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Roman L. Antropov's The Genius of Russian Detection, I. D. Putilin: The Case of Gothicism

Abstract

Serial The Genius of Russian Detection, I. D. Putilin, written by Russian author Roman Lukich Antropov (Roman Dobryĭ) at the beginning of the twentieth century, undoubtedly falls into the category of detective fiction; however, the titles of its individual instalments, such as The Secrets of Okhten Cemetery, The Bloodsucking Vampires of Petersburg, The Spring of Volga Sectarians etc., suggest a strong influence of Gothic literature. The article aims to expose the presence of Gothic literary devices in Antropov's stories, including the introduction of supernatural monsters, namely ghosts and vampires, dismal atmosphere, sublime locations, structures, and objects, causing temporal distancing from the present into the past, suspenseful episodes invoking terror, and horror-infusing visualities. Moreover, the article proposes that the intention behind these elements is not merely to complicate the mystery and intensify the reader's experience but also to convey cultural meaning related to the social anxieties of the time.

Keywords: Roman Lukich Antropov, Roman Dobryĭ, Ivan Dmitrievich Putilin, detective fiction, gothic fiction

1. Introduction

The stories published under the serial title The Genius of Russian Detection, I. D. Putilin (Russ. Geniĭ russkogo syska I. D. Putilin), written by Russian author Roman Lukich Antropov (pseudonym Roman Dobryĭ) and published between 1908 and 1909, display clear characteristics of detective fiction. The protagonist is none other than Ivan Dmitrievich Putilin, a historical figure who served as

the first head of the St. Petersburg Criminal Investigation Division between 1866 and 1889. As implied by Putilin's close friend, Doctor Z, who functions as the fictive author and narrator, the stories were envisioned as a sort of answer to the widespread craze for detective fiction starring Western investigators. Putilin certainly resembles Arthur Conan Doyle's world-famous detective in his methods and skills. Like Holmes, he is perceptive of details and has a strong sense of deduction. He is also an incredible master of disguise and is accompanied by a loyal friend, who frequently marvels at his success. Indeed, the plot of each story centers on a mysterious crime that Putilin always solves with a "complete triumph" (Dobryĭ, Geniĭ russkogo 77, 118). However, even though the conventions of the detective genre are undoubtedly evident in the stories, many of the serial's forty-eight individual titles[1] hint at the presence of Gothic themes. For instance, The Burning Cross (Ognennyĭ krest) suggests demonic supernatural presence behind the omen, The Secrets of Okhten Cemetery (Taĭny Okhtenskogo Kladbishcha) underlines the Gothic setting, The Bloodsucking Vampires of Petersburg (Peterbugskie vampiry-krovopiĭtsy) accentuates the theme of the monster, The Spring of Volga Sectarians (Ḱliuch povolzhskih sektantov) points to dark acts of worship, The Ritual Murder of a Girl (Ritual'noe ubiĭstvo devochki) invokes imagery related to physical suffering etc. In light of the above, this article aims to identify and analyze Gothic literary devices in Antropov's stories and to propose an opinion regarding their intention. For this purpose, and because there is very little written on Antropov's detective serial in general, some story plots will be summarized.

The philological research that mentions Antropov's detective fiction but does not analyze it in detail includes Boris Dralyuk's book Western Crime Fiction Goes East: The Russian Pinkerton Craze 1907–1934, which examines the popularity of early-twentieth-century Russian detective serials. Dralyuk notes that Russian appropriations of American and British detective stories featuring Nat Pinkerton, Nick Carter, Sherlock Holmes, etc., traditionally maligned as Pinkertonovshchina (xiii), were extremely popular at the time but that Russian fictive detectives could not reach the popularity of their Western counterparts (18). The same opinion is held by Jeffrey Brooks, who, in his book When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917, nonetheless claims that The Genius of Russian Detection, I. D. Putilin was more successful than any other serial of purely Russian invention (146). A more detailed analysis of Antropov's two stories, The

Kiss of the Bronze Virgin and White and Turtle Doves, was conducted by Claire Whitehead in her book The Poetics of Early Russian Crime Fiction 1860-1917: Deciphering Stories of Detection, as part of a research of a wider scope. She examines the level of authority the detective and the narrator have in Antropov's stories and how that authority, or lack thereof, generates uncertainty in the mind of the reader (80). Furthermore, she analyzes their temporal structure and identifies the use of analepsis (130), ellipsis (161), and scene-type treatment of events (155). Whitehead considers Antropov to be one of the authors of early Russian detective fiction "deserving of a higher profile than they currently enjoy" (10) and mentions that his stories have a lot in common with Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes serial (182-83). It is also with this last presumption that Nelly Shulman, in her article "Sectarianism as a Plot Motif in Russian and Foreign Detective Prose of the XIX Century," approaches the comparison of Doyle's A Study in Scarlet and Antropov's White and Turtle Doves. As announced by the title, she underlines that both literary works employ sectarianism as a plot motif, which has a dual purpose – to provide an exotic component to the plot in order to attract and retain the reader's attention and to "discredit processes and phenomena recognized as dangerous, negative and destructive from a public and state point of view"[2] (Shulman 284).

