little-read writer
was an important part of his self-fashioning, one he sometimes used quite deliberately to
provoke critics and, sometimes quite successfully, to mold the reception of his work. This
means that the author of *The Legend*, like many early modernists, had a keen understanding of
the importance of one’s personal myth for establishing one’s position in literary tradition. For
someone cultivating the image of himself as a writer for a select group of intelligent and

160 Teffi, 426.
161 Pavlova, 336–7.
164 Pavlova, 353.
165 See, for example, Maximilian Voloshin’s comparative review of Sologub’s *The Legend* and Leonid Andreev’s
*Darkness* (*T’ma*, 1907). Voloshin presents Sologub as a subtle and elitist writer as opposed to Andreev, who knows
how to shock and attract the reader but is no true artist.
sensitive readers,\textsuperscript{166} wide popularity—especially in the face of a radical shift in the composition and tastes of readership that \textit{fin-de-siecle} Russia had witnessed\textsuperscript{167}—presented a considerable problem\textsuperscript{168}: not a \textit{personal} one, perhaps, but an \textit{ideological} one\textsuperscript{169}.

This self-perpetrated myth fit in well with another aspect the Romantic ideal of the writer espoused by modernists. Such an ideological bind is an important context in which the narrative of \textit{The Legend} should to be situated. Again, my goal here is not so much to psychoanalyze Sologub as to understand the conditions under which a character such as Trirodov could have been and was conceived.

\textbf{The Hero as Agent in the Literary Field}

The utopian romance of the first two volumes of the trilogy—\textit{Drops of Blood} and \textit{Queen Ortruda}—gradually changes its narrative shape to accommodate the problem of the relationship between the figure of the artist and the modern world, presented as drab and spiritually barren. Solving this problem consists of confronting two challenges: one, to present a type of hero that could bring about social change and lead people to a brighter future (a goal that has metaphysical as well as revolutionary undertones); and two, to make sure that such as hero, the poet-creator, stays unaffected by the process, i.e. that he does not become

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\textsuperscript{166} In his self-fashioning Sologub adopted, like many of his fellow early modernists, the Romantic opposition between the creative poet and the ignorant crowd. See, for example, his attack on mass readership and the “popular” reception of literature in the article “On the All-Russian Celebration” (\textit{K vserossiiskomu torzhestvu}, 1899), published on the occasion of Pushkin’s centennial, where he writes: “Is it not insulting that the great name becomes the property of the crowd that, as before, has nothing in common with he who carried the name? The lack of understanding of “stupid crowd” is as vulgar as in the past, and its unchanged thoughts are likewise as far from the pure thoughts of the poet as they used to.” Sologub, 37.

\textsuperscript{167} See Reitblat, “Roman literaturnogo krakha,” 327.

\textsuperscript{168} I want to make a distinction between “popularity” and “notoriety”: even though he was irritated by and protested against identifications of himself with his anti-hero Peredonov, Sologub seemed to have endorsed or, at the very least, tolerated, his “decadent” public image (as a Satanist, pornographer, necrophiliac, etc.). See Pavlova, 336-7.

\textsuperscript{169} Sologub rather enjoyed his popularity among female readers who began writing to him \textit{en masse} after the publication of \textit{The Petty Demon} and he very diligently responded to their letters. See Misnikevich, “Fedor Sologub, ego poklonnicy i korrespondentki.”
compromised in his rise to the position of the saviour. Here we may recall the well-known aphorism by Nietzsche, according to which “[w]hoever fights with monsters should see to it that he does not become one himself. And when you stare for a long time into an abyss, the abyss stars back into you.”\textsuperscript{170} In other words, by becoming involved with society and its affairs, the poet could become tainted by various mechanisms of power that drive it. After all, being an outsider and a contestor, it seems, is easier than being a champion of the masses.

This formal challenge reflects and responds to the dilemma faced by early Russian modernists when dealing with the realities of the literary market. Sustaining their gradually increasing cultural significance had to be supported by various strategies of self-promotion. These, however, could easily jeopardize the idealized self-image of early modernist authors, such as the one adopted by Sologub. Again, in that sense it is much easier to be a rebel, a member of the shunned avant-garde movement, than a part of the mainstream establishment. The narrative of \textit{The Legend} progresses toward the goal of resolving this contradiction, while moving away from the more grandiose project of becoming a modern epic of spiritual rebirth and social transformation announced at the beginning. The earlier project is still there, but it becomes projected further into the future, into the happily ever after following Trirdov’s ascension to the throne of the Islands.

So by what means does Sologub’s text attempt to achieve the new goal? How can the modern artist exert influence on society without losing his (imaginary) autonomy? Can one create a figure uncompromised by any concession to the ways of the world, yet also effective (and most importantly, serious) about his or her task of changing the said world? Can one create a more pragmatic and more successful Don Quixote (or even a Christ, for that matter)?

To begin answering these questions, I want to turn to the figure of the central hero, Georgiĭ Trirdov. I finished the first part of my analysis by stating that although Trirdov’s characterization corresponds to the archetype of the romance hero, his enormous potential for action remains dormant throughout the narrative and never directly affects the course of events (even at the end, when he escapes Skorodozh in his flying vessel). Having studied the context

\textsuperscript{170} Nietzsche, \textit{Beyond Good and Evil}, 69.
of the trilogy – its strong correspondence with the ideological conflicts and paradoxes of the Russian literary field, I now focus on other, less exposed features of this character that can solve the enigmatic lack of consequence in the narrative of *The Legend*.

I will start by analyzing the semantic links that connect Trirodov to the field of literature. The first of those links – and one that was quickly noticed by the novel’s first critics – is Trirodov’s resemblance to his creator, Fedor Sologub. Let us look at the description provided by the narrator:

> Trirodov was about forty. His hair was cut short, his face shaven, – this made him look much younger. Only by peering closer could one notice the many gray hairs, the wrinkles on his face around the eyes and on the forehead. He had a pale face. The broad forehead seemed very large, the effect of a delicate chin, sunken cheeks and partial baldness.  

Both the age and physical features match those of Sologub at the time of composing the trilogy. As Chukovskiĭ and other contemporaries of the author observed, these parallels run much deeper. On numerous occasions Trirodov quotes lines from Sologub’s published poems and his views on child education are based entirely on a series of articles Sologub published prior to working on *The Legend*. Trirodov also shares other aspects of his creator’s worldview, as evidenced by the positions he takes in various exchanges with other characters that closely mirror the polemics Sologub carried on with his fellow writers, such as the debate surrounding the publication of Merezhkovskii’s article “Approaching Boor” (*Griadushchiĭ Kham*, 1906). Trirodov’s melancholy disposition as well as his outlook on life, society and the world is also unmistakably derived from Sologub’s artistic persona. The little information readers are given about Trirodov’s artistic output further emphasizes the affinity between the two individuals:

> His fame was very limited, few read his verses and prose and few of his readers recognized his talent. His compositions, novellas and lyrical verses, were not distinguished by any particular vagueness or any particular decadent affiliations. But they did bear in themselves the stamp of something bizarre and refined. A

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171 *DB*, 36.
person would have had to possess a peculiar makeup to love this poetry so austere to the eye, yet so unusual.\footnote{DB, 86.}

Later, when Trirodov suddenly announces his willingness to ascend the throne, the following information about him appears in the press: “Georgy Trirodov, a refined Russian poet, little known to larger public, but talented, has drawn the attention of connoisseurs and appreciators of sophisticated literature with the bizarre form and psychopathic content of his novellas and verses.”\footnote{SA, 44.} Lucid, bizarre, and refined form coupled with “psychopathic content” – critics and readers regularly applied these epithets to Sologub’s work.\footnote{See again Pavlova, 336-7.} The only difference between the protagonist and the author in that respect seems to be the fact that the former “wrote a great deal, but printed very little,” whereas the latter was, as mentioned earlier, a self-professed graphomaniac who on top of writing a lot never missed an opportunity to recycle and republish his old material. This particular aspect of Sologub’s artistic practice is conveniently effaced from his idealized self-portrait.

Sologub was very secretive about his past and publicly claimed: “my biography should be of no interest to critics.”\footnote{See the interview with Sologub in Kniga o russkikh poetakh poslednego deiatletiia, 240.} This corresponds to the fact that very little is known about Trirodov’s past.\footnote{Chukovskiĭ, “Nav’i chary,” 80.} Nonetheless, one may also observe a certain biographical link connecting the creation with the creator. Trirodov is a widower and much of his melancholia revolves around his dead wife, which in Smoke and Ashes turns out to be Lilith, the mythical first wife of Adam. Falling in love with and his betrothal to Elisaveta, who is full of energy and joy of life, is a cure for melancholia and propels him to perform his social experiment: to become the king of the United Islands. Reading The Legend biographically, one sees in this shift a reflection of the two important circumstances that had a huge impact on Sologub’s further career. The first of these

\footnote{DB, 86.}
\footnote{SA, 44.}
\footnote{See again Pavlova, 336-7.}
\footnote{See the interview with Sologub in Kniga o russkikh poetakh poslednego deiatletiia, 240.}
\footnote{Chukovskiĭ, “Nav’i chary,” 80.}
is perhaps the biggest tragedy in his adult life, namely the death of his quiet and supportive sister with whom he was very close. The second is the overcoming of that tragedy by entering into a relationship with and then marrying Anastasiia Chebotarevskaia – a development coinciding with the author’s sudden rise to fame and together creating “the beautiful legend” in their own social world.177

Finally, there is the episode from the draft of The Legend brought to attention by Henryk Baran.178 In this episode Trirodov visits St. Petersburg and attends soirees at the most prominent modernist salons of the time, those of the Merezhkovskiïs and Viacheslav Ivanov (whose names are thinly parodied as “Pirozhkovskiï” and “Divanov”). Sologub decided not to include this episode in any of the published versions. Baran suggests that the reasons for this absence are compositional as well as biographical: its introduction of St. Petersburg as the third space would have disrupted the spatial arrangement of the novel without adding much to Trirodov’s ideological portrait, whereas the satirical treatment of fellow symbolists would signal a sharp break with the modernist movement and its ideals. Sologub, writes Baran, continued to define himself and his work in the cultural framework of early modernism and was clearly not comfortable with open ridicule of its chief representatives lest it would diminish his own position.

It is possible to read these biographical parallels as Sologub’s deployment of Romantic irony or evidence of his artistic narcissism. Indeed, many contemporaries have read The Legend as superbly narcissio. However, the removal of the St. Petersburg episode may suggest that although Sologub wanted to establish a connection between himself and his alter ego, he did not want to include in this self-portrait certain circumstances of his social and artistic position. For example, Trirodov’s role in the trilogy obscures the communal aspect of modernist culture, making the protagonist the sole representative of this milieu. Also, as is evident from the size of Trirodov’s artistic output, Sologub was cautious not to make Trirodov a prolific writer like himself, which suggests that he modeled his hero in equal parts on his own persona and his “ideal” self-image discussed in the previous section. The attitude and skills necessary to

177 See Lavrov, “Sologub i Anastasiia Chebotarevskaia.”

178 See Baran, “Trirodov Among the Symbolists.”
manage one’s career as a published author are also present in *The Legend*, but they do not fit any of the “symbolic” roles Trirodov plays, such as the romance hero, genius inventor, enchanter, or artist. They seem to correspond, at least in part, to figures of businessmen and entrepreneurs that were not among the social types most warmly treated by Russian literature. Perhaps because of that, these aspects of Trirodov’s persona were never studied in detail. I would like to argue that they allow us to see the main protagonist as an agent in the cultural field, but in a way that would not compromise his idealized image to the same extent as a too-close association with the author’s persona would.

First of all, Trirodov is a self-made man who at the beginning of the story is already in possession of a sizeable fortune. His wealth can not only buy him the estate of Millet Glades and to renovate it with the help of foreign workers, but also to seek further expansion of his lands. The source of Trirodov’s fortune is unknown and because of readers’ lack of knowledge about this character’s background (with the exception of a single flashback to his revolutionary past and some vague information about his first marriage), it is an ambiguous issue. Although the villain Ostrov suggests that Trirodov obtained his wealth legally (the adverb he uses is *chistyĭ*: “pure, clean”), readers never get to know exactly how he did it. At the beginning of the third book of the trilogy, Trirodov mentions his proletarian origins and admits that he came in possession of a large fortune “only by chance.” Once again this word – “chance” – surfaces in my analysis. The protagonist “by chance” becomes the new king of the United Islands just as “by chance” he acquires a considerable wealth prior to his arrival in Skorodozh. Here I must stop and ask a question about what kind of agency this concept of chance has in *The Legend*, since so much seems to depend upon it.

Chance plays a special role in the trilogy. Like in every romance narrative – from ancient to modern – the plot of Sologub’s novel is filled to the brim with coincidences, random encounters, and ironies of fate. Bakhtin describes this aspect of romance:

> Moments of adventuristic time occur at those points when the normal course of events . . . is interrupted. These points provide an opening for the intrusion of nonhuman forces – fate, gods, villains – and it is precisely these forces, and not the heroes, who in adventure-time take all the initiative. Of course, the heroes themselves act in adventure-time – they escape, defend
themselves, engage in battle, save themselves – but they act, as it were, as merely physical persons, and the initiative does not belong to them. . . . In this time, persons are forever having things happen to them (they might even “happen” to win a kingdom); a purely adventuristic person is a person of chance.  

The above passage seems to capture the narrative spirit of *The Legend*. Bakhtin even mentions the motif of winning a kingdom by chance: something that directly corresponds to the plot of *Smoke and Ashes*. Unfortunately, in Sologub’s work chance is a very different type of agency from that described by Bakhtin. After all, Trirodov does not lack initiative like the heroes of ancient and medieval romances. On the contrary, he is the embodiment of initiative. The passage in which he echoes the narrator’s opening lines demonstrates that very clearly: “Fate draws me on. I wish to be king. And I shall be king. . . . In order to overcome, to conquer, remake everything in my own fashion, to raise the sign of my will over a world of haphazard occurrences. In order to expand life, to make life yet greater.” The plot of *Smoke and Ashes* is in large part a series of consequences of Trirodov’s decision to intervene in the history of the United Islands, i.e to volunteer his candidacy to the throne. His actions are minimal, but initiative and design are clearly there. Also, whenever Trirodov is directly involved in action, he assumes complete control of the situation. Thanks to his uncanny abilities he can relatively easily deal with dangerous situations (to himself as well as to his friends and allies), including life-threatening ones such as the attack of Cossacks. While chance and fate are freely at work in Sologub’s tale, they never affect him directly. The world of Trirodov and the world of chance are two separate realities that come together only when the protagonist sends a “signal” announcing his readiness to widen his circle of influence.

Why is chance such a significant element in *The Legend*? Simply put: it resolves the problem of the protagonist’s responsibility for his actions. After all, to enjoy the result of a happenstance is not the same as to act. In Trirodov’s case, becoming a king does not necessitate any direct

179 Bakhtin, 95.

180 SA, 12.
involvement in dirty politics of the type practiced by the prime minister of the Kingdom, Victor Lorena. The same goes for his public appeal: the future king of the United Islands does not need to conduct any electoral campaign: the media frenzy around his candidacy for the throne is self-perpetuated and its valences slowly but surely secure him as the only plausible candidate. Replacing the “deed” (acting on one’s intentions) with “chance” (where all is given externally, without the protagonist’s engagement) is all the more daunting because of Trirodov’s characteristics that clearly make him capable of carrying out his projects were he ever given the opportunity to do so. There is a clear dissonance here.

I will now inspect these characteristics more closely. They are somewhat curious given the fact that Trirodov is supposed to represent the artistic and intellectual circle of Russian modernists; they are not as spectacular as his wizardry, yet serve him equally well in his quest for transforming reality. I refer here to the characteristics of a successful entrepreneur. The secrecy of Trirodov’s fortune aside, he is a character who certainly knows how to manage his finances.

Over the course of the trilogy – mainly in *Drops of Blood* – he shows himself to be a skilled manager and administrator with a unique talent for diplomacy. I already mentioned Trirodov’s plans for expanding his property by buying land from neighboring landowners (e.g. the Rameevs), which indicates an expansive and forward-looking business attitude. Furthermore, his school colony turns out to be not simply an eccentric utopian project but the most efficient learning institute in the district, capable of successfully competing with all the other schools and withstanding a combined onslaught of unfavorable school officials, including the notorious Ardal’on Borisych Peredonov. Trirodov, as it turns out, is extremely pragmatic with regards to his educational institution, planning to turn it into an experimental farm in the future (and hence a business enterprise) if he is ever forced to close it: “They could close the school but it would be rather difficult to stop people from living on the land and taking up farming. If the school became not only a school but also an educational agricultural venture, then it would successfully replace the large undertakings of the landowners.”

This project ostensibly echoes a similar venture from the bestselling novel by Nikolaï Chernyshevskii’s *What Is to Be Done? (Chto delat’?*, 1863): Vera Pavlovna’s unionized sewing shop. This indirect reference

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181 *DB*, 62.
associates Trirodov with Chernyshevskii’s “New Men” (*novye liudi*) and social revolutionaries with an utterly pragmatic sensibility.

When Ostrov attempts to blackmail Trirodov early on in the story, the latter refuses to give in, one of the reasons he gives being that Ostrov would senselessly blow through the money in a very short time. “And do you waste it with greater sense?” asks Ostrov, to which Trirodov replies: “If not with sense, then with calculation.”\(^{182}\) A calculating mind is yet another characteristic that seems at odds with the detached ideology professed by the main protagonist and the Romantic philosophy of creative will that permeates the trilogy. Another instance of when this quality shines through occurs during the visit of police officials who follow up on slanderous accusations made about the indecencies that take place in the colony. Both visits – from the police sergeant and police superintendent – result in bribes that buy a temporary peace for the school. This illustrates that Trirodov’s calculating attitude allows him to function equally efficiently in grey areas of social domain as in the “honest” accumulation of wealth. The importance and the value of his approach is highlighted by characters who function as Trirodov’s alter egos, or “shadows,” (such as Ostrov, Matov Senior, or Prince Tankred) that notoriously run into financial troubles and try to save themselves by villainous actions, such as Ostrov’s blackmailing and slanderous activity in Skorodozh, Matov’s betrayal of a revolutionary group, and Tankred’s bloody fantasies of conquest and colonization resulting in a conspiracy to overthrow Ortruda. Trirodov’s financial shrewdness likens him to the social type represented by characters like Andrei Stoltz from Goncharov’s novel *Oblomov* (1959) or Lopakhin from Chekhov’s famous play *The Cherry Orchard* (1904). However, just as social and political engagement so is entrepreneurship an ideologically risky quality in a character who is supposed to represent unrestrained poetic and creative imagination.

Two aspects are of special significance here. First, wealth and recognition for Trirodov are never goals in themselves and to a casual reader they function merely as a realistic prop that allows Sologub’s protagonist to carry out his fantastic and utopian activity (after all, one has to have money and leisure for all that). Second, even though Trirodov is a wealthy man, he is not a capitalist and his wealth is not gained from business or commerce. This is an extremely

\(^{182}\) Ibid., 78.
important fact that is directly linked to the rhetoric of innocence that can be seen in the way chance functions as an alibi for Trirodov’s political designs. “Money from these sources [business or commerce],” observes Jeffrey Brooks,

although clearly sought after by those who had the opportunity, was regarded with ambivalence or hostility by much of Russian society, both because it was not old, established wealth, and because commerce and industry were associated with the exploitation of others. The artist, on the other hand, was considered free of conventions, obligations, and greedy dealings. Money came to these people not because they consciously set out to amass it, but rather incidentally – because the adoring crowds wanted to reward their talents. Therefore, talent, unlike entrepreneurial skills, justified fame and glory [although not for the modernists].

Here is a perfect formula for Trirodov’s *modus operandi* and yet another aspect of his persona that likens him to an agent in the field of cultural production. The type of success that an artist can enjoy is qualitatively different from that of someone who sells his skills or products of his or her labour. Cultural capital – at least so it seems in this case – is not accumulated by way of the exploitation of others, at least that is how authors like Merezhkovskii, and Russian society at large, tended to perceive it. There is of course a problem here that I mentioned when I discussed Merezhkovskii’s essay: how to differentiate between, on the one hand, such a disinterested writer-genius who shares his inner vision with society without an eye for financial gains, and on the other hand, a hack who consciously uses his talent as a money machine? Questions of this sort were of course nothing new – already writers like Gogol and Dostoevskii had to face it in their attempts to become recognizable literary figures – but the continuing commercialization of the publishing market blew up the issue to an unprecedented magnitude. Sologub’s solution is to separate the two areas of social economy – the cultural and financial – into two seemingly unrelated spheres of Trirodov’s activity: his management of the utopian school and his artistic and supernatural activity.

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183 Brooks, *When Russia Learned To Read*, 278.
What is being suggested here is that those who remain faithful to their vision and have a strong will, are eventually rewarded with wealth and social status, and their success does not have to compromise their ideals (in large part because they do not have to labour for it). It is wishful thinking, for sure, but not of the kind that the critics of The Legend usually ascribe to its author, i.e. one involving the utopian components of the story. Trirodov’s success – as an artist, intellectual, innovator, educator, entrepreneur, utopian activist, and political figure – mirrors and magnifies Sologub’s own success in the literary world, but it does so by what Freudians would call a displacement, i.e. moving around representations and meanings. Thus, the anxiety of being a sell-out is handled by a double operation of separation. Firstly, every financial and social aspect attached to artistic activity is transferred onto an altogether different area of activity. Sologub’s text separates the literary and intellectual activities of the main protagonist from his materialist pragmatism, so that what makes him a successful reformer is unrelated to what makes him an important thinker and poet. Secondly, both types of activity are removed from the taboo realm of the social and financial economy by introducing the “blind” agent: chance. Unlike a noble status or entrepreneurship, this source of wealth is ethically neutral because by definition it is available to all and, most importantly, free of the moral responsibility associated with the conscious pursuit of money and success. Hence, Sologub manages to symbolically mend the contradiction between the modernist ideal of the author with that of the recognized and commercially successful professional which he became in the course of his literary career.

The conversation that takes place between Trirodov and his bride Elisaveta immediately after he decides to become the new king of the United Islands offers an excellent illustration – and to some extent even theorization – of the logic of compromise behind the larger narrative of the trilogy. Elisaveta reacts with amusement and disbelief to Trirodov’s announcement: “‘How strange that you should want such a thing! You really aren’t seeking fame?’” “‘Fame? What need to I have of fame?’” responds Trirodov, and then he starts a tirade:

And who is famous? The songstress of tavern songs, a sweet tenor, a pretentious novelist, a man who has created an enormous scandal, a person who has created publicity successfully around himself. What is it worth, this fame torn from the dull and malicious crowd! With every imaginable malice people catch the news
of every awkward step of those who have been elevated by them! And how they gnaw at and poison the famous when their fragile pedestal begins to shake. No, I have no need of fame.  

Here, Trirodov is a mouthpiece expressing the disdain Sologub and his milieu felt towards the phenomenon of popularity. Yet Elisaveta retorts “quietly”: “There is a pure fame [chistaia slava].” It is a small remark, almost accidental – and the conversation immediately shifts focus as Trirodov observes that Elisaveta began to think of something else. Yet one is left with this peculiar concept that explains much of the curiously inconclusive ending: realizing utopia is secondary to achieving that curious status, “a pure fame.” Just like Trirodov’s mysterious fortune, so is his political success identified as a pure affair, one where ethical dilemmas surrounding the determined pursuit of a goal (especially one associated with money and power) can somehow be avoided and the imagined autonomy of the subject preserved in a network of determining forces.

On this point, Sologub’s utopian romance – a romance offering two distinct yet interwoven narratives, or rather novelized treaties – converges with the classical romances described by Bakhtin, in which the role of the protagonist is to endure the game fate plays with him: “And he not only endures,” writes the author of the “Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel,” “he keeps on being the same person and emerges from this game, from all these turns of fate and chance, with his identity absolutely unchanged.” The obvious moral of the story is therefore that there is nothing wrong with enjoying social, cultural, and economic capital, if only one had no direct influence over their accumulation and if this capital had no bearing on one’s self. But the question of whether this narrative concealment (achieved thanks to the fairy-tale logic of the romance mode) can be successfully forged into a convincing justification of Sologub’s own ambivalent position in the literary field is another story, and given the disinterest with which the conclusion to the trilogy was met, probably one without a happy ending.

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184 SA, 13.
185 Ibid.
186 Bakhtin, 105.
Conclusion

I have extensively argued that what Baran identified as the idea that “the novel contains within its bounds textual elements which create meaning according to different principles and which are mutually incompatible” can in fact be accounted for if one reads Sologub’s novel-trilogy as a resurfacings of the romance paradigm rather than as a novel in the traditional sense.\(^{187}\) When one looks at *The Legend* as a merger between the poetics of romance and the early modernist imagination, the novel’s numerous subplots and generic markers begin to fit together into a semantically coherent whole.

The one element that sticks out is the strange passivity of the protagonist, a passivity that causes a dissonance between his enormous potential for action and the oddly impersonal manner in which his final victory is achieved. To explain this dissonance I referred to the ideological and sociological context of the literary market in Russia at the time (with a discussion of Sologub’s own position in this market). I have pointed out the key ideological conflict within the modernist ethos, one that grew bigger as the market expanded and the modernists’ share of it increased. The question was: “How to retain one’s self-image – based on artistic independence and an elite disdain for things adored by ‘the crowd’ – in the face of growing popularity (and sums on paychecks)?” By viewing the protagonist of *The Legend* as not simply his creator’s mouthpiece but a symbolic representation of an agent in the field of cultural production (like Sologub and other early modernists) I offer a new interpretation of the Sologub’s tale “of the enchanted and the beautiful.” I propose to read it as a story that, in a veiled and indirect way, attempts to justify literary success without ostensibly contradicting the early modernist ideals about art and the artist’s vocation.

\(^{187}\) Baran, “Fedor Sologub and the Critics,” 33.
Chapter 2

In Search of a New History:

Jerzy Źuławski’s The Lunar Trilogy

At the end of the nineteenth century the slowly coalescing genre of science fiction suffered a kind of schizophrenia that reflected the dual perception of this historical period. For some, the turn of the century was a time when Europe celebrated its greatness and was eagerly anticipating the future despite the signs of coming trouble: economic crises, social unrest, and portents of the international conflict. From this perspective, it was *la belle époque*, “the beautiful era.” For others, the last two decades of the nineteenth century were anything but celebratory. They perceived signs of civilizational degeneration in all spheres of life and counted themselves among the last scions of a dying “European race.” For artists and intellectuals who shared this perception, the period was the end of an era and in a deeper sense, the end of times: *fin de siècle*.189

Like all forms of popular culture, past and present, scientific and utopian romances written at the time were closely attuned to these social and cultural sensibilities. Therefore, hopeful utopias like Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward, 2000-1887* (1887) and William Morris’ *News from Nowhere* (1890) have their dark counterparts in such somber visions as those of Richard Jefferies’ *After London* (1885), Didier de Chousy’s *Ignis* (1883), and H.G. Wells’s scientific romances where humanity dangerously balances between utopian and catastrophic scenarios of its not-too-distant future.

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188 See, for example, Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire*, 46-55. For a more detailed social and cultural account of the Belle Époque, see also Rearick, *Pleasures of the Belle Époque*.

189 There exist numerous overviews of the pessimistic and apocalyptic sensibility characterizing late nineteenth-century Europe. For an excellent and now classical study of the subject, see Pierrot, *The Decadent Imagination*.
The first book of Żuławski’s trilogy, *On the Silver Globe (Na srebrnym globie)*, was written between 1901 and 1902 then published in 1903.\(^\text{190}\) It was a surprise to many critics due to Żuławski’s employment of the genre of scientific romance, hitherto virtually absent from Polish literature. The novel tells the story of a hapless expedition to the Moon, narrated through the retrieved personal journal of Jan Korecki, one of the expedition’s members. He starts writing his journal in the immediate aftermath of a crash landing on the moon that kills the leader and organizer of the expedition and that leaves the remaining four participants confused and short on air supply. The group undertakes a difficult journey to the lunar North Pole, in hope of finding suitable conditions for a settlement there. Before they reach their destination, another member of the crew dies, leaving only two men and a woman.

On the other side of the moon they indeed find a “Green World,”\(^\text{191}\) which they can inhabit. However, a conflict ensues between the two men over the woman Marta, who – in the role of a new Eve – would give birth to a new generation (and hence foster a civilization). The trauma resulting from this conflict destroys the lives of Marta and her new “husband” Piotr Varadol, making Korecki the sole guardian and teacher of a new generation. The physical conditions on the moon make Marta’s children and their offspring dwarfed. The Selenites – i.e. Marta’s offspring and their offspring - reject Korecki’s educational efforts, instead making him into a cult figure referred to as the Old Man. Alienated and melancholic, he finally abandons the growing Selenite tribe and returns to the other side of the moon to send his manuscript to Earth and to end his life.

