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Prologue

In the Beginning was Peter's Word

Things come to life in St. Petersburg.

Ever since metal softened into flesh in *The Bronze Horseman*, Alexander Pushkin's famous *poema* to Peter the Great's new capital, the city has provided a literary space in which inanimate things spring into life. From statues to noses, overcoats to words, and even sounds and letters themselves, these objects take on flesh and stroll through the pages of literary Petersburg. Meanwhile, in mute contrast to these awakened objects, the city's human occupants—the ostensible "heroes" of these tales—remain almost ostentatiously voiceless, silenced variously by madness, incoherence, or social position. What aspects of the city's literary heritage produce this strange alchemy, this peculiar Petersburg condition in which matter passes into life, and life back into shadow?

Of course, such *ozhivlenie* (vivification or "coming to life") is hardly confined to Petersburg literature. The Pygmalion myth from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*—in which the sculptor Pygmalion caresses, kisses, pleads, and finally prays into life the ivory figure he has sculpted—represents one particularly productive iteration of this phenomenon of divine animation. The Pygmalion motif has been retold and transformed countless times in the Western canon, from the Middle Ages through the modern age.[1] A few of its most famous variations appear in the final scene of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, in which Hermione appears to warm from stone back into flesh; in Shaw's comic play *Pygmalion*,

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1 Angela Moorjani names works by Chaucer, Petrarch, Shakespeare, Rousseau, Goethe, Hoffmann, Hawthorne, and Shaw as some of the most important reworkings of the Pygmalion motif in world literature. See Angela B. Moorjani, *The Aesthetics of Loss and Lessness* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 3. For a survey of postclassical retellings of the Pygmalion myth, see Essaka Joshua, *Pygmalion and Galatea: The History of a Narrative in English Literature* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2001); for an in-depth exploration of the theme in literature and art, see Victor Stoichita, *The Pygmalion Effect: From Ovid to Hitchcock*, trans. Alison Anderson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

in which phonetics professor Henry Higgins falls in love with the eloquent society lady he has coaxed out of a Cockney flower girl; and in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, in which retired detective Scottie Ferguson attempts to resurrect his dead beloved Madeleine through the forcible transfiguration of another woman. The sculptural myth has been richly elaborated in Russian literature as well, particularly in the poetry of Pushkin, as Roman Jakobson famously detailed in his influential "The Statue in Puškin's Poetic Mythology."[2] It is curious to note that, before Pushkin brought Étienne Falconet's most famous monument to life on the page, the sculptor had produced his own statue of Pygmalion with his marble-to-flesh creation, Galatea.[3] And Falconet's Bronze Horseman itself—the steed rearing up, frozen at the very moment of its leap into Russia's future—carries on the spirit of Pygmalion as well, both visually and literarily, though its own "animation" will be fully realized only later, when the Horseman is brought to textual life by another artist.

The theme of material animation in a broader sense runs like a rich vein through world literature from its very origins; it has been most productively mined in mythology and folklore, children's literature, and science fiction. Bits and pieces of the material world—broomsticks, carpets, chess pieces, dolls, and playing cards, to name just a few—cross over into the living in texts from the Greeks and the Grimms through J. R. R. Tolkien and J. K. Rowling. In the archetypal example, an object is brought to life by a god or other supernatural force: Gaia, Brahma, a witch or wizard, a fairy godmother. In looser adaptations of the motif, powerful authority figures—often male—can also effect the transformation: a professor, a police detective, a scientist.

Though not restricted to the literature of Petersburg, the phenomenon of supernatural animation nonetheless constitutes a marked and well-developed element within it. The first few decades of the city's literary tradition alone witnessed a bronze statue in pursuit of a young clerk; a playing-card queen winking at an officer; a nose donning a uniform and strolling along Nevsky Prospect; a man taking an overcoat as his life companion; and yet more cards

2 Roman Jakobson, "The Statue in Puškin's Poetic Mythology," in *Puškin and His Sculptural Myth*, trans. and ed. John Burbank (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), 1–44.