This article views sectarianism in Antropov's stories through the prism of demonization and, therefore, principally as a Gothic motif and as merely one instance of his general tendency to utilize Gothic literary devices in a manner similar to great Western authors of detective fiction, ranging from Edgar Allan Poe and Willkie Collins to Arthur Conan Doyle. Scholars have already highlighted the connection between the two genres. Michelle Miranda, for example, points out that Poe and Doyle were instrumental in linking Gothic and detective fiction "often through the combination of horror and reasoning," and both "took cues from their own periods in history to isolate existing social anxieties to cause both fear and relief within the same tale of mystery" (2). Some other scholars, such as Francisco Javier Sánchez-Verdejo Pérez, even suggest that "detective fiction is an evolution of Gothic literature" (4).

What most researchers agree upon, however, is that one of the most famous Doyle's Sherlock Holmes adventures, The Hound of the Baskervilles (1902), clearly shows the use of Gothic elements in plot development and setting (Miranda 9, Sánchez-Verdejo Pérez 9, Clausson 63,

Anish 96). It was the first Holmes novel after he had allegedly fallen to his death in the 1893 story The Final Problem. Translated into Russian in 1902, the same year of its original publication, The Hound of the Baskervilles undoubtedly had a major impact on the Russian reading public. Indeed, many researchers maintain that the adventures of Sherlock Holmes were tremendously popular at the beginning of the twentieth century, so popular in fact that Russian authors began to write their own imitations (Mironova 81; Piliev; Stepanova 172; Zhirkova 36-37). Especially fruitful was the year 1908, when the two authors, P. Nikitin and P. Orlovẽts, started publishing imitations (Zhirkova 38). Nikitin, who wrote twenty-one Holmes stories in total, especially favored by the reading public, utilized elements of Gothic literature already in his first story, The Mysterious House, as recognized by Zhirkova (39). Bearing in mind that Antropov's Putilin adventures were also written under the influence of Doyle's Sherlock Holmes adventures and published in the same year, it seems logical to assume that Gothic elements also came from the same source.

Antropov employs Gothic literary devices not in one but in numerous stories, as will be shown. These include the introduction of supernatural omens and monsters, such as ghosts and vampires, sublime locations and objects causing temporal distancing, an ominous atmosphere of gloom and dismay, suspenseful moments invoking terror, and horrific visualities infusing both the narrator and the reader with fear. Such prevalence of Gothic elements suggests a tendency perhaps intensified by broader social imperatives. As Botting notes, there is cultural significance behind the Gothic figures of ghosts, vampires, and monsters; they can function as "embodiments and evocations of cultural anxieties" (1). If Gothic literary works can be seen as the byproducts of anxiety and fear in the face of significant social, economic, political, and cultural changes (Botting 15), then Antropov's tendency of employing Gothic elements could be viewed as a means of coping with the uncertainties of the period between two revolutions of 1905 and 1917. The year of 1905 had already seen the eruption of violence in the so-called Bloody Sunday massacre during which hundreds of unarmed protesters were killed by the Tsar's troops and which led to strikes and riots breaking throughout the country (Hosking 408-09; Sablinsky 229-72). The notion that the emergence of Gothic themes in literature can be read as the result of revolutionary shocks has already been highlighted by scholars such as Ronald Paulson (536), Fred Botting (40), and Katherine Bowers (Writing Fear 139). Paulson, for example, claims that "the popularity of Gothic

fiction in the 1790s and well into the nineteenth century was due in part to the widespread anxieties and fears in Europe aroused by the turmoil in France" (536). In a similar fashion, Jeffrey Brooks notes that "the Gothic aesthetic first appeared in Russian public discourse and literature in the immediate pre-revolutionary decades. It was deployed in satirical journals of the 1905 Revolutionary period to portray the tsarist regime as an inhuman and demonic force" and "served to vent anger at the tsarist regime and rally the public to the revolutionary cause" ("Gothic Tradition" 11-12). Other scholars, such as Neil Cornwell (1999), Vadim Shneyder (2021), and Katherine Bowers (2022), however, recognize Gothic devices in Russian literature already in the nineteenth century. Bowers, for instance, finds that Gothic poetics in Russian literature "enabled new forms of critical discourse, articulated moral paradigms, and reflected deep-seated cultural anxieties," including the threat of revolutionary terrorism, the decline of the family, urban poverty, and the woman question (Writing Fear 13-14). This article takes into account the findings of these studies while also relying on the works of scholars such as Fred Botting in order to properly identify Gothic themes and tropes.