The other volumes of *The Lunar Trilogy – The Conqueror* and *The Old Earth* – appeared much later, in 1910 and 1911, respectively. *The Conqueror* begins with another spaceship landing on the lunar North Pole. Its sole passenger is Marek, a young adventurer who wants to follow in the footsteps of the first expedition. The seven hundred years that have passed since Korecki’s

\(^{190}\) For a more detailed publication history of individual books in the trilogy, see Karwacka, “O trylogii fantastycznej Jerzego Żuławskiego,” 83-4.

\(^{191}\) What Korecki and his fellow explorers find is a natural sanctuary on the Norther Pole of the Moon and a dazzling, natural ecosystem covering the hidden side of the Moon (the impossibility of which Żuławski was well aware of). By calling it a “Green World” I want to draw a parallel with Frye’s interpretation of this theme (more on this in further parts of the text).
death have witnessed the growth of the Selenite clan into a young civilization organized around the cult of the Old Man. In the interval between Korecki’s death and Marek’s arrival, the Selenite civilization is conquered and colonized by an ancient race of lunar creatures known as Sherns. The Selenites immediately assume Marek to be the legendary Old Man, who now returns in a new form to fulfill the messianic promises given by several generations of their prophets. Seeing the desperation and degradation of this new humanity, Marek willingly assumes this role and, armed with weapons brought from Earth, leads a rebellion and then a successful conquest campaign against the demonic “aliens.” He soon learns, however, that his victory will never eliminate the threat from the Sherns, which makes many Selenites doubt his divine nature. After retreating from the war he attempts to use his position to improve the lunar society by introducing social and political reforms. Threatened by the changes, Marek’s former supporters in the priestly caste turn the people against him. His crucifixion at the end of the novel marks the birth of a new myth.

Before Marek’s downfall, his spaceship is accidentally taken back to Earth with two Selenites onboard. Their misadventures on Earth, a futuristic dystopia, constitute one of the two interlacing plots of The Old Earth. The other one revolves around Jacek, a brilliant inventor who, together with a few other characters, recognizes the catastrophic impasse to which scientific progress has led mankind. The masses have considerably benefitted from technological advancements, but once their need for comfort and security has been satisfied, they turn away from metaphysical and epistemological pursuits. Jacek desperately seeks a way to overcome this situation, but it seems to be too late to awaken humanity’s curiosity for metaphysics. Art and thought are disappearing from Earth. In an act of desperation Jacek builds a bomb that could potentially destroy the entire globe. He is courted by different fractions, including the leader of the world’s new proletarians, to hand over this powerful weapon. In the end, after the events lead to an aborted revolution of the working classes, a bourgeois government representing a hedonistic and consumerist society dissolves the scientific council and all other institutions conducting scientific research. History comes to a dystopian end. Jacek disappears, teleported into the unknown by Nyanatiloka, a Buddhist mystic whom he befriended. Materet, a Selenite who came to appreciate all of Earth’s history and development, is the only person to mourn its demise.
On the Silver Globe received generally positive reviews and became hugely popular; the other two books were less popular, mostly due to the perceived repetitiveness of the fantastic tropes.\(^{192}\) Almost all reviewers wrote about Jules Verne’s influence on On the Silver Globe, although they also pointed out the psychological realism and poetic qualities that put Żuławski’s work above that of the French author.\(^{193}\) The only negative review appeared, somewhat surprisingly, in Chimera, an artistic-literary journal that was one of the flagship publications of Young Poland. The author of the review, Maria Komornicka, writing under the pseudonym Piotr Włast, described the novel as derivative, indicating that “the lack of technical inventiveness [pomysłowości technicznej], adventurous imagination and poetry have made this journey to the moon a boring and, in the romantic parts, disgusting romance, decorated here and there with beautiful depictions of landscape.” She also suggests that the book reminds one of a “list of contents of sociology textbooks. . . . There are the newest scientific hypotheses, but there is no creative synthesis, no intuition.”\(^{194}\)

The comments about the lack of an authentic poetic talent must have been particularly upsetting for Żuławski, whose essayistic work repeatedly celebrates creativity and originality as supreme artistic values. What is interesting about this review is that it will become symptomatic of a certain tendency in the critical reception of Żuławski’s work, which has also affected scholarly criticism. Namely, it is the tendency to separate Żuławski the Intellectual from Żuławski the Artist. His dramas and prose are often considered mere allegories of the ideas contained in his essays.\(^{195}\) The Lunar Trilogy is no exception, usually being “assigned” to Żuławski the Intellectual. With few notable exceptions voiced in a relatively recent criticism of Żuławski’s

\(^{192}\) See Karwacka, “O trylogii…,” 83-4.

\(^{193}\) See Sten, Matuszewski, and Karwacka.

\(^{194}\) Włast [Komornicka], 335.

\(^{195}\) See Kreczmar, 5-14. In fact, the majority of articles dedicated to the trilogy focuses on the author’s “views” [poglądy] and philosophy, considering his trilogy as yet another platform for expressing his intellectual speculations. Consider, for example, titles of essays collected in the critical anthology Jerzy Żuławski. Życie i twórczość, ed. Eugenia Loch: “Społeczne i filozoficzne poglądy Jerzego Żuławskiego w Trylogii fantastycznej,” “Utopia i historiozofia w poglądach Jerzego Żuławskiego na przykładzie Starej Ziemi,” etc.
work (particularly by Miklaszewska and Trześniowski\(^{196}\)), Eugenia Łoch’s call for further inquiries into the narrative patterns in this work remains unanswered.\(^{197}\) One of the corollaries of my reading is the discovery that the unique combination of romantic and modernist elements at work in the trilogy shapes Żuławski’s philosophy to the same extent as it is shaped by it.

As a work drawing on scientific and adventure romances, Jerzy Żuławski’s *The Lunar Trilogy* displays the same type of duality in its outlook on human history and possible futures as I described at the beginning of the chapter.\(^{198}\) Yet it is first and foremost an early modernist work, written by one of the more prominent representatives of Young Poland, and its engagement with the questions of history and of human nature goes far beyond the typical scope of popular adventure and scientific romances. This hybridity between the two modes – modernism and popular romance – is highly unusual because the modes emblematize two very different approaches to modernity: one is “objective” and affirmative (what Stephen Spender refers to as “the contemporaries” or “Voltairean egoists”), the other subjective and negative (“the moderns” in Spender’s terminology; “early modernists” in mine\(^{199}\)).

In this chapter I analyze how and when these two modes reinforce and contradict one another in Żuławski’s opus. I also attempt to define what kind of model for the early modernist novel this

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\(^{196}\) See Miklaszewska, “Katastrofizm w twórczości Jerzego Żuławskiego”; Trześniowski, “Młodopolskie źródła fantasy”; and Trześniowski, *W stronę człowieka*.

\(^{197}\) See Łoch, “Techniki narracyjne Trylogii księżycowej Jerzego Żuławskiego,” 193.

\(^{198}\) All the quotations come from following editions: Jerzy Żuławski, *Na srebrnym globie: rękopis z księżyca* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1957); Jerzy Żuławski, *Zwycięzca* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1959); Jerzy Żuławski, *Stara Ziemia* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1959). All translations are mine. When quoting from Żuławski’s work throughout this chapter I will use the abbreviations *OSG*, *TC*, and *TOE* to denote *On the Silver Globe*, *The Conqueror*, and *The Old Earth*, respectively.

\(^{199}\) “The faith of the Voltairean egoists,” writes Spender, “is that they will direct the powers of the surrounding world from evil into better courses through the exercise of superior social or cultural intelligence of the creative genius, the writer prophet. The faith of the moderns is that by allowing their sensibility to be acted upon by the modern experience as suffering, they will produce, partly as the result of unconscious processes, and partly through the exercise of critical consciousness, the idioms and forms of new art. The modern is the realized consciousness of suffering, sensibility and awareness of the past.” Spender, 72.
fusion offers and what kind of “dissonance of existence” (to use Lukács’s famous formula\textsuperscript{200}) is prompted such an unusual experiment. To make my argument more transparent, I choose to organize it around the vectors of space, protagonists, and time in *The Lunar Trilogy*. These are the three major narrative aspects where the distinction between romance and the novel is the sharpest. They also happen to be the crucial loci of the interaction between the old and new traditions of romance and early modernism in Żuławski’s work, which makes them ideal examples of Żuławski’s uses of and departures from the romance paradigm.

**Space in *The Lunar Trilogy***

“Any history of the romance will in one sense be a record of decadence,” writes Gillian Beer.\textsuperscript{201} Indeed, despite its idealism and wish-fulfilling utopianism, the modern romance seems to be a thoroughly nostalgic mode of fiction, preoccupied with holding on to the sense of wonder and amazement that is inevitably slipping out of the world.

When the term “romance” appears for the first time in Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism*, in the first essay, it is one of several fictional modes (mythical, romantic, high mimetic, low mimetic and ironic) whose progression takes us from the ancient forms of literature to realism and modernism. Frye’s history of literature – as a history of fictional modes – is a process of gradual displacement from myth. Literary representations of the world of man move away from the undiluted imagination of myths (with their roots in ancient rituals and sacred practices) to the more “plausible” medieval romance and the high mimetic mode of renaissance literature and then to the low mimetic mode and finally irony; the last two Frye associates with the nineteenth-century realism and modernism, respectively.

Michael McKeon in *The Origins of the English Novel* and Jameson in *The Political Unconscious* recognize that Frye’s theory is driven by the “idea of historical identity,” i.e. the

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{200} “Every form is the resolution of a fundamental dissonance of existence; every form restores the absurd to its proper place as the vehicle, the necessary condition of meaning.” Lukács, 62.

\textsuperscript{201} Beer, 1.
\end{footnotesize}
notion of the uninterrupted continuity of literary tradition from ancient times to the present moment.\textsuperscript{202} Both critics, inspired by Marxist views of history, offer a much more dynamic vision of the history of the novel form. In a chapter specifically dedicated to Frye and romance (“Magical Narratives”) Jameson incorporates the Canadian critic into his vision of novelistic history which stresses the significance of the development of capitalism in late modern era. Specifically, he points to historical circumstances under which romance flourishes and diminishes throughout the nineteenth century. The persistent role of this mode, he argues, is to replenish a sense of wonder in a disenchanted world of accelerating rationalization and modernization. In order to do so, it needs to draw on “the raw materials of magic and Otherness”\textsuperscript{203} – the still unexplored or little known areas and populations – using them as a kind of scaffolding for its adventurous plots. Needless to say, such magical zones – once abundant in the pre-modern world – are rapidly diminishing with the onset of modernity and its cartographic conquests.

Thus, for both Frye and Jameson, the romance paradigm is an ever decaying and vanishing phenomenon, both as an “object” (a specific form of writing) and “subject” (the sense of wonder and adventurousness), to borrow Jameson’s dialectical terminology. John A. McClure offers an even more historically specific version of the above narrative by viewing Jameson’s theory in geopolitical terms in the context of late imperial culture. He observes that the period between 1870 and 1914 witnessed an unprecedented tightening of the global network of communications, international trade and colonial relations. Various sites of “magic, adventure, providential mystery, and Otherness,” which in the literary imagination take the form of lost lands, dark continents, utopias, earthly paradises, frontiers, etc., could no longer be accommodated geographically.\textsuperscript{204} The colonial project came to a completion: “At this moment,” writes McClure, “when it became impossible to ignore the prospect of global modernization, the eradication of the last elsewhere, the writers of imperial romance began to


\textsuperscript{203}Jameson, 117.

\textsuperscript{204}McClure, \textit{Late Imperial Romance}, 9.
become uneasy.” Works such as those of Joseph Conrad, which the critic calls late imperial romance, began to project this uneasiness by making into a quest the very act of regaining the sense of enchantment, adventure, and discovery.

Because of the scope of his research, which is limited to Anglophone literature, McClure does not include the work of Verne in his discussion. However, the French author plays a pivotal role in the process described above. Verne’s *Voyages extraordinaires*, the impressive body of fifty-four novels, present a world where, despite the complete quantification of time and space, utopian dreams of temporary escape from the bourgeois boredom can be projected onto the new means of locomotion. Darko Suvin rightfully calls this body of work “an epic of communication for the age of industrial liberalism.” Verne’s rendition of the relationship between the scientific progress and space is a Newtonian one in at least two ways. First, the fantastic spaces described in his novels do not affect in any radical way the status quo of European civilization as it is. Second, as technology and communication gradually deplete the world of the old sites for romance, they manage to produce new ones, although only temporarily, i.e., these new sites are no more than spatial extensions for various new modes of locomotion and, as mentioned, exist only for the duration of a given journey. This is a utopian prospect in its belief in unlimited travel and unlimited expansion of the frontier of Western rationalism. With vehicles like the Nautilus of *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (*Vingt mille lieues sous les mers*, 1869) or the Columbiad from *From the Earth to the Moon* (*De la terre à la lune*, 1865), the sky, earth, oceanic depths and cosmic vacuum become spaces of infinite possibilities for adventurous romance that can be “activated” whenever desired, spaces which do not interfere with the rationalizing processes of the modern world.

Those who continued Verne’s legacy, however, could no longer share his initial optimism. Even Verne’s own work displayed increasingly darker overtones towards the end of the nineteenth century (for example, in the already mentioned *The Purchase of the North Pole* or *The Master of the World*). H.G. Wells, who continued and further developed the form of scientific romance,

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205 Ibid., 11.

206 Suvin, 150.
presents the wondrous element as a disrupting force that undermines the civilized world. If Verne’s work shares many traits with imperial romance (albeit without the burden of colonization), the author of *The Time Machine* leans more towards the tradition of Gothic romance. In his work, “the vast, menacing, stupid powers of nature as they appear to a technologically undeveloped society” once again come to haunt the civilized metropolis. Wells describes the philosophy behind his work with a vivid spatial metaphor:

Science is a match that man has just got alight. He thought he was in a room – in moments of devotion, a temple – and that his light would be reflected from and display walls inscribed with wonderful secrets and pillars carved with philosophical systems wrought into harmony. It is a curious sensation, now that the preliminary splutter is over and the flame burns up clear, to see his hands lit and just a glimpse of himself and the patch he stands on visible, and around him, in place of all that human comfort and beauty he anticipated – darkness still.

Thus, Wells’ world, unlike that of Verne, is no longer a rational universe filled with exciting possibilities for adventurous exploits but a world surrounded by darkness, filled with anxieties about what may lurk in the distant (e.g. *The Time Machine*) and not-too-distant (e.g. *The War of the Worlds*) future. Reason and morality, in terms of which the Victorian culture wants to see itself, turn out to be made of a very thin fabric. Just as one of his protagonists returns to England after experiencing the horrors of Dr. Moreau’s experimental island, all around he discovers “faces keen and bright, others dull or dangerous, others unsteady, insincere, none that have the calm authority of a reasonable soul” and immediately, unsettling thoughts come to mind: “I feel as though the animal was surging up through them; that presently the degradation

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207 For a detailed discussion of Wells’ early romances in the context of the British romance revival, see Linda Dryden, *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles*.


209 Wells, “Rediscovery of the Unique,” 30-1.
of the Islanders will be played over again on a larger scale."\textsuperscript{210} This is not to suggest that Wells is entirely pessimistic or devoid of utopian hopes. He is indeed considered a paradigmatic utopian writer of the twentieth century (although this reputation rests largely on his later works). However, his vision of the world and history is much different from the kind of mixture of romanticism and positivism one finds in \textit{Voyages extraordinaires}.

The comparative view of the work of Verne and Wells shows that differences in their styles closely correspond to the transition that Jameson and McClure (and to an extent also Frye) describe in their studies. On the one hand, there is a sense of moving away from the existing sites of romance to virtual ones, which now have to be created artificially by the new science. On the other hand, one can talk of the “return of the repressed,” as the hitherto externalized spaces of otherness begin to manifest themselves at home and threaten the very fabric of the familiar world of the everyday. Technological achievements of reason and progress can no longer serve as magic weapons and amulets that aid humans in their fight with forces of nature and unreason, because this conflict now takes place mainly in the inner world of human psyche.

These two trajectories of generic development form the system of coordinates for Żuławski’s literary universe. The romantic conceptualization of space outlined above, even though a product of a particular historical and cultural context, is not limited to it, but becomes a part of the grammar of the genre. As Jameson writes: “the ideology of the form itself . . . persists into the later, more complex structure as a generic message which coexists – either as a contradiction or, on the other hand, as a mediatory or harmonizing mechanism – with elements from later stages.”\textsuperscript{211} Thus, by referring to the genre of scientific romance, Żuławski – consciously or unconsciously – becomes a participant in its tradition and his work inherits all the problems with which this tradition engages in the process of its formation.

\textit{On the Silver Moon}, more than the two other novels in the trilogy, brings this spatial duality of late-nineteenth-century romance to the fore. From the very beginning of the novel the Moon is presented as a romanticized space. The author of the introduction asserts that it is “not a

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{210} Wells, \textit{The Island of Dr. Moreau}, 183.
\end{flushright}

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\textsuperscript{211} Jameson, 128.
\end{flushright}
hospitable world” and that the knowledge about the side of the moon visible from the Earth “was enough to discredit this globe completely in the opinion of people dreaming about settling worlds other than the Earth.” This last assertion turns out to be false, as there are some would-be explorers who persist in fantasizing about the unknown: “Who knows – they thought from time to time, elevated by the grandeur of their enterprise – maybe they will find on that other, mysterious side of the moon a magical and strange paradise [raj czarodziejski i dziwny], a new world, quite different from the earthly one, but hospitable?” One recognizes here the familiar motif of a prohibited land, a dark continent, and the lost land/paradise/holy grail/treasure hidden in the midst of it – a motif used with great success in such classical colonial romances as Rider Haggard’s King Solomon’s Mines (1885) and She (1887). The Moon thus functions as a site for romance, even though its geography is outlined in the novel in accordance with the state of knowledge about this natural satellite circa 1900 and, for the most part, attempts to give the journey across the visible part of the moon some plausibility.

The calm and informative style of the introduction, whose genre is that of a newspaper story, quickly gives way to the highly impressionistic tone of Korecki’s manuscript. In the explorer’s first-person account the Moon becomes a magical space where cultural fears and hopes can be projected into figures of horror and wonder, respectively. The lunar landscape that unravels before the explorers is a cosmic wasteland. It alternates between vast and desolate open spaces (like the monotonous and depressing Mare Imbrium) and the sublime chains of mountains (e.g., the crater of Eratosthenes). The silver light reflected from the Earth partially illuminates “the bottomless black sky,” making white and black the only perceptible colours. It is consistent with the demonic imagery of Frye’s theory of archetypal meaning as the world that human desire rejects, the world of bondage and pain and “monuments of folly.” The visible side of

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212 OSG, 16.
213 Ibid., 17.
214 Ibid. 18.
215 Ibid., 28.
the moon is in part all of those things, as will soon become evident. It is first and foremost an image of hell. Korecki’s evocation of Dante demonstrates that clearly enough:

Unconsciously I heard in my head the words of Dante:

Vero è che in su la proda mi trovai
Della valle d’abisso dolorosa…

[“In truth I found myself upon the brink of an abyss…”]

And in recollection of those words, in my mind . . . woke up the vision of Dante’s hell, which truly could not be more terrifying from what I had before my eyes! The smoke pyres moving on the bottom of the giant hole seemed to me groups of condemned ghosts, spinning around the monstrous figure of Lucifer, whose shapes were assumed by the nearest of volcanic peaks.\(^{217}\)

Like the Italian poet, the members of the expedition have to traverse the demonic landscape of hell before they can access what might be called the purgatory and heaven of the lunar world (the North Pole and the Other Side, respectively). Unlike Dante’s inferno, however, the lunar rocky desert is the hell of ossified and frozen forms rather than fiery passions and marked by sterility rather than excess.

The lunar landscape is also a mirrored reflection of the Earth itself, a geographic embodiment of the Earth’s spiritual condition. When shining above the silver globe, the latter literally stares down upon humans like an evil omen: “we saw her above us. She was almost full. She looked like an eye, wide open in amazement; now the eyelid of shadow slowly falls on this terrible, still eyeball.”\(^{218}\) The feminine and the supernatural become one as the eye is identified with a vengeful, maternal deity: “[the] open eye, merciless and watchful, [that] stares intently and with amazement at [those] who escaped from her with [their] bodies – the first of all her

\(^{217}\) \textit{OSG}, 60.

\(^{218}\) Ibid., 27.
children.” This gaze constantly haunts the explorers, reminding them about their transgression and the punishment that eventually awaits them. When the Earth becomes eclipsed, its shadow veils everything in a shroud of darkness, while the planet becomes a dark icon on the sky: “the black spot of the Earth now looked like an emanating hole of some monstrous well, drilled in the starry sky.” The sterility and deadly stillness of the lunar landscape evoke the fairy-tale image of a cursed or enchanted land. At the same time, however, it is a striking example of the misogynist fantasies of early modernism refracted through the prism of the landscape. The cold, distant and cruel Earth is the embodiment of the archetypal *femme fatale* whose figures dominate literature and the fine arts associated with early modernism (e.g. Lilith, Judith, Salome, and Sphinx). Żuławski’s moon is thus a heterogeneous space in which all kinds of symbolic representations of the demonic world – popular as well as high cultural – can coexist.

Such a vision of the world – dead, cold, and sterile – is the antithesis of the colonial and metaphysical fantasies of the members of the expedition, who expect to find a lost paradise on the moon. For them, the search for what is on the other side of the “silver globe” is not only simply a yearning for a place – a kind of natural utopia – but first and foremost a spiritual quest for the Holy Grail and all it stands for, especially the dream of immortality. Yet every quest for an eternal life in literature begins with a narrative of descent – the journey through the land of the dead. As I already indicated, mortality, associated with the primal sin, closely connects the visible side of the Moon with the abandoned home world. As Korecki reflects, “[they] escaped from the Earth, but death, the great mistress of earthly tribes, traversed with [them] those spaces and now reminded [them] right away that she is with [them] – cruel and victorious as always.” But it is not death itself that is their curse, as Korecki would like to believe, but a kind of immortality that instead of embodying dreams of vitality, youth, and eternal

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219 Ibid.

220 Ibid., 95.

221 For more examples of the *femme fatale* archetypes in the art and discourse of early modernism, see Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*.

222 *OTSG*, 31.
rejuvenation of life, brings with it the burden of melancholic timelessness. As such, this form of immortality is close to post-Lacanian readings of Freud’s concept of the death drive (Todestrieb)\textsuperscript{223} as the ineradicable excess over the libidinal desire that persists even beyond the life-sustaining regulations of the pleasure principle. As Slavoj Žižek writes,

the Freudian death drive has nothing whatsoever to do with the craving for self-annihilation, for the return to the inorganic absence of any life-tension; it is, on the contrary, the very opposite of dying – a name for the “undead” eternal life itself, for the horrible fate of being caught in the endless repetitive cycle of wandering around in guilt and pain. The paradox of the Freudian “death drive” is therefore that it is Freud’s name for its very opposite, for the way immortality appears within psychoanalysis, for an uncanny excess of life, of an “undead” urge which persists beyond the (biological) cycle of life and death, of generation and corruption.\textsuperscript{224}

According to Žižek, therefore, the most common metaphorical representation of the death drive is the figure of the undead. And indeed, it is not death, but deathlessness that truly terrifies Žuławski’s characters. The eye of the Earth is a “glass spectre [upiór]\textsuperscript{225}” that radiates “ghostly light [upiorne światło]\textsuperscript{226}”. Korecki’s imagination transforms the scenery before his eyes into “a theatre of giants, terrible, skeleton giants [kościołupie olbrzymy].” “I wouldn’t be surprised,” he says, “if those mountainsides filled with a crowd of those giant skeletons, moving slowly in the light of Earth and taking spectators’ seats. . . . It seems to me that I see all of that.”\textsuperscript{227} O’Tamor’s body, like those of the prophets that centuries later will await the return of the Old Man, does not decompose in the thin atmosphere of the Moon. The Old Man himself is the

\textsuperscript{223} For the original formulation of the idea as an instinct striving towards the erasure of all psychic tensions via a return to the inorganic state (i.e. death), see Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle.”

\textsuperscript{224} Žižek, 62.

\textsuperscript{225} OTSG, 27.

\textsuperscript{226} Ibid., 25.

\textsuperscript{227} Ibid., 78.
recipient of this strange gift of unwanted immortality. In their journey towards the North Pole the explorers discover what seems to be ("under the Earth’s light"\textsuperscript{228}) the ruins of a decrepit, long-time dead city. The encounter with this eerie site results in the untimely death of another expedition member who ventures to investigate it. Before he passes away a few days later, he recalls encountering there the apparitions of three dead astronauts, including O’Tamor, the leader of the expedition:

\begin{quote}
I couldn’t move, turn away… Then they started speaking, yes, speaking, and I heard their voice even though there was no air (…). They said how I’ll die and how you’ll die, the two of you. They marked the day and the hour. They also told me that one does not leave Earth without being punished and that one does not look with impunity into mysteries hidden from human eyes.\textsuperscript{229}
\end{quote}

The flight from Earth is now once more equated with mystical transgression and a venture into the realm between life and death. “There are strange riddles and mysteries,” reflects Korecki, “To this petrified globe there already came people and Death; maybe together with people and their constant companion, Death, there also came that Thing unknown, which on Earth for centuries has been escaping all knowledge, all research and inquiries?”\textsuperscript{230} In Freudian terms it is “the return of the repressed” that characterizes the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century romance, from the Gothic revival to H.G. Wells’ early cycle of romances; magic and otherness eradicated from the map by the tightening of global network of exploration and trade manifest themselves at home as evil and menacing (often supernatural) forces. “That Thing unknown” therefore stands for the lost metaphysical imagination, rejected by secularist rationalism and now returned as a haunting presence.

\textit{The Old Earth} shows the final stage of this process: a globe where all of Verne’s dreams of infinite travel can finally be realized, but unlike in the early \textit{romans scientifiques}, they fail to

\textsuperscript{228} Ibid., 113.

\textsuperscript{229} Ibid., 146.

\textsuperscript{230} Ibid., 147.
generate new possibilities for excitement, romance and adventure. The utopia of scientific progress turns out to be a parody of itself, a dystopian world where everything is possible, but no one has the desire to reach out to those possibilities. As one of the protagonists reflects on this problem,

after the period of the unheard of, extraordinary inventions, when one discovery gave birth to ten new ones and it truly seemed that humanity was on the path of some fairy-tale progress without an end (...) – there came a complete halt, as if the mysterious forces of nature, which were supposed to serve man, had exhausted their combinations and, harnessed all to the triumphant chariot of human well-being, had nothing more to reveal.²³¹

His account is further amplified by the disappointed confession given by Jacek’s teacher, Lord Tedwen (modelled on Lord Kelvin, a renowned nineteenth-century British mathematician, physicist, and engineer), in which he states the impossibility of ever realizing a utopia.²³² Speaking in front of the scientific council of the United States of Europe, the great scientist thus concludes this moment of human history: “we circle in an errant movement, as if fish inside a glass bowl that cannot be shattered. The sun is far behind us, coldness embraces us.”²³³ He evokes here the popular theories of entropy that theorize the thermal death of the universe. Grabiec, the demonized figure of a revolutionary, describes this reality in more primeval terms: “today’s world is like a monstrous animal with a massive belly that had expanded at the expense of legs and the head.”²³⁴ He therefore compares his society to Leviathan, the ancient monster traditionally associated with sterility of the fallen world.

Demonic imagery manifests itself on almost every level of composition in the last novel of the trilogy. It is present in the world of people, reflected in the resignation and despair felt by the

²³¹ TOE 17.
²³² Ibid. 136.
²³³ Ibid. 216.
²³⁴ Ibid. 188.
more sensitive individuals like Jacek or Tedwen, in the pettiness of characters like Bernard and innumerable members of the middle-class who value comfort over anything else, the hateful brutality of Grabiec and his proletarian hordes, and finally, in the fierce destructive passion of the stage artist Aza, the novel’s femme fatale. As in *On the Silver Globe*, this spiritual state also finds its simile in the inorganic world of the desert surrounding the city of Aswan where most of the action takes place, and in images such as the ruined temple of Egyptian deities turned into “bazaar booth [buda jarmarczna]” of a concert hall. Jacek’s deadly invention, the bomb that can spread massive destruction through a communications network across the globe, adds another level to this metaphor by rendering all of the Earth virtually but not yet effectively dead, which is yet another form of the state of deathlessness that terrifies Korecki on the Moon. Unsurprisingly, the only way out is offered by Nyanatiloka who represents Eastern mysticism and hence, spirituality, irrationality and the transcendental.

