

ERIC NAIMAN

# Sex in Public

*The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology*



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THE INCARNATION OF  
EARLY SOVIET IDEOLOGY

*Eric Naiman*

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*For Gregory Freidin,  
Boris Gasparov,  
and  
Anne Nesbet*

*in awe*

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## *NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION, CITATION, AND TRANSLATION*

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WITHIN THE TEXT, I have used the transliteration system of the Library of Congress but have altered it slightly to render the endings of first and last names familiar to, or at least less unpronounceable for, readers unfamiliar with Russian (e.g., Trotskii becomes Trotsky, Evgenii Preobrazhenskii becomes Evgeny Preobrazhensky). In the notes I adhere strictly to the Library of Congress system throughout.

A bibliography would have substantially increased the length and price of this volume. In the notes to each chapter, a full reference is provided upon the first citation in that chapter of a given work. To facilitate the task of obtaining items on interlibrary loan, for references to works published in periodicals or in anthologies of works by more than one author, I have provided in parentheses the page numbers for the entire item. The index includes references to all authors cited in the notes. If no parenthesis is given, the page(s) cited in the note constitute the entire item. The following abbreviations for places of publication have been used: L.—Leningrad; M.—Moscow; Pb.—Petersburg; Pg.—Petrograd; SPb.—Saint Petersburg. (In each case I have adhered to the place-name specified by the title page regardless of the official name of the city at the time.) IMLI signifies the archive of the Institute of World Literature in Moscow; RGALI refers to the Russian State Archive for Literature and Art. Unless otherwise noted, all emphasis belongs to quoted authors, as do all ellipses unless they are enclosed in brackets, in which case they have been supplied by me.

For readers unfamiliar with Russian I note that the word “komsomolets” refers to a young man who has joined the Komsomol (Communist Youth League). “Komsomolka” refers to a woman—and “komsomolki” to women—in that organization. “Komsomol'tsy” refers either to more than one man or to a mixed group of Komsomol adherents.

Except where otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

## Sex in Public

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## INTRODUCTION

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### MENSTRUATION AND A NEW PAIR OF GLASSES

On 1 January 1925, *Izvestiia* published an attack on a new book by Martyn Liadov, the rector of Sverdlov Communist University, the highest Party school.<sup>1</sup> In this work, based on a series of lectures to communist cadres under his tutelage, the rector had revealed that nonseasonal sexual desire and, implicitly, menstruation had been inflicted by capitalism on the female body. "In no animal," he had explained, "is sexuality a dominant emotion throughout the whole year. It appears only at a specific time, during the female's spring heat. [. . .] For a prolonged historical period (and this is clear from a wide range of historical sources) man, like all other animals, mated only once a year. [. . .] When a market economy developed, when private property began to be accumulated, then woman, too, was transformed into private property and had to be prepared to satisfy her master's demand at any time."<sup>2</sup> Refuting Liadov (a noted Party historian) and Aron Zalkind (a "psychoneurologist" who frequently published articles about sex in the Komsomol press), the Soviet health commissar, Nikolai Semashko, charged in *Izvestiia* that they were turning Marx "inside out" in their ignorance of basic biological and historical facts. Many animals menstruate, he pointed out, as had women prior to the development of capitalism. The Romans, for example, had referred to women's periods as "menses," an indication that their women bled monthly and were sexually available throughout the year.

Why were future Party leaders being instructed about female physiology and human sexual desire as part of their political education, and why was this subject deemed sufficiently significant to merit space in the Soviet government's central press organ? We are accustomed to viewing early Soviet culture through the lenses of a few well-worn pairs of glasses that, depending upon our mood, enable us to spy retrospectively on political machinations, plunge us into a world of widespread artistic and social innovation, or allow us to savor the edifying spectacle of a lonely individual's heroic refusal to submit to conformity and oppression. Usually we are not bothered by the divergent ways in which these eyeglasses refract the past any more

<sup>1</sup> N. Semashko, "Kak ne nado pisat' o polovom voprose," *Izvestiia*, 1 January 1925, 5.

<sup>2</sup> M. N. Liadov, *Voprosy byta* (M.: Kommunisticheskii universitet, 1925), 30. Despite the book's official publication date of 1925, the publication of Semashko's attack on 1 January of that year indicates that the book was available in the previous year.

than, as readers, we are disturbed by the different worldviews found in the detective novel, the romance, or other genres available for the price of an old paperback. They have helped us categorize—and cope with the existence of—a powerful neighbor whose presence might otherwise have roused in us an uncomfortable level of fear or desire. However, as the stakes of research into the Soviet experience change and as scholars liberate themselves from the oppressive weight of judging the past through its consequences in the present, wearers of old glasses ought to feel less nervous about the dangers of trying on new visual aids. The collapse of the Soviet Empire has profoundly affected the contemporary political relevance of Soviet studies; it should also encourage scholars to engage in imaginative reconceptualization and methodological experimentation that may substantially broaden our understanding of the Soviet past.

The following pages attempt to reshape accepted narratives of early Soviet history. I will consider the manner in which ideological fictions during the 1920s led political discourse to become preoccupied with sexuality and the body. As I focus attention on the early Soviet projection of ideological and political anxieties onto a corporal canvas, my primary goal will not be to catalog the historical, moral, and political failings—or, to use the terminology of ideology theory, the contradictions—of Bolshevism during the New Economic Policy, but to examine the way in which ideological problems were imaginatively or affectively handled. This book is both a historical study and an analysis of ideological poetics.