2. The Supernatural Monster

Many of Antropov's stories begin in the same manner – by setting up a classic Gothic atmosphere and introducing a supernatural occurrence, which adds to the complexity of the mystery and immediately captures the reader's interest. In The Burning Cross, for example, Putilin is summoned to one of the richest monasteries in St. Petersburg by archimandrite Valentin to investigate ghost sightings and a terrifying burning omen prophesying the monastery's fall through gold: "666 Ashche chrez zlato pogibel'" (Dobryĭ, Ognennyĭ krest 6). The "burning vision" (Russ. ognenoe videnie) suggests that the "precious objects, gifts from kings and nobles (…) pearls, and precious stones" (Dobryĭ, Ognennyĭ krest 10), which the monastery had been accumulating for its entire existence, attracted an evil force that now threatens to consume the world of spiritual values. Botting claims that gothic fiction frequently adopts a cautionary strategy, "warning of dangers of social and moral transgression by presenting them in their darkest and most threatening form," which "threatens not only the loss of sanity, honour, property or social standing but the very order which supports and is regulated by the coherence of those terms" (5). That is to say, the omen can

be interpreted both as a warning and a critique addressed to religious institutions regarding materialistic inclinations, especially since the ghost attempting to steal the riches, as Putilin reveals, is Father Valentin's personal cell attendant, novice Serafim. The writing on the wall motif is additionally meaningful if its biblical-apocalypse origins are taken into consideration. Namely, in the Book of Daniel, the writing on the wall during Belshazzar's arrogant feast announces his doom since he had blasphemed against God![3]

Furthermore, the monastery's ancient heritage suggests its construction dates back to the foundation of St. Petersburg (1703), while its underground tunnels invoke associations with the earliest monasteries of Kyivan Rus, such as Kyiv Pechersk Lavra, which grew out of a cave. In other words, the setting stimulates temporal separation from the present and submergence into the past. Botting claims that the major locus of plots in early Gothic fiction was the castle and other similar edifices of medieval architecture, such as abbeys, churches, and graveyards, which "in their generally ruinous states, harked back to a feudal past associated with barbarity, and fear" (3). On the other hand, he claims that early Gothic literary works also sustained "a nostalgic relish for a lost era," a world seen from the writers' perspective as an ordered one. Such fiction then also preserved older traditions (4). To put it differently, Gothic literary works carry an ambivalent note in their ties with the past. This can also be said of Antropov's story, which defends the perfectly ordered hierarchical world of the Orthodox monastery but also displays the anxieties related to materialism and corruption.

The Mystery of the Sukharev Tower opens with the description of the Sukharev Tower in Moscow, a structure so loved by its people they refer to it as the "old grey lady Sukharevka" (Dobryĭ, Geniĭ russkogo 81). Rising high above the bustling market in the square it is illustrated as watching over its people and "jealously guarding her kingdom," while at night "under the stream of deathly pale moonlight it seems like a huge, tall, white monument" (Dobryĭ, Geniĭ russkogo 81, 86). As the narrator informs us, there is a popular belief in Moscow that the tower wields a mysterious power and that for as long as it stands intact, nothing bad can happen to the city. Put simply, the structure is described both as magnificent and obscure, as invoking awe and fearfulness and can thus be said to fall under the category of sublime objects characteristic of early Gothic fiction. Edmund Burke claims that the objects usually evoking sublime are in some way obscure (76), great in

dimension (104), and represent some modification of power (85), which overwhelms the individual subject with emotions such as admiration, reverence, respect and in its highest degree – astonishment (74), all of which in fact have terror at its core (75). The source of the sublime can be seen in the grandeur of nature but can also be identified in Gothic architecture, which "raises ideas of grandeur in our minds, by its size, its height, its awful obscurity, its strength, its antiquity, and its durability" (Blair 59). Sukharev Tower cannot be called a Gothic structure in the fullest sense of the term since it was built in 1695 when Russia was still predominantly under the Byzantine architectural influence, while, at the same time, Gothic architecture was spreading from France throughout Europe. However, its magnificence and obscurity produce a similar effect on the reader.

Following the mention of the popular belief surrounding the tower, a "strange and incomprehensible" occurrence takes place: Muscovites report having sighted a terrible specter on its roof, gazing at the city bellow as if heralding misfortune (Dobryĭ, Geniĭ russkogo 83). This supernatural presence can thus be viewed as a threat to the future of Russian society. In addition, the fear for their future suddenly transforms into the fear of the past when the onlookers realize the specter resembles Tsar Peter the Great. Even though primarily celebrated for his great achievements, Peter I is also associated with violence and traumatic experiences since the progress he ushered meant the traumatic suffering of society at the hands of the state (Platt 50; Hosking 81, 86). Moreover, bearing in mind that Antropov wrote the story in the period between revolutions against the repressive monarchy, and that Romanov dynasty to which Peter I belonged was already abhorred by generations of democrats (Service 1), his specter haunting Moscow could be interpreted as a metaphor for the threat the monarchical rule of the tsars poses to Russia's future progress, and the result of growing anxiety during changing political conditions. Indeed, Botting maintains that "in Gothic images of violence and excessive passion, in villainous threats to proper domestic structures, there is a significant overlap in literary and political metaphors of fear and anxiety" (40). In Antropov's story, the metaphor becomes implicitly subversive when Putilin discovers that "Peter the Great" is merely an escaped mental patient, Nikolaĭ Petrovich Ĺankovskiĭ, who suffers from grandiose and persecutory delusions. To rephrase, he entirely believes in his own relevance, power, and fame when he, in fact, has none. This grandiose delusion is even visually

underlined when the terrible specter is spotted on the roof bathed in moonlight, and we read it had "assumed enormous proportions due to some optical trick" (Dobryĭ, Geniĭ russkogo 87). Moreover, as Putilin will discover later, Ĭankovskiĭ is "haunting" the Sukharev Tower because he believes a legendary treasure is hidden in its walls, but, indicatively, nothing but decay surrounds him.