Opposite to this demonic imagery of the dystopian Earth and the barren side of the moon are various spatial manifestations of the lost “sense of wonder,” most notably the Eden-like, hidden side of the moon. The search for these magical spaces is what drives members of the first expedition to abandon the Earth and come to the ethereal lunar world in *On the Silver Globe*: “when I was a child, it was too cramped for me on Earth,” admits Korecki towards the end of his manuscript, “and I constantly flew with my winged thoughts to those distant worlds, shining on the firmament.” It is also the motivation behind Marek’s journey, struggle, and demise in *The Conqueror*. Finally, in *The Old Earth*, where such places do not exist, every page is an account of “a determinate, marked absence at the heart of the secular world.” In many ways, the presence (or the possibility) of such utopian enclaves offers a much more interesting problem than the desolate, dystopian spaces depicted in the trilogy, mainly because the former are so ephemeral. I will return to this problem later on, when I discuss the structure of time and temporality in *The Lunar Trilogy*. For now, however, I want to look at some examples of these visions of paradise.

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235 *TOE*, 55.

236 *OSG*, 382.

As Korecki and his companions make their way to the other side of the moon, their vehicle becomes the new Ark: the presence of dogs (a mother and two puppies) and a deluge that carries it away later in the novel are obvious enough references. It is a microcosm that, thanks to Marta’s efforts, acquires the aura of a domestic space, “the form imposed by human work and desire” on the natural world, to recall Frye’s definition of the archetypal paradise.²³⁸ She is the first one to evoke a nostalgic and sympathetic image of the Earth during the journey and it is her description of it that later becomes the fabric of other characters’ dreams. She soothes Tomasz, her dying lover, “On Earth the air is blue, and clouds walk upon it. There is a lot of water on Earth, whole seas of it. On the shore there are sand and colourful seashells. There are plains, where grow such aromatic, sweet, moist flowers… Behind the plains are forests, full of different animals and singing birds.” Korecki and Varadoli listen to her words as if it were “the most beautiful, magical fairy-tale.”²³⁹ This vision of Earth, which will recur as a dream motif throughout On the Silver Globe, will gradually materialize for the protagonists as the silent and eerie paradise on the other side of the moon: “Now we breathe freely under a sky as blue as that on Earth, on the seaside of a real, wavy sea, and we look at forests of strange and incredible plants.”²⁴⁰ But there is more to this scenery than a realized ideal of virginal wilderness.

The lunar “lost world” is first and foremost a magical space uninhibited by the spectral presence of the Earth, a space where all the nightmarish dreams, hallucinations and visions mentioned earlier give way to a wish-fulfilling fantasy. While still on the lunar desert, Korecki writes: “It still seems to me that I dream or I’m in an opera house at some strange and fantastic spectacle [dziwnej feerii].”²⁴¹ Elsewhere he adds: “Sometimes I feel as if I were dreaming while awake.”²⁴² The motifs of sleep, dream, and fantasy recur throughout the entire novel and culminate when Korecki loses consciousness before his companions reach the North Pole and

²³⁸ Frye, Anatomy, 130.
²³⁹ OSG, 147.
²⁴⁰ Ibid., 173.
²⁴¹ Ibid., 26.
²⁴² Ibid., 76.
he reawakens already on green pastures. When traversing this realm in the first days, he can only observe: “our whole journey through this valley was like an enchanted dream, full of unexpected and marvellous scenes.”243 This oneiric aura evokes the fantastic forests and islands of Shakespeare’s romantic comedies, from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* to *The Tempest*. The green world, as Frye refers to those archetypal sites, stages the triumph of the forces of life and love over the wasteland.244 Unfortunately for Korecki, however, he cannot take part in the new cycle of life and death that will begin with the first Selenites. Even though displaced physically and spiritually, he still belongs to the material world of the Earth and, like his guide O’Tamor and the Biblical Moses, he cannot enter the new chapter of human history.

Żuławski’s return to less subjective modes of narration in *The Conqueror* does not uproot the magic of this strange world but rather further displaces it in the direction of pre-novelistic forms of romance. Although the other side of the moon no longer possesses the enchanted aura of a dream world of the second and third books of *On the Silver Globe*, it is still a highly romanticized landscape. It resembles the worlds of ballads – or a novel like Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) – where the supernatural element (or a suggestion thereof) manifests itself through nature and its uncanny bond with the heroes. The marvellous character of this world owes a lot to Marek’s perspective with which the reader is to identify: “he walked along the bank of the river, over strange flowers and herbs, shooting up to life from underneath his feet after a night’s rest. . . . He smiled at the ‘dwarfs’ running alongside him and enjoyed with them the rising sun of the ‘new day’.”245 Marek’s cheerfulness, energy and youthful optimism find their reflection in the new day of lunar spring. Throughout the narrative, his victories will likewise be reflected in images of the sun, green plains, and a peaceful sea, whereas his struggles and defeats will be underscored in the furious sea storms and volcanic eruptions.

The horizontal division of space in *On the Silver Globe* and also, to an extent, in *The Old Earth*, one based on the Earth-Moon relation, is organized in *The Conqueror* into a much simpler,
vertical structure. At the top there is the North Pole, the only place where members of the first expedition found moments of happiness (the topos of Paradise before the fall). It is a holy place where dead saints and prophets rest in their non-decaying bodies, awaiting the coming of the saviour. It is a sacred sphere, the equivalent of King Solomon’s Temple. It is surrounded by a permanent snow that symbolizes purity. Below are the lands occupied by the Selenites, the world of changing seasons, where the spring of lunar day that announces Marek’s arrival is preceded and followed by the wintry lunar night that marks the absence of the solar hero. It is a world of ordinary experience, a fallen world where dreams of paradise are overshadowed by the proximity of hell: here, this shadow has the very concrete shape of the dark citadel of Awij, the evil Shern steward. Below this world of men there is the great ocean, which separates the realm of the living (Selenites) from the underworld (Sherns) like the river Styx in Greek mythology. This transitional symbolism of the Ocean is also stressed by the presence of Cemetery Island, where the parents of the Selenite tribe are buried and where Malahuda, the last archpriest of the old faith, retreats after Marek’s arrival. At the very bottom is the desolate and sterile domain of the decadent alien race, a land resembling the lunar scenery of the first part of On the Silver Globe. The Shern fortress, towering amidst treacherous mountain chains, and holding in its corridors dark and inaccessible secrets, is situated at the very heart of the South Pole, directly opposite of the sacred space of the North Pole.

The spatial architecture of this fictional universe is thus highly polarized: in terms of the dialectic between the utopian/paradisiacal and catastrophic/sterile visions of the world, but also in terms of the classical dualism between internal (subjective) and external (objective) representations of reality. The dual space in The Lunar Trilogy exists partially as an objective and autonomous entity and partially as an extension of the characters’ psyche. The journey to the moon undertaken in On the Silver Globe is both a physical dislocation and a spiritual transgression. Likewise, Marek’s historical quest in The Conqueror is a fantasy of his adventure-seeking desire (undercut in the end by the “reality principle”) and the dystopian world of The Old Earth reflects Jacek’s growing disillusionment with the human civilization. It is in this particular aspect of the setting that the tropes of popular imagination (which I defined as the romance paradigm) intersect with tropes of the early modernist discourse: anxiety, metaphysical restlessness, catastrophic imagination, spiritual yearning, fear of the natural world, liminal states of human psyche, and entanglement in the complex web of cultural history (the
latter evident in the rich pattern of subtexts and intertexts). Moreover, the relationship between the two modes takes the form of symbiosis. Modernist style and content intensify (and intellectualize) the otherworldliness of Żuławski’s landscapes, whereas the dual nature of the romantic geographies creates a stark and dynamic environment in which various ideological contrasts that pervade the modernist discourse can be dramatized and translated into an engaging narrative.

Protagonists of The Lunar Trilogy

In works that belong to the romance paradigm, the hero is the locus of action and libidinal energies. As Frye suggests, the relationship between the protagonist and his or her fictional environment allows us to differentiate between different types of fiction. Specifically, he suggests that fictions “may be classified, not morally, but by the hero’s power of action, which may be greater than ours, less, or roughly the same.” 246 Since his definition of the hero of romance will be important for the analysis of the protagonists of Żuławski’s trilogy, it would be worthwhile to quote it in its entirety.

If superior in degree to other men and to his environment, the hero is the typical hero of romance, whose actions are marvellous but who is himself identified as a human being. The hero of romance moves in a world in which the ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended: prodigies of courage and endurance, unnatural to us, are natural to him, and enchanted weapons, talking animals, terrifying ogres and witches, and talismans of miraculous power violate no rule of probability once the postulates of romance have been established. 247

246 Frye, Anatomy, 33.

247 Ibid.
Frye places this definition in the opening essay of *Anatomy*, where he considers romance first and foremost as a historical category. As such, the above definition needs to be supplanted with a more universal conceptualization of the function of the hero.

It is useful to invoke at this stage Īuriĭ Lotman’s semiotic analysis of the category of fictional characters. The Russian scholar describes the relationship between the hero and his or her environment in terms of mobility, rather than the power of action: “And so the starting point of the narrative motion is establishing the relationship of difference and mutual freedom between an acting hero and the semantic field that surrounds him: if the hero is not essentially different from his environment or does not have the ability to detach from it the development of the plot is impossible.” Unlike Frye, Lotman does not introduce a generic classificatory system for literature, but he does stress the difference between fictional and non-fictional texts. Both of them, he argues, organize their semantic fields according to the logic of binary oppositions. This is manifested as essentially spatial differentiation between desired and undesired worlds, much like those described by Frye. The examples Lotman gives include such opposites as the world of the rich and the world of the poor, the village and the city, and the civilized continent and the pristine isle, among others.

The property of non-fictional texts is that their prime interest is in organizing the inherent and relational hierarchies for each of these opposing semantic fields, while implicitly or explicitly stressing the imperviousness of the boundaries that separate them. In other words, non-fictional texts do not allow for any exceptions when it comes to the rules that govern their representation of the world. Fictional texts, on the other hand, introduce an agent (which can be a person, a group, or a deity) that is given the exclusive permission to bend the established rules and trespass the boundaries between semantic fields in the text. These can be quite explicit – as the journey to Hades and back to the world of the living, a possibility denied to all but the hero – or implicit, as the ability of the hero or heroine to get along with people of different social strata. Lotman does not introduce any generic distinctions between these forms of semantic mobility, yet he does indicate that the relative “magnitude” of a given transgression makes a given story more or less fabulous.

248 Lotman, 342.
From these two definitions – Frye’s modal and Lotman’s structural one – two characteristics of the hero figure in the context of romance can be derived: 1) the relative superiority of the protagonist vis-à-vis other characters and the fictional world he inhabits; 2) a permission (exclusive) to repeatedly cross boundaries between the semantic fields within a given fictional world that may or may not resemble the real world. Both of these points, if considered separately, roughly correspond to the dialectic of forza (violence) and froda (cunning), two human impulses translated by the romantic imagination into two types of narratives, as Frye suggests in *The Secular Scripture*. As Michael Dolzani summarizes this insight, “the literature of forza is tragic and ironic; its violence is that of humanity hurling itself against the limitations of the fallen world, which ultimately destroy it. The literature of froda is comic and romantic; its fraud is the inventive imagination that outwits those limitations.”

A part of the task in analysing Żuławski’s *The Lunar Trilogy* from the point of view of its protagonists is to determine how these two aspects of literary romance contribute to the symbolic meaning of each book and the trilogy as a whole.

The question of whether the protagonists of the trilogy can be seen as the heroes of romance revolves around two problems. The first is the notion of displacement, whereby, as Frye argues, the magical elements of naïve romance (i.e. fables and fairy tales) find their structural equivalents in a more realistic (i.e. “plausible”) – and often more contemporary – guise. The science-fictional context is an excellent example of such a displacement, as more often than not advanced technology takes over the functionality of magic and divine interventions. The second problem has to do with the typically modernist approach to understanding a phenomenal reality as a complex system of symbols and codes that point to a transcendental reality. In this particular case, as the protagonists carry out their actions – which to a large extent mirror classical myth narratives, such as stories of exodus, deluge, or the death of a young god – they are occasionally made aware of their “narrative blueprints,” i.e. they recognize themselves as following in the footsteps of mythical forebears. Such awareness on the part of the protagonists and readers alike introduces a peculiar duality: the protagonists become both the adventurous heroes of a scientific romance and tragic figures doomed to repeat the fate of their mythical

249 Dolzani, xlv.
counterparts. In these two problems the conflict between the “form” (romance) and the “content” (the modernist conception of human involvement with history) comes to the full force.

According to Frye, the difference between myths, fairy tales, and romances and so-called realist fiction lies in the fact that the latter bury their narrative kernels under what Ian Watt calls “formal realism,” i.e. a set of aesthetic techniques conveying a particular vision of reality.250 The romance paradigm is different in that respect from the realist paradigm, for it does not mask its narrative implausibility (or does so very cursorily). Indications of displacement – in our case making the exceptionality of the protagonists plausible – appear very early on in Żuławski’s trilogy. In the paratextual introduction to On the Silver Globe the narrator quotes various incredible rumours about the superhuman training of the members of the first lunar expedition: “that they learned to endure temperatures of plus and minus forty degrees [Celsius] wearing only light clothes, to do without water for days, and to breathe without harm an air much thinner than that of the highest mountains.”251 Regardless of whether these rumours are true or not within the fictional world of the trilogy, this description serves to demarcate the protagonists as fabulous individuals who are entitled to transgress the barriers of semantic fields. At the same time Korecki and the other would-be astronauts retain the plausibility of the heroes of realistic fiction. After all, the statements about their superhuman status are presented as little more than exaggerated rumours (although never checked within the text).

The physical properties ascribed to the lunar gravity function in the text as yet another guise for the exceptional (and superhuman) status of the members of the expedition. Due to the reduced gravitational pull, all objects weigh six times less on the Moon than on the Earth, which in practice means that the astronauts’ powers of action are significantly increased. For example, when faced with a mountainside too steep for their vessel to descend, they are able to pull the vessel down all the way only with their muscle power and a few ropes. Exotic physical conditions on the Moon are also responsible for the extended longevity of Korecki in later parts

250 Apart from Ian Watt’s The Rise of the Novel, see the discussion of the concept of prose in Franco Moretti’s, The Bourgeois.

251 OSG, 7.
of the text, although this particular phenomenon would be much harder to justify in realistic (i.e. scientific) terms. When asked by a Selenite why he does not die, the Old Man can only reply with a sense of fright: “I don’t know.”

The same elevation from human to superhuman status applies to Marek from *The Conqueror*, although the displacement at work here is of a different kind than in *On the Silver Globe*. First of all, like Korecki and his companions, Marek is affected by the lunar physics (although it is far less pronounced than in the first book), which together with his well-timed arrival on the Moon makes him recognized as the promised messiah figure (literally – the Old Man returned). The very structure of the plot makes *The Conqueror* the closest in form to the classical romance: there is a well-defined quest for Marek (the liberation of the Selenites and defeat of the Sherns) and a clear division among the other characters into helpers (most of the Selenites) and opponents (the demonic, dragon-like Sherns). Therefore, more than any other book in the trilogy it fits the mythical and fairy-tale schemas proposed by Vladimir Propp and Algirdas J. Greimas.

At the same time, the matter is made more complex because of Żuławski’s switch from the subjective (i.e. first-person) to external (i.e. third-person) narration. The introduction of an external narrator diminishes the role of expressionistic and poetic language in establishing correspondences between the realistic and mythical levels of the story. Rather, the tension between these two levels is separated from the discourse of the narrator and made more intrinsic – as the puzzling quality of the text itself (much in a manner that evokes the uncertainty of “the fantastic” in Tzvetan Todorov’s definition of the term).

Whenever Marek is compared to a god or mythical hero, it is done not by the narrator but through the voices of other characters (mainly Selenites): “You are powerful like a god and you can be fierce in battle and cruel to the enemy, but I am told that you have also committed deeds of mercy, which we know on the Moon only by the name… And you are beautiful, my lord, this

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252 Ibid., 371.


254 See Todorov, *The Fantastic*. 
young might of yours makes you more beautiful than anything that my eyes have ever seen!"\textsuperscript{255} Unlike Ihezal, the narrator does not engage in this kind of discourse and only occasionally makes a reference to the significance of Marek’s actions for the Selenites. Even at the end he gives the voiceover (and with it, the final word on the significance of Marek’s quest) to three quasi-historical accounts of his death: the official, academic, and religious. Thus, in the end the reader is left uncertain as to whether Marek should be read as a “historical” figure or whether indeed some magic was at work throughout his quest.

Although the latter alternative may seem less plausible in the light of those interpretations that consider \textit{The Lunar Trilogy} as an intellectual experiment of Żuławski’s, it is nonetheless sustained throughout the text by multiple uses of an openly symbolic presentation of events. Let us consider the following fragment of the text:

\begin{quote}
Marek did not wait for the storm to calm down. The sea, still disturbed and furious, was striking against the ruins, washing them down with its blows. Hurriedly, the Conqueror’s orders to lay down the mines that were to make way for the waves were carried out. Soon a thunderous blast was heard and a cone of water and stone erupted in the air. The sea fell back for a moment, pushed away by the blow, but in that instant it stirred violently and dashed through the broken barricades to the underground caves. . . . And [the Conqueror] himself sat down over the rubble. Basking in the new, fresh sun that came out from behind the clouds, he stared at the sea, which calmed after the storm and smoothened itself into a wide, rainbow mirror. . . . A strange bird with golden wings flew out of the bushes nearby and, shining in the sun, began circling over the head of the Conqueror, making wider and wider circles.\textsuperscript{256}
\end{quote}

This passage illustrates the ambiguous nature of the displacement strategies used in the book. On the one hand, there are no explicit references to the supernatural elements at work here. Marek’s unique “power” to command the water element and unleash it on his adversaries – a

\textsuperscript{255} TC, 83.

\textsuperscript{256} TC, 141-2.
biblical reference evoking the passage through the Red Sea – is given sufficient rational justification (i.e. the gunpowder brought from the Earth). On the other hand, the passage contains elements that clearly indicate his status of the hero of romance, namely his marvellous bond with the forces of nature. In this scene, as well as throughout the text, Marek’s actions are closely reflected in the lunar weather: the former serving almost as a magnifying screen to the latter. As if to underscore doubly Marek’s exceptional and possibly divine status in the lunar world, the narrator includes in this scene a bluntly allegorical detail: the golden bird circling over the head of the hero as a clear sign of the blessing of Providence.

Finally, Jacek from The Old Earth is a hero even further displaced. The most intellectual and passive of the three protagonists, he is nearly the opposite of Marek from The Conqueror. As a matter of fact, he resembles one of the characters of the paradigmatic bohemian novel of the Young Poland, Waclaw Berent’s Próchno (Rotten Wood, 1903). This is a novel from which The Old Earth borrows some structural elements (such as the introduction of several point-of-view characters, the dialogic and discursive nature of the story, and the theme of the lost generation). However, the guise of a disenchanched scientist and philosopher he is presented in does not explain the centrality of his position in the narrative of the novel. As soon becomes apparent, other characters are invariably drawn to him, either recognizing his spiritual potential as a “hidden power of the highest degree” (Nyanatiloka), being attracted to his moral sanctity (Aza), or laying claims to his destructive invention (Grabiec). Marek’s destructive potential – the idea of unleashing his telegraphic bomb on the world – is yet another indicator of his superior status as someone capable of both redeeming and annihilating humanity. Because of all those interconnections and dependencies, the outcome of Marek’s moral and philosophical struggle is hardwired – quite literally – to the fate of the human world.

At the same time, he shares with the majority of turn-of-the-century artists and intellectuals a heightened metaphysical unrest, which makes him – like the members of the first lunar expedition – the seeker of the lost “sense of wonder” in the tradition of nineteenth century romance. Although a representative of scientific rationality, Jacek is the first one to admit that: “all that surrounds us is strange.”257 In conversation with the cynical revolutionary Grabiec he

257 TOE, 61.
speaks of the world as being in need of re-enchantment: “Have the courage to admit, sir (...) that our thought and our intent alone decide whether each place we occupy turns into a true temple.”²⁵⁸ He still believes in the mythopoetic powers of humanity despite the frightening inertia of a technocratic and indifferent society. Comparing himself to Nyanatiloka, he says: “you have come through life like a fiery storm and you didn’t need to regret anything in the moment, when you closed yourself in your own mind and began to create your own world. I, on the other hand, sometimes feel that I’m still a helpless child that wants to dream golden fairy-tales.”²⁵⁹ Thus, in this least “romantic” and most tragic of the books of The Lunar Trilogy, he stands out as the locus of the heroic belief in the salvational power of imagination.

Together, these two qualities – the command of technology inaccessible to most other people, as well as acute metaphysical sensitivity – make Jacek clearly superior to the world he inhabits. They also make him the only character capable of transgressing spatial and human barriers, rendered in such motifs as his ability to travel around the world in his flying machine, interact with all the interest groups presented in the plot and, finally, to transcend reality altogether. Therefore, despite functioning in a different type of narrative than the other two protagonists, he shares their position as the romantic hero.

I will now consider the second factor complicating the generic identity of Żuławski’s characters, namely their relationship to the mythical patterns they consciously or unconsciously re-enact. This problem has been partially analyzed by Dariusz Trześniowski, whose study focuses on biblical themes in Polish literature of the turn of the century. The author recognizes that the biblical myth participates in the creation [współkreuje] of reality in The Lunar Trilogy:

One can evoke in this case the role played by the degraded myth . . . desecrated, turned into a tale whose original meaning fades away. The unreadable symbols inscribed in it begin to act through man – to form his imagination and govern his actions. The Bible is offering the language in which the travellers describe their experiences. The Earth is slowly

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 83.
²⁵⁹ Ibid., 234.
elevated to the role of Paradise Lost. The expedition is referred to as Exodus. The other side of the Moon, where life is possible, becomes the Promised Land.

In other words, the myth functions in *The Lunar Trilogy* not only on the level of subtext, but as a deterministic force that has an active way of shaping the fate of the protagonists.

Although the levels of identification with myth vary for different characters of the trilogy, the problem of determinism brought about by this identification is shared by all of them. The presence of myth as an accessible reference point for the protagonists introduces a daunting circularity in the semantic organization of the text. The myth is the semantic core of the romance paradigm – even in popular and commercial literature – and so it is already inscribed in the structure of the plot, the constitution of characters, etc. But making protagonists aware of their role in their stories by evoking the biblical context complicates the picture significantly because it means that the hero is confronted with his own generic status and needs to decide on his actions while constantly bearing in mind the role he was assigned “by fate.”

The key to this layered narrative structure can be found in Lotman’s definition of the protagonist as a transgressing figure. Żuławski’s protagonists can function on both levels: as heroes of the adventurous romance and as conscious participants in the reenactment of ancient myths. Those two levels of the plot are made into opposing semantic fields that the protagonists constantly cross. Their shift from “action” to “reflection” mirrors the generic heterogeneity of the narrative: from the space-adventure romance to modernist tragedy. In generic terms it is the difference between being a toy in the hands of fate (as the protagonists of romance generally are) to being the master of one’s own fate. Such oscillation between the two positions represents Żuławski’s vision of history as a work of genius that shapes its societies through a constant struggle with what the early modernists referred to as “mob” (*tłum, motloch, tol'pa*) and what one may call “collectivity.”

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In both theory and artistic practice, such a conception of the individual distinctly evokes the Nietzschean concepts of the Overman [Übermensch] and the Eternal Return.²⁶¹ Nietzsche is a particularly important subtext here, because his presence sheds light on the problem of man’s relationship to recurring patterns in history. One aspect of Nietzsche’s Overman is that he can embrace the possibility of an eternal recurrence of the same, i.e. the cyclical nature of time, both on the individual and historical planes. In an oft-quoted passage, the author of Thus Spoke Zarathustra poses the following question:

What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: ‘This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more. . . .’ Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: “You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine.”²⁶²

Żuławski, who not only wrote about but also translated some of Nietzsche’s work, was certainly familiar with this idea and its impact on early modernist conceptions of subjectivity and history. Notably, all the main characters in the trilogy reply to Nietzsche’s demon in the positive: they agree, often against their desire, to the role bestowed on them by the repeated patterns of historical development of mankind, even if it leads them to melancholy and solitude (Korecki); rejection, torment, and death (Marek); or a leap into the unknown (Jacek). As Żuławski wrote in his reflections on history:

Civilization is a work of exceptional individuals (…) A lot is being said about the

²⁶¹ I invoke Nietzsche’s idea of the Overman specifically in relation to the Eternal Return, as the ideal of man’s domination over time and history. Some aspects of this concept though, for example Overman’s “in-worldliness” and rejection of any transcendental metaphysics, clearly do not fit Żuławski’s protagonists (unless we conceive of their progress in narrative as a gradual abandonment of idealism and move towards the ideal of the Overman).

involvement of crowds, masses, and nations in the grand civilizational march of humankind. We forget that “involvement” is not quite “creation,” and that moving forward down a trodden path is not the same as making the path. Crowds can tread paths, but the true discoverer and creator is always the one who first walked the path.\textsuperscript{263}

This passage echoes Thomas Carlyle’s controversial “theory of great men” presented in his treatise, \textit{On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History} (1841), which was famously disputed by both Leo Tolstoy (in \textit{War and Peace} [\textit{Voïna i mir}], 1869) and Fedor Dostoevskiï (in \textit{Crime and Punishment} [\textit{Prestuplenie i nakazanie}], 1866). For Żuławski, therefore, the individual act of engaging the course of history, of creating new values and new orders (as Korecki, Marek, and, to some extent, Jacek, all attempt to do at some point) is the fundamental driving force behind any historical progress.

However, just like the spatial relationship between the Earth and the Moon, which remains in constant flux, the transient nature of the protagonists is not limited to their passive willingness to accept their fate and their roles as the midwives of new historical eras. And this is precisely how the formula of romance augments early modernist discourse, for what designates Żuławski’s protagonists as the true heroes of romance is their unique ability to cross boundaries between different types of spaces. Korecki and his companions in \textit{On the Silver Globe} are the only humans who dare to venture a journey to the moon; they traverse the nightmarish desert of the visible side and, once again, cross over onto paradisiacal other side. At the same time, their vessel serves them not only as the new Ark, but also as Charon’s boat, allowing them to travel in between the world of the living (embodied in the images of the Earth and the lunar Eden) and the world of the dead (reflected in the sterility of the visible side and the eerie city of the dead). Marek’s historical and mythical role, indicated in the title of the second novel, is not strictly that of the messiah but the conqueror. Therefore, apart from repeating the transgressive journey of the first expedition, he is the only individual who can successfully lead the Selenites across the Great Ocean to the rocky and labyrinthine domain of Sherns. Although the potential of mobility (on many different levels) has been significantly reduced in the petrified world of \textit{The Old

\textsuperscript{263} Żuławski, “O cywilizacji i filozofii,” 4.
*Earth*, Jacek is continuously shown as someone who can move to different locations (like Warsaw and Aswan) more freely and swiftly than other characters. His final departure with Nyanatiloaka into the unknown transcendental plane (possibly the Indian Nirvana) at the end of the novel marks the historical end of mankind’s history.

Frye writes that the complete form of romance must involve the successful quest that usually consists of three stages: “the stage of perilous journey and the preliminary minor adventures, the crucial struggle . . . and the exaltation of the hero.”

Despite the fact that each of Żuławski’s characters suffers defeat at the hands of fate, ultimately they all “reach for godliness, becoming the ‘irreducible source of eternal spiritual rebirth.’” Their conscious submission to their mythical roles is not the immediate cause of such mythical and historical elevation (*anagnorisis* in Frye). Rather, this willingness to become acting agents in the recurring cycle of history is already the result of their earlier decision to transgress the boundaries of their world and to realize their utopian dreams of reaching and possibly inhabiting different spaces – be they heavenly or demonic, internalized or externalized, historical or mythical. The decision to locate new sites of romance and spiritual exploration is what gives birth to new myths that ultimately rejuvenate history.

There is a paradox here for sure. Yet when it comes to this double-status of the characters of the trilogy, the two modes – popular romance and modernist discourse – seem to form a coherent message: history is doomed to repeat itself on an ever grander scale and its ultimate outcome may not always be beneficial for mankind, yet it still requires a supreme type of individual to keep the cogs turning: to bring about the new cycle. It may not be a movement forward, but – the conclusion of *The Old Earth* seems to be suggesting – it is better than no movement at all.