The title, *Sex in Public*, is meant to suggest the ideological importance of sex as a topic of public discussion. I will argue that talk about sex was a means of popular mobilization and, at the same time, a process of ideological entrapment (and self-entrapment) of which the Party and Komsomol were never in total control. The subtitle of the book, *The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology*, requires more explanation. In 1925, in the midst of Party discussions about the extent to which the Party had delayed the achievement of the Revolution's goals, Grigory Zinov'ev, simultaneously the chief executive of the Comintern and the head of the Leningrad Party organization, declared that during the preceding few years Soviet society had witnessed the "gradual incarnation [*voploshchenie*] of the October Revolution's program." Responding to charges that in an excess of pragmatism the Party had "liquidat[ed] the Revolution's 'flight'" and had "ceased to breathe with a common breast with the poor," he contended that the Party was becoming "ever more intimate with the new masses of workers and poor in order to help them incarnate their dream [*voplotit' mechtu*] of a new order, a classless society, and genuine socialism."<sup>3</sup> Zinov'ev's defense of Bolshevik

<sup>3</sup> G. Zinov'ev, *Filosofia epokhi* (M. and L.: Moskovskii rabochii, 1925), 27.



policy implicitly rejected the notion that the Revolution in its concrete, incarnated form would inevitably fall short of pre-Revolutionary goals. In the near term, Soviet leaders would contend, Soviet reality merely *looked* different from its earlier bloodless and theoretical projection onto the future. But many Party members were unable to achieve Zinov'ev's level of confidence, and Zinov'ev himself would soon stand accused of the sin of ideological pessimism. Just as—to quote one of Russian poetry's most famous lines—“the thought, once spoken, becomes a lie,” the dream of utopia is apt to display disturbing defects when compelled to assume political and economic flesh.<sup>4</sup> This book will examine the ideological uses made of the body at a concrete historical moment when theory is put into practice; the chapters to come will explore the discursive marks made on the flesh when it is forced to “mediate” between the Ideal and the Real.<sup>5</sup>

#### APPROACHING NEP: IDEOLOGICAL ANXIETIES AND THE “UNARMED EYE”

*Sex in Public* takes as its object Soviet ideology during the years of the New Economic Policy (NEP), a period (from 1921 to, roughly, 1928) in which the Party asked its followers to defer ideological expectations for the sake of economic efficiency and the consolidation of power. The Civil War that followed the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution was essentially over by late 1920, and one of NEP's defining features was its status as communist Russia's first experience with peace. Following the turmoil, starvation, and forced labor of the Civil War, NEP would seem to have offered a welcome respite to a nation that, according to its leader, had “never been so exhausted, so worn out, as now.”<sup>6</sup> Yet remarkably soon after the conclusion of the Civil War, many citizens and leaders intent on revolutionizing politics, literature, and the recalcitrant category of “everyday life” (*byt*) were to view the preceding four years with nostalgia, as a time of uncompromising—and thus comforting—purity, as a Golden Age of physical and ideological chastity when trivial but annoyingly importunate spheres of human activity had been splendidly eclipsed by an all-consuming cause. Trotsky expressed a defining concern of the period when he worried that “without revolutionary perspectives, or a broad historical framework,” the young, especially, might “ossify in an atmosphere of Soviet petty deeds,” that “one awful day it might turn

<sup>4</sup> F. Tiutchev, *Polnoe sobranie stikhotvorenii* (L.: Sovetskii pisatel', 1987), 105.

<sup>5</sup> I take the term “mediation” from Ludmilla Jordanova, who uses it to discuss the way in which medical and scientific images “speak to and contain implications about matters beyond their explicit content.” *Sexual Visions: Images of Gender in Science and Medicine between the Eighteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 2.

<sup>6</sup> V. I. Lenin, “Rech' na vserossiiskom s'ezde transportnykh rabochikh” (27 March 1921), *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 5th ed., 45 vols. (M.: Gos. izd., 1958–1965), 43:104.

out that we and [our youth] are speaking different languages.”<sup>7</sup> For all its justly deserved reputation as a period of relative tolerance and cultural experimentation, the era of NEP was a profoundly *anxious* time; many Russians deriving retrospective pleasure from the sacrifices demanded by the Civil War had difficulty reconciling themselves to the prospect of life in a world no longer blessed by adherence to absolute categories of human interaction.

NEP began as it would end—with a whimper rather than a rhetorical or propagandistic bang. The Tenth Party Congress, lasting from 8 to 16 March 1921, is generally considered NEP’s birthplace. Only one of the policy’s planks, however—the replacement of grain requisitions by a tax in kind—was proposed at that gathering, and this proposal was overshadowed by the struggle with the “Workers’ Opposition,” a Party faction insisting on greater unity between the Party’s bureaucracy and the factory workers whom the Party claimed to represent. Furthermore, the entire assembly was diminished in importance by the uprising of disaffected sailors on Kronstadt and its suppression. Not until the ensuing spring and summer were the further proposals that would become the core of NEP enshrined into law. On 23 March, a decree permitting free trade in grain surpluses at markets and bazaars went into effect; in May, the Soviet government began permitting cooperatives and private managers to lease previously nationalized enterprises. Government industries were organized into trusts and placed on *khozraschet*, which meant that their production decisions were to be determined by commercial principles. Finally, in July 1921, a decree was issued permitting anyone over sixteen years of age to participate in retail trade. Within a year, small private businesses were flourishing and a class of entrepreneurs had arisen, a group indispensable to the new market-oriented economy but despised by many whose lives it was indirectly helping to improve.<sup>8</sup>

Exactly when these measures, obviously part of a new economic policy, became *The New Economic Policy* is difficult to determine, but by fall 1921 the Party and its press had grouped these new directives together and had begun to interpret them as the unified sign of a new era. Resistance to NEP also started to surface among communists reluctant to abandon the militaristic, uncompromising positions adopted during the Civil War toward the peasantry and private enterprise. Initially there were few direct attacks on the new policy; rather, a certain confusion and unease were apparent among Party members and ideologically committed citizens who did not hold Party membership. Nikolai Bukharin, who was later to be one of NEP’s most consistent supporters, complained in a much reprinted 1921 essay that

<sup>7</sup> L. Trotskii, “Mysli o Partii,” in his *Zadachi XII s’ezda RKP* (M.: Deviatoe ianvaria, 1923), 48.

<sup>8</sup> The preceding paragraph is based upon the overview of NEP provided by Edward Hallett Carr in his *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917–1923*, 3 vols. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980), 2:269–360.