A dismal and gloomy atmosphere meets the detectives when they enter the tower:

> *The old iron door opened with a quiet, drawn-out squeak and groan. That obnoxious squeak stayed in my ears for a long time, echoing anxiously and melancholy through my heart. (…) Putilin lit his famous dark lantern (…) because the darkness inside was almost sepulchral. A terrible smell of dampness, mold, and some kind of decay filled the air like in a crypt. We began to climb very narrow stone stairs. I stumbled several times, and once I almost fell when a collapsed brick rolled out from underneath my foot. 'What dilapidation!...' muttered Putilin. (Dobryĭ, Geniĭ russkogo 94)*

Adding to the atmosphere are also the sudden flocks of shrieking owls, often presented as birds of death in classic literature (Ferber 147-48), and squealing hordes of rats, inherently Gothic creatures accentuating decay (Crofts and Hatter 139). The striking contrasts between exterior light and interior darkness, between sepulchral silence and animalistic shrieks, leave the narrator overwhelmed several times, that is, work to augment the effect of the sublime. According to Burke, great contrasts in light with the use of architecture have a greater effect on the passions of the individual (113), while excessive loudness tends to overpower the soul and fill it with terror (115).

The Secrets of Okhten Cemetery opens with an elderly guard, Pëtr Okovchuk, reporting supernatural events that are occurring at St. Petersburg's cemetery. He describes having seen colorful lights moving among the graves in the dead of night, hearing terrible screams, and coming face to face with the white figure of a tall dead man. The cemetery, as an antiquated space, which testifies to human finitude and spurs the readers to meditate on death, represents a classic gothic setting with hidden secrets of the past haunting the characters (Hogle 2). Putilin and the Doctor arrive at the "Kingdom of the Dead" in the twilight of a cold autumn day. The sky is described as hanging heavily over them and weeping while the wind sweeps through the almost bare treetops, tearing off the last of the yellow leaves. Treading through this dismal atmosphere, they arrive at the location of supernatural occurrences and discover a sublime object – a grave monument consisting

of a large metal pool and a tall cross in the center with a copper serpent descending from it. The monument, antichristian in its nature, immediately overwhelms the narrator with awe and horror. Okovchuk then tells them it was erected by the son of a wealthy merchant couple lying there. The son first attempted to exhume the coffins for an unknown reason, but when numerous snakes started crawling out of the grave, the diggers immediately surrendered, and the monument was built. The mysterious reasons behind the attempted exhumation and the emergence of snakes, as well as ghost sightings in the vicinity of the serpent monument, hint at a family curse, or more precisely, at some sort of transgression occurring in its past, which had initially provoked the curse and now drives the current circumstances. Put differently, the monument is not only a sublime object but hides the narrative of family decline, closely associated with the Gothic genre. Putilin eventually discovers that the wealthy couple "cursed their son for immoral transgressions, debauchery, and theft" (Dobryĭ, Putilin i Peterburgskiĭ 339) by having the inheritance buried with them, which is why he pretended to haunt the graves. This narrative of family decline can be linked to wider social anxieties regarding the abolition of the bourgeois family that the socialists leaning on the teachings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were calling for. To clarify, Russian socialism, which emerged as a key opposition to the tsarist regime in the second half of the nineteenth century, revived by parties such as The Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party, founded in 1898, and The Socialist Revolutionaries, founded in 1902, leaned on Marxist ideology. In The Communist Manifesto of 1848, Marx and Engels called not only for the abolition of bourgeois property/capitalism but also for the abolition of the family whose foundation was based on capital. They predicted that "[t]he bourgeois family will vanish as a matter of course when its complement vanishes, and both will vanish with the vanishing of capital" (59). In Antropov's story, the bourgeois family is literally buried with capital, whereas its heir is depicted as a criminal attempting but failing to haunt the present, indicating on multiple levels that its time has passed. This notion is further intensified by the cemetery ambiance, twilight, and autumn.

Another, although miniature, narrative of bourgeois family decline can be recognized in the true story Okovchuk shares with the Doctor as they wait for Putilin to scout the cemetery. The story revolves around a general's daughter who was buried alive by her family in a state of lethargic sleep. Additionally, this Gothic insert serves at least three more purposes. It is a device of

"retardation," used to postpone the solution of the mystery. It is a "red herring," misleading the reader to think the young lady might be the one haunting the cemetery. And finally, it evokes horror both in the narrator and the reader as Okovchuk describes the emotionally charged moment of exhumation and finding the lady "lying in the coffin with her back turned up. Legs stretched out, hands all bloody and bitten through" (Dobryĭ, Putilin i Peterburgskiĭ 315). Such horrific images also work to increase suspense before the protagonists' final confrontation with the specter and suggest the most likely scenario when they find themselves deep in the bowels of a crypt, waiting in ambush. Surrounded by complete darkness and hearing the specter approach, the narrator feels earth pouring onto his head and trembles with terror at the thought of being buried alive. However, Putilin suddenly breaks the Gothic spell by disguising himself as a ghost, arising from the bowels of the crypt to terrify the specter into submission and ultimately revealing his human nature. Put otherwise, Putilin manages not only to demystify the Gothic villain but also to turn the villain's "weapon" against him.