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265 Trześniowski, 289.
Time and History in *The Lunar Trilogy*: Between Decadence and Utopia

The trilogy has been described on several occasions as a “utopian” narrative, despite the fact that none of the three books describes a utopia and one – *The Old Earth* – could fit in well in the genre of dystopia. Justyna Miklaszewska argues that Żuławski’s position is from the start anti-utopian and his philosophy of history – catastrophist. The author, suggests Miklaszewska, not only demonstrates the grim consequences of utopian dreams but also clearly indicates the crisis of the positivist worldview and anticipates a sudden or gradual destruction of human civilization. Stanisław Lem discusses the trilogy as part of the utopian tradition in science fiction, but he classifies it as literature of “socioinvolution,” which is to say literature of an isolated social experiment (such as Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* or Golding’s *The Lord of Flies*). One of the major problems in deciding on the generic identity of *The Lunar Trilogy* is the ambiguity of the qualifier “utopian” which may describe literary utopias (such as Thomas More’s inaugural *Utopia* or works by Bellamy and Morris) as well as so-called anti-utopias and dystopias. Regardless of the overall anti-utopian message of the trilogy, however, its utopian aspect cannot be brushed aside, for it plays a crucial role in the narrative. I consider the antagonism between these “utopian stases” and history represented as a process of gradual decline to be the fundamental opposition in *The Lunar Trilogy* as far as its interlocked themes of time and history are concerned.

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266 A number of scholars have discussed the relationship of the trilogy with the utopian tradition. See for example Dubownik, *Fantastyka w literaturze polskiej*, and Krzyżanowski, *Neoromantyzm polski*, 118.

267 Miklaszewska, *Antyutopia w literaturze Młodej Polski*, 170 (and also her “Katastrofizm w twórczości Jerzego Żuławskiego”), as well as Rogala, “Społeczne i filozoficzne poglądy Jerzego Żuławskiego w Trylogii fantastycznej”.

268 See Lem, 2:505-510.

269 Both anti-utopias and dystopias are also considered to be utopian narratives, since they still rely on utopia as their central concept despite their anti-utopian message. Anna Goreniowa distinguishes between “utopia” and “the utopian attitude” [postawa utopijska] and writes, “the authors of Young Poland displayed ‘utopian attitudes’ but argued against ‘utopia.’” See Goreniowa, “Utopia i historiozofia w poglądach Jerzego Żuławskiego na przykładzie *Starej Ziemi*,” 140.
The catastrophic or decadent view of history is not specific to the trilogy but is part and parcel of the historical imagination of early modernism. By the early 1880s the belief in the redemptive power of progress started to wane and modernity began to cast a long shadow over the intellectual life of the continent. As it turned out, the great achievements of modernization – such as the technological and scientific discoveries that revolutionized communication and medicine, the economic boom that increased general prosperity, and all the democratizing processes – were not nearly enough to alleviate the striking poverty of the rapidly growing working class or to abate anxieties over future conflicts.\textsuperscript{270} Practicing the \textit{laissez-faire} economy significantly increased the wealth and prosperity of European societies, but did so unevenly and at the cost of upsetting traditional social ties, for example in the relationship between urban and agricultural zones. In the second half of the century the village had lost its commercial and cultural autonomy, which had a tremendous impact on a large percentage of the population. The increased mobility and openness of the new society came at a price.

All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind,\textsuperscript{271}

wrote Karl Marx in his \textit{Communist Manifesto}; the sense of transience and insecurity he alludes to was a commonly shared sentiment. Both rural and urban landscapes were undergoing fast and oftentimes radical changes. Yet, it was increasingly difficult to see benefits of this transformation and that difficulty gave rise to a brooding feeling of nostalgia. At the same time, the Long Depression (1873-9) demonstrated the frailty and cyclical nature of the large-scale capitalist economy, which in turn led many to question the crude linear model of progress and the utopian promise behind it. Crime, prostitution, and epidemics were becoming notorious in


\textsuperscript{271} Marx, \textit{The Communist Manifesto}, 77.
urban centers across the continent, to the point where they could no longer be ignored or masked by social taboo. All of these factors were contributing to the growing awareness of the darker side of progress, especially since the concept of modernity acquired an aura of necessity and inevitability. By the last quarter of the century, it was evident to all that such iconic markers of modernization as the network of railways, smoking factories with their adjacent working-class barracks, not to mention crowded and bustling city streets, were not a temporary arrangement but the new face of reality.

The natural sciences gave additional causes for alarm about the present state of European civilization. The cult surrounding science in the nineteenth century as well as the rapidly expanding publishing industry (ever keen to propagate news from the scientific frontier) enabled a quick migration of new theories into the social sphere. The most paradigm-changing of those was Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution, laid out in *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859) and *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871). Darwin’s theories squarely placed the human species back into the world of nature as a subject rather than a sovereign. The law of “natural selection” states that only the strongest and the most adapted species will survive and prosper in the natural world, at the cost of less adapted ones. Thus, nature ceased to be a static entity. It is now neither an idealized domain where man can truly be himself and where all living beings coexist in perfect harmony (as imagined by sentimentalists and Romantics) nor a near-perfect mechanism designed by a divine clockmaker (as rendered by the Enlightenment). Rather, it has to be seen as a state of relentless strife between various competing species – and not only that. As Darwin himself wrote, “the struggle almost invariably will be most severe between the individuals of the same species, for they frequent the same districts, require the same food, and are exposed to the same dangers.”

Applying this observation to humankind puts a question mark not only over the philosophy of social progress but over the entire vision of society as an organic whole. Of course, the tendency to represent social interactions as parasitic and predatory was already present in Honoré Balzac’s *La Comédie humaine*. However, the impact of evolutionary biology enabled a metaphorical realization of this theme by turning it into a scientific fact. Without intellectual

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and cultural barriers separating nature and civilization, especially in the light of “mapping out” the natural world in scientific and colonial advances, nature becomes at once absent (as a thing-in-itself) and disturbingly omnipresent. This also evokes one of the crucial cultural myths of the nineteenth century that developed in parallel to Darwinism as yet another form of naturalistic determinism: the degeneration discourse.

At the beginning of the century the forerunner of evolutionary biology, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, introduced a hypothesis called “the inheritance of acquired characteristics.” According to the French zoologist, specimens can pass onto their offspring characteristics acquired during their lifetime. The cultural mood growing out of the discontent with modernity made people focus specifically on the negative interpretation of Lamarck’s idea, namely the role of physical and mental defects that, once developed by a given generation, were to be perpetually inherited by succeeding generations – “a morbid deviation from an original type.” His idea gave rise to a theory of “degeneration” or “degeneracy,” first formulated by French physician Bénédict Morel in 1857 in the context of modern psychiatry. The theory gained popularity in the scientific world – in disciplines ranging from anthropology to criminal psychiatry – and quickly entered public discourse. According to this theory and its many variants, the once superior European race were in decline due to accumulation of undesired, “degenerative” features over the centuries. Ill-adjustment to modernization and other factors made these effects exponentially worse. Thus, for example, Joris-Karl Huysmans’ first truly decadent novel, Against Nature (À rebours, 1884) famously opens with the description of a gallery of portraits: “Imprisoned in old picture-frames which were scarcely wide enough for their broad shoulders,” hang the founders of the family, presenting “an alarming sight with their piercing eyes, their sweeping mustachios

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273 To put it into perspective, Robinson Crusoe, the paradigmatic English middle-class hero, could have succeeded in his struggles with the wilderness, but civilization was a different realm and one entirely on his side, ready to nourish and reward him every time he returned to its shores. Surviving in the wilderness of the modern world (or rather, the modern world as wilderness) is a completely different matter. For a more contemporary “Crusoe,” like H.G. Wells’ Pendrick in The Island of Dr. Moreau, the division between the two worlds is much more problematic. Cf. Wells, The Island, 183.

274 Nordau, Degeneration, 16.

275 See Gilman, “Sexology, Psychoanalysis, and Degeneration.”
and their bulging chests filling the enormous cuirasses which they wore.” Then, there is a gap in “the pictorial pedigree, with only one face to join past and present”: “In this picture (...) the defects of an impoverished stock and the excess of lymph in the blood were already apparent. Since then, the degeneration of this ancient house had clearly followed a regular course, with the men becoming progressively less manly; and over the last two hundred years, as if to complete the ruinous process, the Des Essaintes had taken to intermarrying among themselves, thus using up what little vigour they had left.” 276 The result of this is Huysmans’ protagonist, the last representative of a once great house: physically frail, neurotic, impotent, and unable to function in the modern world. Unsurprisingly, Des Essaintes became a symbol of the new sensibility and the most iconic representative of the physical and mental decline that was believed to threaten European nations. 277

Żuławski’s work is filled with various topoi of decadence and degeneration. To name but a few examples, O’Tamor’s expedition in On the Silver Globe leaves the world that has already abandoned the hope of discovering new, better worlds and hence begin the process of spiritual ossification. The sterility of imagination on humanity’s home planet is reflected in the sterility of the lunar landscape on the side of the moon that is directly facing the Earth. The lunar desert turns out to be not only a geological cemetery but also an archaeological one. Amid the rocky desert astronauts find dead cities and the ghostly remains of an extinguished civilization. The

276 Huysmans, Against Nature, 3.

277 A number of publications and debates were generated over the causes of this biological decline: racial mixing, licentiousness and other “vicious habits,” excessive consumption, urban lifestyle, epidemics (especially of sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis), Jewish cultural influence, etc. In other words, the concept of degeneracy lent a scientifically plausible guise to all kinds of social and cultural prejudices. The list of symptoms of this European malady was equally comprehensive to that of its causes. In a seminal 1892 treaty Degeneration (Entartung) – a book that quickly reached the status of an international bestseller – a German journalist Max Nordau famously applied the theory, especially in the form adapted by Lombroso in the field of criminal psychiatry, to an entire range of cultural phenomena associated with the fashionable term “fin de siècle.” Like many before him, he sees causes of degeneracy in “the excessive organic wear and tear suffered by the nations through the immense demands on their activity, and through the rank growth of large towns.” However, his case studies of degenerate mentality include representatives of modern painting (the impressionists), music (Wagner and his followers), theatre (Ibsen), philosophy (Schopenhauer, Nietzsche), and literature (almost all of it, from Tolstoy and Zola to Baudelaire and the Parnassians). Nordau argues that the problem with the current state of European culture is that a small group of madmen – products of hereditary decline, like the fictional Des Esseintes – managed to impose their perverse tastes on the majority of an educated public. Nordau, 43.
shadow of death and melancholy covers even the lunar paradise on the other side of the moon, for example, Cemetery Island where the bodies of the astronauts are buried, is made into the sacred heart of the new human colony. The Selenites themselves turn out to be a physically and intellectually inferior “race” in comparison to their earthly ancestors, once again evoking the degeneracy theories popular at the time in Europe.

In *The Conqueror* readers encounter the decadent race of reptilian Sherms that subjugate the young Selenite civilization. The history of these demonic First Inhabitants [*Pierwobyłcy*] gloomily mirrors that of the humanity on Earth: “The Moon was once a wonderful garden,” boasts Awij, the captured Sherm overseer, “and Sherms lived in rich cities over thundering seas!”[^278] What supposedly put an end to their civilization was a cosmic cataclysm that tidally locked the Earth and the Moon and turned half of the silver globe into the rocky desert. Yet in Awij’s account other signs of cultural decline can be discerned, such as the rejection of all civilizational achievements for the sake of an indulgent, aristocratic lifestyle, the chief philosophy of which is “to live and let others work for you.”[^279] Perhaps the largest constellation of decadent motifs can be found in *The Old Earth*. Some of them I already mentioned in my discussion of the spatial symbolism in the trilogy. Here too there are deserts, ruined and desecrated temples, and a civilization that could once call itself utopian but is now on the brink of disintegration. What makes all of this even more pronounced is the persona of the central character Jacek, who constantly contemplates the historical failures and inadequacies of his civilization measured against the utopian fantasies of the past.

Emptiness [*pustka*], barrenness, and old age are the three key images of the decadent vision of history that reappear throughout *The Trilogy*. Old age is a powerful historical metaphor for Żuławski, as the majority of conflicts in each of the three narratives can be represented as the conflict between youth and old age: the old human civilization versus the new Selenite civilization, Korecki as the Old Man versus his Selenite protégés, Korecki as the Old Man versus memories of his childhood self, Selenites versus Sherms, Marek versus the Selenite

[^278]: TC, 122.
[^279]: TC, 147.
elders, Marek versus Sherns, Mataret versus Roda, Jacek versus his fellow scientists and philosophers, etc. In Żuławski’s narrative, both youth and old age are metaphors of the flowering and decline of creative powers, respectively. Żuławski’s historical dialectic follows the essential points of Auguste Comte’s cyclical theory of history laid down in *Russia and Europe* (1871). According to Comte, civilizations develop in the same way living organisms do, passing from birth to death and as some civilizations bloom, others descend into a decadent stage.

Because the world of the trilogy is highly polarized – as befits any romance – it is not surprising to discover that with few exceptions there are hardly any “intermediate states” between these two categories. As readers we encounter the three civilizations appearing in the trilogy either in their youthful (Selenites) or decaying state (humanity, Sherns). In the trilogy there is no “golden era,” no period of stabilization between the two extremes. Selenites are a good example, since their progress from the religious tribe in *On the Silver Moon* to a developed (yet still young) civilization is never the subject of the books. The narrative is exclusively interested in origins and ends, and the same goes for characters. Although we do get a sense of Marek’s maturing over the course of the story in *The Conqueror*, he remains a young adventurer until his final demise. Korecki from *On the Silver Globe*, on the other hand, is an old man even before he becomes the Old Man of the young Selenite tribe: a characteristic that is a by-product of his function as the narrator and chronicler of the first lunar expedition. The conflict plays out differently in various scenarios in the trilogy, but the outcome always seems to be stressing the destructive power of time. The vitalism and dynamism of youth has to give in to the stagnation of the old age. If the reverse happens to be true – as in the case of the young tribe of Selenites that outlives the Old Man Korecki – youth is presented in terms of a biological and intellectual regression (“dwarves sitting on the shoulders of giants,” as the metaphor has it): “the spirit in those midgets is oddly withered,” as Korecki observes on numerous occasions. There is, it seems, no escape from the deteriorating forces of history.

Given all of the above, why do some readers and critics continue to perceive *The Lunar Trilogy* as part of the utopian tradition? Earlier I showed how the building blocks of popular romance narratives and early modernist imagination combine in the ideal of a creative individual (embodied in the protagonists of the trilogy): someone longing for a sense of wonder, adventure and better worlds, someone whose determination eventually enables him to overcome
deterministic forces of recurring history. In what follows I examine the relationship between such a protagonist, temporality, and the idea of utopia.

First of all, as Dariusz Trzaśniowski observes with respect to On the Silver Globe: “the escapism of tired Earth-dwellers had a utopian premise.”280 Indeed, much of the motivation of Żuławski’s protagonist comes from their utopian ambitions: the first expedition’s spirit of discovery and desire to find a new and better form of life on the moon, Marek’s curiosity and decision to improve the Selenites’ lot, or Jacek’s resolution to find a way out of the civilizational crisis engulfing the Earth. Also, all of the three novels contain what Jameson calls “pocket[s] of stasis within the ferment and rushing forces of social change.”281 Jameson refers to the genre’s continual reemergence during the particularly turbulent moments of history, which is quite fitting given Żuławski’s intent on presenting his narrative as an allegory of historical progress.

These utopian enclaves, which I will rename as utopian epiphanies, are the moments in the narrative where the progress of time seems to be temporarily stopped and where the chance for correcting history or breaking away from its downward-spiraling course seems palpable. My use of the term “epiphany” is informed by Charles Taylor’s definition of epiphany as “a manifestation which brings us into the presence of something which is otherwise inaccessible, and which is of the highest moral or spiritual significance.”282 To give but a few examples: before the conflict erupts between Piotr Varadol, Korecki, and Marta, as to who will wed Marta and become the father of the new civilization, the green paradise on the hidden side of the moon is perceived by the explorers as the Garden of Eden: a place where a different, happier life is possible. There is also the great hope of the lunar society liberating itself under the leadership of Marek from the Shern yoke in The Conqueror and a glimmer of faith that a new form of spirituality can be introduced to the aging human civilization in The Old Earth with the help of

280 Trześniowski, W stronę człowieka, 284.


282 Taylor, Sources of the Self, 419.
the wisdom of the Eastern mystic Nyanatiloka. All of these are instances of the utopian imagination at work.

In *Archaeologies of the Future*, Jameson distinguishes between two types of utopian imagination: a utopian program – which offers a blueprint for social reformation – and a utopian impulse, which is a driving force behind any desire for reform, but in itself is not focused on attaining any particular form of future society. He understands the utopian impulse in Ernst Bloch’s terms, as “an allegorical process in which various Utopian figures seep into the daily life of things and people and afford an incremental, and often unconscious, bonus of pleasure unrelated to their functional value or official satisfactions.” Such definitions of utopian impulse (or utopian desire) can account for various degrees in which the topos of utopia manifests itself in various forms of utopian literature. The closer the attainment of a particular utopian goal, the more static and programmatic a narrative becomes (and hence can be considered a part of the genre of literary utopia). According to the same logic, the further the goal, the more obscure and idealistic its forms and the more dynamic the narrative (most romances fall under this category). Popular romance in its various forms is itself precisely such utopia *in statu nascendi*, always hinting at the possibility of mending social ills and reconciling the past and future with the present.

Yet to return to the question of the relationship of utopian programs and impulses to time in Żuławski’s trilogy, I will now take a look at the moments when the utopian temporality manifests itself and disrupts the otherwise catastrophic stream of history and ask about the function of these interruptions. Jameson’s study once again proves helpful. Attempting to explain the peculiar status of utopian fantasies in modern culture, he evokes Niklas Luhmann’s description of modernity as a process of gradual differentiation (by segmentation, stratification and diversification) of social systems. Jameson suggests that both real-life or literary utopias offer a kind of temporal enclave within the differentiating social space that is “a kind of mental

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283 Ibid., 5.

284 For a more comprehensive look at Luhmann’s systems theory in relation to modernity, see Rasch, *Niklas Luhmann’s Modernity*. 
space in which the whole system can be imagined as radically different.”

Even though they eventually get liquidated as history transitions to a new moment, Jameson argues, their cultural benefit lies in their capacity for imagining alternatives to the social organization and course of development. Of course, the vision of history outlined above is in many ways an abstraction that does not always correspond to the actual historical circumstances under which many utopian societies or literary utopias emerge. However, it helps to explain the temporal significance of utopias, i.e. how the introduction of utopia – as a space, historical stage, or a moment of hopeful anticipation – interacts with time in any given narrative.

To return to Žuławski and his work, one could easily substitute history as such or history as a process of degeneration for Luhmann’s “differentiation” to apply Jameson’s theory to The Lunar Trilogy. As I already described in the section dedicated to the protagonists, Žuławski is keenly interested in the Nietzschean problem of the individual’s triumph over the nightmare of recurring (and at this point one could say “downward-spiraling”) history. It now seems that in order to pass the trial, his protagonists need motivation in the form of a temporary vision of a possible utopian outcome for their actions. The “utopian enclave,” as Jameson has it, is therefore a temporal suspension of the normal flow of time in which they have the opportunity to adjust to the demands put on them by their extreme situations (as founders, messiahs, or leaders of civilizations). A path towards a better future is laid down before them – like the object of the quest in fairy tales or romance narratives – and what is left for them is to choose to willingly sacrifice themselves for that future. The sacrifice does not necessarily bring it about (in most cases, it does not), but it is enough to alter the course of history and set a new one, which seems to be the ultimate goal of romantic heroism in Žuławski’s trilogy.

So how does utopian time manifest itself in the narrative? Such moments are generally filled with a sense of wonder and anticipation, and also have a distinct dream-like quality. They are usually announced by what Frye calls the “break of consciousness”: “Such a catastrophe, which is what it normally is, may be internalized as a break in memory, or externalized as a change in

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285 Jameson, Archaeologies, 16.
fortunes or social context.”286 At least two types of such “breaks” occur in each book of the trilogy: one signals the utopian interim and the other signals the return to the nightmare of history. Korecki’s manuscript begins with precisely such a moment of a break of consciousness:

My God! What date should I put down?! The monstrous explosion that threw us out of the Earth shattered [rozsadził] the thing considered there the most important of all that exists: it shattered and damaged time for us. It is truly horrible! To think that here, where we are, there are no years, months, or days; our short, wonderful earthly days…287

What follows is the arduous journey through the lunar hell, yet another form of what Frye describes as the narrative of descent: the hero or heroine descending into the underworld or its functional equivalent. Later on, however, between parts one and two of On the Silver Globe, we have a borderline experience between consciousness and a dream. When Korecki wakes up on the lunar North Pole, he is utterly confused and has difficulty distinguishing between dreams and reality. His gradual awakening and recovery mark the beginning of what he calls “the most pleasant memories of my entire life on the Moon.”288 I refer to these dream-like interludes, where the burden of the past fades away and the future seems filled with possibilities, as utopias of discovery. These are the moments when the normal flow of time is unsettled by excitement and anticipation for something new: an unknown that may be terrifying but at the same time contains the promise of starting anew and fixing all ills of the Earthly civilization.

Marek’s arrival on the Moon in The Conqueror is not accompanied by the experience of vertigo, like in Korecki’s account, but nonetheless it is an event that shatters the existing (in this case not personal but historical) temporality. The young Selenite civilization has developed around the religion built on the cult of the Old Man and the promise of his mystical return. Żuławski clearly models the lunar faith on the messianic component of the Judeo-Christian tradition (the second coming of the Old Man as the coming of the messiah). The appearance of

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287 OTSG, 23.

288 Ibid., 181.
Marek is thus read by the Selenites as the fulfillment of the promise contained in their holy scriptures: “One day, from a distant star shining over deserts, there came people,” the prophecy goes, “and when the time is fulfilled, the Conqueror will come from there, bright and radiant… Then the eternal day and happiness will begin on the Moon.” Marek is the harbinger of the end of History and a deliverance from all its sufferings, in this case the long struggle of Selenites against the Shern threat. All of this causes a shift in the historical sensibility of the lunar civilization, indicated by repeated expressions such as “times are fulfilled” [czasy się wypełnily], “time is completed” [dokonany czas], and “the time of waiting is over.” “So far we were supported by the hope that the Conqueror will come,” says the Selenite High Priest to Marek, “remember that from now on, after you have arrived, there is no more hope: there has to be reality [jawa].”

Hence, what I call utopian time is framed here as the time of the apocalypse: the beginning of the new and timeless era of happiness for the lunar civilization. However, as elsewhere in the trilogy, the utopian suspension of historical time carries with it a wager. On the one hand, it promises a better and brighter future, like the one Elem imagines: “From now on a new era begins. He already saw it in his mind, bright and triumphant.” On the other hand, it threatens the return of history with a vengeance. In this case, Marek’s arrival promises a triumph of the lunar civilization, but also annihilates an ages-long religion that was hitherto fundamental to the Selenite identity. High Priest Malahuda’s address to Marek renders that ambiguity: “you came here and you turn upside down [wywracasz] everything that was before.” And later: “you have to fulfill what that longing of ours, steeped in blood, dreamt up through the ages. And if you do not then truly, it would have been better for us and for you if your foot had never touched the Moon, for you will be cursed among us.” The conclusion of the book underlines the ambiguity of Marek’s role in Selenite history. Instead of the third-person narration readers are presented with three accounts of Marek’s tragic death (made to mirror various accounts of

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289 TC, 61-2.
290 Ibid., 58.
291 TC, 57.
292 TC, 58.
Christ’s death): political-historical (written by a “contemporary” Archpriest Sewin), scientific-historical (by Professor Omilka, an historian), and a religious one (written by an unknown author and modeled on gospels and letters of the New Testament). Neither of these paratexts explains to the reader the actual significance of Marek’s appearance on the moon for the future developments of the Selenite culture. Rather, what this multi-perspective ending achieves is to create a sense of the magnitude of the event as something that alters the course of history and yet resists singular interpretation (i.e. how exactly the course of history has been changed). By using such narrative device Żuławski presents yet another aspect of the relationship between the individual and temporality: historical relativism.

The Old Earth, published only a year after The Conqueror, continues many of its predecessor’s reflections, yet it also attempts to establish a connection with the first novel of the trilogy. The effect of the dissolution of time due to physical dislocation, featured most vividly in On the Silver Globe, reoccurs at the beginning of The Old Earth, when two Selenites, Roda and Materet, travel to Earth in Marek’s spacecraft. There is no vertigo effect like in the case of Korecki and his expedition, but the opening chapter is filled with the narrator’s remarks about the extending and shortening of time and the inability to measure it correctly. Thus, similarly to the first two books, traveling between the Earth and the Moon reads like a tale of time travel. Disordered temporality is also used as an estranging device in the second chapter, when readers stumble upon an extended passage about the progress that took place in the future (both from our perspective and that of Żuławski’s readers) only to learn that it is a fragment of a history book read by Jacek (and that the actual plot is set even further into the future). Such double exposition clearly echoes the conclusion of The Conqueror and its problem of historical relativism and underlines the message of the first chapter that one is entering a reality where time is out of joint.

Unlike the first two parts of the trilogy, The Old Earth presents an unambiguously catastrophic (and even dystopian) vision of the future Earth in which the human civilization has reached an epistemological ceiling and is at the stage of complete atrophy due to lack of possibilities for

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293 “Omilka” is an ironic name, which to the Polish ear sounds akin to omilka (a mistake). The use of the device immediately puts into question this seemingly objective and detached rendition of Marek’s final hour.
further development. Rationalism and instrumental reason thus reveal themselves as poor substitutes for metaphysical imagination. Given such a situation, the opposition between the all-engulfing stream of history and the eponymous utopian enclaves takes the form of the contrast between the inert, technocratic society and select individuals willing to explore metaphysical questions.

The defeat of the classical utopian ideals embodied by the first member of the pair – the future technocratic society – is spelled out by Lord Robert Tedwen:

Nothing can be done for social system. Society is not an intelligent creation and for that reason it will never be perfect. Any utopia – from Plato to the present – will always stay a utopia (...). An ideal co-existence between people; a perfect social system: these are unsolvable problems by their very nature. Universal agreement is an artificial concept; it is too rational. In nature, universe, and human society there is only struggle and temporary, illusory balance of antagonistic forces. Justice is a deceptive idea and [an] extremely popular one at that, because from the human point of view it describes nothing real and everyone can interpret it his own way.  

Tedwen’s pessimism is all the more pronounced considering that he is not only the former president of the United States of Europe, but also the person who invented such miraculous technologies as the substance regenerating organisms (which eliminated all diseases) and a system for controlling the weather (which revolutionized agriculture and eliminated global hunger). The old inventor expresses here the anti-socialist sentiments of the early modernist formation. Utopia as a particular way of organizing society can never be achieved because history is perpetual movement; it ends only when the world itself ends. At the same time, however, utopianism as an impulse towards perfecting – civilization, the mind, the body – is never questioned as such. Whereas the philosophical view informing The Old Earth rejects the desire to build a social utopia – the desire that guided the protagonists of the other two volumes

294 TOE, 136.
– it turns to the individual as the new (and possibly the only viable) “object” of utopian transformation.

The shift from the collective to individual utopia is indicated by Tedwen himself, who admits to Jacek that once he realized that humanity can be improved but not perfected, he decided to focus on individuals instead: “those who are the brain and soul of human society.”295 The true herald and at the same time the embodiment of the “utopia of the individual” is the mysterious Hindu Nyanatiloka,296 who over a series of visitations becomes Jacek’s friend and mentor.

Nyanatiloka’s appearances are accompanied by the intrusion of utopian time into linear, historical time. This intrusion is marked by motifs recognizable from the previous two volumes, such as vertigo, the disruption of one’s sense of time, and dream-like sensations. Before their first encounter, Jacek travels in his motorboat down the Nile River and approaches the shore when he hears Nyanatiloka’s voice in his mind.297 The protagonist’s journey to Egypt is presented as the journey to the cradle of human civilization and so the situation may be interpreted metaphorically as stepping out of the stream of history. Later on in the novel Nyanatiloka appears in Jacek’s house just in time to prevent an accidental detonation of the lethal invention. This miraculous intervention leaves Jacek completely disoriented: “Jacek’s head was in chaos; it all seemed to him so incredible and so unusual to the normal order of human thought that he was afraid to ask [Nyanatiloka] what happened. Only after a while (…) he woke up from his stupor and stared at Nyanatiloka as if awakened from a dream, with eyes wide open.”298 Before the mystic’s powers temporarily transport him to the moon, Jacek experiences the same type of dream-like state: “He completely lost awareness of place and time.