3 *Pygmalion and Galatea*, exhibited in 1763. For more on this sculpture and its reception, see Alexander M. Schenker, *The Bronze Horseman: Falconet's Monument to Peter the Great* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 42–43.

fluttering to demonic life in a game of *shtoss*. Beyond these enchanted or inspired objects, the pages of the Petersburg text host instances of animation of a more figurative sense, as well: the Neva writhes and moans in her bed like an invalid; a clerk's double is suddenly made flesh; a young ex-student is metaphorically brought back to life; and words, letters, and even sounds seem to take on life in the streets of Peter's capital.[4] In this particular tradition, there is no master massaging life into his marble beloved; rather, these objects appear to be animated by the peculiar aura of the city itself: Petersburg, called into life *ex nihilo*, in turn provides a fertile literary environment in which dead matter periodically gasps into existence.

The theme of "coming to life" might represent a thrilling feature of Petersburg literature, but it is, in fact, only a manifestation of a larger verbal phenomenon. This book addresses the question of *ozhivlenie* in Petersburg by analyzing the powerful, performative function of language in the city's literature. The introduction offers a close analysis of Petersburg's underlying creation myth—in which the tsar Peter appears as a godlike creator, calling his city forth from nothing—in order to unearth an essential motivation for the significance of verbal fiat in the works that stem from it. Each of the chapters examines one of the foundational tales of the city's early literary tradition—Alexander Pushkin's *The Bronze Horseman* and "The Queen of Spades," Nikolai Gogol's "Nevsky Prospect," "The Nose," and "The Overcoat"—in order to uncover the critical, transformative role that language plays in each. I explore this problem of *logos* (the acts of the creative word, or the Word-made-flesh) within traditional biblical or historical frameworks, advancing close, comparative readings of each work and postulating new or underexplored subtexts to these very familiar texts. Tracing the creative word through these five early nineteenth-century works exposes a pattern of verbal creation, oppression, and rebellion fundamental to the city's narrative, equally crucial to its underlying mythos and its continuing literary tradition. I argue that the unexpected awakening of everyday matter in these texts—sculptures, body parts, articles of clothing—emblematizes the fundamental unnaturalness of Peter's creation

4 Alexander Pushkin's *The Bronze Horseman* and "The Queen of Spades"; Nikolai Gogol's "The Nose" and "The Overcoat"; Mikhail Lermontov's unfinished novel *Shtoss*; Fedor Dostoevsky's *The Double* and *Crime and Punishment*; Andrei Bely's *Petersburg*.

and, more important, dramatizes the struggle over language and power inherent to the city's literary and political traditions. These startling acts of literary animation, which emanate from the verbal challenges issued time and again by Peter's most subjugated human subjects, draw attention to the creative word as a potent response to an oppressive political order.

Introduction

St. Petersburg

Myth, Text, Word

"Peter's Creation": Peter the Great, His City, and Its Mythos

Although only three centuries have passed since Peter the Great decreed his newborn city the capital of Russia, St. Petersburg has become the empire's most "literary" of spaces; in fact, the city is so frequently cast in textual terms that at times it seems to have been fashioned as much out of pen and ink as out of granite and iron. Given the vaporous literary atmosphere surrounding the city, it is perhaps not surprising that even its relatively modern origins should be fogged over by myth. Certain facts remain solid and undisputed: it is known, for instance, that Petersburg was founded in 1703 as a military fortress. Several basic details of the city's provenance, however, are missing; scholars disagree, for instance, on precisely when the city was named Russia's new capital.[1] Perhaps the fictional aura surrounding Petersburg explains why certain "factual" matters remain indistinct.

The city's prehistory, at least, is well established: in the late seventeenth century, the reformist tsar Peter I set out to transform the ancient, isolated tsardom of Russia into a modern European state. He was determined to rip out primitive tradition at the root, and his reforms would violently transform every aspect of Russian culture, from its political and social institutions all the way down to its linguistic fabric.[2] In a stroke against the Orthodox Church, he

1 According to most scholars, the capital was moved from Moscow to St. Petersburg around 1712. See P. N. Petrov, *Istoriia Sankt-Peterburga s osnovaniia goroda do vvedeniia v deistvie vybornogo gorodskogo upravleniia po uchrezhdeniiam o guberniiakh, 1703–1782* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2004), 57.