The Bloodsucking Vampires of Petersburg begins similarly to the previous stories – by introducing a supernatural monster that strikes at night. However, this time, the location is not a monastery, tower, or cemetery but a luxurious mansion belonging to Russian nobility. Having held a successful ball, Countess G. retreats to her boudoir, where she is met by the demonic eyes of a winged monster with a round head and a red snakelike tongue protruding from its mouth. The monster introduces itself as a bloodsucking vampire who feeds only on women and promises to spare her life on the condition that she be his, after which the countess faints. Although she is not the heroine of the story, Countess G. embodies the Gothic trope of a passive damsel in distress terrorized by a villain who seeks to control her. The claim that the vampire lays over the countess speaks of male desire to dominate women and has clear sexual overtones hinting at rape, despite it never being explicitly illustrated in the story. The scale of this problem becomes apparent as more and more ladies of higher social standing – eight in total – report being attacked by a vampire. Additionally, several citizens describe having seen terrifying winged figures dressed as men but with satanic faces, riding in a carriage through the city as if carried by a whirlwind. The vampire menace in the story can thus be read as a metaphor for the prevalence of sexual violence in Russian society. Indeed, as Putilin manages to uncover – the demonic vampires are all men. What is more, they are

members of the so-called Adam's Order (or Adam's Club), which, according to the paintings and inscriptions found at their mysterious mansion, is an order of misogynists. The inscription Putilin keeps encountering in their lair is also significantly important: "Do not give in to the temptation of a woman, for through a woman the world has lost its heavenly bliss" (Dobryĭ, Putilin i Peterburgskiĭ 271). Laying the blame on women even though they are sought out and attacked by the same people who preach those words in itself seems monstrous.

It is important to underscore that the vampiric predators in the story, although nameless, are all members of aristocracy – one is a baron, the other a count, and the third a duke, which adds an entirely new layer of meaning to the problem of dominance assertion. Firstly, the villainous aristocratic trio is already in possession of power and yet desires more, which illustrates their greed. Secondly, they are misusing power in order to gain access to their victims. Thirdly, they seek to subject women solely to procure entertainment for themselves. Such a depiction of three different members of aristocracy speaks of a rather harsh social critique, especially if the vampire's parasitic nature is taken into consideration. A certain amount of cynicism directed toward aristocracy can also be heard in Putilin's words when he calls the trio "entitled idiots" as well as at the beginning of the plot when the narrator describes the end of the countess's ball in the following words: "Incredibly glorious 'illumination' of the Russian nobility, eternally feasting in sophisticated festival orgies, went out" (Dobryĭ, Putilin i Peterburgskiĭ 245). The citation not only foreshadows the events of the plot but hints at the meaning behind it.

3. Sects and Fanaticism

Several of Antropov's stories have Gothic elements introduced not at the beginning but later in the plotline, and these often refer to the secret practices of sects and religious fanatics. Considering that sects usually emerge as a result of heresy perceived by a larger group (Orthodoxy in this case), in Antropov's stories, they are seen as ab initio transgressive. However, their true monstrosity becomes apparent in the overreach of authority within their own community and/or in the violent attempts to subject others to their control and belief system.

White and Turtle Doves begins with merchant Sila Fëdrovich Vakhrushinskiĭ reporting the disappearance of his twenty-four-year-old son and only heir. The clues lead Putilin and Doctor Z to

a remote settlement at the edge of Moscow. Followed by frantic barking and howling of chained dogs, they walk through deserted streets and back alleys on a pitch-dark night, ultimately reaching the house the narrator describes as black and massive. Shrouded in darkness, the house hints at the presence of villains while its location speaks of their marginal place in society. Putilin manages to enter the house and, having descended into a subterranean room, hides under the table, witnessing a terrifying scene. After listening to an elderly preacher's condemnation of carnal pleasures, the religious fanatics dressed in long white robes, their eyes full of "sectarian madness" (Dobryĭ, Belye golubi 17), hold an "infernal concert" (Dobryĭ, Belye golubi 19) as hot breaths fill the air and the room trembles with the stomping of their bare feet. The concert ultimately transforms into an orgy "disgusting in its shamelessness," and Putilin manages to escape their clutches just barely, afterward admitting to "have never experienced such blood-curdling horror" (Dobryĭ, Belye golubi 21). As he informs the narrator later, that house belongs to the Khlysty sect. Unlike the fictive Adam's Order, the sects mentioned in this story presented a real source of anxiety in Russian society. Considered "the root of all Russian sectarianism" (Buss 73), the Khlysts were a Christian sect that believed in the domination of the Spirit over the flesh and in salvation achieved through the liberation of the soul from the body, which is why they systematically suppressed physical urges and considered sexual relations a great sin (Buss 74-75). They practiced the ritual of "rejoicing" (Russ. radenie), which consisted of ecstatic dances and simultaneous singing of spiritual songs that helped them reach the state of ecstasy, during which, they believed, the Holy Spirit could descend upon any one of them (Buss 74). Nevertheless, the sect was pursued by accusations of sexual misconduct, which, although unfounded, led to the government launching several major investigations in 1733, 1745-1752, 1837-1839, and 1846 (Clay 72-73). In other words, Antropov's text exploited real social anxieties and added to the vilification of the "heretical menace" that "plagued" Russian society during the eighteenth and the nineteenth century by depicting the ritual of "rejoicing" as a diabolical concert/orgy.