"many of our comrades in the Party lack vision: it's as if their vision has been lost, as if clear and distinct lines have become blurred, lost in something murky and highly indistinct."<sup>9</sup> This sense of drift gave way to outright hostility in many quarters by fall of 1922, when a good harvest had begun to create economic inequality in the countryside. As early as March 1922, Evgeny Preobrazhensky, coauthor with Bukharin of the highly popular *The ABCs of Communism*, had warned the Central Committee:

The leveling of class contradictions in our country has come to a halt. The process of differentiation has begun anew and grown; it is strongest in places where the revival of the peasant economy has been most successful and where the area of land under cultivation is increasing. . . . An agricultural bourgeoisie is emerging, but the peasant economy as a whole is in marked decline and the countryside is generally becoming impoverished.<sup>10</sup>

Hostility toward NEP would take various forms and align itself with different fears.<sup>11</sup> We will examine several of its manifestations in the following chapters, but at this point it is worth noting that even those whose job was the propagandizing of NEP—who knew they must sell this economic and cultural hybrid to wary, ideologically steadfast supporters—even these salesmen had doubts about their product. Speaking to the Comintern in 1924, Bukharin frankly admitted the discomfort many communists had first experienced with NEP:

After the introduction of NEP, we Russian communists, and to some degree our friends from foreign parties as well, almost without exception felt that we were doing something that was not entirely correct, as if we had to apologize for NEP. In its most subtle form, this "apologetic" attitude amounted to our regarding NEP exclusively from the point of view of political expediency, as a political concession to the bourgeoisie. We did not think that NEP was expedient and rational in and of itself, but we believed that we should introduce it out of political considerations.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> "Novyi kurs ekonomicheskoi politiki," in N. I. Bukharin, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia* (M.: Politizdat, 1988), 29. In 1921 and 1922 the speech was published as a separate brochure and included in several collections of essays devoted to NEP.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, 2:292. Preobrazhenskii's comments represented a significant evolution from his position just seven months earlier, when he had warned that the expression of doubt about the Party's line was tantamount to "sabotage of thought." "Bol'she vnimaniia partii," *Pravda*, 27 August 1921, 1. Even here, though, Preobrazhenskii had cautioned that the Party was menaced by "a deviation toward bourgeois liquidationism" and "more retreating than we actually need."

<sup>11</sup> Alan Ball's study of private entrepreneurs during NEP examines the vicissitudes in the Party's implementation of its new course and discusses the hostilities that these fluctuations generated. *Russia's Last Capitalists: The Nepmen, 1921–1929* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> "Doklad tov. Bukharina po programnomu voprosu," *Pravda*, 1 July 1924, 3.

It is important to note the manner in which Bukharin presented this description of anxiety. The Bolsheviks charged with implementing NEP were beset by uneasiness that could not be rationalized; they were troubled, even ashamed, by the Party's authorization to violate ideological taboos internalized in an earlier period of political life. In the speech quoted above, Bukharin would claim that Soviet communists had overcome their initial discomfort. But this assertion was belied by his too frequent protestations of members' newly acquired but now unflagging certitude. Bukharin's rhetoric exposes his difficulties in abandoning his earlier "apologetic" stance: "*I beg your pardon for the detail with which I will be dwelling on this question [of NEP].*"<sup>13</sup>

If Bukharin's colleagues reacted to NEP with unease, members of the younger generation and of the proletariat often responded with outright hostility. Refusing to renounce his adherence to the apocalyptic rhetoric and utopian dreams of War Communism, twenty-three-year-old Andrei Platonov, a fledgling journalist descended from railway workers and miners, complained bitterly when the editor of a local paper refused to print his hymns to the industrial promise of global Revolution. In October 1922, he dispatched his imitative poems to another editor with the following note:

[. . .] I am sending you the rhythm of beautiful dynamite and of shots of explosively bright summer lightning. By the way, in the offices of *Kineshma Convolutions* (*Kineshma Life*) an extremely responsible and serious editor evaluated the enclosed as follows:

—"The time for this has passed. Now it's NEPO!"<sup>14</sup>—(a disgusting word reminding one of chocolate perfumed with cheap pomade).

But for you (I think) Rebellion—as an idea—will always be alive regardless of all sorts of new economic and other policies.<sup>15</sup>

Lenin and Bukharin treated the exponents of such views with slightly less condescension than did Platonov's dismissive editor. They portrayed impatient supporters of communist ideals as children, and, indeed, the metaphor of childhood was consistently attached to War Communism, a period with an infantile psychology, when all questions had been resolved in accordance with the immediate fulfillment of needs. During War Communism the watchword had been "not 'produce' but 'take,' 'take' in order to supply the Red Army and munitions workers as quickly as possible. This and *only* this stood at the center of attention."<sup>16</sup> Now the childhood stage and its needs had been left behind forever. In 1924 Bukharin wrote in the Party journal *Bol'shevik*:

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. (emphasis added).

<sup>14</sup> Platonov was using the early acronym "NEPO"; "NEP" did not become the generally accepted shorthand until later in 1922.

<sup>15</sup> RGALI, fond 602, opis' 1, ed. khran. 853.

<sup>16</sup> Bukharin, "Novyi kurs," 24.

In the fire of . . . self-criticism the *illusions* of the childhood period are consumed and disappear *without a trace*, real relations appear in all their sober nakedness, and proletarian policy acquires in appearance sometimes a less emotional, but therefore a more assured, character—a solid one, adhering closely to reality and therefore much more truly changing this reality.

From this point of view, the transition to the new economic policies represented the collapse of our *illusions*.<sup>17</sup>

For Bukharin, NEP was a coming of age, when childish fantasies about a perfect world and unlimited power had to be put aside like the dolls with which, according to an earlier comment by Lenin, utopians were wont to play.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, Bukharin's statement collapses when viewed with anything more rigorous than the most superficial gaze. Have the illusions really been so totally obliterated, or are they being reinstated at the conclusion of his first paragraph ("adhering closely to reality and therefore much more truly changing this reality"), vanquishing reality through the wonders of dialectical rhetoric?