2 Biographical information on Peter the Great is adapted from M. M. Bogoslovskii, *Petr Velikii: Materialy dlia biografii*, ed. S. O. Shmidt and A. V. Mel'nikov (Moscow: Nauka, 2005); N. I. Pavlenko, *Petr Velikii* (Moscow: Mysl', 1990); and Lindsey Hughes, *Peter the Great: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

famously ordered all long beards to be cut off, casting himself as state barber and levying a "beard tax" on those who failed to conform; he forced his subjects to wear fashionable European clothes and to dance the minuet at balls and soirées; he reorganized the military, the civil service, and even the Cyrillic alphabet along meritocratic lines, exiling certain outmoded letters and reordering the rest. He even altered time itself, declaring that modern Russians should count the year from the birth of Christ, rather than from the purported creation of the world; five and a half millennia evaporated overnight as the year was reset from 7207 to 1700. And most radically, of course, Peter founded a new, European-style city in a frozen, swampy corner of his empire and transferred the capital from the ancient Russian city of Moscow to the infant city of Sankt Piterburkh, whose Dutch-inflected name proclaimed its founder's Western influences. The new city, with its neoclassical architecture and radial layout, served as the ultimate physical emblem of Russia's radical modernization. Though the choice of site was dictated more by military and commercial necessity than by symbolism, Petersburg would soon be celebrated as a "window to Europe," a port city that would open up the insular, backward empire to the West.[3]

Despite these solid-seeming historical foundations, however, the city of Petersburg would prove particularly susceptible to mythology. As many scholars have noted, it is a distinctly ahistorical city: founded late (two years after Detroit, Michigan, but within the ancient bounds of Russia), on a legendarily empty space, Petersburg lacks an organic history of its own.[4] And in the absence of history, mythology rushes in to fill out the missing narrative.[5]

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3 This famous formula was first recorded by Italian visitor Francesco Algarotti in his 1760 *A Sampling of Letters about Russia*; Pushkin quoted the line from memory ("Pétersbourg est la fenêtre par laquelle la Russie regarde en Europe") and popularized it in *The Bronze Horseman*. See N. A. Nekrasov, *Petersburg: The Physiology of a City*, ed. Thomas Gaiton Marullo (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 32n29.

4 In his 1842 article "Moscow and Petersburg," the philosopher Aleksandr Herzen famously called Petersburg "a city without history" (in *Moskva-Peterburg: Pro et Contra* [St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Russkogo khristianskogo gumanitarnogo instituta, 2000], 177). The "emptiness" of the original site is as mythical as the rest of its origin story—in fact, there were a number of populated settlements, including the fortress known as Nienshkants (Swedish Nyenskans), which had to be captured before the foundations of the new Russian city could be laid. See Petrov, *Istoriia Sankt-Peterburga*, 36–38; and James Cracraft, *The Revolution of Peter the Great* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 136–38.

5 As literary scholar and semiotician Yuri Lotman wrote, "The lack of history gave rise to a tumultuous growth of mythology. Myth filled the semiotic void, and the situation of the

In Julie Buckler's words, "some cities are more 'storied' than others";[6] in the case of St. Petersburg, the city's identity depends almost entirely on the myths, legends, and literature surrounding it, since its actual history (and geography) is but a lacuna.

In a popular Finnish legend, Petersburg was built by a *bogatyr* (legendary warrior hero), who planted house after house on the marshy grounds, only to watch the greedy swamp swallow them up. Finally, knitting his black brows and wrinkling his head in thought, the colossus opened his hand and constructed an entire city on his palm, then lowered it to the ground. As the swamp could not swallow the city whole, it was forced to submit to the great man's will; Petersburg remained whole.[7] Other oral lore associated the city's miraculous emergence not with the heavens but with the underworld: one eighteenth-century nickname for the city was "stone devil, risen from the swampy abyss" (*kamennyi d'iavol, vosstavshii iz bolotnoi khliabi*).[8] These origin stories demonstrate popular perceptions of the city as a profoundly unnatural phenomenon that materialized suddenly, as though fully formed, on the banks of the Baltic Sea.

But the most famous myths of Petersburg's genesis are associated with its visionary progenitor, Peter the Great. Few cities are as closely associated with a single historical figure as is Petersburg with its founder. Although successive rulers all contributed to the character and look of the new city, in the public imagination and the poetic record, Petersburg would always remain a product of the will of a single individual: "Peter's creation" (*Petra tvoren'e*), in Pushkin's famous formulation. According to the most persistent legends, Peter handpicked the site of the original fortress, marching his troops through the swamps to find the ideal location: "Surveying the island, he took a soldier's bayonet, cut two pieces of turf, and, laying them in a cross, said, 'Let there be a city here' [*Zdes'*

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artificial city proved extremely mythogenic" (Iu. M. Lotman, "Simvolika Peterburga i problemy semiotiki goroda," *Izbrannye stat'i*, 3 vols. [Tallinn: Aleksandra, 1992–93], 2:14).