295 TOE, 138.

296 The character of Nyanatiloka is based on an actual person, Nyanatiloka Mahathera (born Anton Walther Florus Gueth), one of the first Europeans to become a fully ordained Buddhist Monk. See Nyanatusita and Hecker (eds.), The Life of Nyanatiloka Thera.

297 TOE, 60.

298 Ibid., 159.
This could have lasted a second or a millennium.” During the very next visit, Nyanatiloka teleports Jacek to a mountain top in Tatra mountain range. After their brief conversation the young scientist wakes up at his home, not sure whether the meeting in the mountains was a dream or a reality.

All of this indicates that Nyanatiloka’s presence in the novel functions in the same way as moments of utopian exhilaration in On the Silver Globe and The Conqueror: disrupting the sense of time and blurring the border between dream and reality. His interventions could be likened to what Darko Suvin defined as the novum: a technological or alien wonder that disrupts the placid Victorian world in H.G. Wells’ scientific romances. The difference is of course that Nyanatiloka represents the metaphysical and transcendental realms rather than scientific inventions or alien forces. The mystic represents a very different utopian dream from that in which lord Tedwen and his pupil Jacek were involved: it is the dream of subjugating the world of matter to that of the spirit. Nyantiloka’s spiritual training allows him to have a unique power over matter: he is immortal (as neither time nor death can affect him) and can use his will to teleport himself and others to virtually any location, including the moon. The paradoxical quality about Nyantiloka’s uncanny abilities is that they derive from his disregard for the material world and from the belief that the only destiny of the spirit is to attain the state of freedom in emptiness. “You are pure,” he says to Jacek, “but you cannot free yourself from the swamp of matter, although you know very well that it is only an illusion.” Nonetheless, he is the vessel of utopian impulse in the novel and in the end he manages to convince Jacek to depart with him into the unknown, away from the material world and its problems and towards the transcendental.

The conclusion to be drawn from this discussion is that in all three novels the utopian epiphany disrupts linear time flow and impacts the course of history. What changes is the form of the utopian impulse manifested through these occurrences: from the thrill of discovery and a hope

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299 Ibid., 164.

300 See chapters dedicated to Wells in Suvin’s Metamorphoses of Science Fiction, 208-242.

301 TOE, 64-5.
of finding a new paradise (and this symbolically resetting of history) to the dreams of saving mankind from itself and from history by leading a victorious revolution, to the rebirth of metaphysical curiosity among select individuals. What can be observed over the course of The Lunar Trilogy is thus a form of phenomenological reduction of the utopian impulse in order to break away from the constrictions of history and the material world (and hence the perspective of imminent death). It starts with a project to build a new civilization in On the Silver Globe, continues with an attempt to reinvigorate and reform an existing civilization, and ends with a spiritual liberation of a single individual. The last stage reinforces Żuławski’s overall message that any real historical change has its source in the minds and souls of a few exceptional individuals, whereas society at large only impedes novel developments. The utopian epiphanies recurring throughout the trilogy represent moments when such exceptional individuals realize the full spectrum of possibilities available to them and attempt to take control over the historical forces to which they were hitherto subjected.

Utopia as a genre and topos – even if in the weakened form which I refer to as a utopian epiphany – has a complex relationship with both the romance paradigm and early modernism. With its origin in philosophical reflections on what constitutes a good society – from Plato’s The Republic to More’s Utopia – the tradition of literary utopias oscillates between a political treatise and didactic literature (on occasion coming close to a fable or allegory). Hence, despite the occasional stir they cause in the intellectual world, it is hardly a “popular” genre in the same way most romances are, particularly in modern version of both genres.

Nonetheless, authors of literary utopias regularly borrow narrative devices from romance fiction to give their intellectual experiments the outlines of the plot, both to provide an alibi for their politics and to increase the readability of their work. William Morris’ News from Nowhere is a good example of such a combination. At the same time, utopia in its various manifestations is

302 The literature on utopian fiction is vast and growing. For an interesting and quite comprehensive description of the genre, see Morson, The Boundaries of Genre. See also Frye’s “Varieties of Literary Utopias.”

303 Consider Patrick Parrinder’s discussion of what he refers to as “utopian romance” in Parrinder, “Utopia and romance.” Frye uses the term “utopian romance” to refer to literary utopias, thus suggesting a generic affinity between the two fictional modes, which may explain frequent exchanges of narrative and symbolic elements between these forms. See Frye, “Varieties of Literary Utopias.”
an often-used motif in much of modern popular literature, from lost civilizations and green
paradises in adventure novels to alien worlds and alternate temporalities in scientific romances.
The same ambiguity pervades the relationship between utopia and early modernism. They both
display radical idealism and a deeply rooted contempt towards their historical realities, although
both ideologies (if they may be called so) diverge considerably when it comes to their responses
to these realities. Entrenched in the cult of art and individual genius, early modernists were
programmatically opposed to the very idea of utopia – particularly of a socialist type – as a too
positivist, materialist and anti-individualist solution. Yet in one form or another they engaged in
various forms of utopian creativity, from various grandiose visions of metaphysical and cultural
revival through art to *zhiznetvorchestvo* and erotic utopias practiced by Russian modernists.

All of these antinomies are at work in *The Lunar Trilogy*. Utopian epiphanies experienced by
Żuławski’s protagonists cannot be unambiguously attributed to any of the three aesthetic modes
(i.e. utopia, romance, early modernism), which may be an indication of the conflict between the
form and ideology. On the one hand, the author clearly posits the idea that exceptional
individuals have the leading role in history, partly because they are both willing and empowered
to “step outside” of history – to transgress the prison house of material and historical
determinism – and partly because they have enough willpower to take on the burden of
whatever historical or mythical role is bestowed on them (see the middle section of this
chapter). Hence Korecki, Marek, and Jacek all correspond to the archetype of the solar hero
present in most romance narratives and to the modernist archetype of a prophet-outcast;
heroism and social rejection go hand in hand. Anti-social idealism is therefore what brings the
poetics of romance close to the early modernist ideology. On the other hand, as transpires
through my reading of the role of time and history in *The Lunar Trilogy*, these great
individualities cannot exist and operate *in vacuo*: they are compelled to assume whatever role
destiny holds for them by accepting utopian dreams of fixing history and organizing better,
more permanent forms of society.

These dreams involve the collective, not just the individual, thus connecting the three
protagonists with the world of other human beings. Jacek’s reluctant departure with
Nyanatiloka at the end of *The Old Earth* suggest that even in his case the desire to improve the
lot of mankind has not been entirely subsumed by the goal of personal illumination. And this is
the paradox of *The Lunar Trilogy*: the idea of utopia is rejected on ideological as well as
rational grounds, but at the same time the reliance on narrative patterns of romance both necessitates the presence of utopian idealism as the quest-object (if only to be represented as misconceived and doomed to failure) and presents it as an efficient weapon against the entropic forces of nature and history.

**Conclusion**

Analyzing the three major structural components of *The Lunar Trilogy* demonstrates how romance and modernism interact with one another to create a distinct novelistic form. Examining the construction of narrative space, the role of protagonists, and types of temporality from the dual perspective of romance and early modernism suggest that the two modes behave similarly to the physical phenomenon of interference (e.g. in sound), where one wave superimposes itself on another to create a wave that is either higher (constructive interference) or lower (destructive interference) in an amplitude greater than that of the two individual waves. In the case of the unique novelistic form represented by *The Lunar Trilogy*, the lyrical and melancholy aesthetics of early modernism resonate with the fantastic aura of romance and together they strive for that which Henry James calls “experience liberated”: experience disengaged, disembroiled, disencumbered, exempt from the conditions that we usually know to attach to it and . . . drag upon it,”304 or in other words, an imaginary recreation of the individual’s agency vis-à-vis the world by means of unplugging him or her from the network of impersonal forces – be they historical, social, or economic – that diminish that agency.

Romance organizes the modernist worldview into a polarized semantic space filled to the brim with narrative possibilities, although it loses some of the symbolic subtlety and enigma that characterize modernist poetry. The reluctant heroes of the three stories start off as daring explorers not much different from those crowding the pages of popular adventure novels, yet over the course of their adventures they transform into the representative protagonist of modernist fiction, filled with metaphysical anxiety and struggling to define their position with regards to history and society. Here the overlap is not ideal in the sense that the identity of Żuławski’s protagonists remains fragmentary, built from incompatible parts. At the same time,  

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304 James, preface to *The American*,” 33.
however, it does fit in with both traditions. On the one hand, the fragmentariness and volatility of these characters aptly reflects the psychology of the fin de siècle (defined by anxiety, melancholy, disillusionment, neurotic disposition, and idealism\textsuperscript{305}). On the other hand, the destinies of these heroes echo the tragic heroes of epics and romances who try to achieve some kind of liberation for themselves through their physical strength and are destroyed by the very passions and forces responsible for their power.\textsuperscript{306} This happens to all three of Żuławski’s protagonists, whose unique status within each of the spatio-temporal and social settings becomes the source of their alienation and death (with the exception of Jacek, whose fate is unknown). What is gained by bringing the two modes together is the novelization of the Nietzschean ideal of the Overman as the individual who can sacrifice himself for mankind by willfully accepting the historical role bestowed on him (without any perspective of a future reward in the afterlife).

One realizes the importance of such a figure when one considers the vision of time and history that informs Żuławski’s science-fiction epic: the eternal and universal struggle between creative and destructive forces; between the Apollonian and Dionysian principles. Without exceptional individuals driven by utopian idealism, the human civilization would submit to the entropic processes of ossification and decay caused by the flow of time. In a world that is deemed beyond repair, utopian dreams and metaphysical search become quest objects in and of themselves. Jerzy Żuławski’s \textit{The Lunar Trilogy} thus inscribes itself in the tradition of what John McClure calls late imperial romance. Works such as Joseph Conrad’s \textit{Heart of Darkness} (1899), \textit{Lord Jim} (1900), and much later \textit{A Passage to India} by E.M. Forster (1924), argues McClure, “conduct us from one romance to another: from the heroic political romances of imperialism, which are discredited, to heroic \textit{spiritual} romances which enact the rediscovery of mystery and depict the disillusioned individual’s strong rejection of the world of political

\textsuperscript{305} See for example Pierrot’s \textit{The Decadent Imagination}.

\textsuperscript{306} At the beginning of the chapter on heroes and heroines of romance (“Our Lady of Pain”) in \textit{The Secular Scripture}, Frye writes, “there is an inner dialectic in the eulogy of power which tends to make all heroes of action ultimately tragic heroes.” Sooner or later, observes Frye, “some chink of armour opens up and the hero is destroyed,” which in a way restores the natural balance to the world of the given story. Frye, \textit{The Secular Scripture}, 45.
engagement.” Reading *The Lunar Trilogy* as an imperial romance could be an extremely interesting critical exercise, but even without the colonial context it is not difficult to see the two forms – late imperial romance as described by McClure and Żuławski’s modernist scientific romance – as part of the same moment in the history of the early modernist novel.

The success of this aesthetic experiment in Żuławski’s case is a problematic one. As I already mentioned, with the exception of Maria Komornicka’s negative review in *Chimaera*, the reception of *On the Silver Globe* was generally positive. Critics appreciated the poetic beauty of the lunar landscapes depicted by the author, the psychological realism of the work, and its philosophical approach to the form of fantastic travel (in the style of Jules Verne). The book went through three editions in Żuławski’s lifetime alone and several more after his death (including the most recent adaptations into an audiobook form). Together with the other two volumes it was translated into several languages (Russian, German, Czech, Ukrainian, and Hungarian), in some case also going through several editions: a fact that testifies to its popularity in central and eastern Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. Stanisław Lem, the most prolific and talented author of science fiction in Polish literature, considers the trilogy to be one of his literary inspirations. Although the other two volumes were not as successful in terms of popularity or critical appreciation, they nonetheless managed to integrate with their predecessor and form the unity known as *The Lunar Trilogy*. Hence one may speak of a moderate success of these books as far as readership and criticism are concerned. However, Żuławski’s experiment did not find any continuators, neither among the modernists nor popular authors. Other early modernist excursions into the fantastic – for example in Tadeusz Miciński’s *Nietota. The Secret Book of the Tatra Mountains* (*Nietota. Księga Tajemna Tatr*, 1910) and *Faust the Priest* (*Xiądz Faust*, 1913) – did not follow the trajectory of the trilogy, focusing more on the supernatural rather than speculative and scientific elements (and that too in a clear separation from the poetics of romance and popular fiction). With the possible exception of Mieczysław Smolarski’s *The City of Light* (*Miasto światłości*, 1924), Polish popular literature from the 1920s and 1930s could not aspire to the imaginative and

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307 McClure, 12.

308 See, for example, Jerzy Żuławski, *Na srebrnym globie*, read by Roman Gancarczyk (Audea, 2010, CD MP3).
philosophical scope of the trilogy and rarely sought to revisit its artistic territories. Thus, *The Lunar Trilogy* remains one of the most intriguing and continuously popular literary products of early modernism, but as a model of prose it came to be an evolutionary dead end to the Polish modernist novel.
Chapter 3

“Wild Whirlwind of Ancient Life”: Evgeniĭ Zamiatin’s *We*

Zamiatin is a threshold figure. His oeuvre stretches across two eras of Russian literature separated by the two revolutions of 1917. Aesthetically, he belongs to a different phase of modernism than Sologub, Żuławski, and their peers, although his works still bear the unmistakable marks of an early modernist sensibility (such as a distrust of rational utopianism). There are at least three reasons for considering his most popular and artistically accomplished novel *We* (1920-21, 1924) as part of the modernist experiment with romance. The first one is Zamiatin’s very self-conscious situating of his work at the intersection of the two literary traditions: modernism (neorealism\(^{309}\)) and romance (Wellsian science fiction). I will discuss his views on this matter and place them in their cultural context in the late 1910s and early 1920s in the first section of this chapter. The second reason is the unique narrative structure of Zamiatin’s novel that almost seamlessly blends various strands of the romance mode (most notably the gothic and the Hunted Man story) with layered symbolism and the philosophical sophistication of modernist aesthetics. I will dedicate sections two and three to analyzing these aesthetic and generic interactions. The third and the final reason (at least as far as this study goes) concerns the theme of the artist and authorship that not only connects Zamiatin’s novel with the work of his two predecessors but also helps in identifying the underlying trajectory of the development of the “modernist romance” (the gradual internalization of the narrative patterns of romance) as the stakes involved in the experiment. I will address these issues in section four and the conclusion, which will also offer the summary of my findings.

\(^{309}\) Cf. Khatiamova, 32-8.
Synthetism and the Quest for the Adventure Novel in Early Soviet Russia

Before examining Zamiatin’s foray into the “modernist romance” experiment, I want to set the ground for my inquiry by looking at his essayistic work that deals with post-revolutionary Russian literature; his essays draw on both the early modernist aesthetics and the author’s fascination with popular literature. My aim is to establish an affinity between the model of prose theorized by Zamiatin and the early modernist experiment with the romance form as I examine it in this study.

Despite having some reservations about playing the role of a literary critic (“willy-nilly [ponievole mne], I, a writer of fiction, must step out of the circle and take a look from the side…”310), there is hardly a fellow contemporary writer so much preoccupied with theorizing the past, present, and future of modern Russian literature as Evgeniĭ Zamiatin. As usual in such cases, Zamiatin’s goal is to establish his place and identity among the chaos of various traditions, trends and developments that marked the early post-revolutionary Russian literary scene. The author’s artistic manifesto is generally taken to be the essay “On Literature, Revolution, Entropy, and Other Matters” (O literaturе, revolutsii, ĕntropii i prochem 1923), but many basic points of his philosophy of art and literature – especially concerning the problem of the relationship of modernism and “the romance paradigm” – are scattered across his writings, most notably “The New Russian Prose” (Novaia russkaia proza, 1923), “On Synthetism” (O sintetizme, 1922), and “The Genealogical Tree of Wells” (Genealogicheskoе derevo Uellsa, 1921-22).

In Zamiatin’s eyes the primary culprit obstructing the path of Russian literature towards modernity is “primitive realism [primitivnyi realizm].” What he means by the term is not the historical realism of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century, but the contemporary...

310 Evgeniĭ Zamiatin, “The New Russian Prose,” 92 [3:125]. With the exception of the novel My, for which I relied on a separate scholarly edition (see further in the text), all my source material comes from Evgeniĭ Zamiatin, Sobranie sochinenii v 5-tomakh (Moscow: Russkaia kniga, 2003). Unless otherwise stated, all English quotations are based on Mirra Ginsburg’s translation in Yevgeny Zamyatin, A Soviet Heretic: Essays by Yevgeny Zamyatin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). My references will include page numbers in both editions. The first number will refer to the Ginsburg translation, the second one (in square brackets) will refer to the Russian original.
applications of realist aesthetics to a post-revolutionary reality. According to the author of *We*, the moment of realism has passed irrevocably. The return to classical, nineteenth-century realism is in his view a misguided attempt at making sense of the new situation by means of obsolete artistic methods. Zamiatin depicts this “resuscitated” form of realism as a grotesque figure of a ghoul or a vampire (an imagery that can be found in *We* as well): “primitive Realism, its *cheeks reddened* with left-wing political views, *is crawling out* into the open [vylezaet] *shaking off the dust* of forty years. But today, when exact science has exploded the very reality of matter, Realism *has no roots*; it is the refuge of old men and of old young men.”

Zamiatin’s aversion has philosophical as well as artistic grounds. Realism is not merely a set of fixed formal devices, which are in themselves no longer adequate mimetic tools: the specificity of this aesthetic consists for him in the fact that it also dictates the object of artistic representation, which in the case of Russian prose is what he identifies as *byt*: the mundane, everyday existence. To use Zamiatin's own description of the realist school, “in the works of these writers everything is corporeal, earthly, everything is based on daily life.” The view of literature as a chunk of life [*kusok zhizni*] offers a narrow and necessarily fragmentary perspective on the complexity and dynamics of modern life:

> Bare depiction of daily life [*byta*], even if it be archcontemporary, no longer fits the concept of contemporary art. The recording of daily life [*bytoopisanie*] is arithmetic: single units or millions – the difference is merely quantitative. In our age of great syntheses, arithmetic is powerless. . . . Daily life can enter the new prose only in synthetic images, or only in the form of a screen for some philosophic synthesis.”

The concept of *byt* is to a large extent a product of the nineteenth century scientific and social materialism, grounded in the belief in a single, objective, and stable universe governed by natural laws. That universe, declares Zamiatin, no longer exists: new discoveries in physics

311 Ibid., 104 [3: 138].


have displaced the Newtonian paradigm, just as the October Revolution displaced the social order of ancien régime in Russia. The modern world has changed beyond recognition and “life itself today has lost its plane of reality: it is projected, not along the old fixed points, but also the dynamic coordinates of Einstein, of revolution.” As a consequence, reality can no longer be apprehended by the simple accretion of images, just as our understanding can no longer be based simply on the accumulation of knowledge. Thus, as an aesthetic, realism has lost the power to capture what Lukács would call a “totality of life.” What modern art needs, therefore, is a means to synthesize the fragments into meaningful unities. Yet in order to reflect the tempo and fluidity of modern life, these unities need to be dynamic: “what we need today are automobiles, airplanes, flickering, flight, dots, dashes, seconds.” This then is Zamiatin’s creed for the literature of the new era. So how does the theory translate into practice?

Zamiatin does not call for abandoning the realist aesthetic altogether. In fact, such complete rejection was, in his view, the historical role of early modernism (which he refers to as “symbolism”). The early modernists “chose as their subject that which is not on earth, that which cannot be found on earth.” The author of We uses the similes of a mirror and an X-ray as a means of comparing realism and symbolism. Realism, reflecting the external reality like a mirror (a critical cliché by this point), is interested only in physical and material aspects of experience, whereas symbolism looks at “the corporeal life” and sees a “skeleton of life” in spiritual and metaphysical aspects, as in an X-ray image. Both perspectives produce incomplete but mutually complementary pictures of reality. Zamiatin’s criticism focuses more on realism because by the late 1910s early modernism and its poetics were no longer in vogue (“it exists only on the bookshelf, firmly bound”), whereas realism continued to exert a strong influence on Russian belles lettres. What Zamiatin proposes, therefore, is not a return to the

314 Ibid.
317 Ibid.
symbolist eschewing of realism but rather an expansion of its aesthetics beyond the base *byt*. His solution is closely based on the formula of literature he evokes in his critique of Viacheslav Ivanov: “the art of the word is painting + architecture + music”\(^{319}\): painting being the setting and imagery, architecture the “architectural forms of plot construction,” and music referring to the “music of the word,” i.e. style. His theory of a truly contemporary (and, by the same token, revolutionary) art can be thus broken into these three interlocking categories.

The stylistic aspect of literary “synthetism” is perhaps the easiest one to specify based on Zamiatin’s writings. Towards the end of “On Literature...” he offers a detailed characterization of what for him constitutes the proper new prose. It is worth quoting it in its entirety:

> The old, slow, creaking descriptions are a thing of the past; today the rule is brevity – but every word must be supercharged, high voltage. We must compress into a single second what was held before in a sixty-second minute. And hence, syntax becomes elliptic, volatile; the complex pyramids of periods are dismantled stone by stone into independent sentences. When you are moving fast, the canonized, the customary eludes the eye: hence, the unusual, often startling, symbolism and vocabulary. The image is sharp, synthetic, with a single salient feature – the one feature you will glimpse from a speeding car. The custom-hallowed lexicon has been invaded by provincialisms, neologisms, science, mathematics, technology.\(^{320}\)

Needless to say, Zamiatin’s *We* is itself the best exemplar of the style described above, as many critics have duly observed.\(^{321}\) The author advocates here for a very particular economy of style that would replace the early modernist tendency towards verbiage with the brevity and expressionism of avant-garde poetry (“supercharged, high voltage” words). At the same time, he clearly does not dispense with the early modernist predilection for symbols. This is, in fact,

\(^{319}\) Ibid. 96 [3: 128].


\(^{321}\) See, for example, Russell, *Zamiatin’s ‘We’*, 50.
the first indication of how the realist perspective can be made fantastic and otherworldly: the new aesthetic ought to strip the realistic forms of representation from the “canonized” and “customary” elements, leaving only carefully distilled symbols and images. Though sharp and synthetic, these symbols and images require a considerable effort on the part of the reader to be fully comprehended. The new style should also be open to all kinds of non-literary registers of language, from provincial dialects to the discourse of hard sciences. What is being proposed here is a style that resembles a rebus puzzle. The literary language of the “prose of the future” no longer strives to create an illusion of translucence and objectivity. Rather, it presents reality itself as something mystifying, estranged, and uncanny.

Another step towards representing the estranging realities of the modern era is to present new settings and new types of imagery (the “painting” analogy). Here Zamiatin calls for an infusion of byt with elements of the fantastic. Since reality itself had lost stability and “the best-known formulas and objects become displaced, fantastic, familiar-unfamiliar,” the only logical step for modern literature is to attune itself to these changes and emulate them. What he has in mind when he writes about the fantastic, however, is not a form of escapism into imaginary dreamscapes, but a rather a new cognitive tool. Zamiatin’s understanding of the fantastic is in line with Darko Suvin’s definition of science fiction as a literature of cognitive estrangement and Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr.’s suggestion that science fiction should be treated as “a mode of art and thought” rather than a genre: “a constellation of diverse intellectual and emotional interests and responses that are particularly active in an age of restless technological transformation.” The author of We does not consider the fantastic to be strictly limited to what one could call “science fiction” or “fantasy.” Writing about neorealism (novorealizm) in 1918 he characterized the fantastic as means of turning the realist “material” (“life, earth, rock, everything that has weight and dimensions”) into “generalizations and symbols.” As one example he evokes the eerie and uncanny atmosphere of Sologub’s The Petty Demon. “In

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323 See Suvin, Metamorphoses of Science Fiction, 3-15.
324 Csicsery-Ronay Jr., The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction, 5.
reality there could be no such thing, it is incredible,” he writes, “but the author has created it to convey the state of mind of a man who lives in the atmosphere of constant gossip, spying, eavesdropping, and malicious rumors that prevailed in the small town.” The fantastic is thus an epistemological as well as mimetic device and a form of condensing and estranging reality. It allows one to cognize life in its increasing complexity by synthesizing it into metaphors and symbols that, even though they present phenomena from out of this world (when considered against the backdrop of byt), are in fact just a reflection of “objective” reality. This is precisely what Zamiatin has in mind when he calls for a literature that must turn away from byt and towards byt.

As I mentioned, although Zamiatin does not limit the scope of the fantastic to the task of conveying futuristic visions, its primary vocation is nonetheless to engage with the rapidity, intensity, and complexity of modern life. However, if the fantastic is indeed the most adequate mode of comprehending the processes of modernity, it is not only due to its symbolic or allegorical potential, but also because life itself has acquired a new aura of wonder and amazement. Here the author of We recognizes a shift in Western and Russian cultural sensibility that counters Weber’s diagnosis of the growing disenchantment of the world. Namely, science and technology that have all but eradicated the sense of wonder and adventure – an effect bemoaned by romance writers in the West – have managed to replenish it, albeit with their own devices: by offering new possibilities for civilizational development (to an extent far superseding the new means of transportation so celebrated by Verne). In her study We Modern People, Anindita Baerjee indicates that in the Russian context the popularization and sensationalization of Western scientific discoveries – mostly by the burgeoning publishing market – took place in the virtual absence of technological innovations at home. This contrast has created a cognitive gap that was readily filled with popular collective and individual fantasies: a process emblazoned by the rising genre of science fiction literature [nauchnaia fantastika]. Although modernity has dispensed with religion, it generated myths of

326 Ibid., 42 [5: 306].
327 McClure, 11.
328 See Banerjee, We Modern People.
its own, suggest Adorno and Horkheimer in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Much in the same vein, Zamiatin presents H.G. Wells’s scientific romances as modernized fairy tales, with magical effects displaced and recast as technological achievements: the flying carpet turns into the time machine, goblins and man-eating monsters turn into the Martians, the invisibility cap turns into the invisibility serum, etc. Presenting readers with the seeming paradox of Wells’ blend of fairy-tale fantasy and modern science, Zamiatin argues that it is an unavoidable combination, because “a myth is always, openly or implicitly, connected with religion, and the religion of the modern city is precise science [*tochnaia nauka*]. Hence the natural link between the newest urban myth, urban fairy tale, and science.” Thus, to return to the question of aesthetics, the amalgam of the real and the fantastic is a direct transposition into literary terms of this dual nature of progress. On the one hand, progress and modernization gradually erode all sense of mystery and wonder from the universe and, as a consequence, subject all areas of human activity to the hegemony of reason. On the other hand, they build an aura of mystery around their own achievements, as if in accordance with the most famous of Arthur C. Clarke’s “laws” that states that “any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.”

The final point that needs to be discussed in relationship to Zamiatin’s theory of what one might call a “modernization” of romance devices is the question of the plot. In his critical articles, elements of the fantastic and engaging plots are two components of fiction that go hand in hand as markers of the emerging literary trend. What was the significance of the plot for the author

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331 Ibid., 261 [3: 77].


333 They are mentioned in tandem in both “The New Russian Prose” and “H.G. Wells.” The fact that the plot and the fantastic are mentioned in both contexts – Russian modernist prose and the tradition of scientific romance – is significant because it clearly indicates that Zamiatin’s model of the new literature unifies these two traditions. This
of *We*? In one of his lectures on the craft of fiction delivered at the House of the Arts in 1920-1, titled “Theme and Plot” [*O sjuzhete i fabule*334], Zamiatin diagnoses another of the malaises of contemporary Russian fiction resulting from the prolonged engagement with realism and *byt*, namely “plot anemia [*sjuzhetnaia anemiia]*.”335 As he writes, after Tolstoy, Dostoevskii, and Leskov, “Russian literature devoted itself to perfecting form and language, to deepening psychological analysis and elaborating on social problems. Plot itself was forgotten. Form and psychology have been developed in our fiction to the point where they probably outstrip even the Western European models, but this has been done at the expense of plot.”336

Zamiatin was not alone in his diagnosis. At around the same time Osip Mandelshtam published an ominously-titled article “The End of the Novel” (*Konets romana*, 1922), in which he proclaimed that the novel, a genre based on the framework of individual or collective biography, cannot be written in an age where the notion of “character” has gradually disintegrated and history no longer is the canvas of human agency. “The contemporary novel at once lost the story [*fabula*], that is the character acting in the time covered by it,” points out Mandelshtam, “and psychology, insofar as it no longer serves as basis for any action.”337 In other words, the novel as a story is done for because “the character as a story” (“biography” in Mandelshtam’s parlour) is done for. Thus the story and, by extension, the plot were among the first victims of the modernist tendency to decentralize the subject, be it individual or collective.

allows us to view this model as essentially reiterating the basic tenets the early modernist experiment with romance.