Platonov's transformation of the New Economic Policy to a repugnantly connotative verbal sign was typical of the era that came to bear the policy's name. NEP was a period that came to be identified with and defined by the class enemies regarded by the Bolsheviks as the era's most disturbing denizens. The fluctuations of the Party's economic policies between 1921 and 1928 did not fundamentally affect "NEP"'s ideological identity, for that identity signified something far broader than the execution of a particular economic program. In his survey of the language of "the Revolutionary epoch" (1917–1927), Afanasy Selishchev drew on speeches of two authoritative Bolsheviks in providing the following gloss:

With the word "NEP" another meaning has become associated: (1) "speculation," (2) "new bourgeois elements": "When we say NEP [*kogda my govorim NEP*], we often mean by this word speculation, self-seeking greed [*rvachestvo*] and NEPmanism [i.e., the phenomenon and characteristics of the "new" bourgeoisie]." (Zinov'ev, *Pravda*, 28 May 1924). "When people say NEP in informal speech [*kogda govoriat v prostorechii NEP*], they mean by this not our economic

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 139.

<sup>18</sup> Lenin, "Uspekhi i trudnosti sovetskoi vlasti" (17 April 1919), *Polnoe sobranie*, 38:53–54. See also his "Detskaia bolezn' 'levizny' v kommunizme" (April–May 1920), *Polnoe sobranie*, 41:3–104, where he applied the diagnosis of "infantile leftism" to communists abroad who failed to understand that concrete historical situations frequently necessitate pragmatic departures from political ideals. In that pamphlet Lenin also used the term "children" to refer to Russian communists who had failed to understand the necessity of tactical compromises during the decade preceding the Revolution.

policy as a whole and not even the economic order as a whole, but new bourgeois elements, the new bourgeoisie." (Bukharin, *Pravda*, No. 2, 1926).<sup>19</sup>

Tension is implicit in these two quotations. One Bolshevik is willing to attribute to "us" ("when we say NEP") a hostile attitude that another, less antagonistically inclined, attributes to others' everyday speech ("when people say"). In both cases a pernicious synecdoche threatens to render repugnant the country's current ideological experience: NEP—and the communists who live it—are reduced to NEP's most negative elements. Discussions of NEP frequently employed a rhetoric of negation, as if the era could be present as a conversational object only if the speaker simultaneously expressed a desire to deny the object's existence. In 1925, in the midst of intra-Party struggles that will be examined in chapter 7, Zinov'ev declared in *Izvestiia* that since the New Economic Policy had little new in it, it might more accurately be labeled "Not-NEP" (*ne-Nep*). "If we really want to keep the same word 'NEP,'" he added, then it was necessary "to say that this word is derived from the phrase 'Necessary' Economic Policy [*Neobkhodimaia ekonomicheskaiia politika*] or 'Inevitable' Economic Policy [*Neizbezhnaia ekonomicheskaiia politika*]."<sup>20</sup>

It was important for Party leaders to sell NEP as a legitimate policy—the ideological "Real Thing"—and to portray War Communism as an aberration necessitated by the exigencies of Civil War.<sup>21</sup> Through temporal legerdemain "War Communism" became "nothing other than a correction to NEP" rather than an originary and disgracefully abandoned path.<sup>22</sup> This point was crucial because NEP had more in common with purgatory, a place for shedding the mentalities and actions of the past, than with paradise. There was always a danger that communists who had believed themselves on the brink of entering ideological heaven would, seeing similarities between NEP and the pre-Revolutionary past, believe they were headed *down* Purgatory's mountain rather than upward toward Marx's Beatrice.

NEP, the Party continually cautioned, did not entail struggle's cessation but its complication. Defining the "philosophy of the epoch" in 1925, Zinov'ev wrote:

<sup>19</sup> A. M. Selishchev, *Iazyk revoliutsionnoi epokhi: iz nabliudenii nad russkim iazykom poslednikh let 1917–1926*, 2d ed. (M.: Rabotnik prosveshcheniia, 1928), 196. Reprinted by Prideaux Press (Russian Titles for the Specialist, No. 30), Letchworth, England, 1971.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, the assertion made in 1921 by the head of the Red Army's Political Administration, that "had there been no Civil War, we would have introduced essentially this same 'New Economic Policy' in 1919–1921. [...] The 'New Economic Policy' is the direct continuation of the October Revolution." S. Gusev, "Eshche o novoi ekonomicheskoi politike (k chetvertoi godovshchine oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii), *Krasnaia nov'*, no. 3 (1921): 329–330 (326–330).

<sup>22</sup> Bukharin, "Doklad tov. Bukharina," 3.

The battles that will decide the fate of the Revolution continue, although they are “bloodless,” silent, and without the accompanying roar of cannon fire. These battles differ from those we knew earlier on the fronts of the Civil War precisely in their quietness, in their being drawn out in time and fragmented among a whole series of almost petty episodes; they differ in that they occur in the quotidian economy and in everyday life, in that their development is hidden and without external effects, in that sometimes they are even invisible to the naked [or, more literally, “unarmed” (*nevooruzhennyi glaz*)] eye.<sup>23</sup>

Committed communists needed to know how to arm their eyes; they had to pay close attention and learn to find and read the “red thread” that ran through the confusing world of NEP.<sup>24</sup> Given the hidden nature of conflict during NEP, Zinov’ev continued, “the proletarian avant garde must look all the more attentively, all the more searchingly at the road upon which we walk; it is all the more essential that one repeatedly measure the path already covered and analyze the dangers lying in wait for the Revolution in the future.”<sup>25</sup> This kind of close and repeated reading of the Revolution’s course was predicated on a sense of heightened caution and danger in which painstaking analysis and verification could easily shade into mild paranoia or, at least, lead to the triumph of imagination over intellect. Without using the term “imagination,” the constructivist dramatist and theorist Sergei Tret’iakov more or less made that category a prerequisite for the development of correct political perspective:

[Representatives of the Party] always remember that they are in the trenches and that the enemy’s muzzles are in front of them. Even when they grow potatoes around this trench and stretch out their cots beneath the ramparts, they never allow themselves the illusion that the trench is not a trench but a dacha [. . .] or that their enemies are simply the neighbors in the dacha next door.<sup>26</sup>