6 Julie Buckler, *Mapping St. Petersburg: Imperial Text and Cityshape* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 17.

7 N. A. Sindalovskii, *Legendy i mify Sankt-Peterburga* (St. Petersburg: Fond "Leningradskaia galereia," 1994), 16–17. The legend's focused attention on the bogatyr's head (brows, forehead, black eyes lit with "diabolical flames") and deep thought ("Togda bogatyr' zadumalsia [...] Dolgo dumal bogatyr' i pridumal") renders the city a product of the creator-figure's mind. See Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 370n8.

8 V. N. Burlak, *Tainstvennyi Peterburg: Legendy severnoi stolitsy* (Moscow: AiF-Print, 2002), 146.

byt' gorodu]; at that moment, an eagle miraculously appeared, hovering above the tsar."[9] Peter's legendary decree (to his soldiers? to the earth?) rhetorically echoed the divine "Let there be light" of Genesis, bearing within it the implication that Peter had called his city forth from nothing, by proclamation alone, as though his Word itself had given birth to the city.[10]

Peter's defining act assumed mythologized form almost instantly in the national psyche, taking on sacred dimension in both sanctioned (written) literature and oral legend. The founding of Petersburg was glorified in the poetic record as a modern-day miracle of the northern swamps: the transformation of nothing into something; the coaxing of chaos into cosmos. In early odes, Peter appears as a divine creator, a demiurge of modern Russia: in the first of his "Inscriptions for a Statue of Peter the Great," composed in the 1740s, Mikhail Lomonosov declares him an "earthly god"; and in his 1755 "Ode to the Emperor Peter the Great," Aleksandr Sumarokov opines that, were it not for the Christian injunction against sacrilege, Peter would be recognized "not as a tsar but as a god." While this rhetorical tradition of deification lasted throughout the eighteenth century, among the devout *narod* (folk) Peter was regarded as a demonic figure: he was denounced as the Antichrist by the Old Believers of the Orthodox Church, who recognized apocalyptic warning signs in his sweeping program of reform (the imposition of foreign dress and customs, the forced secularization of Russian society) and alarming personal appearance and habits (his giant size; his use of alcohol, tobacco, and coarse language).[11] Pushkin would draw on this ambiguity in *The Bronze Horseman*, hailing him at once as a

9 For these and other legends surrounding the founding of Petersburg, see N. A. Sindalovskii, *Legendy i mify Sankt-Peterburga* and *Peterburgskii fol'klor* (St. Petersburg: Maksima, 1994); Burlak, *Tainstvennyi Peterburg*; and M. N. Vlasova, *Tainy Severnoi stolitsy: Legendy i predaniia Sankt-Peterburga* (St. Petersburg: Azbuka, 2012). Buckler has commented on the difficulties inherent in chronicling oral legends, which are "everywhere asserted and nowhere documented" (*Mapping St. Petersburg*, 128); despite the seeming impossibility of sourcing and recording rumors, however, these scholars have compiled rich collections of the lore associated with the early city.

10 Another little-known legend from that time—in which an old man appears in the camps of the Russian army on a May night in 1703, points toward the Finnish gulf, and repeats several times, "May Peter's city be here" (*Byt' gradu Petra*)—offers a twist on the perceived oral genesis of the city (Burlak, *Tainstvennyi Peterburg*, 33).

11 For more on popular images of Peter, including his identification with the Antichrist, see Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *The Image of Peter the Great in Russian History and Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 74–85; and Kevin Platt, "Antichrist Enthroned: Demonic

wonderworking builder (*stroitel' chudotvornyi*) and an idol (*kumir, gordelivyi istukan*). Over the course of the nineteenth century, the balance would shift decisively away from the old panegyric image of a divinity toward one of an unholy pretender-God, a false creator whose brash reforms had infected the pure body of holy Rus'—ancient homeland of the Russians—with insidious Western ideas.

Peter's extraordinary creation was likewise subject to binary verbal representation. Almost as soon as the foundation was laid for the Peter and Paul Fortress, the future capital took on a new life in words, simultaneously celebrated in official odes and demonized in the legends and prophesies that accompanied its founding. (The resulting duality was reflected onomastically: in odes, Petersburg became a lofty Northern Palmyra or Venice of the North; in the common tongue, it remained, simply, *Piter*.) Petersburg was never merely a physical, historical space but also an imagined one, which took on "fictional" dimensions right from the start. These two opposing verbal forces that sang of Peter's act (the odes commissioned from above and the underground tales from below) forged the narrative of the city's founding, producing a bifurcated mythology that was both publicly declaimed and privately whispered.