334 Zamiatin uses the two terms (*sjuzhet* and *fabula*) differently than the Russian Formalists, to the point that the translator chose to render the title as “Theme and Plot” rather than “Plot and Story” (which would be a more accurate translation). In the section of the essay dedicated to *sjuzhet*. Zamiatin discusses how stories are derived from their authors’ experiences and how to develop the story from the initial idea (“embryonic form”) into a full-fledged work of literature. His use of the term *fabula* in the second part of the lecture is closer to what we would understand as “plot” or *sjuzhet* (in the Formalist sense) or “narrative structure.”


The article is symptomatic of the fact that the problem of the disappearing plot (as well as other points brought up by Zamiatin in his articles) was a part of the wider ongoing debate among the cultural elite about the future of the novel in post-revolutionary Russia. As Irina Gutkin notes, “the Revolution heightened the anticipation for a novel, new in form and befitting the new era.”338 Up until the loudly proclaimed “revival of the novel” in the second half of the 1920s, the novel “without a hero,” amorphous, decentralized, with shifting (and not necessarily intersecting) planes of narrative (yet still working within the realist paradigm) became the dominant model for the genre. “If one can make a novel out of a short story collection or the other way around,” commented Konstantin Loks referring to Pil’niak’s The Naked Year (Golyi god, 1922), “then it means the writer either does not have any idea about plotting or does not need it altogether.”339 The departure from the “traditional,” character-based realism was motivated by the rebellion of young Soviet writers against what was considered the bourgeois individualism of Western prose,340 although as is clear from the passage quoted earlier, for Zamiatin this trend had started long before the revolution.

The author of We himself was a representative of the opposite point of view, which saw the revolution as the opportunity to reclaim the plot for the Soviet novel. “In recent years,” he observes in a lecture delivered at the Petrograd House of Arts, only third rate writers, or, to be precise, hacks like Verbitskaya and Nagrodkaya, have been interested in plot, in cultivating the story line. But true masters of literary prose have treated the problem of plot with disdain and even seem to have regarded concern with plot beneath their dignity. (…) As a result, according to library statistic, third rate hacks like Verbitskaya win the largest number of readers. And such artists, such masters of the word as Bunin remain on the shelves.”341

339 Loks, “Sovremennaia proza,” 84.
He then moves on to point out to his audience (consisting mostly of aspiring Soviet literati) the realities of the literary field motivating a return towards the plot-intense literature (*ostrosjuzhetaia literatura*): “We must keep in mind, first of all, that the reading public is changing. Formerly, it consisted chiefly of intellectuals, many of them capable of enjoying the esthetic forms of a work, even if these were achieved at the expense of plot. The new reader, more primitive, will unquestionably have *a far greater need for interesting plots* [my emphasis].” This goes to show that the preoccupation with the problem of plot had material and social as much as aesthetic or philosophical foundations. But the latter nonetheless played a key role: “There is also another factor, a psychological one, which compels the writer to pay more attention to plot,” continues Zamiatin, “life has become so rich in events, so unexpected and fantastic, that the reader has inevitably developed a different scale of emotions and different demands on literature. Literary works must not be inferior to life.” Here, the question of the readership and its sensibilities is directly linked with the rapidly changing “objective” reality and the quickening pace of life, a phenomenon Zamiatin more extensively described in his other writings, most notably in “On Literature….” The author of *We* interprets these phenomena differently from Mandelshtam. For the latter, the growing complexity of man’s relationship with history becomes the basis for the dissolution of the plot as a variation on the concept of biography (a meaningful and orderly arrangement of events from the life of an individual). Zamiatin, on the other hand, considers the situation a challenge for the contemporaries to return to sophisticated plotting as a way of aesthetically reproducing that very complexity. The two arguments are thus opposed in their interpretation of causes and effects; for Mandelshtam the novel lost the plot because it can no longer adequately represent reality via the notion of “character,” whereas for Zamiatin the novel can no longer represent reality because it lost the plot.

As I mentioned earlier, the conviction that one must resurrect the tradition of the dynamic and engaging plot (*ostrosiuzhetnost’*) – which in my view is closely linked to the romance paradigm of the novel – was not Zamiatin’s alone. It was a part of a larger cultural project, focused

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342 Ibid., [5: 333].

343 Ibid.
around the literary studios at the Petrograd House of Arts (November 1919 – January 1921), whose intention was to foster a new tradition of Russian prose based on the premise that literature is a form of craft like any other and as such can be taught and learned. Thus, the increased attention towards the problem of plotting manifested itself already in the work of the Russian Formalists, as well as their (and Zamiatin’s) students from the House of Art, most notably the Serapion Brotherhood (Serapionovy brat’ia). Assessing the output of his pupils in 1921, Shklovskii noted that although each of the young writers operates with his own artistic idiom, their work is nonetheless unified by two shared lines of descent: the Russian tradition of skaz (“from Leskov to Remizov and from Andrei Belyi to Evgeniï Zamiatin”) and “the adventure novel that came to Russia either directly from the West or developed from the ‘minor’ line of Russian literature” (Shklovskii mentions the romantic tales of Aleksandr Grin as example of the latter).  

Shklovskii’s indication of the adventurous plot as one of the identifying markers of the group was amplified in Lev Lunts’s address to his fellow Serapion Brothers “Go West!” (Na zapad!, 1922), where he bemoans the inability of Russian writers to produce interesting plots: “we Russians cannot handle the plot [s fabuloï], we do not understand the plot, and therefore we despise it.” This inability had led to the decline of the novel in Russia; he therefore was calling on his fellow writers to turn to the West for inspiration on how to turn the trend around:

> Because of that I shout “to the West”! In the West there exists a strong tradition of plotting, and there we will be away from the contagious presence of Remizov and Belyi. We shall imitate . . . the adventurous novels slavishly at first, like plagiarists, and then carefully – oh, how carefully! – fill in the mastered plot with Russian spirit, Russian thinking, and Russian lyricism.

Zamiatin’s influence is clearly discernible in Lunts’s plea. But what is perhaps more interesting is the purpose of the proposed appropriation of Western models of adventurous novels (the


346 Ibid., 52.
romance paradigm). The idea is to use the engaging, complex plot as scaffolding on which truly national narratives can be built. The form of romance is to be filled with “local” content: Russian “spirit,” “thinking,” and “lyricism.” One finds a similar rationale in Zamiatin’s writings, although the author of We puts more stress on the synthesizing potential of a well-designed plot. Writing in praise of the work of H.G. Wells, he notes that

[in] Wells’s sociofantastic novels the plot is always dynamic, built on collisions, on conflict; the story is complex and entertaining. Wells invariably clothes his social fantasy and science fiction in the forms of a Robinsonad, of the typical adventure novel so beloved in Anglo-Saxon literature. (...) However, in adopting the form of the adventure novel, Wells deepened it, raised its intellectual value, and brought into it the elements of social philosophy and science.347

What might be termed “content” is of crucial value to Zamiatin. It is what ought to distinguish the literature of tomorrow from simply bad literature, the kind of literature for which entertainment is the end in and of itself. While enthusiastic about the new developments in world and Russian literature along the lines of the fantastic and the adventurous plot, he is wary of the traps that lie ahead. “Another extreme may develop,” he warns: “some writers may simply be diverted into thoughtless games, into adventure novels. . . . But such novels reflect only one color in the contemporary spectrum. To reflect the entire spectrum the dynamics of the adventure novel must be invested with a philosophic synthesis of one kind or another.”348

Such caution with respect to the integration of ostrosiužheitnost’ into the fabric of “artistic” literature is well justified given the larger cultural context in which the above artistic deliberations took place. “Surveys of mass readership in the 1920s showed clearly,” writes Richard Stites, “that people wanted to read books for relaxation with adventure and action or vivid descriptions of everyday life and without political rhetoric, ornamental prose, bad


language, or elitist attempts to reproduce lower class jargon and slang.”\(^{349}\) This assessment 
explains why the early 1920s in the Soviet Russia witnessed an unprecedented growth of 
popularity of detective and fantastic fiction, a lot of it of rather questionable artistic merit. 
Anatoliĭ Fedorovich Britikov’s and Robert Russell’s studies provide a detailed account of the 
proliferation of Soviet detective novels in which adventurous plots and elements of the fantastic 
freely mixed with Bolshevik ideology, thus offering readers entertaining yet officially 
sanctioned pulp.\(^{350}\) The phenomenon of “Red Pinkertonism,” named by Nikolai Bukharin after 
Nat Pinkerton, the hero of the American detective series notoriously popular in the pre-
revolutionary Russia, is an important background for the deliberations on the merits of the plot 
lead by literary elites. For one, it testifies to the currency of the problem: as Zamiatin himself 
points out, since plot structures translated directly into numbers of readers, literature that 
ignores its storytelling aspects condemns itself to oblivion.\(^{351}\) Indirectly, it also confirms the 
thesis about the quickening pace of life, which now finds a clear reflection in the reading tastes 
of society at large: the unmistakable appetite for dynamic plots, exotic settings with equally 
exotic gadgetry, and action (rather than psychology).\(^{352}\) Secondly, as Robert Russell notes, the 
Red Pinkerton and associated genres – such as the “resurrected” picaresque novel – paved the 
way for more sophisticated authors who searched for formulas that would appeal to a larger 
reading public, which desired easy entertainment, as well as to the culture officials, for whom, 
like for many in the intellectual elites, literature had first and foremost a didactic function. 
Finally, it put a pressure on the literary elites to compete for the reader with popular fiction, 
oftentimes by appropriating its themes and devices. Consequently, “there is hardly a fellow-
traveler of any importance who did not turn his hand to either a detective novel or a science 
fiction work during these years. Bulgakov, Olesha, Katayev, Ehrenburg, Shaginyan, Kaverin,

\(^{349}\) Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*, 42.

\(^{350}\) See Britikov, “Detektivnaia povest’ v kontekste prikluchencheshskikh zhanrov,” and Russell, “Red Pinkertonism: 
An Aspect of Soviet Literature of the 1920s.”

\(^{351}\) Zamiatin, “Theme and Plot,” 173 [5: 332].

\(^{352}\) “If the inner world of a person is at the centre of the social-realist *sotsialno-bytovoi* story, in an adventure 
story *povesti prikluchencheshkoil* the reader learns about character indirectly, through the logic of deeds, through 
Aleksey Tolstoy – the list includes many who were already or were shortly to become leading figures in Soviet literature,” concludes Russell. Zamiatin’s name could also be added to the list.

Though the majority of the developments I described here took place already after Zamiatin composed *We* (written mostly in the course of the year 1920), the creative process took place while many of these phenomena were germinating. As one of the editors of Gorkii’s World Literature project launched in 1918 and a lecturer at the House of Arts, he was one of the best-informed people in the Soviet Union as far as Western and Russian literary trends were concerned. The dates of Zamiatin’s lectures and essays indicate that his ideas about the new directions in Russian prose (towards the fantastic and towards the plot) anticipated future developments. It is thus safe to assume that many of his more mature reflections on the subject found their way into the process of writing his magnum opus. Zamiatin himself uses it as an example of the new “synthetic” Russian literature and it also contains material from his future essays (e.g. the discussion on energy and entropy in “On Literature…”), all of which points to the continuity in his thinking about the need for romance in Russian literature.

To sum up my commentary on Zamiatin’s model of the new prose: there are clear parallels between synthetism and the early modernist experiment with romance. I use the term “early modernism” deliberately. For one, it is clear from Zamiatin’s essayistic work that it is the early modernists (especially “neorealists” such as Sologub, Blok, Remizov, and Belyĭ) that exerted the strongest influence on him, much stronger than the avant-gardes of 1910s or the experiments of his contemporaries. Also, despite being written in the early 1920s, *We* continues developing themes and problems introduced by the early modernists. I will thus consider Zamiatin’s synthetism a variation on the “modernist romance,” i.e. a project of enlisting popular culture, particularly one focused on adventure, science, and the fantastic, in the service of


modernist aesthetics and modernist ideology. Zamiatin’s work fits this critical framework also for another reason: regardless of his admiration for what might be referred to as a “middlebrow” popular fiction (Wells, Conan Doyle, etc.), he clearly subscribes to the modernist ideal of autonomous art, symbolism (although not in a transcendental sense), historical pessimism, and the cult of individuality. In other words, for the author of We, romance is a way to invigorate modernism, not the other way around. There is perhaps hardly a better example to illustrate this relationship than Zamiatin’s most popular and critically acclaimed novel wherein modernism, the fantastic, and adventure all come together to produce a radically new type of story.

**Modernism, romance, dystopia**

Like Sologub’s *The Created Legend*, *We* is a heterogeneous work, not because of the overwhelming number of plotlines or formal complexity but because it yields itself rather easily to many diverse interpretive strategies: generic, political, psychoanalytical, mathematical, etc.\(^{356}\)

Also, quite unusually, no single perspective is particularly exclusive of others. Despite this semantic richness, from the generic perspective scholars seem to agree that the place of this novel is in the utopian-dystopian context. *We* is one of the progenitors of twentieth-century literary dystopia, also referred to as anti-utopia, negative utopia, satirical utopia, and critical utopia.\(^{357}\) George Orwell’s admission that he had been impacted by *We* when writing his anti-totalitarian classic *1984* and his suggestion that Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* must have been likewise inspired by the novel\(^{358}\) (denied by Huxley) made Zamiatin’s novel part of this distinctly twentieth-century tradition that continues to produce acclaimed literary works, to name but Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) or the more recent Haruki

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\(^{356}\) See Kern, introduction to *Zamiatin’s ‘We’: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 14. A useful summary of the main critical perspectives on *We* can be found in Russell, *Zamiatin’s ‘We’*.

\(^{357}\) Lyman Tower Sargeant considers these to be distinct literary forms and presents a strong argument for preserving the differences between them, although it seems to me that the distinction is more philosophical than literary. The majority of scholars continue to use them as synonyms and so will I. See Sargent, “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited.”

Murakami’s *IQ84* (2009-10), as well as popular bestsellers (such as Suzanne Collins’s hugely successful *Hunger Games* trilogy, 2008-10 and its multiple knock-offs). Zamiatin’s *We* and the subsequent dystopian works introduced one the most iconic topoi of contemporary science fiction: the dark, futuristic city inducing confusion, paranoia, and estrangement in its inhabitants. Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* (1982) and Alex Proyas’ *Dark City* (1998) are perhaps the most easily recognized cinematic examples of this setting. Urban or otherwise, dystopias are all enclosed worlds where “men are conditioned to obedience, freedom is eliminated, and individuality crushed; where the past is systematically destroyed and men are isolated from nature; where science and technology are employed, not to enrich human life, but to maintain the state’s surveillance and control of its slave citizens.”

This brief definition by Hillegas, one of many available, succinctly captures all of the hallmarks of the genre.

It is generally agreed that the genre of dystopia emerged as a form of critique of nineteenth-century utopianism. While the question of origins is ever open for debate, the most often mentioned forerunners of the dystopian tradition are Fedor Dostoevski’s *Notes from the Underground* (*Zapiski iz podpol’ia*, 1864), Samuel Butler’s *Erewhon, or Over the Range* (1872), H.G. Wells’s *The Time Machine* (1895), E.M. Forster’s *The Machine Stops* (1909), and Zamiatin’s *We* itself as the first fully developed dystopian novel of the twentieth century. The influence of degeneracy theory and the so-called “school of suspicion” (represented by such intellectual figures as Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud) on the genre cannot be underestimated and for this reason it is perhaps not surprising to find many traces of dystopian imagination in early modernist fiction, in works such as Sologub’s *The Petty Demon*, Briusov’s “The Republic of the Southern Cross” (*Respublika iuzhnogo kresta*, 1907), and


360 Cf. Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, 99-100. Kumar suggests that the concept of anti-utopia (dystopia) from the start accompanied the utopian tradition.

361 See, for example, the extremely useful summary of both the literary and scholarly milestones of the dystopian tradition in Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, 111-182.

Żuławski’s *The Old Earth*. Although the dystopian imagination later will be adapted with great success by postmodern literature (to mention only cyberpunk fiction or more recent Russian works by such authors as Victor Pelevin, Vladimir Sorokin, and Tatiana Tolstaia), its relationship with early modernism is more elusive and problematic. The *fin-de-siècle* sensibility is to a considerable extent anti-utopian in that it emerges from the alienation from and disenchantment with modernity, yet dystopian writing as such occupies a rather marginal position in early modernist literature (see my examples above). Zamiatin’s novel is perhaps the only self-consciously modernist work of fiction that makes the full and extensive use of this nascent genre.

Because of its generic pedigree and ideological uses, dystopian narratives are generally perceived as either satires or parodies of utopian sentiments. Hence, in his classical essay “Varieties of Literary Utopias,” Northrop Frye refers to the “straight utopia,” exemplified by canonical works of Edward Bellamy, William Morris, and H.G. Wells (in *A Modern Utopia*, 1905), and to the “utopian satire or parody,” exemplified by Huxley, Orwell, and, of course, Zamiatin. These utopian satires, writes Frye, “are products of modern technological society, its growing sense that the whole world is destined for the same social fate with no place to hide, and its increasing realization that technology moves toward the control not merely of nature but also of the operations of the mind.” In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye discusses dystopian texts as exemplifying the sixth and the last phase of the Mythos of Winter (i.e. the ironic/satirical narrative archetype). Works that belong to this phase depict “human life in terms of largely unrelieved bondage” and presents the social realm as “the nightmare of social tyranny.” It is the extreme of the ironic/satirical mode, where humour and even the slightest chance for positive change are all but gone and the reader is forced to experience the “shock and horror” of

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363 For more examples in Polish literature, see also Podraza-Kwiatkowska, *Literatura młodej polski*, 253-8.

364 See, for example, Alexandra Aldridge, *The Scientific World View in Dystopia*, ix; as well as Morson, *The Boundaries of Genre*, 115-142.


366 Ibid. 327.

a hopeless world ruled by misery and madness from which there is no escape but through death. Frye’s classification of the dystopia as a form of satire is echoed in the more recent approaches to the genre, such as Erika Gottlieb’s *Dystopian Fiction East and West*. Directly referencing Frye, Gottlieb argues that *We* – like most dystopian narratives – is generically situated in the “no man’s land” between satire and tragedy, with the former mode dominating in the representation of society, the latter in the trajectory of the protagonist’s fate. Indeed, all the major representatives of the dystopian canon deal with the perceived dangers in the new social and political phenomena: capitalist consumerism for Huxley, totalitarianism for Orwell, etc. In Zamiatin’s case it would be Leninism and not surprisingly the novel was from the start read as an anti-Soviet satire on Leninism, Proletkul’t, and other political, social, and cultural developments of the war communism in Russia. This approach continues to be the most widespread reading of *We*. 

While it is hard to deny the satirical aspects of dystopian writing in general – and *We* in particular – a different set of generic characteristics explicitly links both the genre and Zamiatin’s novel with the romance paradigm: mystery, suspense, estrangement, the fantastic, and adventure. Scholars working with the dystopian tradition often mention these characteristics, but their observations hardly ever receive extended theoretical treatment. Jameson, for example, notes in *Seeds of Time* that “the dystopia is generally a narrative,” concerned with what happens to “a specific subject or character,” as opposed to what he calls the Utopian text, which is defined as a non-narrative exercise of the imagination; a blueprint rather than a “story.” Similarly, Gary Morson notes that “whereas utopias describe an escape from history, these anti-utopias describe an escape, or attempted escape to history, which is to say, to the world of contingency, conflict, and uncertainty.” Since such a world is the basis

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368 See Erika Gottlieb, *Dystopian Fiction East and West*, 13-15. For her discussion of *We* as a satirical text, see 62-4.

369 See Russell, Zamiatin’s ‘We’, 8-9, and Lewis and Weber, “Zamyatin’s *We*, the Proletarian Poets, and Bogdanov’s *Red Star*.”


371 Morson, 128.
for any dynamic plot,\textsuperscript{372} I shall rephrase this statement and say that utopias escape from narrative, whereas dystopias escape towards it, a dynamic which reminds one of the relationship between romance and realism.

Even if the claim of the essentially non-narrative status of utopian fiction can be and indeed has been questioned,\textsuperscript{373} Jameson’s remark points to an important fact, namely that the continuing cultural significance and popularity of dystopias cannot be accounted for simply by the topicality of the twentieth-century experience of totalitarianisms and the persisting fear of modernity. This popularity owes to a considerable extent the attractiveness of the form itself. One finds in dystopian narratives the dramatic struggle of the individual psyche, an acute sense of danger and impeding doom, the aura of mystery and paranoia, and, finally, an engaging, dynamic plot. M. Kenneth Brooks, another eminent scholar on the dystopia, suggests that “the prevalence of dystopian visions of the future can no doubt be attributed to the fact that such visions probably open up more interesting visual and narrative possibilities than do more utopian ones.”\textsuperscript{374} Likewise, John Glad writes that whereas “most utopias . . . are a sort of exhibition of accomplishments of the future, the anti-utopia gives more attention to considerations of plot. By definition, it describes an unsatisfactory situation, the correction of which frequently takes the form of an adventure plot.”\textsuperscript{375} Commenting on the recent popularity of dystopian fiction, marked most recently by the phenomenal success of Collins’s \textit{The Hunger Games} trilogy, Moira Young, an author of dystopian literature herself, drives the above points home by observing that:

for the most part, dystopian fiction owes more to myth and fairytale than science fiction. These are essentially heroes’ journeys – they just happen to be set in an imagined future world. The hero, reluctant or willing, is just as likely

\textsuperscript{372} See Bruzelius’ treatment of the exotic landscapes in \textit{Romancing the Novel}, 40-73.

\textsuperscript{373} Moylan, “‘Look Into the Dark’: On Dystopia and the Novum,” 62.

\textsuperscript{374} Booker, “On Dystopia,” 1.

\textsuperscript{375} Glad, \textit{Extrapolations from Dystopia}, 113.
to be female as male. Something happens – an event, or a messenger arrives bearing news – and the teenage protagonist is catapulted out of their normal existence into the unknown. They cross the threshold into a world of darkness and danger, of allies and enemies, and begin a journey towards their own destiny that will change their world.\footnote{Young, “Why is Dystopia So Appealing to Young Adults?”}

Young’s remarks are primarily aimed at the recent developments in young-adult literature rather than the mainstream dystopian “canon,” yet they are invaluable in that they pinpoint the elusive relationship between the dystopian “master plot” and the romance paradigm. Although contemporary dystopias are typically more action-driven than the ones written in the first half of the twentieth century, it is not difficult to identify these mythical and fairy tale aspects with more general – if occasionally displaced or overshadowed – elements of the genre. Thus, I can conclude that dystopian literature is a generic mix of at least three – rather than two – fictional modes: satire, tragedy, and romance. Zamiatin’s We is an excellent case in point and therefrom comes my proposal to read this work not as a modernist masterpiece or a satirical attack on War Communism, but rather as a “closet romance.”

The novel, much like the troubled self of its protagonist D-503, is characterized by a number of dichotomies. To begin with, there is the obvious discrepancy between D-503’s “authorial intention” and the final product of his artistic activities, i.e. the text of We. Simply put, the type of narrative D-503 sets to write – a propaganda piece for the One State – turns over the course of writing into something else entirely: a novel or, as he himself would suggest in the middle of his narrative, a romance (“adventure novel”). Regardless of how one reads the novel, it is most definitely a “story” rather than “Utopian text,” to evoke Jameson’s terms. D-503’s musings on the perfection of the One State and the triumph of rational planning it embodies quickly give way to a much more complex and dynamic narrative as soon as “the world of contingency, conflict, and uncertainty”\footnote{Morson, 128.} intrudes on the utopian everyday. Another dissonance, even more significant for the aims of this study, manifests itself at the level of the plot. Morson observes that “describing unexpected events, [D-503’s] ‘poem’ or treatise becomes a narrative; and as a

\footnote{Young, “Why is Dystopia So Appealing to Young Adults?”}

\footnote{Morson, 128.}
narrative about the emergence and development of personality, it becomes a novel.”\textsuperscript{378}

However, the two movements described by Morson do not fully coincide. D-503’s internal and external realities each produce a story of their own: one narrates the birth of selfhood and artistic sensibility, the other a political thriller revolving around an attempt to overthrow the authoritarian social system of One State. Although closely intertwined (and focused on D-503), these two narrative levels have to be approached differently. However, even though the two narratives – “external/narrative” and “internal/meta-narrative” – incorporate the semantics and structure of romance in distinct ways, they are still both part of the “romance text.”

In what follows, I begin by considering the “external” or plot of \textit{We}, because the generic markers of romance are much more easily discernible. Specifically I look at the generic links between the novel and two of the most characteristic modern representatives of the romance paradigm, namely the Gothic romance and the spy thriller (in particular, “the Hunted Man story”).

\textbf{The Gothic Plot}

Eric Naiman and, more recently, Muireann Maguire,\textsuperscript{379} have both placed Zamiatin’s text within the larger phenomenon of the Soviet Gothic, i.e. the resurfacing of Gothic themes in early Soviet ideology and literature as a form of mediation between the pre- and post-revolutionary history. Both scholars focus their attention on the role of the Ancient House in the novel as “a focus of Gothic mystery.”\textsuperscript{380} Officially functioning as a museum – as material evidence of the irrationality of the mentality, tastes, and lifestyles of old – decrepit apartment building presents an unacknowledged challenge to the aesthetic and social ideology of the One State. Eventually it will also reveal itself to be an operational base for fomenting revolution within the city walls. In her more detailed analysis, Maguire points to three semantic clusters associated with the Ancient House. First of all, the old building is a point of interaction between the sterile, ultra-

\textsuperscript{378} Ibid., 134.

\textsuperscript{379} See Eric Naiman, \textit{Sex in Public}, 297, and Maguire, \textit{Stalin’s Ghosts}.

\textsuperscript{380} Maguire, 73.
modern civilization of the One State and the wilderness stretching beyond the Green Wall. It performs this function both symbolically (as a representation of the “barbarous,” “half-wild” civilization of the “ancients”) and literally as the hidden gateway into the world outside of the city. Second, in the seemingly transparent social world of the One State, the Ancient House is the locus of secrets and ambiguities, which easily affects the imagination of those that come into contact with it. Finally, it is also a place associated with the disturbing forces of excess, such as desire, sexuality, and death. In my reading of Zamiatin’s novel I would like to expand on each of these three aspects, because, I argue, they are not constrained topographically to the Ancient House and its premises, but apply to the entire text of the novel. As D-503 himself admits, the “origin of the coordinates for this whole story is, of course, the Ancient House. The X, Y, Z axes that emerge from this point have been the coordinates of my world in recent days.” Hence, The Ancient House emanates (or – alternately – embodies) an aura of mystery, paranoia, and moral transgression that affects the entire fictional world of the novel, including the course of events.

Let us begin with the theme of the natural threat. The positioning of the Ancient House as a “liminal site” between “organic” nature and “artificial” civilization, as well as between the future and the past, reflects the typical binaries of the late-nineteenth-century urban Gothic literature. As I mentioned in the introductory chapter, the gradual erasure of sites of magic, discovery, and adventure from the world map in the late nineteenth century made the “otherness” of these exotic spaces begin to manifest themselves at home, transforming the modern metropolis into a new and unexpected source of threats and anxieties. This phenomenon is more apparent in imperial cultures, such as Great Britain. There one finds its most colorful examples, like Robert Louis Stevenson’s The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886), Bram Stoker’s Dracula (1897), and H.G. Wells’ Time Machine. Some of the threats are imagined as external (taking the form of Draculas, Martians, and other demonic “invaders”), but many simply represent the city as a ticking time bomb ready to explode with

381 Zamiatin, We, 82. In this study I rely on the recently published scholarly edition of My edited by Liubimova and Curtis. Natasha Rendall’s translation (Modern Library edition of We) is the source of my English quotations. References to the Russian original, whenever necessary, will appear in square brackets next to page numbers in the translation.
barely suppressed destructive instincts and what may best be described as the dark side of human nature. In these popular British fin-de-siècle romances the traditional wilderness seems surprisingly tame in comparison to the passions and instincts residing within human beings; passions and instincts only temporarily held at bay by social norms and values. Hence, as Linda Dryden observes, “in [the] modern Gothic, physical transformation from human to some bestial other is a central trope.” Fuelled by the discourse of degeneration, the idea that the animal side of the human psyche can take over and pose a threat to the foundations of civilization – the nation, the society, the human subject – was equally present in early modernism and Gothic popular romance.