To help them “remember” that the enemy was always near, the Bolsheviks and their supporters employed various ideological narratives that will be examined from several perspectives in this book. Presented as scientifically proven antidotes to illusions, these narratives were—like all narratives—illusions themselves; they presented a satisfyingly convenient, but simplified and incomplete, view of the world and of the proletariat’s place in it. In her

<sup>23</sup> Zinov’ev, *Filosofia epokhi*, 5. The reader should note the tension implicit in Zinov’ev’s reference to “bloodless” battles during a time of Revolutionary incarnation. In chapter 6, I will return to this question of the problematic relationship between “blood” and “flesh” in ideological anxieties about NEP.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>26</sup> S. Tret’iakov, “LEF i NEP,” *LEF*, no. 2 (1923): 72 (70–78). Tret’iakov was a member of the Left Front group, which explored the potential for artistic practices to play a role in the shaping of a new, communist everyday life.

important work on “the Bolsheviks’ dilemma,” Sheila Fitzpatrick has captured the quandary faced by the Party during and immediately after the Civil War, when the working class had begun to evaporate into the army and the village.<sup>27</sup> In 1920 there were only half as many “workers” in Russia as there had been in 1913;<sup>28</sup> the urban population had been decimated by the collapse of networks of distribution, and, by 1921, less than 40 percent of Party members were workers.<sup>29</sup> Lenin admitted in March 1921: “Our proletariat is in large measure déclassé; unprecedented crises and factory closures have led our people to flee from hunger. Our workers have abandoned their factories and been forced to settle in villages; they cease to be workers.”<sup>30</sup> “Against the odds,” writes Fitzpatrick, the Bolsheviks “had made a workers’ revolution. Then, in the hour of victory, the Russian proletariat had disappeared, leaving only its vanguard, like the smile of the Cheshire Cat, behind.”<sup>31</sup> Fitzpatrick’s Cheshire cat is an elegant but inapt image. Smiles were foreign to the terrifying tales and images to which the Bolsheviks resorted to keep their dilemmas at bay; in addition, in these stories the *body* (unlike that of Carroll’s feline) never disappeared—it remained disturbingly present and, for reasons that will be examined, became central to the tales and pictures that expressed and sought to defuse ideological anxiety.

#### UTOPIA AND ITS INFECTIONS

NEP was an exercise in patience, a period of learning and maturing for an ideology that had hitherto not contemplated the possibility of so strange an animal as eschatological adolescence. To many communists, NEP essentially meant Utopia Postponed. The age was regarded as a necessary compromise with reality, a period that would eventually lead to the evolution of the ideal society. The shining goal of Socialism would be reached via a decidedly dimmer, if temporary, market-based detour.<sup>32</sup> There was a fundamental problem with NEP’s self-definition, however. In his tragicomic novel, *The Sugar German* (1925), Sergei Klychkov tells of a powerful but ridiculous king, Akhlamon, the lord of a fantastically rich fool’s paradise.

<sup>27</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 16–36.

<sup>28</sup> V. M. Selunskaiia, ed., *Izmeneniia sotsial’noi struktury sovetskogo obshchestva 1921—seredina 30-x godov* (M.: Mysl’, 1979), 23.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>30</sup> Lenin, “Zakliuchitel’noe slovo po otchetu TsK RKP(b) [Desiatyi s’ezd RKP(b)]” (9 March 1921), *Polnoe sobranie*, 43:42.

<sup>31</sup> Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front*, 19.

<sup>32</sup> The word “utopia” is often applied quite loosely to Soviet culture, frequently sarcastically or without proper justification. I use it to refer to maximalist or chiliastic aspirations rather than to specific blueprints for the building of perfect societies. The term is not intended—at least not primarily—as a value judgment about communism in twentieth-century Russia.



No one has been to the World's end,  
 No one has seen Akhlamon's land,  
 And whoever has seen it, though he set out alive,  
 returned dead.<sup>33</sup>

These playful lines, describing even as they seek to destroy the possibility of description, wisely point to a paradox that plagues all utopian mentalities, including the one that tried to reconcile itself to the wisdom of NEP. A constant feature in the construction of a would-be perfect world is the isolation of the ideal society; millenarian communities strive to wall themselves off from the rest of the world, and authors of utopian projects frequently seek to bracket their descriptions with protective narratives and framing devices that serve as a moat's narratological equivalent.<sup>34</sup> In the fact of description, however, lies the seed of the utopia's disintegration. The hermetic seal between the ideal, sacred land and the contagious imperfection of the reality known to and constituting the reader is necessarily broken by the mere fact of the text's existence and *transmission*. In the act of communicative intercourse between the dreamer/author/planner and his audience, both parties are fatally infected: the utopian's ideal by contact with an unsatisfactory and intrusive "real world," the "reader" by the desire for a state of purity that he cannot avoid contaminating. There is no such thing as "safe speech." The utopian enterprise is doomed by the necessity of being expressed and limited through the nonutopian, historically determined communicative instrument of language. The perfect utopia—a utopia immune to linguistically transmitted diseases—would be like the perfect crime: we would be ignorant of its existence.

Utopias are contaminated not only by linguistic but also by historical transmission. The question of how one gets from here to there requires the establishment of a link between the flawed present and the unflawed future (or past). If the utopian, or utopian-inclined, mentality producing a text does not opt for the solution of an unexplored planet or continent but seeks to ground the utopia's genesis in the present, it must deal with the problem of transition.<sup>35</sup> Here two concerns clash: on one hand the future must be ideal; on the other, it must not be utopian in the second sense of the word (a community that will never exist)—on some level the consciousness creating the utopia believes that it can be attained.<sup>36</sup> Since the present is so imperfect,

<sup>33</sup> Sergei Klychkov, *Chertukhinskii balakir* (M.: Sovetskii pisatel', 1988), 24.

<sup>34</sup> For a discussion of framing in utopian narratives that does not consider the device's apotropaic function, see Gary Saul Morson, *The Boundaries of Genre: Dostoevsky's Diary of a Writer and the Traditions of Literary Utopia* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1981), 138–142, 162–175.