The city's written chronicle was begun in the eighteenth century, and its earliest poetic records generally follow the generic and aesthetic conventions of that age.[12] Beginning with Gavrilo Buzhinsky's 1717 "Oration in Praise of St. Petersburg and Its Founder," the era's brightest luminaries—Vasilii Trediakovsky, Lomonosov, Gavriil Derzhavin, Mikhail Murav'ev, Sumarokov, Konstantin Batiushkov—all contributed odes and lyrics to the new capital's growing literary corpus.[13] By the time Petr Viazemsky composed his own "Petersburg" in 1818, these poets had constructed a poetic monument to Peter and his creation that was as lofty and as gleaming as the Admiralty Spire. These verses cultivated a flattering image of the city, praising its maker and expressing a sense of awe before its miraculous conception. A single set of themes and motifs was repeated across these early works (Peter as creator and protector;

Visions of Russian Rulers," in *Russian Literature and Its Demons*, ed. Pamela Davidson (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), 99–100.

12 Julie A. Buckler contends that the eighteenth-century Petersburg literary tradition was a more eclectic phenomenon than previous scholars have allowed. See *Mapping St. Petersburg*, 72.

13 For more on the city's eighteenth-century odic tradition, focusing on the era's overlooked literary diversity, see ibid., 67–73.

his miraculous creation of something out of nothing), establishing and reinforcing an "official" mythology of Petersburg. No sooner were these poets' exalted words inscribed, however, than an alternative oral mythology began to bubble up beneath their written memorial, disrupting and destabilizing the officially sanctioned story of the city.

While Peter's miracle on the northern swamp was officially styled after Genesis, the popular response was patterned more after Revelation, and a promise of destruction loomed over the city from its very beginnings. Peter's conservative first wife, Evdokiia Lopukhina, is said to have leveled the original curse at her husband's newborn city: "May Petersburg be empty." Her words would be recalled and repeated throughout the city's history, particularly during times of famine, fire, and, especially, flood. Other prophets emerged in the early days of the capital, foretelling Petersburg's imminent destruction by water; one mystic's 1720 vision of the godless city swallowed up by the sea was so influential that inhabitants began to move to higher ground.[14] According to such eschatological models of the city, chaos would eventually triumph over cosmos; the city would flood, sink, or otherwise end in emptiness, in accordance with Lopukhina's curse ("Peterburgu byt' pustu"), a rhetorical echo and negation of her husband's originating "Zdes' byt' gorodu." It is hardly surprising that the religious and superstitious Russian peasantry should have responded to the city with some degree of suspicion and hostility—after all, its origins were murky, steeped in mythology; it was an inorganic city that seemed to grow unnaturally fast; and then there was its inauspicious location: even though the city was represented as man's victory over nature, a sharp tension between nature and city persisted. Built over a swamp, it is dominated by fog, rain, and periodic floods, which seemed to foreshadow the destruction of the artificial city, buttressing prophesies that Petersburg's end would come at the hands of the elements. The city was thus strongly associated with both birth (creation,

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14 For these and other legends and prophesies of Petersburg, see Sindalovskii, *Legendy i mify*, 15–16; and Vlasova, *Tainy Severnoi stolitsy*, 63–80. This prophetic tradition continued into the nineteenth century, when the artist-freemason I. I. Oleshkevich foretold both the flood of 1824 and the uprising on Senate Square, and the preacher Feodosii Levitskii later interpreted both events as signs of the apocalypse. See I. N. Bozherianov, *Nevskii Prospekt (1703–1903): Kul'turnoistoricheskii ocherk dvukhvekovoi zhizni S.-Peterburga* (St. Petersburg, 1901–3), 2:375, in Vlasova, *Tainy Severnoi stolitsy*, 66.

newness) and death (apocalypse, destruction, eschatology), hailed at once as a New Jerusalem and condemned as a second Babylon.

