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Extractivism as rebordering: Dmitrii Savochkin's *Mark Sheider*, Russo-Ukrainian mining literature, and the fragmentation of post-Soviet Ukraine

Andrei Rogatchevski

Department of Language and Culture, UiT-The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, Norway

ABSTRACT
This essay examines the Russian-language novel *Mark Sheider* (2009) by the Ukrainian author Dmitrii Savochkin in the context of the classical American and European (Émile Zola, Upton Sinclair, George Orwell), as well as Russo-Ukrainian (Aleksandr Kuprin, Larisa Reisner, Vasilii Grossman, Boris Gorbatov, Fridrikh Gorenshtein) writing about mining. It identifies some *topoi* common to mining fiction and non-fiction. It also considers the Russo-Ukrainian versions of such *topoi*, with a special focus on extractivism represented as a form of rebordering. Wolfgang Iser's concept of fictional representation provides the article with the principal theoretical framework for the analysis.

Rationale

Extractivism is 'the practice of drawing minerals and fossil fuels out of the soil' for profit, usually associated with the capitalist exploitation of people and environment.[1] The extractivist approach treats nature as 'little more than a site and source of the natural resources required for the operations of modern societies. […] What is extracted is used up, leaving behind only dangerous waste, environmental destruction, and substances that interfere with the climate'.[2] Extractivist practice has been inextricably linked to coal mining, which is often seen as the source not merely of society's 'material wealth but of modern civilisation itself'.[3] The boons of civilisation, however, come at a price, as, of all our common energy sources, 'coal creates the most greenhouse gases for the energy obtained'.[4]

It is undoubtedly coal's polluting properties, first and foremost, that connect it with extractivism. Since pollution contaminates something pure with impurities, it is also an attribute of rebordering – if rebordering is understood not as a 'reactivation of certain border functions on the symbolic and material levels'[5] (wherever the previously existent bordering had been removed and then reinstated again), but rather as reshaping, blurring, merging, or otherwise altering the physical or imaginary boundaries which normally keep objects, substances, entities, and concepts apart from, and in a certain balance with, each other. This kind of rebordering has a great deal in common with extractivism, 'a process that reshapes and uses up the natural environment, with consequences for both those who live close to the sites of extraction and those far from these sites'.[6]

Environmental pollution is not the only area where extractivism and rebordering intersect. This can be illustrated, for instance, by such model examples of coal mining fiction as Émile Zola's *Germinal* (1885) and Upton Sinclair's *King Coal* (1917), written long before either extractivism or rebordering gained terminological currency. Together, the two novels make a significant contribution to a coal fiction master narrative, about a novice/stranger who gets a job in a mine, and, appalled at the working conditions there, becomes a leader of the miners' resistance movement, which proves tragically futile. The variety of rebordering practices described by Zola and Sinclair includes rearranging the land- and townscape (by means of coal extraction, which leads to large-scale accidents that dramatically affect the way things appear under- and above-ground); the difficult process of miners' unionisation (an amalgamation of individuals, yet another form of rebordering); and the miners' strike/rebellion (the workforce's attempt at a management participation, seeking to remove, albeit temporarily, the hierarchical borders between employers and employees), which shakes the very foundations of the society that the characters inhabit.[7]

How are extractivism and rebordering represented in Russophone writing about coal mining? Russia has the second largest coal reserves in the world and is the fifth-largest consumer of coal and the sixth-largest producer of coal, so it is only natural that Russian mining-related writing is rich, varied and worthy of note. Yet little has been done hitherto to analyse it as a body of text with recurrent motifs that are partly reminiscent of, and partly dissimilar from, the Zola/Sinclair master narrative. Russian writing about coal mining can hardly be separated from Ukrainian. The Ukrainian region of Donbas was an extremely important coal-producing area in both Imperial and Soviet Russia, and remains so for independent Ukraine. Irrespective of their linguistic preferences (some of them were fluent in both Russian and Ukrainian in any case), a number of Ukrainian authors did not fail to reflect this fact in their works. Russian and Ukrainian portrayals of miners, whether novelistic or essayistic, do not seem to differ substantially

from each other, and should be considered as a kind of continuum – especially because (more rebordering!) Russian and Ukrainian identities are often mixed and confused on account of frequent intermarriages, labour migration well beyond places of birth, and the Soviet policy of Russification. Besides, miners' professional solidarity tends to be stronger than their loyalty to a particular ethnic origin.