The Khlysty, however, was not the only villainous sect mentioned in the story. On the second night, Putilin and the doctor visit yet another Gothic location on the edge of the city: a two-story house made of stone, with antique shutters tightly bolted and surrounded by a log fence with large nails on top. Seemingly unenterable, the house is a stronghold both literally and symbolically since it

points to the unwavering faith of those who inhabit it, as well as the intent of practicing their faith in utter secrecy. Nonetheless, Putilin and the Doctor manage to bypass the fence and enter the bathhouse at the center of the garden, where they are met by the similarly hot and stuffy atmosphere as the night before and oddly reminiscent of hell. Namely, the narrator describes bright flames from the large stove casting a "bloody glow on the walls, shelves and benches" (Dobryĭ, Belye golubi 24). Waiting in ambush, they soon hear fanatic chanting and witness elderly preacher Prokl Onufrievich attempting to castrate an abducted young man as he struggles against it. We find out that the elderly fanatic is in fact a member of another existing sect – the Skoptsy (derived from the Russian word skopet͡s, meaning eunuch), also known as Castrati. Although emerging in the other half of the eighteenth century from the Khlysty, the Skoptsy sect reached the peak of its popularity at the beginning of the twentieth century when Antropov was writing the story. They believed that castration was the "only means of salvation" (Buss 77) since genitals were seen as the root of sexuality that "prevented people from communicating with God" (Tulpe and Torchinov 81).

In other words, both sectarian "ships" (as they are called in the story) are defined as infernal nests of the damned not only through the description of the hellish ambiance but also through the illustration of abhorrent practices within their walls and the violent attempts to subject others to their belief system. The literary demonization is unsurprising if it is considered that both sects believed in achieving religious salvation through direct connection with God (Tulpe and Torchinov 77) and therefore represented a threat not only to Orthodox Christianity as the official state religion but also to the Church as the Institution mediating between believers and God. In other words, their beliefs designated them as the Other in society on multiple levels. Indeed, the Skoptsy were proclaimed the most dangerous and blasphemous heresy by the Holy Synod in 1807 and "the enemies of humankind, destroyers of morals, criminals against laws-Divine and civil" by the Senate of the Russian Empire in 1835 (Varadinov 84).

The Kiss of a Bronze Virgin begins with the young Polish count, Boleslav Rzhevusskiĭ, confessing to a priest of the Jesuit Order his intention of converting from Catholicism to Orthodoxy in order to marry a Russian woman. His decision is met with a strong protest and a threat of severe punishment. Soon thereafter, his disappearance is reported to Putilin by his future father-in-law,

Mister Rakitin. Parallel to the investigation, the reader is shown Jesuit Order fathers holding a secret tribunal and sentencing Count Rzhevusskiĭ to death by the kiss of the bronze virgin. Even though the punishment is evidently death, its execution remains a mystery until the very end when Putilin demonstrates how the bronze virgin functions – upon receiving the victim into her embrace, she closes her arms with spikes simultaneously springing up from every part of her body. The bronze virgin can be considered a Gothic element for several reasons. Firstly, it is a mysterious harbinger of death that intensifies both interest and terror in the reader. Secondly, it generates temporal distance, bringing into mind the gruesome torture device often thought to have originated in the Middle Ages – the so-called iron maiden, a metal sarcophagus that has a door lined with spikes strategically placed to hit the vital organs just deep enough to make the victim suffer in agony until they bleed to death. The device was probably constructed at the end of the eighteenth century (Wüst and Hirte 59), but the myth about it originating in the Middle Ages, built on the belief that people of that era were uncivilized, was far more widespread. Accordingly, the Jesuit Order in Antropov's story, which uses similar torture devices to ruthlessly punish and enforce their authority, would be perceived as equally medieval, perhaps even as an extension of the Medieval Inquisition, if we take into account that Rzhevusskiĭ committed heresy by leaving Catholicism for Orthodoxy. In any case, the extreme overreach of the Jesuits' authority within their own community is the apparent source of the monstrous. Aiding in their vilification is also the ambiance surrounding their procession upon descent into the underground dungeon:

> *The air changed all of a sudden. There was a whiff of unbelievable dampness, as if from a swamp. The ground became moist, large drops of cold water were dripping from somewhere above. The light of torches and candles flickered in quivering tongues (…) It seemed as if strange spectral entities, having emerged from the earth, were rushing back into its mysterious bowels. (Dobryĭ, Geniĭ russkogo 186-87)*

The descent of the Jesuit procession into the underground not only alludes to death and the descent into the grave but at the same time symbolizes their alienation from light and God since "ominously thick darkness reigned here" (Dobryĭ, Geniĭ russkogo 186). In short, the Jesuit order is designated as the collective antagonist and as the Other in relation to the Orthodox Church, in the same manner as the Khlysty and Skoptsy sects in the previous story. The difference, however, is

that the Khlysty and Skoptsy were sects openly persecuted in Russian society at the time, while the Jesuits were (and are) one of the official orders of the Catholic Church, which may speak of broader interreligious conflicts and anxieties dating back to the "Great Schism of 1054."

The story Egyptian Darkness, although not as rich in gothic elements, follows almost the same plot. The difference here is that the future victim is Rahil', the daughter of a rich Jew, Veniamin Lazarevich Kogan, who accuses her of betraying the faith of her fathers by wanting to marry a young Russian man and convert to Orthodoxy. Soon afterward, she is not only reported having disappeared from the midnight train by her fiancée, Dmitriĭ Nikolaevich Bystr͡itskiĭ, whom she was eloping with, but also by her father. Putilin and Doctor Z take the same midnight train to retrace her steps and, almost at the last stop, discover Rotomka, "a suburban Jewish ghetto" (Dobryĭ, T'ma egipetska͡ia 18) inhabited by religious fanatics, where kahal, the "council of lay leaders (…) held collectively responsible for the actions of individual Jews in the community" (Rabinovitch 24) sentences her to stoning. It is worth mentioning that the location of Rotomka at the edge of the city, like the locations of sects in White and Turtle Doves, hints at their marginality and the threat they pose to the central religion, Orthodoxy. Also, similarly to the bronze maiden in the previous story, stoning as the method of capital punishment creates temporal distance reaching to biblical times and ancient Israel, where it was used as a standard form of execution (Lev. 20:2, 27, 24:16). The monstrous overreach of kahal's authority becomes especially apparent in contrast with Rahil's romantic speech on love earlier in the plot and counteraccusations of hypocrisy during the trial. Finally, thanks to Putilin, Rahil' is liberated from the hands of malevolent religious fanatics, virtue is preserved, and domestic harmony reinstated when Veniamin approves of the marriage. In other words, like many gothic heroines of Ann Radcliffe's books, Rahil', encounters not only frightening violence at the hands of fanatics but also adventurous freedom as she challenges the ideologies dating far back into history and still threatening nineteenth-century society.

In The Spring of Volga Sectarians, Putilin investigates yet another disappearance. This time, however, the victim was not abducted but groomed by a sect of Schismatics (raskol'niki) to join them and self-immolate as a part of the ritual. Schismatics, also known as Old Believers (Russ. starovery), are Orthodox Christians excommunicated by the Church for rejecting reforms introduced by Patriarch Nikon between 1652 and 1666. Considering the reforms corrupt and

contradictive, Schismatics maintained the old ritual practices but were severely persecuted from the end of the seventeenth century until 1905 (De Simone 13-14, 147) because they were seen "not only as competition to the Russian Church, but also as an alternative culture set to define both Orthodoxy and Russianness itself" (De Simone 14). Although "the doctrine of voluntary death" (Russ. uchenie dobrovol′noĭ smerti) was mentioned by some Orthodox authors, Romanova warns that their writings cannot be entirely trusted (231-33). Therefore, the guided self-immolation in the story functions primarily as a demonizing element invoking horror with the promise of gruesome death in the same manner as the bronze maiden and stoning. Demonization is evident in several more elements: in the fact that Schismatics not only looked to convert people but groomed a young man said to be "half-witted"; in the description of their animalistic homes that look like "large anthills, or huge mole holes, but not human dwellings" (Dobryĭ, Klĭuch povolzhskih 20); as well as in the fact that they hide deep within a sublime dark forest of centuries-old fir trees.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of several detective stories written by Russian author Roman Lukich Antropov (Roman Dobryĭ) as part of the serial The Genius of Russian Detection, I. D. Putilin has shown frequent utilization of Gothic devices. These include the introduction of supernatural monsters such as ghosts and vampires, as well as the illustration of sublime locations and structures – the magnificent and obscure Sukharev tower of Moscow, the historical monastery and Okhten cemetery of Sankt Petersburg, and the centuries-old forests of Volga region, all of which exude gloom and invoke awe and fearfulness in the eyes of the narrator. The stories also depict horrific acts of sectarian worship, like the diabolical concert/orgy held by the Khlysty, the self-immolation of the Schismatics, and the castration performed by the Skoptsy. Fanatic worship often transforms into overreach of authority within the religious community itself – for instance, both the Catholic Jesuits and Jewish zealots sentence the followers they consider heretics to a horrifying death, which includes antiquated torture devices and stoning. Both types of execution not only promise a gruesome tortuous death but also generate temporal distance, harking back to the Middle Ages in the first case and the biblical times in the latter. Suspenseful moments invoking terror in the narrator as well as in the reader occur almost in every story in the dead of night and following the

protagonists' infiltration into the villainous group with the aid of a masterful disguise or into their terrifying lair where they wait in ambush, for example in the niche of dilapidated Sukharev tower, the crypt of Okhten Cemetery, the bathhouse of the Skoptsy. The suspense reaches climax as the protagonists are about to witness the monstrous transgression, be it execution, forced castration, guided self-immolation, sexual assault, or theft under a monstrous mask.