Ultimately, the city's mythos sprang from two sources: the establishment's laudatory self-perception, as recorded and proclaimed by the city's earliest bards; and the apprehensive popular response to what seemed an unnatural phenomenon.[15] Every aspect of Petersburg that was praised by the poets was spurned, point by point, by the peasants. The marriage of these two literary lines—the city's grand odic record and its murky, unofficial narratives—would feed and nourish a nascent poetic trend, eventually giving birth to an extraordinary new literature of the city. As many admirers of Peter's city have noted, Petersburg is a city that loves to be written or verbally "authored," whether in its underground oral narratives or in its official artistic ones. As Buckler puts it in the introduction to her work, the city practically wrote itself into being—it is "its own favorite literary subject."[16] And so, the new imperial capital of Russia quickly became its literary capital, too. Although the city boasts only a short history, it has nonetheless generated an extraordinarily rich literary and artistic tradition since the 1833 publication of Pushkin's *The Bronze Horseman*, widely acknowledged as the originating work of what has come to be known as the Petersburg Text, which will be the subject of the second part of this introduction.

Implicit in this discussion runs a through line relating to polarity and contradiction: the city as a political monument to modernization vs. its susceptibility to mysticism and revelation; the reformer tsar's grand ambition vs. the swampy ground he chose to build on; Peter as both God and Antichrist, his creation as consecrated and cursed. Certainly, Petersburg's situation on the northwestern periphery of the territory marked it as fundamentally non-Russian, an unrooted, foreign city alienated from its native culture.[17] Theorists of the city's mythologization and the cultural and literary traditions surrounding it agree that Petersburg's pervasive duality is rooted in the particular circumstances of its genesis. According to Vladimir Toporov, the city's essential

15 As Buckler observes, "It is a Petersburg commonplace that mysterious legends and oral lore play an integral role in the imperial capital's cultural life and convey an essential part of the city's history" (*Mapping St. Petersburg,* 116).

16 Ibid., 1.

17 See Yuri M. Lotman, "The Symbolism of Petersburg," in *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 191–202.

polarity springs from the uneasy equivalence of nature and culture it embodies: "Petersburg as a great city is not the result of any victory or full triumph of culture over nature, but a place where the dual reign of nature and culture is embodied, enacted, realized."[18] Brodsky scholar Maija Könönen theorizes that this nature/culture opposition so strongly associated with the city stems from its extraordinary origins: it did not grow organically but according to the vision of Peter the Great.[19]

This classical nature/culture divide found reflection in its verbal representations: where poets praised the city as a triumph over nature, the peasantry condemned it as a crime against the natural order. Indeed, at the root of these theoretical explanations, I would argue, lies a linguistic source: Petersburg's dualism springs from the opposition between the oral and written traditions that surrounded and conditioned the city's image. It is the tension between the written word that extolled Peter's creation (official, elegiac, encomiastic) and the spoken words that cursed and doomed it (underground, folksy, negative) that ultimately gave rise to both the city's two-sided nature and to its extraordinary literary tradition. That is, while the city's mythos undoubtedly stems from its unusual genesis, I would argue that it is the uniquely *verbal* nature of its derivation—its origin in the Word (Peter's legendary "Let there be a city!"), as well as the subsequent written/oral divide in its literary monumentalization—that is the dominant factor in determining the form of its literary tradition. In a word, Petersburg was founded by the edict of Peter: his fabled proclamation and its literary representation inverted the divine fiat, upending the natural order and creating the conditions that allowed for the *unnatural* animation that occurs again and again in the subsequent literature of his city; one of the most recognizable features of the Petersburg literary tradition, this material animation is a direct result of the struggle over creative language and power in the city.

Within a century of the city's founding, Peter's creative (and, to some, unholy) Word would be challenged on two fronts: from below, his identification with the Antichrist contested his representation as an earthly God; meanwhile,

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18 V. N. Toporov, *Peterburgskii tekst russkoi literatury: Izbrannye trudy* (St. Petersburg: Iskusstvo-SPB, 2003), 35 (hereafter *PTRL*).