<sup>35</sup> In cases of interplanetary or intercontinental travel the problem of historical transmission does not, of course, disappear; it simply assumes a spatial disguise.

<sup>36</sup> Raymond Ruyer argues that a distinctive feature in utopian thought is the combination of

however, that it must be rejected for "another" reality, the process of transition is fraught with danger and necessarily becomes a period of purging, in which all imperfections of the here and now must be destroyed. The persecution of the present is, in part, a campaign against origins, against the germ from which the utopia springs, lest later, after germination, the utopia might be traced to its source and destroyed at and by its roots. Yet no matter how fierce the effort to purge, attempts to describe (or effect) a historical transmission are bound to fail, for historical—like linguistic—transmission necessarily shatters the pure isolation required by utopias for their continued survival as ideals.

As the persistence of utopian projects since at least classical times attests, the impossibility of utopian description does not squelch utopian impulses, and in this century the desire for a perfect world has been central to many ideologies. The impossibility of description, however, does play a role in structuring the necessarily contradictory utopian text or in the manner in which ideologies obsessed with imagined proximity to utopian ideals read and model the world. As if conscious of the paradoxical nature of their undertaking, texts describing utopias and transitions thereto are obsessed with their own impurities. They seem to circle around themselves, looking for every imperfection, as they endeavor to maintain a state of ideological chastity that was lost when they embarked on the enterprise of transmission. Historical epochs can also be read as texts, and those marked by the pathos of utopian yearnings are as preoccupied as their literary brothers with remaining pure. The era of the New Economic Policy is especially instructive in this regard, for the history of its discourse is one of discomfort with and hostility toward the impurities by which the period was defined.

In its fascination with flaws of ideological incarnation, discourse about NEP focused on several categories that may be called "metonymic" (i.e., relating to contiguity) in that they rely on imagery of symbolic and physical penetration and contact. We have already discussed utopian hostility toward language and history, but there are other categories of human experience that may symbolize the interference with and corruption of the Ideal by the Real.

One of these preoccupations is crime. In many societies crime is viewed at least partially, if not primarily, as a violation of the private sphere surrounding and protecting the individual; it is dreaded as a brutal intrusion into the individual citizen's illusion of isolation and independence. Seen as a social problem, crime may signify the vulnerability and penetration of the *composite* social body. As such the punishment of crime may become a matter of fundamental importance in utopian texts, where even the idea of criminality

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fantasy with belief. "L'utopiste doit croire à demi à ses constructions, de même d'ailleurs qu'un joueur doit croire à son jeu[. . .] Sinon, l'utopie devient pur exercice de la fantaisie poétique." *L'utopie et les utopies* (Saint-Pierre-de-Salerno: Gérard Monfort, 1988), 25.

threatens the fantasies of isolation and cohesion upon which the utopian project rests. Campanella's *City of the Sun* is so concerned with neutralizing the dangerously intrusive category of crime that it requires its narrator initially to deny that serious crime exists within the City and, later, to describe exactly how grave crimes committed within the metropolis's walls are punished. (A condemned man, the reader learns, may always appeal to the Metaphysician for mercy.)<sup>37</sup>

Communicable disease is another common focus of utopian fears. Plato's *Timaeus* begins with a curious, brief frame in which Socrates, longing to hear the ideal society described in action, asks where one of his desired interlocutors is, and is told, "He has been taken ill, Socrates, for he would not willingly have been absent from this gathering."<sup>38</sup> The story of how utopia came to be thus begins with the act of excluding illness. Socrates' brief reference to a sick acquaintance is all that remains of the idea of disease, but its verbal trace is the point against which the Ideal repulses itself into being. The significance of the opening extends beyond the mere exclusion of illness. It should be read as a symptomatic and constitutive moment of absence; the utopia is described only after a ritualistic gesture toward an absence has been made. Such a defensive gesture is indicative, I would argue, of utopia's necessary definition through absence, through the description of what it is not. Insistently excising sources of contamination, utopia reveals its metonymic core.

Sex, in particular, presents problems for utopian mentalities, for sexual desire is relentlessly metonymic, predicated upon fantasies of contact and contiguity. Frequently dependent on imagery of penetration, possession, and difference, sexuality may become a utopian obsession. Since sexual desire and activity are so fraught with vulnerability, and since sexuality often operates around the notion of the (at least figured) presence of an Other, utopian integrative aspirations and fears frequently manifest a particular dread of erotic urges. Copulation is controlled with mathematical precision or must be obliterated by monastic rules or self-mutilating strategies of defense. Moreover, sex is so evidently an avenue for contamination that other metonymic categories tend to become equated with it. It may be bound with language as equivalent agents of pollution,<sup>39</sup> it may be depicted—by virtue of its role in procreation—as the embodiment of historical and therefore antiutopian forces, and it may combine easily with disease or crime to produce cultural

<sup>37</sup> Tommaso Campanella, *The City of the Sun*, trans. Daniel J. Donno (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), 41, 97.

<sup>38</sup> Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, trans. Desmond Lee (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 29.

<sup>39</sup> Andrei Platonov's "The Potudan' River" and Andrei Belyi's *The Silver Dove* provide particularly striking instances of this combination. Andrei Platonov, "Reka Potudan'" (1937), in his *Gosudarstvennyi zhitel'* (M.: Sovetskii pisatel', 1988), 354–376; Andrei Belyi, *Serebrianyi golub'* (*Slavische Propylaen*, Band 38) (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1967 [1909]).

events and themes capable of holding a society spellbound. We need not decide now whether other anxieties—linguistic, historical, legal, or epidemiological—are at bottom masked anxieties *about* sexuality. At this point we need only note their similar functions and recognize that sex may act as symbolic shorthand for all forms of contamination feared by mentalities that produce utopian texts.