Material, method, and historical background

I have chosen Dmitrii Savochkin's Russophone Ukrainian novel *Mark Sheider* (2009) as the case study for an examination of how extractivism and rebordering interact in a fictional representation of an East European coal mining milieu. Fictional representation is understood here, after Nelson Goodman and Wolfgang Iser, as 'fact from fiction',[8] i.e. as a modified version of events and/or (classes of) objects with an agenda of its own. This agenda is revealed whenever a representation's 'true nature is laid bare, [and] turns into a way of positing something which in itself is […] unreal yet serves as a means of ordering, measuring and computing things that are real'.[9]

Savochkin's novel is an ultimate example of extractivism represented as rebordering because it predicts, five years before the event, the *de facto* secession of large parts of the Donbas region from the Ukrainian state, instigated in no small measure at the behest of Donbas miners. In the absence of secondary literature about *Mark Sheider* in English, understanding the novel is hardly possible without some knowledge of the preceding Russo-Ukrainian narrative discourse about mining, summarised here by recourse to the relevant works by Aleksandr Kuprin, Larisa Reisner, Vasilii Grossman, Boris Gorbatov, and Fridrikh Gorenshtein (the latter three Ukraine-born, but using Russian as their language of choice). Taken together, these prominent authors chart the role of extractive industries (especially coal mining), as well as society's typical attitudes to them, from late Imperial to late Soviet Russia. *Mark Sheider* owes so much to this Russo-Ukrainian mining literature as a whole that both the novel and its literary context are of necessity given a more or less equal weighting within the space of my article. I also refer to pertinent books by Western authors such as Zola and Sinclair for comparison whenever necessary.[10] I examine the Russian/Ukrainian mining narrative as a subset of 'commodity fiction' (Michael Niblett) – a form of fiction 'about the world a specific fuel creates and maintains'[11]; and in accordance with the so-called FASP approach ('*fiction à substrat professionnel*'[12]), which identifies various professional life narratives, such as the legal FASP, the medical FASP, the journalistic FASP, the police procedural FASP, and the like. In FASP, it is a professional environment that shapes the characters and informs the plot. My article focuses on both 'dramatically

common underground experiences'[13] and the individual differences in miners' portrayal and real-life circumstances.

As far as the historical background is concerned, it is useful to remember that in pre-revolutionary Russia, coal mines were often either owned or run (or both) by foreign capital and management. The entire mining industry was nationalised in the aftermath of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. Coal served as a primary vehicle for the USSR's ambitious industrialisation programme under Stalin, but fell somewhat out of fashion after oil deposits were discovered in Western Siberia in the 1950s–1970s. When the USSR disintegrated in 1991, many mines lost their state support and ownership, which tended to result in wage arrears and neglect over safety rules, if not outright closure. On occasion, miners would turn into an influential political force, making entire governments hostages to workers' demands for fair pay and conditions. All of this has contributed to coal's current reputation, which is perhaps best described as, 'you can't live with it, you can't live without it'.

The course taken by Russo-Ukrainian mining history before, during, and after the Soviet Union has determined the treatment of coal-related pollution in literature about extractive industries. The majority of the Russian and Ukrainian authors named above largely sided with anti-extractivist discourse (which condemns the insatiable demand for the natural resources and workforce), with the clear exception of Gorbatov, who propounds a pro-extractivist discourse owing to his enthusiasm for the modernising drive of Stalin's reforms undertaken in the name of socialism (and is afforded special attention in my article precisely because his stance is so different from those of the other authors included). Szeman explains why the left, normally expected to uphold the anti-extractivist stance, can at times embrace the pro-extractivist viewpoint instead:

> [e]xtraction remains a principal source of economic value, which can be used to help offset social debt and to improve the lives of citizens; in doing so, however, the left often becomes a variant of the right – engaged in the selfsame practices of modern capitalism, with many of the same consequences (especially with respect to the environment […]), even if the original political intention is very different.[14]

As Barbara Freese puts it, 'coal has always been both a creative and a destructive force'.[15] Russo-Ukrainian coal-related writing duly reflects this duality, sometimes within one and the same text.