19 Maija Könönen, "Four Ways of Writing the City: St. Petersburg-Leningrad as a Metaphor in the Poetry of Joseph Brodsky" (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2003), 18, http://ethesis.helsinki.fi/julkaisut/hum/slavi/vk/kononen/fourways.pdf.

after the eulogistic odes of the eighteenth century had petered out, a new generation of writers, beginning with Pushkin, subjected the entire Petersburg project to critical reevaluation. These two waves of verbal challengers threatened Peter's legacy on two levels: one sought to *redefine* him as an Idol, associating his act of genesis with the apocalypse, while the other sought to *replace* him, appropriating the creative word to become a rival force of verbal animation. The poets who took up the pen to challenge the tsar's revolutionary undertaking committed acts of verbal creation to rival Peter's in works that would eventually form the basis of a tradition largely devoted to understanding the city that was, itself, engendered in his word. Their texts feature humble members of Petersburg's bureaucratic or military hierarchies who rise up to issue a challenge to the city's political establishment, their confrontations encoding the authors' own struggle over literary and political authority within an empire still dominated by Peter's authoritarian spirit.

The Petersburg Text of Russian Literature: Toporov and After

The so-called Petersburg Text is a heterogeneous collection of artistic works connected to the city of Petersburg, which has been theorized as a single, collective "text." The term refers primarily to literary pieces but has also been extended to include works of musical, architectural, and visual art. Not just any work associated with the city can join this collective, however; while each representative chapter of the Petersburg Text is "about" Petersburg, not every piece related to Petersburg is considered part of this supertextual tradition. These texts compose a single, synthetic body, unified not only by common locus but by thematic, structural, and even lexical concerns, as each individual work appears to recycle plot points and even a tightly controlled set of vocabulary from earlier works. Vladimir Toporov, the principal theoretician of the Petersburg tradition, details the deep correspondences among these independent texts, from the higher compositional and generic devices all the way down to the phonetic level, concluding that the city has its own language.[20] And while many cities

20 Toporov, *PTRL*, 18–19; 22: "Petersburg has its own 'language.' It speaks to us through its streets, squares, waters, islands, gardens, buildings, monuments, people, history, and ideas, and may be understood as a sort of heterogeneous text, to which is ascribed a certain general

might share a common sign system—in fact, it has become customary for cultural theorists to refer to an "urban semiotics," construing all aspects of a given city's environment, from the material to the linguistic—what makes Petersburg unique, in Toporov's formulation, is the existence of a "synthetic supertext" that unifies and imposes a higher meaning.[21]

This cluster of works thus composes a geographically, thematically, and semantically unified "mastertext," a single, synchronic text written by various authors and at various times in the city's history. This mastertext exhibits strong intertextuality, as its component texts interact with one another, seeming to call out to each other across decades and even centuries. Although Toporov first introduced his concept of a semiotically unified "city text" in the early 1970s,[22] the same body of works had received the critical attention of the literary scholar Nikolai Antsiferov a half-century earlier. A sort of spiritual godfather of the Petersburg Text, Antsiferov composed a series of influential studies in the 1920s probing for the myth and soul of Petersburg.[23] His *Dusha Peterburga* (The Soul of Petersburg) is hardly an objective, scholarly treatment of the city's literary tradition; it represents, rather, the author's impassioned and personal investigation of the cultural mythologies surrounding his beloved city. The result—a lyrical portrait of an unpredictable, unfathomable, and living space, emphasizing its extraordinary artificial origins, as well as the integrity of its literary image across works and eras—prefigures and anticipates Toporov and his later theoretical model.

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meaning, and on the basis of which it is possible to reconstruct a particular system of signs that is realized in the text."

21 Ibid., 23.

22 Toporov first introduced the notion of the Petersburg Text in his 1973 article "O strukture romana Dostoevskogo v sviazi s arkhaicheskimi skhemami mifologicheskogo myshleniia (Prestuplenie i nakazanie)," in *Structure of Texts and Semiotics of Culture*, ed. Jan Van der Eng and Grygar Mojmir (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), 225–302; the construct was most famously developed in a series of articles by Toporov and his fellow structuralists in *Semiotika goroda i gorodskoi kul'tury: Peterburg* (Tartu: Tartuskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 1984). For the most comprehensive representation of Toporov's theory and praxis, see *PTRL*. Unless otherwise noted, all citations from Toporov in the present study refer to this edition. See also V. N. Toporov, *Mif. Ritual. Simvol. Obraz: Issledovaniia v oblasti mifopoeticheskogo* (Moscow: Progress-Kul'tura, 1995), which includes several articles not contained in the later volume.

23 N. P. Antsiferov, *Dusha Peterburga: Peterburg Dostoevskogo. Byl' i mif Peterburga*, reprint of 1922, 1923, 1924 editions, ed. E. B. Pokrovskaia (Moscow: Kniga, 1991).

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