#### SACRIFICING CULTURE / READING IDEOLOGY

When I began this investigation of the meaning of sex during NEP, I envisioned my project as a case study of the place of sex in a "utopian culture." I gradually grew dissatisfied with this phrase. "Culture," meaning the way various segments of a population live, was not my study's object; if anything, culture was the object whose repression—or at least absence—was becoming a unifying theme of the book. Utopianism is all about the *denial* of culture, for culture, which the early-twentieth-century Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev once defined in the best utopian tradition as everything that makes man fail,<sup>40</sup> would seem to serve as a conservative bulwark against efforts to create new societies and to transcend the limitations placed by nature upon humankind. The utopian impulse may be "Faustian" or "regressive," to use Jacques Catteau's terms;<sup>41</sup> it may seek to accelerate or to reverse the course of time, but in either case it manifests a deep dissatisfaction with prevailing social institutions, values, and modes of thought, although inextricably and agonizingly bound up in all these realia.

The desire for a perfect, untainted state of being, whether envisioned in political or metaphysical terms, implies the rejection of the imperfections that surround us. And while many of our endeavors are aimed at ameliorating the human condition, utopian aspirations, with their yearning for maximal transformations, seek a better life in a qualitatively different way. The emphasis is no longer only on improving one's present world but also on exchanging it irreversibly for another. At every step accompanying the utopian desire for something radically better comes a loathing for the unpleasant details one would like to replace and forget. Indeed, the "repression" of biological, historical, or personal "facts" may be the originary inspiration for utopianism, and elaborate descriptions of buildings, mores, and ontological transcendence mere camouflage.

The unpleasant facts that utopian aspirations aim to repress may be corporal—disgust with the body or with sexual desire. They may be political—repugnance at or terror of prevailing forms of social interaction. Moreover,

<sup>40</sup> Nikolai Berdiaev, *Smysl tvorchestva* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1985), 358, 434.

<sup>41</sup> Jacques Catteau, "De la métaphorique des utopies dans la littérature russe et de son traitement chez Andrej Platonov," *Revue des études slaves*, tome 56, fasc. 1 (1984): 41 (39–50).

since the Ideal often springs from passionate rejection of the Real, it is not surprising that the utopian text tends to reinscribe that which it attempts to purge. The detested object may disappear, but its indented characteristics leave a visible and ineffaceable mark on the world that has defined itself by that object's banishment. Utopian aspirations are profoundly—but unsuccessfully—apotropaic; they create structures to protect themselves against anxieties that nevertheless leave traces in paradise's soil. The *study* of a "utopian culture," therefore, might be a story of how a culture obsessed with self-purification struggles at a specific historical moment to repress (and reinscribe) its essential metonymic anxieties.

Such an enterprise sounds more like an analysis of discourse than one of culture. This book will be a study of sex in early Soviet *ideology*, that discursive arena concerned with culture's legitimacy, rather than an exploration of sex in early Soviet culture *per se*. Ideology has been described and employed in a multitude of ways.<sup>42</sup> I will use "culture" to refer to how people live and "ideology" to refer to how people talk about their lives in relation to questions of political legitimacy. This definition, which owes much to Louis Althusser's treatment of ideology as an imaginative, psychological category<sup>43</sup> and to Pavel Medvedev's and Valentin Voloshinov's insistence on the relationship of ideology to language,<sup>44</sup> has serious consequences for historians. Insufficiently theorized, "culture" has often served in the field of Soviet studies as an infinitely expandable "kitchen sink" into which virtually anything can fit, particularly when the analyst wants to present some aspect of life as more "real" or more valuable than officially sponsored fictions. Repelled by the language and mentality of Soviet power, scholars have sometimes forgotten that they inevitably must deal principally with discourse, albeit discourse that may well have an impact on the reality it addresses and seeks to alter.

Defining ideology as *discourse* entails approaching ideology as an object to be *read*. It means treating it with all the gentle interpretive care (or tender paranoia) that important texts merit. Ideology must be read both poetically and analytically and must be understood as a symbolic, even symptomatic, category as well as a cognitive one. As Althusser writes:

<sup>42</sup> For a summary of these ways and their history, see Terry Eagleton's *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), especially 1–31.

<sup>43</sup> Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in his *Essays on Ideology* (London: Verso, 1984), 1–60, and "Marxism and Humanism," in his *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1969), 221–247.

<sup>44</sup> See M. M. Bakhtin (*sic*!?) and P. N. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, trans. Albert J. Wehrle (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978 [1928]), and V. N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973 [1929]). The question of whether these books were written by Bakhtin (rather than by the members of his circle whose names appeared on the original title pages) is a matter of intense, but for present purposes irrelevant, dispute.

in ideology the real relation [between men and their world] is inevitably invested in the imaginary relation, a relation that expresses a will (conservative, conformist, reformist or revolutionary), a hope or a nostalgia, rather than describing a reality. It is in this overdetermination of the real by the imaginary and of the imaginary by the real that ideology is active in principle.<sup>45</sup>

It is one thing to formulate a definition and another to apply it in a historical study. Implicit in the work of students of ideology such as Althusser, Terry Eagleton, or Fredric Jameson is the view that ideology often is the covert, unacknowledged object of the writing of history. Yet theorists of ideology, while they have incited the march of literary studies into the domain of the historian, have been loath to take part in the incursion themselves. They do not provide a model for what it might mean to explore the "overdetermination of the real by the imaginary and of the imaginary by the real" in the context of detailed consideration of a specific topic in a specific historical epoch, a consideration, moreover, that would not take literary texts as its primary objects of analysis. Such an exercise would entail a sensitive dialogue between the disciplines of history and literature that has hitherto been lacking in Soviet studies and would appear natural in the context of Russia, where the enormous importance of literature and literary models ought to render methods developed to analyze literature particularly suitable for the reading of ideology. The rigidity of Russian political and social structures in the nineteenth century and the control exerted over these spheres from above allowed literature to serve "as a replacement for those political, social, legal and even economic phenomena that could not develop fully in Russian society."<sup>46</sup> Consequently, the line between society's life in art and its life in the "real world" was blurred, and both nineteenth-century positivists and twentieth-century Symbolists would have a great deal of trouble determining where the text ended and where extratextual existence began.