It is worth mentioning that in many of the analyzed stories, the mysterious structures inhabited by villains are part of larger spaces that reinforce the gothic atmosphere. For example, the dwellings of the zealots in Egyptian Darkness and the two sectarian groups in White and Turtle Doves not only evoke images of hell but are also situated on the outskirts of St. Petersburg, which aids in depicting them as sinister entities on the margins of society that threaten the social order. The city of St. Petersburg serves as the setting in three other stories – The Burning Cross, The Secrets of Okhten Cemetery, and The Bloodsucking Vampires of Petersburg, suggesting that Antropov might have been influenced by what the scholars now call the "Petersburg Text." This literary concept refers to the works set in St. Petersburg, depicting the city as a symbol-laden, often surreal, and mystical place. Namely, renowned Russian writers, such as Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin, Nikolaĭ Vasil′evich Gogol′, Fëdor Mikhaĭlovich Dostoevskiĭ, and Andreĭ Belyĭ, often infused their works with the common gothic markers (secrets, violence, transgressions, decay, madness, supernatural occurrences) to highlight social injustices and capture the unique, haunting essence of St. Petersburg. Over time, these gothic features became an integral part of the "Petersburg Text" (Bowers, The City 1239). By choosing to set most of his stories in the city of St. Petersburg, Antropov both drew on this concept and reinforced its integral part.

The stories analyzed in the article can be divided into two groups, one of which has Gothic elements introduced at the beginning (The Burning Cross, The Secrets of Okhten Cemetery, The Mystery of the Sukharev Tower, The Bloodsucking Vampires of Petersburg), while the other has them intentionally delayed (White and Turtle Doves, The Kiss of a Bronze Virgin, Egyptian Darkness, The Spring of Volga Sectarians). Gothic elements at the beginning are usually related to the supernatural, including ghosts, vampires, strange glows, and omens, which, due to their seemingly inexplicable paranormal nature, inevitably complicate the regular detective mystery that drives the plot. As a result, both the protagonists and the reader are further motivated to uncover

the truth behind them. As Botting claims, Gothic signifies "over-abundance of imaginative frenzy, untamed by reason and unrestrained by conventional (…) demands for simplicity, realism or probability" (2). Putilin manages not only to identify and capture the villain but also to dissolve the supernatural element by exposing the villain as human and finding a rational explanation for each orchestrated event. Since the initial terror produced by the Gothic beginning is also dissolved in this way, the cathartic effect of the denouement is also doubled. It is noteworthy to mention that Putilin's role of the "light bringer" to darkness and mystery created by the Gothic motifs is signaled by the fact that his clients always implore him to "shed light" on the dark mystery (e. g. Dobryĭ, Putilin i Peterburgskiĭ 83, 112, 206, 252, 401, 596) as well as by the fact that he makes use of his personal lantern to illuminate Gothic spaces in every story mentioned above. Gothic elements that appear further down the plotline do not so much complicate the mystery as shock the consciousness of readers when they learn about disturbing sectarian practices, gloomy isolated places, or people buried alive. All of the above primarily works to infuse the readers with a spectrum of emotions, ranging from excitement and dread to resentment and disgust, and so intensify their interest in the case at hand.

Both groups of elements, however, share a common tendency characteristic of Western Gothic tradition – they seem to carry cultural significance. To be more exact, they can be interpreted as the expression of deep-seated social anxieties caused by the past and present monarchical repression, the uncertainties of the revolutionary period, the socialist call for the abolition of bourgeois family, the subjection and sexual molestation of women, interreligious conflicts and the emergence of sectarianism, especially if it is taken into account that the villains or villainous groups threaten the whole of society. All these sources of anxiety and, consequently, all the themes in Antropov's Gothic-infused stories seem to have a common root – the struggle for power and control. Whether it is the vilification of sects and religions designated as the Other in Russian society to implicitly promote Orthodoxy as the formal persuasion and the Orthodox Church as the single proper Institution mediating between believers and God, the demonization of Russian tsars and aristocracy to expose their excessive control and disillusions, or the introduction of the family curse motif to hint at the obsolescence of the bourgeois family in the new revolutionary period, power and control reveal themselves to be the driving factors behind the Gothicism in Antropov's

detective fiction. That is to say, the readers have an opportunity to expand their investigation beyond the one led by the protagonist and analyze implicit cultural messages conveyed by the monstrous figures.

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[1]Each issue was thirty-two pages long.

[2]All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

[3]See chapter five of the Bible's Book of Daniel.

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