Dmitrii Savochkin's *Mark Sheider* in the context of recent Ukrainian (mining) history

In 2009, five years before the Russian annexation of the Crimean peninsula and the outbreak of the Donbas war in eastern Ukraine, a debut fantasy novel, *Mark Sheider*, by the psychologist Dmitrii Savochkin (b. 1978 in Kharkiv and

educated and residing in Dnipro), came out in Moscow and St Petersburg. The book depicts the secret plan by Donbas miners, disaffected by the Ukrainian government's inability to protect them from the mine owners' greed, to dig an underground tunnel from Donbas to Kyiv in order to dislodge the Ukrainian powers-that-be by 'excavating a gigantic pit under that city, so that it would fall into it entirely, […] together with the President, the Parliament, the ministries and the rest of those who rule the country'.[16] The imaginary disappearance of the Ukrainian central government, engineered by the miners, would be accompanied by the country's fragmentation:

> [t]here will appear several large states on the Ukrainian territory: the Donetsk-Krivii Rig Republic with Dnipro as its capital, the Seaside Republic with Odesa as its capital, the Galician Republic with Lviv as its capital, and the Republic of Crimea. Kyiv and Central Ukraine will form a People's Republic. […] Eventually all these lands will be to a certain extent swallowed by their neighbours. […] Ukraine will cease to exist.[17]

It has not (yet) happened exactly as described in Savochkin's novel, but in 2014, the Crimea's wish for autonomy did result in the territory's amalgamation by the Russian Federation, and the Donbas separatists did proclaim the establishment of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (the DPR and LPR), which continue functioning, for better or worse, to this day. Has someone extremely powerful read Savochkin, become inspired by his vision, and decided to try and implement it, at least in part, just for fun? Or, somewhat more likely, did Savochkin prove attuned to the underground developments (pun intended) that others had missed? In any case, there appears to be a direct link not only between the protests of Ukrainian miners and the attempted rebordering of post-Soviet Ukraine, but also between mining activity as it is represented in fiction (and occasionally non-fiction), and rebordering as a form of extractivism.[18]

Let us briefly summarise the last hundred years of Ukrainian mining history. In Soviet times, and especially since the early 1930s, not only in Ukraine but across the USSR as a whole, miners were the most highly respected and best paid members of the working class. Donbas came to be one of the two main Soviet coal producing regions, and was especially important in the years of Stalin's industrialisation, which was predominantly powered by the Donbas coal.[19] It is arguably Ukrainian miners who were at the forefront of the industry until well after World War II, even though their Ukrainian identity, as a rule, was subsumed by the USSR-wide process of forging a new Soviet man (rising above ethnic distinctions and using the Russian language for intercultural communication), on the one hand, and by the commonalities of the mining profession, which bonded people of various ethnic origins in its ranks, on the other.

After the Ukrainian independence of 1991, and until 2014, when the Donbas war began, Ukraine was the third-largest coal producer in Europe,

extracting 85 million tonnes in 2012 and employing half a million people in the sector,[20] which accounted for some 95% of the domestic energy resources. However, with the partial privatisation and restructuring of the mines (whose profitability was not particularly high), miners lost their privileged status and were frequently owed their salaries by mine owners. In tune with the adopted business practices, in cases of private ownership, the mines' profits were credited to the owners (who often syphoned their assets abroad), while the mines' losses were normally debited to the state.[21] Add to this the losses incurred by the state-owned mines, and by the mid-2000s, the Ukrainian state owed miners some 220 million US dollars in wage arrears.[22] Miners' protest marches on Kyiv took place regularly enough,[23] and resulted in short-term solutions that apparently failed to address the situation long-term.[24] This fostered the popular sentiment that breaking away from the central government might be a better idea than merely toppling it.