Judged by the standards of the sterile, transparent, and artificially regulated society of the One State, the natural world acquires demonic characteristics. It is dark, opaque, polluting, irrational, and associated with desolation and barrenness rather than life-creation (seen from the air it is referred to as the “green desert”). In the early parts of the text D-503 would like to see it as yet another remnant of the past, a backdrop to the technological and social wonder that is the One State. In his words, “mankind ceased to be savage when we built the Green Wall, when we isolated our perfect, machined world, by means of the Wall, from the irrational, chaotic world of trees, birds, animals…”382 However, the suppressed and rejected natural world very quickly becomes a considerable threat to D-503’s very existence and to the existence of his society, because the physical and psychic barriers designed to suppress nature are only seemingly impenetrable. This “natural threat” manifests itself for the first time during the initial encounter with I-330, who not only awakens the protagonist’s sexual desire, but also draws his attention to the animalistic features of his body. “I cannot stand it when people look at my hands,” he writes, “all hairy and shaggy – such stupid atavistic appendages. I extended my arms and with as steady a voice as I could, I said: ‘Monkey hands.’” D-503’s anxiety is the fin-de-siecle fear of de-evolution, here further reinforced by the medicalization of the human nature in the discourse of the One State (where freedom is an “unorganized savage state,”383 inspiration “a

382 Ibid., 83.

383 Ibid., 13.
strange form of epilepsy,”384 and “soul” a form of disease). During their initial exchange, both D-503 and I-330 are marked by animalistic features: D-503 has “monkey hands” and I-330 “sharp, white teeth” and horns in the corners of her eyebrows. In fact, each new character will similarly be marked by a particular physical element (body shape, brows, lips, etc.), which, although not all derived from the natural world, conveys the fragmentariness and grotesqueness of the human form. On the one hand it is a device characteristic of Zamiatin’s mature prose, rooted in his aesthetic theories presented in “On Literature…” and other essays on synthetism.385 On the other, however, it is a staple trope of the late nineteenth-century Gothic, for which the fragmentation of the body, monstrosity, and animalistic features are primary means of dismantling the enlightened view of the human being as a rational machine. Achieving the latter would of course equal death to a citizen of the One State (as can be derived from D-503’s musings on the wastefulness of unregulated life in “ancient times”), which, of course, adds yet another layer to the Gothic overtones of the novel. I will yet return to the theme of fragmentation and its role.

Soon after the first meeting with the enigmatic temptress, the imagined unity of D-503’s rational self and bodily self-image starts to deteriorate. His reflections on the transformation that has started to take place within him illustrate the extent to which the novel relies on Gothic imagery:

There were clouds and cobwebs and a cross, some kind of four-pawed X, inside me. Maybe it was my own paws, since they were in front of me on the table all this time – my shaggy paws. I don’t like talking about them and I don’t like them: they are evidence of the savage epoch. Could there actually be, within me...386

This short fragment explicitly links the theme of nature (“shaggy paws”) with other characteristic tropes of Gothic fiction: the recurring motifs of the “clouds” related to the fog that

384 Ibid., 17.

385 Russell, Zamiatin’s ‘We’, 50.

386 Zamiatin, We, 22.
at one point temporarily engulfs the entire One State (which stands for dreaminess, opaqueness, and confusion); “cobwebs” that bring to mind the decrepit gothic structures like the ancient house, but also symbolize the conspiracy network, entanglement, and narrative complications; mystery (“X” being the mathematical symbol for the unknown); and finally, the beginnings of D-503’s identity crisis, which in these early stages will take the form of a violent and promiscuous double (“could there actually be, within me…”). D-503’s hairy hands point to his connection with the natural world outside of the Wall, a connection I-330 will make explicit much later by suggesting that he might be a product of the illicit intercourse between his mother and one of the “wild” men living in the jungles outside of the city. In this motif, the typically Gothic obsession with de-evolution, animalism, and primal instincts coalesce with the issue of blood and heredity: the two factors that in late-nineteenth-century European imagination were most commonly held to be responsible for the phenomenon of degeneration.

The novel can be (and has been read) as a dramatization of the conflict between biological and cultural determinisms. Hence, blood, with its numerous symbolic meanings ranging across both these categories, is an important, although not particularly prominent motif. Blood, the “hot, red blood” of the Green World dwellers flowing in D-503’s veins belongs to the human realm hidden from the gaze of the One State, just like the imagination or the soul. Thus, implicitly and explicitly it is a part of nature. It is no coincidence that for all of D-503’s talk about the sharp-as-steel logic of the One State or the guillotine as the universal tool resolving all the problems of mankind, state violence – at least in its officially sanctioned forms, such us the glass Bell Jar or the Machine of the Benefactor – is always a bloodless spectacle. Blood is the manifestation of the essentially organic nature of human beings. Therefore, despite the thoroughly rational and medicalizing discourse within which D-503 originally operates, it evokes Gothic horror associated with excessive forces of nature. The Builder of the Integral sees blood in the bright-red lips of I-330, which underlines her vampiric characterization and marks her as an almost supernatural threat. Its appearance on his cut hand coincides with his

387 Ibid., 144.

388 Ibid.
metaphorical death and the discovery of the revolutionary cell in the Ancient House. This small occurrence can be read as a bloody signature on the devil’s contract, as it further seals D-503’s bond with Mephi and their female representative. Before entering the premises of the building he actually imagines himself connected to everything his mind associates with the Ancient House through blood ties: “And in a blink: I, the sun, the old woman, the wormwood, the yellow eyes – we were all one, we were firmly connected by veins of some sort, and through these veins runs one communal, tempestuous, majestic blood.”

The motif of blood is also used to reinforce the fantastic status of this episode, in the strictly Todorovian sense of the term, namely as the protagonist’s and readers’ prolonged hesitation between the fantastic and realistic interpretation of an event. Reflecting on the uncanny nature of what happened to him in the Ancient House, D-503 mentions that his bloody wound is the one piece of physical evidence confirming the reality of this episode. However, he also mentions that the Second Builder witnessed an accident, which can account for the torn skin on his fingers. This puts a question mark on the reality of all he experienced in the Ancient House. Starting with the following entry, D-503 will find it increasingly difficult to distinguish between dreams and reality.

Finally, blood is spilled during the chaos that erupts after the abortive voting ceremony on Election Day. It appears in a scene that could easily find a place on the cover of any penny dreadful: “R-13 suddenly leapt onto a bench: sputtering, red, and mad. In his arms was a pale I-330, with her unif ripped from shoulder to breast – blood on white. She clung tightly to his neck, and with gigantic bounds from bench to bench – repulsive and deft, like a gorilla – he

389 Interestingly, the existing association between blood, vampirism, and I-330 could also suggest a different interpretation of the narrator’s “death” and “resurrection” in this passage, which is usually used to present D-503 as a Christ-like figure. In Gothic reading of this episode, what happens with D-503 is analogous to what happens with Dracula victims: his resurrection does not signify a spiritual rebirth so much as a transformation into the undead: one affected by the vampire curse. After all, he is gradually being transformed into an agent of the revolutionaries and an obedient follower of I-330: their erotic union is stressed in this chapter by the joining of their bodies on their way up.

390 Zamiatin, We, 84.
carried her to the top.” Later on, when I-330 triumphantly proclaims a new era of “the new, the improbable, the unpredictable,” D-503 takes notice of her naked breast and “the finest, little snake of blood.”

Like the hot magma underneath the cool, rocky surface from one of D-503’s metaphors, blood is the carrier and the symbol of the revolution in the name of natural laws. It is also an important link in the often-overlooked relationship between sexuality and violence in the novel, more closely united through yet another gothic figuration: the vampire.

The readers are introduced to I-330 via D-503’s vampirical and demonic description of her physique in the second entry, which is consistent with Zamiatin’s synthetic technique. However, on the day when she takes D-503 for the first time to the Ancient House her Gothic features become more prominent. As the narrator admits: “That I-330 annoys me, repels me – almost spooks me [pochti pugaet].” Non-coincidentally, in the same record, readers are introduced to the Ancient House and its enigmatic guardian, the old, wrinkled woman with sucked-in lips who seems to be the human equivalent of the very structure she is in charge of. Her looks, her role with respect to the Ancient House, and her jovial welcoming remark (“Well, now, my dears, you’ve come to look at this little house of mine?”) vaguely evoke the old witch from the Hansel and Gretel fairy tale. Although the association is never further developed in the novel, at that very moment it serves to reinforce the essentially Gothic nature of D-503’s experience, suggesting a hidden threat, deception, entrapment, and subservience.

The image of I-330 as a vampire figure is much more prominent during their fourth encounter, when D-503 is finally allowed to satisfy his sexual desires (which, non-surprisingly, takes place in the Ancient House). The setting itself is a significant backdrop: on that day the One State is covered with a thick fog, which obscures vision and produces an eerie, dream-like scenery, much reminiscent of the foggy London of Charles Dickens’ Bleak House (1852-3) or, more appropriately, Robert Louis Stevenson’s Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886). The

391 Ibid., 126.

392 Ibid., 128.

393 Ibid., 24 [155].

394 Ibid.
moment of I-330’s appearance is likewise evocative: “On the corner in the white fog: blood – a slit made with a sharp knife – it was her lips.” It is yet another condensation of gothic motifs, from the already-mentioned, all-engulfing white fog to the minimalist description of I-330’s “bloody” lips suggesting predatory sexuality and violence (“blood,” “slit,” “sharp knife”). D-503 presents their erotic union in similarly violent terms reminiscent of a “vampire kiss” from classic horror tales: “The heavy, creaking, opaque door closed and just then, with greater pain, my heart opened wide and then wider still: all the way open. Her lips: mine. I drank and I drank, then broke away and silently looked into the eyes thrown open to me… and again…” Not long before, D-503 described I-330’s lips as “still dripping sweet blood.” Thus, the metaphorical language of the scene (filled with such phrases as “pouring oneself into,” “drinking,” “sucking”) indicates that the coitus between the two characters is doubly transgressive: they sin against the morality of the One State but also against some broader and vague human norm (taboo) with its implied cannibalism. I-330’s remark pointing to D-503’s symbolic defloration (“And now, my fallen angel…”) is ironic, but nevertheless underlines the darker aspects of their intercourse and its potentially destructive consequences not only for D’s safety but also his identity. The vampirical nature of this relationship (seduction, possession, cannibalism) is foreshadowed by D-503’s lustful attack on I-330 in her apartment, when he assumes the role of the passive spectator as his other self, his bestial double, “grabbed her with his shaggy paws, tore up the fine silk and sunk his teeth into her.” It is also reflected in D’s fantasies about being consumed by the vegetative life beyond the Wall when he is longing for I-330 around the Ancient House: “From the boundless green ocean behind the Wall, a wild tidal surge of roots, flowers, twigs, leaves was rolling toward me, standing on its hind legs, and had it flowered over me I would have been transformed from a person – from the finest and most

395 Zamiatin, *We*, 63. It is also worth mentioning that in Bram Stoker’s seminal vampire novel *Dracula* (1897), conjuring fog is one of Dracula’s supernatural skills, deployed on several occasions in the course of the story. I-330’s emergence from the fog is vaguely reminiscent of Dracula’s night visit to Mina, who recalls it as “the cloudy column” through which transpired “a divided fire” that seemed to her “like two red eyes.” Stoker, *Dracula*, 298.

396 Zamiatin, *We*, 65.

397 Ibid., 51.
precise of mechanisms – into…” 398 The end result of this transformation is left unspoken by the narrator, but by that point the readers are given enough material to be able to complete this gothic narrative puzzle. Like its human agent, so is the natural world represented as a vampiric element. 399

One may ask at this point: why the vampire? Vampires traditionally symbolize excess (particularly excessive desire) and bestiality. I-330’s sexuality, which itself takes predatory forms but also arouses the beast in men (at least in D-503), fits into this paradigm quite well. It is in fact one of the points of continuity between Zamiatin’s aesthetics and early modernist ideology. According to Bram Dijkstra, the latter made the vampire into a representation of “the woman as the personification of everything negative that linked sex, ownership, and money.” 400 The author of Idols of Perversity also throws the distracting and destructive world of instincts associated with degeneration into this misogynist cultural matrix. Indeed, the combination: nature – feminine – irrationality – sexuality – vampire, should not be surprising to anyone familiar with early modernist ideology and its various artistic and non-artistic guises. As Richard Kaye notes, “many of the period’s most arresting ideas and images about sexuality are evident in the late-Victorian fascination with an atavistically aggressive female.” 401 From Rider Haggard’s She (1885) to Oscar Wilde’s Salome (1891) the demonic woman emerged as the icon of the dark forces of nature driving the processes of emasculation and degeneration of European males. This also illustrates that, perhaps unsurprisingly, the fin-de-siècle romance is no different

398 Ibid., 82-3.

399 I explore the theme of vampirism as related to the gothic mode, and so I focus in my discussion on I-330 and the natural world. However, a convincing argument could be made about the vampirical nature of the One State, with its numerous transgressions against human nature and its connection to the forces of entropy (in I-330’s discourse). Such an argument, however, would require a very different critical apparatus from the one I have at my disposal at the moment and so I will leave it out from my discussion of the novel.

400 Dijkstra, 351.

in its treatment of female sexuality.\textsuperscript{402} I will once again recall Frye’s definition of the romance quest as “the search of the libido of desiring self for a fulfillment that will deliver it from the anxieties of reality but will still contain that reality.”\textsuperscript{403} However, as Elaine Showalter observes, for the quest romance at the turn of the century (represented for example by H.G. Wells, who, as I pointed out, is an important influence on Zamiatin) this search often takes the form of an allegorized journey into the physical and psychological male self, whereas the primary “anxiety of reality” from which the libido seeks deliverance is represented by various figurations of emasculating, domesticating, or otherwise dominant female sexuality.\textsuperscript{404} In that sense, \textit{We} doubles its gothic message. D-503 is cast in the role of a “rational” male explorer uncovering the secret of the “irrational” demonic female and her network of influence that threatens the social order. But he is also dominated and emasculated by the said demonic female (with the Ancient House serving as a metaphorical prison) and reduced – as far as the capacity for action and ability to control his situation are concerned – to the role of a “heroine” of the female gothic text, who, within “an imprisoning structure, “is compelled to seek out the center of a mystery, while vague and usually sexual threats to her person from some powerful male figure hover on the periphery of her consciousness.”\textsuperscript{405} What it demonstrates is that Zamiatin’s text is more nuanced and ambiguous in its treatment of women and the question of femininity, at least as far

\textsuperscript{402} For another example of the shared models of representing feminine evil in both aesthetic modes, i.e. modernism and popular romance, see my discussion of Żuławski’s description of the Earth in \textit{On the Silver Globe} in Chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{403} Frye, \textit{Anatomy}, 193.


\textsuperscript{405} Cahane, “Gothic Mirrors and Feminine Identity,” 45. The sexual threat for D-503 is two-fold. First, it takes the form of the symbolic castration he suffers from the hands of I-330 who quite literally assumes control over his sexuality. Second, there is the figure of the Benefactor who sheds his disguise of a good, wise man to reveal himself as the evil paternal figure as the plot develops, at least in the eyes of the narrator-protagonist (since the readers are hardly fooled by D-503’s discourse). The Benefactor is a rival deity to D-503 (who on numerous occasions compares himself to a god and the creator of the reality he lives in) and, like I-330, a castrating figure, since the Operation is a castrating act \textit{par excellance}. See Petrochenkov, “Castration Anxiety and the Other in Zamyatin’s \textit{We}.” The problem of D-503’s femininity and masculinity is a complex one, however, and as such is beyond the scope of my present inquiry.
as their gothicized image is concerned, than its early modernist influences. At the same time, there is also no denying that *We* still heavily relies on the clichéd representations of feminine evil both in its structure and imagery.

I should also add, returning to the theme of blood, that apart from excess and sexuality vampires also symbolize moral and biological corruption, which – as per the discourse of degeneration – often go hand in hand. In that respect, *Dracula* is truly a paradigmatic text of the genre. Therefore, although sex with I-330 leaves D-503 feeling satisfied and fulfilled, the readers are well aware that he has been tainted with the very same dark energies that animate I-330 and other representatives of the Mephi. D-503 openly admits on several occasions to being “diseased,” although he bases his understanding of his condition on the diagnosis presented to him by the Medical Bureau (i.e. having a “soul” or “imagination”) rather than on the increased proclivity to answer the call of nature coming from within. Yet, as I indicated earlier, blood, the inner beast, dreams, soul, and imagination all belong to the same realm, linked both to the notions of opacity (they are hidden) and irrationality. They are all symptoms of the same “disease” spread by the vampirism of I-330 (and possibly other members of the Mephi). The doctors of the Bureau openly speak of an “epidemic” and one finds the same language – satiated with tropes of degeneration – used in the official pronouncements in the *State Gazette* (imagination as “sickness,” “the worm that gnaws black wrinkles onto one’s forehead,” and “fever”). The vampire theme and the epidemic discourse are intertwined throughout the

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406 See, for example, an interesting discussion of the critical debates about the status of I-330 in the novel – complete with a useful bibliography of the subject – in Suvin, *Defined by a Hollow*, ff346-7.

407 Although not the same, the novel consciously uses both terms synonymously. It is worth noting, however, that the initial “diagnosis” mentions “soul.” Zamiatin’s obvious irony of using this thoroughly metaphysical concept in the medical context – and the reference to the creation of Adam – does not obscure its other, metaphysical significance. The soul, especially as something invasive, external to D-503’s self-image, evokes the idea of haunting and being haunted (since ghosts, specters, phantoms, etc. are traditionally interpreted as either damned or trapped *souls*). Although the text does not develop this interpretation further, there is a clear connection between the acquisition of the soul and multiple “hauntings” that affect the narrator-protagonist, from disturbing dreams to “shadows” following him around and his long-forgotten private obsessions (e.g. the square-root of -1).

408 Zamiatin, *We*, 81.

409 Ibid., 157-8.
novel and together point to yet another gothic motif, namely the fear of an enemy within: a foreign, alien entity that threatens to overcome the self. D-503’s biologically contaminated blood and I-330’s vampirism engender his “shabby” double: the inner beast that occasionally takes control over his thoughts and actions.

As Frye observes, most romance narratives are driven by the quest, the apex of which is usually the struggle between the protagonist and the antagonist or monster (or both). As I mentioned earlier, gothic romance tends to present this struggle as the conflict between a character representing reason and morality (often a young heroine) and a character (or creature) that, being “beyond law, reason or social restraint gives free reign to cruel, selfish desires and ambitions and violent moods and intentions.” Zamiatin’s readers may quickly learn to see such a powerful antagonist in the Benefactor, whose “reign of reason” rests on political and social organization akin to “a primitive state religion that practices the ritual of human sacrifice.” In being the High Priest of the dystopian society he certainly approximates the evil paternal figures of feudal lords and villains that populate Gothic romances. However, the dictator of the One State does not assume this role in the first half of the novel, at least not for the narrator-protagonist who initially sees the threat to himself elsewhere. As I discussed earlier, in D-503’s perception the true danger lies not in the repressive state institutions – a position he will be unwilling to change even towards the end of his adventure – but in the forces that plot to undermine it; forces associated with nature, irrationality, and “atavism.” The greatest terror, however, comes from the realization that one’s own mind and body are hosts to the threatening Other: the demonized forces of nature, perceived as monstrous and inhuman, are deeply embedded in the human mind itself.

Staring into the eyes of the vampirical I-330, the narrator-protagonist for the first time learns about this disturbing truth:

Before me were two terrifying dark windows, and within them a very unknown, strange life. I could only see fire . . . and there were figures, who looked just

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410 Botting, Gothic, 4.

411 Gottlieb, 20-1.
like… It was only natural, of course: I had seen a reflection of myself. But, in fact, it was so unnatural and unlike me (obviously, the depressing effects of circumstances) that I distinctly felt frightened, felt caught, a captive in this wild cage, I felt myself gripped by the wild whirlwind of ancient life.412

What the hapless Builder of the Integral experiences in this encounter is an instance of the uncanny, one of the primary aesthetic categories of the gothic mode. Introduced by Freud in his seminal essay “The Uncanny” (Das Unheimliche, 1919), the uncanny designates the psychic effect produced when what is most familiar and even intimate (an object, self-image, etc.) acquires disturbing characteristics that render it both familiar and unfamiliar (i.e. strange). Using the work of E.T.A. Hoffman as a springboard for his reflections on this idea, Freud suggests that most of the themes of uncanniness – such as repetition, fear of the dead, and, most importantly for my present discussion, the double – are all forms of ego-disturbances that have their roots in early development stages.

Since Freud’s study, the aesthetic of the uncanny came to signify one of the primary gothic themes, namely the subversion of the security and stability of an everyday reality couched in the rational conception of the self.413 “The uncanny is a crisis of the proper,” writes Nicholas Royle, the author of the most thorough critical examination of this category: “[it] is a crisis of the natural; touching upon everything that one might have thought as ‘part of nature’: one’s own nature, human nature, the nature of reality and the world. . . . It can consist in a sense of homeliness uprooted, the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of hearth and home.”414

There is hardly a more intimate sphere of domestic life than one’s sense of selfhood and consequently there is hardly a more disturbing encounter than seeing oneself as another, of having one’s identity stolen by some utterly alien and implicitly, if not explicitly, monstrous entity.

412 Zamiatín, We, 26.

413 See, for example, Botting, 128-146, and Day, In the Circles of Fear and Desire, 75-8.

414 Royle, The Uncanny, 1.
The presence of the bestial double is in a sense the apex of the process of the fragmentation and externalization of the self, which for D-503 begins once he starts to isolate individual parts and aspects of his body (the nose, “shabby hands”) and mind (instincts, thoughts, etc.). They cease to function as part of the perfect mind-body machine (either as a singular cipher or as the larger social machine of the One State) and become a part of the organic chaos that is the natural world. Freud suggests that “dismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist . . . feet which dance by themselves . . . – all these have something peculiarly uncanny about them, especially when, as in the last instance, they prove capable of independent activity in addition.”

Freud generally ascribes this affect to the fear of castration, which certainly corresponds to D-503’s situation, although in the case of Zamiatin’s protagonist the stakes are much higher, as they involve the fear of losing one’s identity altogether.

By pointing out to the Builder the primitive aspects of his physique and then continuing to unravel the paradoxes in his language, philosophy, and, most importantly, desires, the female cipher effectively destroys the gestalt of her victim’s psyche. And since the One State places a taboo on the inner life of its citizens, the conflicted “private” identity immediately translates into a conflicted social identity: “I know that the criminal that I am has no place among these wide-open, honest faces.”

D-503 begins to see himself as a doppelgänger with respect to his fellow ciphers (as life in the One State leads to uniformity and hence to total self-identity). He is a “bodily fragment” on the loose:

Imagine this: a human finger, cut off from the whole, from the hand – a separate human finger, stooping, bent down, skipping, running along a glass sidewalk. This finger is me. And the strangest, most unnatural thing of all is that the finger doesn’t want to be on the hand, with the others, at all. It wants to be alone . . . or be with that woman again, pouring my whole self into her…”

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415 Freud, “The Uncanny,” 244.

416 Zamiatin, We, 123.

417 Ibid.
Apart from the rather obvious phallic (and castration) symbolism and a reference to another Russian classic, this passage illustrates the uncanny sensation of being both a part of a larger collective body and a separate entity with its own agenda.

As I indicated, D-503’s relationship with his body closely reflects his relationship with the One State, with its transparency/opacity dualism. He first perceives his double in a mirror reflection of himself and henceforth the motif of the mirror as witness of and the instrument of the dissolution of the Builder’s identity will be a recurring motif. The mirror image is both perfectly transparent, as it embodies the idea of self-identity, of seeing oneself as a unified totality (of features, but also, by extension, of thoughts, experiences, affects, etc.) and also perfectly opaque, as it hides whatever lies beyond its surface by reflecting the observer’s gaze. The second glimpse of his double takes place in front of the actual mirror; he is in front of the mirror when he first gains the full awareness of his other self: “for the first time in my life . . . I see myself clearly, definitely, consciously. I see myself, with astonishment, like some kind of ‘him.’ I am him.” At this point there is still a sense of identity between “I” and “him,” but D-503’s other self (I will refer to him, after the novel’s mathematical fashion, as “D’-503”) will soon acquire a separate and autonomous existence, both uncanny and threatening (“I was terrified of being left with myself – with this new stranger, I mean, who, by some strange coincidence, has my digits”).

As was the case with blood and other “internal-yet-external” elements of D-503’s constitution, D’-503 is hidden just under his host’s bodily surface. Facing the object of his aroused desire (I-330), the Builder can penetrate this external shell and – in a scene worthy of any bodily-invasion horror scenario – take a detailed look at his monstrous double: “I saw into myself, inside. There were two of me. One me was the former, D-503, cipher D-503, but the other one… Before, he only just managed to stick his shaggy paws out of my shell, but now he has crawled out whole, the shell is cracked open, now shattered into pieces and… and what next?” Next, D’-503 shows off his bestial/vampirical nature and assaults I-330, but as with Stevenson’s Jekyll, the truly terrifying aspect of this transformation is not the aggressiveness or the bestial nature of the double, but rather is proximity – and interchangeability – with the “proper” or

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418 Ibid., 38.
“real” self. “To be haunted by another, by a spectre, is uncanny enough,” notes Dryden, “but to be haunted by yourself strikes at the foundations of identity.” Narratives of the divided self – gothic and other romances in particular – undermine confidence in the unity of the rational self – the steam engine of the culture of modernity – and force protagonists and readers alike to ponder on the ever-problematic question, “Who am I?”

The deployment of the gothic mode in We thus shows itself to be also a modernist technique through and through, as it strikes at the very heart of what Stephen Kern calls “the personal narrative” of the realist fiction (based on the notion of a unified and responsible subject). “Modernists created characters as a mass of sensations whose ego boundaries are blurred with identities distributed between themselves and others or outside objects,” writes Kern. The recurring figurations of fear and anxiety over losing one’s identity in Zamiatin’s text (the beast within, the vampire, the double) surely conform to such a modernist view of subjectivity.

Romance does, however, enhance the blurring and fragmentation characteristic of the modernist style, by providing them with an element that is quite unique, namely enjoyment. This harks back to Zamiatin’s approach to modern literature, which in his view has to engage and seduce the reader just as modern life engages and seduces people with its ever-changing flow of images, sensations, and experiences. The Gothic romance does not merely allegorize fears and anxieties of early modernism, which found ways to turn them into art, life-philosophies, and even metaphysical doctrines, but hardly a source of pleasure. Rather, it “reveals to the reader the capacity of fantasy to convert and channel the threatening emotions and impulses. The Gothic has a therapeutic value for it converts tension, anxiety, and fear – tensions about desire – into pleasure.” Along with all the negative affects, D-503 experiences elevation and the thrill of discovery as the boundaries of his identity are being redefined. His fiery speech on the rock beyond the Green Wall is sure proof of that. The “liberation of experience,” which is the basis of James’ definition of romance – is as much the effect of the darkest gothic or dystopian fantasy as it is of the lightest of adventure novels.

419 Dryden, 41.

420 Day, 63.
The Adventure of the Revolution

My discussion of the gothic theme underlying the early and middle parts of *We* began with Maguire’s characterization of the Ancient House as the locus of all things gothic, from the ghosts of the past to mysteriousness, and it concluded, somewhat appropriately, with the ultimate mystery that engenders the gothic mode, namely the question of the self. I say “appropriately” because the fundamental logic of romance is to synchronize the trajectories of individual subjectivity with the ebbs and flows of the external world to the point where one is an allegory of the other (I already dedicated some space to the nature of this relationship in the section on the protagonists in *The Lunar Trilogy*). Thus, the secret of one’s identity is more often than not linked to the secrecy of the world in which the protagonist gets to act; a sense of vulnerability and fragility of one’s sanity often translates into the surrealism of adventure; a dark family secret leads to an even darker mystery that threatens to strike the very foundations of society; the question of one’s (more often than not aristocratic) origins often implies the crime from the past and a conspiracy that needs to be exposed and uncovered before the social order can be restored. Frye offers a host of examples of such correspondences in romance narratives, particularly those that deal with what he calls “narratives of descent.” Not surprisingly, in his study of gothic romance William Patrick Day suggests that the only truly successful type of hero in any gothic narrative must be a detective.421 Secrecy and obscurity are as essential to gothic (and dystopian) fiction as transparency is to utopian one. Indeed, “one of the defining features of modern dystopia is its secrecy,” suggests Patrick Parrinder: “There is something about these societies that cannot be admitted, something the inhabitants are not supposed to know.”422 This is yet another element that allows us to approach a dystopian narrative like *We* from the gothic perspective.