Scholars focusing on the extraordinary importance of literature in Russia have operated on the assumption that Russian literature should be read allegorically—as political discourse in code. Students of Russian history have been loath to draw a parallel conclusion, namely, that the unfolding of historical events (and the perception of that unfolding) in Russia may be uniquely dependent on literary models. Yet it is precisely the tremendous significance of literature in Russia that makes Russian history an ideal staging ground for assaults on traditional historical methodologies. Dominick LaCapra has writ-

<sup>45</sup> Althusser, "Marxism and Humanism," 234. Fredric Jameson modifies Althusser's definition of ideology to a "representational structure which allows the individual subject to conceive or imagine his or her lived relationship to transpersonal realities such as the social structure or the collective logic of History." *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 30.

<sup>46</sup> Boris Gasparov, introduction to *The Semiotics of Russian Cultural History*, ed. Alexander D. and Alice Stone Nakhimovsky (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 13 (13–29).

ten eloquently of literature's "second-class status" in history. Often, literature is used as an example, to "give us a 'feel' for life in the past," rather than as a resource for analytical tools that may fundamentally shape the historian's endeavor.<sup>47</sup> Historians "covering" a historical period may devote a few pages to its fiction; capacious anthologies of scholarly articles devoted to an epoch tend to include one or two articles on literature to round out the picture.<sup>48</sup> An essential premise underlying the present work is Fredric Jameson's insight that since history "is inaccessible to us except in textual form, [. . .] our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization."<sup>49</sup> An explicit acceptance of ideology as discourse ought to produce a new approach to Soviet history. Such an approach would insist that questions of vocabulary, rhetorical figures, narrative, and genre are crucial to an understanding of ideology; these categories must not be forgotten even in the reading of the most "aesthetically challenged" texts.

I am not arguing that literature is the primary force controlling historical events. The occurrence of events depends on various material conditions, on "real people and their relations," as Marx and Engels argue in *The German Ideology*, which is surely one of the most hostile texts discourse theorists can imagine.<sup>50</sup> A fundamental premise of my reading of NEP, however, is that ideology and the literature that can shape it are not purely reflective of material realities but affect the perception of those realities in ways that then have an impact on the development of material realities themselves. In the course of their critique of the wayward Hegelian Max Stirner, Marx and Engels write that "ideologists [. . .] inevitably put the thing upside-down and regard their ideology both as the creative force and as the aim of all social relations, whereas it is only an expression and symptom of these relations."<sup>51</sup> Here I will be insisting that the process of symptomization is not a one-way street, that each symptom can be a cause as well as an effect. How people perceive reality has a historical impact upon that reality; this book will argue that the perception of reality and the unfolding of history are not only inescapably discursive but rest to a significant extent on representational and rhetorical models developed in literature. Most of my readers probably do not need convincing that the history of Russia in the twentieth century demonstrates

<sup>47</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *History and Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 126.

<sup>48</sup> See, e.g., Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928–1931* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), and Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch, and Richard Stites, eds., *Russia in the Era of NEP* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

<sup>49</sup> Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 35.

<sup>50</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, 45 vols. (New York: International Publishers, 1975–1991), 5:99. The use of the term "real" or even "extremely real" by Marx is problematic; often, it is repeated with such frequency that it seems to perform as a lexical, even incantatory, crutch necessary for the proper functioning of a materialist worldview. I will return in chapter 4 to the question of Marxism's troubled stance on the recognition of the "real."

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 420.

the real-world consequences of ideology; indeed, much work on Soviet Russia (including, to some extent, this one) may be read as appropriating one of the more vivid images in *The Communist Manifesto*, with various groups—the Old Bolsheviks, the artistic avant-garde, the intelligentsia—assuming the role of the bourgeois sorcerer who has conjured up forces beyond his control. Yet while histories of Russia have stressed the importance of ideology, they have been inattentive to ideology's inherently textual nature. Immersing myself and my readers in the discourse of NEP, I intend to provide a historically grounded *reading* of Soviet communism's ideological spell.

There are distinct problems with reading ideology as a particular epoch's text. First, how do we know where the boundaries of a given ideology lie? When we analyze a work of literature, textual boundaries seem distinct. To a degree, this clarity is a fiction. Students of textological problems know that the establishment of an authoritative text is a difficult task, and, as editors expand or contract a text's bulk, interpretations of it as an integral work may change.<sup>52</sup> In ideological analysis it is much more difficult to fix textual boundaries. I will be dealing with only a fraction of the material published (this word itself introduces a limit) in the Soviet Union during NEP. This study will encompass primarily the discourse generated by what the author of the first linguistic study of Soviet speech termed "the wide circles of Soviet public society [*obshchestvennost'*]";<sup>53</sup> its focus will be texts in which the topic of sex is bound up with Bolshevik legitimacy.

The public discourse that I will be analyzing was largely the product of the extreme discursive centralization that occurred in the Soviet Union during the 1920s. To be sure, to speak of centralization during NEP is somewhat paradoxical: after all, during NEP the Soviet center's physical, institutional presence was diminished throughout the land; libraries, clubs, reading rooms, universities, and orphanages were forced to close by the hard economic realities of the new mixed economy. Most of the materials I will be considering were published in large cities, yet more than two-thirds of Soviet citizens lived in villages, where central publications were scarce.<sup>54</sup> Yet while there may have been only a limited amount of interaction between city and country, there was a great deal of *idealized* urban-rural interaction within the parameters of the centralizing, urban ideological discourse.

<sup>52</sup> See, e.g., Morson's discussion of the textology and interpretations of More's *Utopia* in *The Boundaries of Genre*, 164–175.

<sup>53</sup> Selishchev, *Iazyk revoliutsionnoi epokhi*, 63.

<sup>54</sup> Roger Pethybridge, *One Step Backwards, Two Steps Forward: Soviet Society and Politics in the New Economic Policy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 24; Jeffrey Brooks, "The Breakdown in Production and Distribution of Printed Material, 1917–1927," in *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution*, ed. Abbott Gleason, Peter Kenez, and Richard Stites (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 153–155 (151–174).