There is evidence that the Donbas miners' separatist radicalism has a great deal to do with what they are routinely engaged in by virtue of their professional occupation, i.e. a constant, fearless and ruthless reshaping of terrain both above and beneath the ground surface, which involves hard, mostly male physical labour, as well as a habitual (re-)mapping, renegotiation, dismantling, replacing, and repositioning of all kinds of structural boundaries with potentially far-reaching economic, environmental and sometimes even political consequences.[25] As Andrei Purgin, a co-founder of the Donetsk Republic separatist movement (since 2005) and head of the People's Council and deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers at the DPR in 2014–2015, put it:

> Donbas dwellers' testosterone levels are higher than those in Kyiv. Kyiv dwellers can wave flags at the protest rallies for months. In Donbas, people waved flags for two hours and then started saying: 'Why are we wasting our time? Let's do something!'.[26]

Currently, the Donbas miners in active employment make up less than 10% of the area's population, but it is apparently they (as well as their retired and jobless colleagues) who determined to a significant degree the nature and forms of political activism in Donbas in the mid-2010s. Such a reputation is reflected by a more than century-long joint tradition of miners' representations in Ukrainian and Russian fiction and non-fiction.[27] It makes sense to take a brief look at this tradition to determine how it links extractivism, rebordering, and their political ramifications. For lack of space, only a selection of works can be included,[28] with each author/title indicative of a certain key phase in the relationship between Donbas miners and their local/central authorities. For comparative background, I also draw upon depictions of mining elsewhere, as and when appropriate.

Mark Sheider in the context of Russo-Ukrainian writing about (Donbas) mining

The prerevolutionary years of mining in Donbas are characterised through the story 'V nedrakh zemli' ('In the Bowels of the Earth', 1899) by Aleksandr Kuprin (1870–1938) – an early example of Russian mining fiction, sprung from Kuprin's personal visit to Donbas mines in 1896 – and the novel Stepan Kolchugin (1937–1940) by the Ukraine-born Vasilii Grossman (1905–1964), whose father was a mining engineer in Donbas (Grossman himself worked as a chemical engineer in Donbas mines and research and higher education institutions in the early 1930s, but did not witness the prerevolutionary period first-hand). Fragments from a collection of essays titled Ugol', zhelezo i zhivye liudi (Coal, Iron and Humans, 1924), written in a highly poetic style by Larisa Reisner (1895–1926), depict the immediate post-revolutionary mining reality on the basis of her personal visits to a range of Donbas and Urals mines. The enthusiasm of the shock workers' movement in the mid-1930s (personified by Aleksei Stakhanov, 1906–1977) is represented by the unfinished novel Donbas (1951) by Boris Gorbatov (1908–1954), who was born at a colliery in the Luhansk province, and in the 1920s co-founded the Association of Donbas's proletarian writers Zaboi ('Coalface'). Gorbatov's retrospective rose-tinted view is somewhat tempered by Grossman's novel Gliukauf (Good Luck Getting Out), first published in 1934 and reflecting the contemporary spirit of change with a little more restraint.

The downside of Stalin's mining achievements after World War II is shown in the story 'Zima 53-go goda' ('The Winter of 1953', written in 1965, first published in 1978) by Ukraine-born Fridrikh Gorenshtein (1932–2002), a mining engineer by training, who, in the 1950s, worked at an iron ore mine in Krivii Rig. Banned in the USSR for its bleakness, the story appeared for the first time in an émigré journal in Paris (Gorenshtein left for the West two years after). Even though the action here takes place at an iron ore mine, not at a coal mine, it contains many parameters of the coal mining narrative (for more on it see below) and is therefore worth mentioning in this context. Gorenshtein's highly critical vision of Soviet mining, glorified by his predecessors such as Gorbatov, paves the way to the ultimate deconstruction of the Soviet mining myth by Savochkin, whose Mark Sheider in particular (see chapter 21), contains an unflattering portrait of the model Soviet miner Stakhanov as an alcoholic who died in an accident in a psychiatric ward.

The mining FASP and coal as a commodity

A disparaging description of a miner in literature about mining is, however, a rarity. Coal's particular nature as a combustible compressed carbon

deposited underground determines the very special kind of workforce and equipment necessary for its extraction (people in possession of superior skills, stamina, endurance, and determination), and forms a singular, often mystical or mythologised relationship between human and the mineral that the human extracts.[29] According to Kuprin, who can be credited with one of the earliest memorable Russophone narratives about Donbas coal mining, the mine belongs to a 'supernatural world, the abode of dark, monstrous forces […] terrible, nameless and impersonal, just like the underground darkness that begot them'.[30] In Donbas folklore, these forces tend to be personified by Shubin the mine spirit, now mischievous, now benevolent.[31] In Savochkin's book, a version of Shubin is exemplified by Mark Sheider, a legendary creature with two bodies (those of a police investigator and a miner) and one mind.[32]