The topos of a mystery that shapes both the identity and reality of the protagonist is an important junction point for Zamiatin’s text also because it introduces yet another strand of

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421 See Day, 50-59.

romance into the novel’s generic fold, namely the spy thriller. I use the term rather loosely, as a briefer version of what Martin Green refers to as “the Hunted Man adventure story.” The parallels between Green’s characterization of this variation of the adventure novel and the revolutionary plot in *We* and are so striking that it is worth quoting his definition in full:

The protagonist of this adventure type is, superficially, an anti-romantic figure, who sees himself as ordinary. . . . He wants, allegedly, to be an ordinary person, but he has a greater than ordinary capacity for action – with his fists, his guns, his cunning, his connections to other men of force, keepers or breakers of the law – and a greater than ordinary sense of responsibility. Sometimes he is, or has been, a detective or attorney; sometimes he is strictly a private citizen. In any case, he is effectively alone when he stumbles across a clue, an inexplicable incident, which leads him to find other clues, and ultimately to unravel a puzzle, a plot a conspiracy. And at the heart of the conspiracy he finds a social monster, an organization, sometimes totally illegal, sometimes apparently respectable, that threatens the life of his city or his nation.

Following these clues, piecing together the scattered truth, he attracts the attention of the organization and himself becomes a hated man. From this point on, everyone he meets, even old friends, are likely to turn out to be agents of the conspiracy, corrupt and treacherous, either out of weakness or out of malevolence. Houses, streets, office blocks, familiar to him and of a type familiar to the reader, become sinister. And this transforms the familiar adventure properties, like creakings in the dark, bludgeonings from behind, drugged or poisoned food, windowless basements, and instruments of torture; they become charged with meaning, with ultimately political significance.423

D-503 is the paradigmatic average man of the Hunted Man story: although being ordinary is a matter of principle for him (as a citizen of the One State), he does possess a “capacity for action” that makes him exceptional. He is a *creative individual*, both as the Builder of the

423 Green, *Seven Types of Adventure Tale*, 188-9.
Integral and the author of his diary/novel. The first of these two roles attracts I-330 and the
Mephis to him (not to mention the scrutiny of the Guardians and even the Benefactor himself).
Also, D-503, much like Green’s Hunted Man, carries within him a hidden nucleus of heroism in
the form of his atavistic other self, which does take the form of a disturbing double, but a
double that could – at the right moment – transform him into a proper action hero (“I felt
thousands of eyes on me, wide with horror, but this just gave more reckless, joyful strength to
the wild, hairy-handed person that had torn itself from me, and he ran all the faster”\footnote{Zamiatin, }\textit{We,} 111.). D-
503’s sense of responsibility is also greater than the average citizen’s, on at least three counts: as
a mathematician he embodies and represents the rationality of the One State; as the Builder he
is responsible for constructing the very instrument of the said rationality’s expansion; and
finally, as the writer, he becomes the ambassador of the One State, charged with the
responsibility to convey “the beauty and majesty”\footnote{Ibid., 4.} of his civilization.

The encounter with I-330 initiates the gothic plot discussed above, but also – through the theme
of the mystery – sets the stage for the adventure plot. Other than I-330’s mysterious and
upsetting (to D-503) behavior, the “clue” that initiates the adventure for the narrator-protagonist
is a piece of news he reads in the newspaper about “new evidence ... found of an organization,
which continues to elude us ... whose aim is the liberation of the State from its beneficial
yoke.”\footnote{Ibid., 33.} The “conspiracy” element is of course Mephi, the said secret organization operating
within the One State, whose aim is to bring down the social structure of the One State and
annihilate the walls that separate it from the natural world existing outside. Over the course of
the narrative, D-503 will come into contact with other clues and proof of the existing threat (the
secret epidemic of “the soul,” the sightings of wildlings in the proximity of the Ancient House,
unaccounted personnel at the construction site of the Integral, etc.), as well as of I-330’s
involvement with the organization.

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnote{Zamiatin, }\textit{We,} 111.
\footnote{Ibid., 4.}
\footnote{Ibid., 33.}
\end{footnotesize}
Both the gothic and spy-adventure modes are responsible for the atmosphere of growing estrangement, entrapment, and peril that satiates the first half of the novel. All the forms of gothic menace I discussed in the previous section are reinforced by D-503’s awareness that he is being followed by the agents of the One State (specifically S-4711, to whom he refers – once again in a gothic fashion – as the Shadow):

Suppose someone told you: your shadow sees you, it sees you all the time. Do you understand? Suddenly you experience a strange sensation: the hands at your sides feel like someone else’s and you are aware of how absurdly you’re swinging your arms and how out of step you are. Then suddenly I can barely resist turning around to look – but looking back at anything is forbidden; my neck is locked. And I run and run, faster and faster, and at my spine, I feel it: the shadow is behind me, going faster and faster, and there is nowhere to flee, nowhere…427

The initial pleasure of feeling “someone’s vigilant eye lovingly protecting you from the slightest mistake”428 turns into a growing anxiety and paranoia once D-503 begins to sense his shadow wherever he goes. D-503’s involvement with the Mephi gradually dissolves the gothic atmosphere (although the text continues to play with gothic topoi, such as vampirism, bestiality, and secrecy) and the novel turns to the adventure plot in order to move the narrative forward. Once I-330 forcefully makes D-503 an outcast (by not reporting her to the authorities within 48 hours), he finds himself facing not one but two “social monsters.” Staying true to the narrative pattern, he begins to discover traces of dissidence among his friends (R-13, but also, to an extent, O-90) and the most trusted institutions (the Medical Bureau and, towards the end, the Office of the Guardians). But in the context of dystopian fiction, the “normal” society itself – which in most Hunted Man narratives is the very target of the secret threat – proves to be no less secretive and no less menacing than its adversaries. Therefore, parallel to D-503’s sense of duty and belonging gone awry (“A long time ago I had ceased understanding who ‘they’ were

427 Ibid., 77.

428 Ibid., 59.
and who ‘we’ were.”

What follows from Green’s characterization is that, similarly to the gothic narratives, spy thrillers based on the Hunted Man adventure type use their tropes to estrange everyday reality by rendering it uncanny and threatening. Once the stable social framework starts to disintegrate, the everyday turns into its opposite: the more “normal” it seems, the more terrifying it is for the paranoid mind (which is essentially the type of subjectivity the Hunted Man story espouses), because its monstrous dimensions remain either entirely hidden or just merely glimpsed. Thus transformed, the everyday turns into what Margaret Bruzelius calls an “elsewhere”: an exotic landscape that constitutes “the space of error and wandering,” which “does not give the hero a chance to display his acumen or industry, but is rather a place in which he demonstrates his ignorance and inexperience at the risk of his life.”

For D-503, once he turns into an agent of the revolution fomented by the Mephis, the system of rules, regulations, and duties that constituted his everyday turns into a dangerous labyrinth where he has to constantly maneuver in order to preserve whatever is left of his identity (and life): to fake illness, to evade the guardians, etc. The estrangement effected by his isolation from the rest of his society means that he is involved in a complex game of deception and evasions, made only worse by his proclivity for self-deception. His position is no different with respect to the other side of the conflict. Andrew Barratt convincingly argues in his article that both D-503 and I-330 are involved (although to a large extent unknowingly) in the process of mutual deception. The underground network of labyrinthine passages under the Ancient House provides an apt metaphor for D-503’s predicament.

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429 Ibid., 142.

430 Bruzelius, Romancing the Novel, 41.

431 See Barratt, “Revolution as Collusion.”
However, moving away from the gothic to the spy-adventure mode opens up a possibility for D-503 to be more actively involved in shaping his identity and fate, in other words, to become a hero of his narrative in the true sense. So far, he has been entangled in a cobweb – one of the repeated metaphors for the novel’s narrative complications – of gothic trappings. Yet once reality begins to lose its contours and the social roles become but masks, the narrator-protagonist can now gown his own mask that befits the “fantastical adventure novel [fantasticheskii avantiurnyi roman],” he finds himself writing.

There is a particularly significant narrative turning point where one can observe this “unmasking” taking place. Barratt suggests that D-503’s fiery speech to the Mephi on the other side of the Green Wall is but a deception, since by that moment in the narrative, “the engineer has learned that the surest way to charm his partner is to play the part of the rebel and this is his most dazzling performance.” On the other hand, one cannot but see in D-503’s elevation the “experience liberated” which accompanies any adventure worthy of the name: “This was exceptionally strange, intoxicating: I felt myself above everyone, I was myself, a separate thing, a world; I stopped being a component, as I had been, and I became the number one.” If there is a moment in Zamiatin’s text that can be considered on par with the utopian epiphanies from Żuławski’s The Lunar Trilogy, this is it. D-503 can now – temporarily at least – fashion himself a true hero, a champion of the people and a Nietzschean Overman at the helm of history, even if his brief transformation can be attributed to no more than his sexual desire for I-330 or to the workings of his “shaggy” double. The question regarding to what extent his words have inspired Mephis and, as a result, helped to initiate the full-scale revolution that took to the streets of the One State has to remain open, but even as a possibility it may resonate with those unwilling to accept the novel’s drastic conclusion. What readers witness here is the point in the narrative when the pleasure of playing the game – of standing beyond (literally) the institutions of the everyday – surpasses the horror of transgression and fear of retribution; a moment which,

432 Zamiatin, We, 91 [205-6].

433 Barratt, 349-50.

434 Zamiatin, We, 138.
I would argue, is as much rewarding for the reader as it is for the narrator-protagonist, even if it is short-lived.

Disassembling the novel’s dystopian identity as I did so above shows the extent to which it relies on the semantics and narrative patterns of romance. It also opens up new interpretive possibilities. Having thus considered the two modes of romance that to a large extent shape the plot of *We*, one cannot but notice the centrality of the self and creativity. Therefore, in the next stage of my argument I turn to what I referred to earlier as the “internal” plot of the novel. This layer of the narrative is of crucial significance for my argument, because it clearly shows the stakes involved in Zamiatin’s take on the modernist experiment with romance.

**The Internalization of Romance**

I begin this part of my argument by considering the theme of writing and authorship in *We*. My objective is to flush out some of the parallels existing between this theme and the gothic-adventure-romance element of the text.

For all its affinity with the gothic and spy-adventure strands of popular romance, and even its generic label as a “dystopian novel,” *We* is at heart a *Künstlerroman*: a story about artistic maturation. Critics have observed that as the novel progresses, D-503 becomes a better writer: starting as a mere copyist of state announcements, through the process of acquiring new experiences and new metaphors and similes through which to express these experiences, he produces a remarkable modern novel.435 Zamiatin’s novel is also clearly metafictional in the sense that it narrates the process of its own creation. The effect is achieved primarily through the use of *skaz*, with D-503’s repeated addresses to his imagined readership and his manifest

435 M. A. Khatiamova suggests, for example, that “D-503’s ‘authorial duty’ [avtorskii dolg] keeps evolving; it goes through several stages corresponding to different artistic attitudes: from agitation . . . through indifference towards the reader in instances of ‘the avant-garde madness,’ to, finally, the desire to be understood by the Other.” Khatiamova, *Tvorchestvo E.I. Zamiatina*, 130 (my translation). Khatiamova sees the metanarrative plot of *We* as a movement from solipsism and instrumentalism towards a genuine form of dialogue with the reader. I will return to this conception later on in this section. Her entire chapter on *We* (“Tekst v tekste: «My» kak metaroman”) is an excellent bibliographical resource on the themes of metatextuality and authorship in the novel.
preoccupation with the role and shape of his “poem,” which draws attention to the process of storytelling even more so than the story itself. The best example here is perhaps the narrator-protagonist’s bewilderment that what comes from under his pen is not “an orderly and strict mechanical epic poem in honor of the One State,” but an adventure romance.  

Other textual devices further reinforce the meta-fictional status of the text. Three of them are particularly worth mentioning. One is the recurring motif of “cobwebs,” “threads,” and “lines,” a motif that always signifies narrative complications. It also suggests that even without fully realizing it, D-503 thinks about his encounters, relationships, and experiences like a fabulist does, namely in terms of recurring and interlocking patterns (of events and “themes”). Another one is the use of the manuscript of the novel itself as a plot device. Over the course of the narrative, the manuscript of *We* in its physical form becomes the most incriminating evidence of its author’s transgressions against the One State. As Skorospelova succinctly puts it in her study of the novel, the manuscript is cried upon, read, and reported to the authorities. It “becomes the reason for the failure of the revolutionaries (the adventurous plot), the basis for the conviction of I-330 that D-503 had betrayed her (the love plot), and the metaphorical representation of D-503’s inner transformation (the image of the fallen and scattered manuscript).” Finally, D-503’s narration – in a very modernist fashion – oftentimes evokes the theme of blurring the boundaries between life and art. One finds this, for example, in D-503’s complaints about the narrative-turn his life has taken (“Ah, if only this was really only some sort of novel and not this new life of mine”). This motif returns later in the novel when I-330 likens the life of a person to a novel. \[439\]

Writing is also what puts the plot in motion. As Julia Vaingurt notes, critics “are usually divided between ascribing D’s newfound self-awareness either to his illicit love affair with I-330 or to his writings. Writing indeed seems paramount: D-503 becomes self-attuned as soon as he picks

\[436\] Ibid., 91.

\[437\] Skorospelova, *Zamiatin i ego roman ‘My’*, 76.

\[438\] Zamiatin, *We*, 91.

\[439\] Ibid., 141.
up a pen, while sexual desire for I-330 comes later, possibly even as a result of D’s writing.” Indeed, Zamiatin’s scholars were quick to point out the irony of opening a novel entitled “We” with a sentence that starts with “I”; this paradox suggests a close connection between the creative act of writing and the awakening of D-503’s individualism. Sure enough, D-503’s identity as the writer takes precedence over and is a precondition for any other adventurous role he assumes in the course of his story (such as the captive, the lover, the detective, the revolutionary, or the fugitive). But there is more to that: when D-503’s ego is hurt and he invokes his authority (“Didn’t I populate these pages with all of you? Not long ago they were just four-cornered, white deserts. Without me, would you have ever been seen by all those that I am leading through the narrow footpaths of these written lines?”), he unwillingly brings up an important problem, namely the extent to which he himself is responsible for transforming his life into a hybrid of romance genres (rather than it being transformed by external circumstances).

The key aspect of this problem is the relationship between creative capacity and sexual potency, as noted by Margaret Petrochenkov: a relationship signaled early on in the novel via D-503’s burning cheeks and the Integral’s phallic symbolism coupled with birthing metaphors (all present in the very first record). Petrochenkov augments her argument by referencing Zamiatin’s letter to his friend Іuriі Annenkov in which he explicitly links the sphere of sexuality to artistic production. Since Freud’s famous theorization of art as a form of sublimation and auto-therapy for the artist, there emerged a vast body of scholarship exploring this connection. Needless to say, much of it is far beyond the scope of this study. What matters for me and my argument is that it allows us to see the gothic and adventure plots of the novel not only as

440 Vaingurt, 93.

441 See, for example, Borenstein, “The Plural Self,” 667, and Russell, Zamiatin’s ‘We’, 44.

442 Zamiatin, We, 105.

443 This further validates my gothic reading of the novel, since sexuality engenders both desire and fear (of castration) and the dialectic of the two is the driving force of gothic narratives according to such critics as Day. See Petrochenkov, “Castration Anxiety and the Other,” 251.

444 Petrochenkov, 253.
dramatizations of the psychological and sexual conflicts, but also, on a slightly more sublimated level, as expressions of the inner evolution of an artistic mind.

To illustrate and also to return to my earlier point about D-503’s complicity in turning his life into a romance, I want to look once again at I-330’s vampirical aspects. Her first appearance—the first flash of sharp, white teeth—in itself anticipates symbolic castration, since she interrupts D-503 as he imagines himself as the god-creator of his reality. In other words, even before she comes to represent a sexual threat, she stands as a threat (but also a challenge) to D-503’s potency as the writer, at least the type of writer who remains in control of his creation. I will once again invoke Dijkstra, who interprets the female vampire as a manifestation of the danger feminine sexuality carries for masculine creativity. “The womb of woman was the insatiable soil into whose bottomless crevasses man must pour the essence of his intellect in payment for her lewd enticements.” Going back to D-503 as the romancer of his experience, Petrochenkov observes that in the final record, written already after D-503 has undergone the Operation, I-330’s distinctive gothic features (“sharp, white teeth”) are presented as mere facts and possess none of the poetic intensity of the first records. Petrochenko attributes that to the narrator-protagonist’s inability “to project meaning upon the significance of her white and beautiful sharp teeth” once he is castrated. In other words, the gothic figurations sprouting in the first half of the novel are as much the products of D-503’s imagination as of the circumstances. Hence, his role as the writer not only pushes him towards adventure, but also—unconsciously—stimulates him to present his experiences in the style of a romance novel (gothic or otherwise). As he admits while thinking about the semblance his life has taken to “some kind of fantastic adventure novel”: “But it may be that this is for the best. It is highly

445 Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, 334-335. A detailed discussion of the inverse relationship between sexuality and artistic creativity in the early modernist ideology can also be found in Olga Matich’s *The Erotic Utopia*.

446 Petrochenkov, 248.

447 On occasion, thanks to the written diary formula, D-503’s manipulation of the structure of the plot becomes evident. One example is his footnote commenting on S-4711’s mysterious smile which states: “I should say that I discovered the exact grounds of this smile after many days, after being filled to the brim with events both strange and unexpected.” The only purpose of this remark, which appears to have been added to the record retrospectively and therefore disrupts the progressive nature of the records, is to create narrative tension and intrigue the readers to read on. Zamiatin, 132.
likely that you, my unknown readers, are mere children in comparison with us. . . . And, like children, you will only swallow this bitter thing I am giving you if it is thoroughly coated with a thick adventuresome syrup.\textsuperscript{448}

This suggests that whatever blows his ego suffers in his role as the protagonist, he compensates himself with the sense of empowerment he derives from his role as the writer/narrator. His story of entrapment and involvement in the revolutionary plot becomes the story of his evolution as a writer, presented as a struggle against opposing forces (such as ideology, sexual temptation, maternity – represented by O-90, and censorship). Hence, the reason for the correspondence between D-503’s status as the writer and the novel’s adventurous plot, I argue, is the fact that the very nature and philosophy of writing as represented in Zamiatin’s text are prefigured as a form of romance. The novel can thus be read as an “internal” romance as much as an “external” one.

The theoretical groundwork for my argument is laid out in Harold Bloom’s influential essay “The Internalization of Quest Romance” in which the critic presents his theory of the development of English Romanticism: “The poet takes the patterns of quest-romance and transposes them into his own imaginative life, so that the entire rhythm of the quest is heard again in the movement of the poet himself from poem to poem.”\textsuperscript{449} The basic premise of Bloom’s theory is that the Romantics reconfigure traditional figurations of romance narratives as metaphors of the poet’s internal struggle on the path towards a mature and expanded self-consciousness; self-consciousness unburdened by nature, ideology, or any form of solipsism. Bloom views the traditional quest-romances as reflecting the movement from nature to redeemed nature, which corresponds to Frye’s “seasonal” system and the idea of romance as allegory of a “humanized” nature taking over a wild and destructive nature. In an internalized romance, however, “the movement is from nature to the imagination’s freedom”: “The quest is to widen consciousness as well as intensify it, but the quest is shadowed by a spirit that tends to

\textsuperscript{448} Ibid., 91.

\textsuperscript{449} Bloom, “The Internalization of Quest Romance,” 15.
narrow consciousness to an acute preoccupation with self.” In the end, the quest defined in these terms is an infinite one, as it aims at its own perpetration, since, as Bloom concludes, “the man prophesied by the Romantics is a central man who is always in the process of becoming his own begetter, and though his major poems perhaps have been written, he as yet has not fleshed out his prophecy, nor proved the final form of his love.” In other words, the ultimate, fulfilling poem remains unwritten.

D-503 is not, strictly speaking, a poet, let alone an English Romantic (although he is certainly endowed with poetic imagination, duly noted by his “professional” friend, R-13). However, I see clear analogies between the internalization of romance as described by Bloom and the quest for a new Russian literature initiated by Zamiatin and embodied in the (mis)adventures of his protagonist. Zamiatin’s goal as outlined in the first section of this chapter is to – ultimately – synchronize modern consciousness with modern life; to bring art and, by extension, human perception and imagination, up to speed with the rapidly changing world. The limited capacity of the human mind next to the infinity of external, ever-shifting sensations and experiences accelerated by modern technologies and lifestyles creates a bottleneck problem that can be resolved only by the art of what he called “synthetism”: an art capable of capturing the transient nature of reality within “a single salient feature – the one feature you will glimpse from a speeding car.” Furthermore, such literature has to be heretical and revolutionary, which, in Zamiatin’s language, means that it has to perpetually questioning its own symbolic achievements. D-503’s diary unwillingly realizes this dual project by turning his adventures into an artistic quest for self-consciousness. This quest would not be directed inward (“symbolism”) or outward (“realism”), but rather towards an ideal of spiritual integrity (with oneself and with the world at large) that shares some features with both Bloom’s “selfless self” and James’ “experience liberated.” There are a few instances in the novel when D-503 comes close to realizing this ideal, in the moments where his desire translates directly into a verbal prowess (“a muddled flood of words”) and an almost nirvana-like experience:

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\(^{450}\) Ibid., 16.

\(^{451}\) Ibid., 35.
I am a crystal, and I am dissolving in her, in I-330. I feel it clearly, totally: a melting, the melting of the polished facets that confine me in space. I am disappearing, dissolving in her knees, in her. . . . Because she is not she, but the universe. And for the second I am one with this chair by the bed, suffused with joy. The grandly smiling old woman at the doors of the Ancient House, the wild jungle beyond the Green Wall, some kind of silver wreckage dozing like the old woman against a black background, and the slamming of a door in the far distance – all this is within me and together with me, listening to the beating of my pulse and flying through this blissful second…”

One sees here a different form of ideal than the one emerging from the “external” romance, where the protagonist liberates himself from and steps beyond and above the confines of his reality. In the internal romance, at least the one outlined in *We*, the object of the quest is presented as a momentary experience of unity with one’s creation, a transformation of reality through an artistic imagination that is not reductive – by subjecting it to the dictates of the ego or by imitating and fragmenting – but rather expansive, for it expands consciousness and allows it to fully participate in the present moment. Khatiamova interprets this expansion as opening oneself up to the reader: a desire to establish a genuine dialogue with the Other.453

Reflecting on his “dissolution into the universe,” D-503 speculates that the limit of this experience is death and this is in fact what awaits him in the end. He is deprived of his selfhood and depleted of the means to create, which, as Zamiatin’s famed letter to Stalin indicates, equals the death of the artist. Yet, in achieving his symbolic death as the protagonist, D-503 is fully “dissolved” in his creation; his spiritual annihilation marks the completion of his life’s work, just as his and I-330’s sacrifice marks the continuation of the struggle between heresy and dogma, only in changed terms. His defeat as the protagonist thus becomes the triumph of the artist-narrator. As Frye suggests, “in the criticism of romance we are led very quickly from what the individual work says to what the entire convention it belongs to is saying through the

452 Zamiatin, *We*, 115.

453 See, in particular, Khatiamova, 132-3.
work” and in this instance, the message seems to be that D-503’s triumph or defeat is less important than the persistence and continuing vitality of the imaginary structures that took possession over his conscience.

**Conclusion**

In the first two chapters I have analyzed Sologub’s *The Created Legend* and Żuławski’s *The Lunar Trilogy* as instances of a modernist reworking of the romance paradigm. Both of these works engage with modernity and its challenges by combining various strands of romance, from imperial/adventurous to scientific and utopian ones. Their works thus turn into complex parables or “narrative theories of modernity,” to borrow Nicholas Daly’s term. Both of these works, as well as (and especially) Zamiatin’s *We*, were considerably influenced by H.G. Wells’ early scientific romances. Wells’ work offered early modernists an attractive literary model of how to successfully mesh their private mythologies and philosophies – steeped in the hopes and anxieties of the turn of the century – with the type of writing that would appeal to the larger literary market. One of the central problems of this study – and of any study devoted to modern incarnations of romance – is the inseparability of the semantics of romance from their social circulation. The question here is how to harmonize the rich semantic pedigree of this form (its “archetypal” status) with its manifestations in mass literature and hence the economy of the literary field. I cannot say this study resolves this ambiguity, but what I think transpires from my analyses, and what I ultimately believe, is that this ambiguity is what made the experiment with romance so attractive in the first place. After all, it allows the author to smuggle a certain surplus of enjoyment into what might have been thoroughly morose narrative and it provides a plausible excuse for making the work marketable to wider audiences. However, despite their similarities in that respect, Sologub and Żuławski use romance to advance different ideological agendas. For the author of *The Legend* it is the glorification of the poetic imagination and its power over crude reality, but also, less conspicuously, a justification of Sologub’s own success.

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455 Daly, *Modernism, Romance, and the ‘fin de siècle’*, 5.
as a modernist author in the literary field of early twentieth-century Russia. Żuławski’s work on
the other hand uses romance as means of illustrating his philosophy of historical development
which stresses the importance of mythical imagination and the role of exceptional individuals in
shaping the course of human civilization.

The experiments undertaken by both these authors in the field of the novel find continuation in
the work of Evgenii Zamiatin, particularly his novel *We*. Placing these three novels (and novel-
trilogies) next to one another in a chronological order shows what I would consider a trajectory
of development of the modernist experiment with romance, namely a gradual revelation of the
figure of the artist as the embodiment of the modern man’s quest for regaining control over the
forces of modernity. From the builders of new civilizations in *The Lunar Trilogy*, to the poet-
builder of a utopian community in *The Created Legend*, and to the engineer-turned-novelist, the
institution of authorship and its challenges come to occupy the center stage in the “modernist
romance.” I believe this pattern is not coincidental and offers a fresh perspective not only on the
treatment of popular fiction in Polish and Russian modernist literature, but also on modernism’s
self-representation.

One can make better sense of this gradual process of making the hero and the author into one,
when one places Bloom’s idea of the internalization of romance side by side with the other two
historical accounts of the mode, namely Frye’s theory of displacement and McClure’s thoughts
on the receding romantic frontier beginning in the late nineteenth century. As the latter notes, at
the turn of the century the sites of romance began disappearing in both geographical and
symbolic senses as colonial order and international trade engulfed the entire globe. There is a
reflection of this process in the three works, all of which describe some form of withdrawal
from romantic spaces where everything seems possible (such as humanity’s turning away from
the moon or Trirodo’s plight from Russia). Even the romantic spaces themselves seem to fall
short of the expectations they manage to arouse in the protagonists and readers alike (the moon
in Żuławski, the exotic United Islands in Sologub, and the Green World in Zamiatin). At the
same time – and here I channel Frye – romance is gradually displaced (in real as well as
fictional life) and pushed aside as the everyday becomes the prevailing mode of existence.\footnote{456 I was inspired to include the question of the everyday (or byt in Russian) in my discussion by Michael Sayeau’s intriguing treatment of this subject in his recent work. See Sayeau, Against the Event: The Everyday and Evolution of Modernist Narrative (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013).} Simply put, as moderns we are prisoners of byt even as we become fascinated by its increasing complexity. All these transformations are responsible for the post-Romantic internalization of romance that begins with early modernism. Exotic landscapes become mental landscapes, solar heroes become estranged creators, and adventure plots become quests for the ideal self-image. In the process the artist uses whatever scraps of “magical narratives” may come his way and – like Sologub’s narrator in The Legend – builds an enchanting legend out of them; a legend that is oftentimes both a fantasy of empowerment and an allegory of artistic exploration.

If one can conceive of at least a transient, symbolic victory over the historical antagonist – modernity – it would be the attainment of utopia, an escape from history. Thus, in each of the three works one finds creative individuals – Żuławski’s explorers and scientists, Sologub’s Trirodov, and Zamiatin’s D-503 – pursuing some vision of the historical “happily ever after.” This distant, perhaps even imaginary, goal can take the form of utopian epiphanies experienced by Żuławski’s protagonists, but can also be found in Sologub (e.g. Trirodov’s transportation to Oile, the project of settling on the moon) and Zamiatin (the Jamesian “experience liberated”). Unlike the concrete utopian projects – the Selentite civilization, Trirodov’s school, the reformed United Islands, or the futuristic One State – these ephemeral utopias are the true motors of change and the only worthy objects of the artistic quest because they suggest the existence of a transcendental rather than social ideal, the possibility and the hope that “the secular scripture” (romance as the universal treasure trove of literature) and “the revealed scripture” (the divine plan or some other form of transcendental teleology) may in the end prove to be the same thing.

Modernism and romance, myth and the market, narcissistic fantasy and the pursuit of the transcendental: there are no clear ways out of these contradictions, but perhaps finding exits is not the point. After all, it lies in the very nature of experiments that success, however defined, is
not always the true measure of progress. Rather, creative potential comes from, as one of
Zamiatin’s characters nicely puts it, simply “banging things together.”\textsuperscript{457}

\textsuperscript{457} Zamiatin, \textit{We}, 154.
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