The mine itself can also possess anthropomorphic features. In the eyes of a Grossman character, it 'looked like a wise living creature, unkind and sarcastic towards people'.[33] It can even remind some authors of a disease-infected human body. As Reisner puts it, 'in a living mine, dark dampness, too, flows down the walls of the lungs, where, in the depths of respiratory passages, dull tuberculous foci function as miners' lamps'.[34] Sometimes, conversely, it is humans who are identified with the mineral that they are out to get: '[t]hey breathe inside a sack full of coal dust; their skin, saturated by sweat and powdered by soot, turns people into sculptures made of coal'.[35] There is also a symbolic *quid pro quo* scene in Kuprin, equating miners and their commodity during a shift change: men are going down the mine while coal is being lifted up. The fusion between mine, coal, and miners obviously qualifies as an imaginary by-product of extractivism in its rebordering function.

Another example of rebordering is the blending of dead and living matter. Even though the mine can be defined as a 'gigantic grave',[36] and the miner's situation inside it as one of being 'buried alive',[37] the boundary between the animate and the inanimate, human and machine, in mining (non-)fiction is not impenetrable. A miner's tool could be described as a body part, to illustrate how natural and efficient the bond between a conscientious worker and his/her equipment is (cf.: 'for Victor, his jackhammer has now become merely an extension of his extraordinarily powerful right hand').[38] Conversely, the same bond between man and machine could result in a miner becoming a dehumanised automaton (cf.: 'It is unlikely that the fingers of a living being would squeeze so dexterously between the winding cable and the drum, straightening the cable. Such fingers would have been flattened and torn to shreds long ago').[39]

Miners versus managers

Among such humans, a distinction is frequently drawn between mine workers, often treated as legendary heroes,[40] and mine managers/owners,

often treated with a mixture of awe, fear, hatred, and contempt.[41] Kuprin calls miners' labour 'inhumane', because it takes place in such a 'tight and narrow space that it is impossible to work there while sitting or standing. Miners have to cut coal while lying on their backs, which is the hardest and most demanding form of the art of mining'.[42] Reisner defines miners' 'struggle with coal, damp, hunger and exhaustion' as 'heroic',[43] while a character in Grossman's *Kolchugin* claims that 'hanging yourself five times is better than spending a day inside the mine'.[44] Conditioned by such a 'beastly' ('*zverskoi*') working environment,[45] or 'life on all fours' ('*zhizn na chetveren'kakh*', as Gorbatov puts it[46]), it is hardly surprising that miners' temper and lifestyle are characterised by Kuprin as

> unrestrained, ugly and wild. […] An ordinary business conversation or a friendly joke can lead to a terrifying explosion of animosity. People who have just been talking peacefully would jump up suddenly, their faces turning pale, their hands frantically squeezing the handle of a knife or a hammer, terrible curses bursting out of their trembling foamy lips amidst jets of saliva.[47]

Such an intolerance would sometimes be directed not only against fellow miners, but also at line managers. It is truly exceptional when a high-ranking mine manager (before the 1917 revolution, often a foreigner) is described, as it happens in Kuprin, from the point of view of the 12-year-old loader Vaska, as if a simpleton is observing a demi-god:

> Vaska cannot even compare to anything the level of authority enjoyed by this superman [the Frenchman Karl Frantsevich, the mine director]. Karl Frantsevich can easily do whatever in the world he wants. One wave of his hand, his sole look mean life and death to all those timekeepers, foremen, miners, loaders and haulers, fed by the colliery in their thousands.[48]

Much more often, mine managers and owners are portrayed as exploitative enemies who deserve a beating, and even death. *Kolchugin*, for example, contains a description of miners' unsuccessful assassination attempt on their manager.[49] In the times of post-Soviet capitalism, a mining official responsible for the post-accident search and rescue effort does not invite much sympathy either, when he reveals his rationale for a decision regarding whether to call for a mine rescue team or not:

> I take the number of people buried under the rubble (A). Knowing their age, I estimate how long on average they may still live for if they are pulled out (B), and multiply these figures by two constants – a lifetime pension for the miner who was injured at the coalface (X) and a lump sum payment to the family of the deceased (Y). The arithmetic is simple. If A x B x X is greater than A x Y, the miners remain in the pit. Forever. Alive, they cost more.[50]

What about mine management under socialism? Even though after the revolution, the mine industry was nationalised and mine ownership

transferred to the employees, it did not seem to fundamentally alter the relationship between the workforce and the new management, as the latter was still keen to squeeze the maximum out of the former, not in the name of private profiteering, but in order for the socialist state to thrive. Thus, in the early 1920s, at the Bilimbai colliery in the Urals, a six-hour working day was replaced by an eight-hour one by the same government that had taken power in the workers' name only a few years previously.[51] Some 10 years later in Donbas, reducing working hours by almost half would not bring miners much relief: 'Under the Tsar, we toiled for eleven hours a day. Now they harness us for six hours but life is still bad (*vse odno propadaem*)'.[52] To the managers measuring gas concentration in the air, these miners say: 'You'd better measure the level of our grief! […] [You are] parasites […] always riding on our backs'.[53] Speaking of the early 1950s in the mid-1960s (i.e. after the official denunciation of Stalinism), Gorenshtein likens mining to torture and a mine manager to an executioner. Gorenshtein's protagonist, a fresh recruit at a Ukrainian iron ore mine, at some point imagines verbally abusing his line manager, and then hitting and kicking him.[54] Only Gorbatov (writing about 1930s Donbas in the last years of Stalin's rule) is excited about the socialist management of the mines, describing, for instance, a young woman who 'grew up with a Soviet mine, not knowing any other kind of mine and therefore always thinking of it as a second home and never as a black hellhole (*katorga*)'.[55]

Environmental changes as a product of extractivist rebordering

The mine's comparison to hell is fairly common.[56] It encompasses both underground and above-ground mining structures, and can be found, for example, in Grossman (whose character Polia imagines 'the flat steppes of Donbas as netherworld, complete with flame, thunder and clouds of sulfur'[57]); and in Gorenshtein (whose protagonist Kim in the opening chapter inside the mine feels how 'inferno itself has bared its innards before him'[58]); and in Savochkin (who writes: 'In Donbas, slagheaps are all over the place. This is where hell comes out into the surface'[59]).

The emergence of hell from down below regularly manifests itself through the motif of environmental pollution. Kuprin's story begins with a stark contrast between a fragrant flourishing steppe on a beautiful spring morning and a dirty, ugly, noisy, malodorous and hazardous coal mine, in which glimmering oil lamps replace the shining sun. Donbas's mining settlement of Yuzovka (or Hughesovka, founded by the Welshman John Hughes in 1869) is described by Grossman as follows (referring to the early 1910s):

> Everything was dark and poor here. Even the snow lying around the mine was completely black. The faces of people leaving the mine were black, too, and so

were their clothes. [...] The entire village – walls, roofs and gray-black fences made out of slate – all of it was joyless.[60]

Particular attention is paid to hideous transformations at and above the ground level, which come as a result of coal extraction: 'gloomy dug up earth, [...] mountains of rock in shreds of gray and yellow fog, the smell of sulfur, which seemed to saturate both heaven and earth'.[61] Referring to a time period approximately a hundred years later, Savochkin describes roughly the same area, renamed after Stalin in 1924–1961 and currently known as Donetsk, in a similarly depressing vein: 'Oblong black mounds as high as a multi-story building are always hot and smoky. [...] Every now and then the sky is lit up by a flame from the pipes which syphon methane from the pits'.[62]

Only Gorbatov's picture of Donbas in the early 1930s, concerning essentially the same man-made landscape, is replete with enthusiasm, because it is shown through the eyes of two teenage idealists from Nizhyn, a town with no mining history, over 420 miles northwest of Donetsk. The two are recruited by the Young Communist League in the course of a campaign to add fresh blood to the mining workforce, and subsequently become Stakhanovites:

> Donbas appeared to the boys in all its beauty and power: roaring and aflame; in clouds of dense black smoke above the quench stations; in the crimson gleam of blast furnaces; with lights flickering mysteriously on slag dumps; with blue bonfires on slagheaps; with a bitter smell of coal and pungent-sweet smell of stewed coke; with disturbing smells of gas, sulfur, iron and pyrite, smouldering in heaps; with a difficult, heavy, intermittent breathing, as if all the bellows, blowing engines and steam power stations could not inject enough air into its heroic iron lungs.[63]

This is a eulogy, not a condemnation. It is the anthropogenic nature of the Donbas topography that makes it especially valuable for Gorbatov: 'The Donetsk landscape is dear to my heart precisely because it is human-made. [...] Humans have become gods and created for themselves forests, rivers and mountains in the steppe'.[64] Miners' radical activity does not limit itself to transforming nature. Society gets altered, too, ostensibly for the better – and not only for the immediate surroundings, but for humanity at large:

> The sunsets [in Donbas] are always disturbing. [...] There are no idylls in them, but there is restless longing and thirst for a new day. [...] And instead of lazy evening church bells, a chorus of impatient hooters thunders about. Is it why here, at sunset, people's dreams are different? The dreams that come to people are not of the kind that one may have at dusk – not smug, not sweet, but violently daring and courageous. And people dream not about having their own house under the acacias, but about remaking the world and [achieving] happiness for everyone.[65]

In (non-)fiction about mining, it is of course miners themselves who predominantly spearhead the remaking process, mostly thanks to the

transformative quality of their daily jobs. As Gorbatov puts it, 'miners' happiness is to burst coal deposits open, to break into the very bowels [of the Earth]'.[66] Yet transformation merely for transformation's sake it is not. In Reisner's words, 'every swing of the pickaxe at these diabolical mines is accomplished in the hope of an imminent beginning of a more humane and just life'.[67] Rebordering creates a basis for miners' drive towards mankind's radiant future.

Space inversion as a form of extractivist rebordering

At first glance, in the mining context, the surface and the underground coexist as two different and divided worlds, the former full of sunlight, and the latter, of darkness: 'People from above, the communists of a cheerful and bright land, will never understand the boundless fatigue of the subterranean dwellers', who profess an 'irreconcilable hatred of the sun, [as well as] a complete indifference to the earth and its insubstantial affairs'.[68] However, in a young miner's dream in Gorbatov's novel, an underground coalface is imagined as 'merry, pink, all lit by the pockmarked sun'.[69] The miner's girlfriend, similarly, thinks of such a coalface as

> infinitely long, […] like a steppe, and coal sparks [are glistening in it], like dew drops under the sun. […] And a handsome, good fellow […] walks along this expanse, completely alone, and fearlessly chops and mows coal, like a haymaker in a song. […] All you can hear is the noise!.[70]

In other words, underground mining is visualised here as open-pit mining, with elements of agricultural labour added in for good measure, so that the upper world merges with the netherworld, filling the latter with light and space that the mining underworld normally lacks.[71] This cannot quite be called a marriage between heaven and hell, but their separation from each other is nevertheless terminated.

Extractivism's future: an international miners' union defying state borders worldwide?

Miners are apparently capable of rearranging not only geographical but also geopolitical space, in the spirit of the Marxian slogan, 'Workers of the world, unite!' A character in Savochkin (chapter 12)

> proposes to dig tunnels in each of the countries where coal is mined, and to unite all the miners in the world. […] For a moment, I imagine the Earth all dug up with underground passages, up and down. I imagine such passages dug under rivers and lakes, bypassing mountains and rocky massifs. I imagine such passages connecting China and Russia, Russia and Ukraine, Ukraine and France, France and South Africa, South Africa and the United States of America. I imagine tunnels crossing entire continents and laid under the ocean floor. […] Under the ground, at a depth of just five hundred meters

or so, lies a huge network of caves and tunnels inhabited by the people who cross borders without passports and customs, and recognize neither race nor nationality. These people don't even need a common language, because they communicate through the rumble of a mining combine. Day after day, these people go to bed and wake up, travel or sit still, are born and die without ever rising to the surface.[72]

Why imagine such an international underground community of miners so eagerly at a time when mining finds itself in decline?[73] Savochkin does not give us any explicit reason, but it may be safely assumed that in their struggle against the dwindling coal reserves and the advance of postindustrial society, which is dramatically curtailing mining activity (although it is not yet altogether redundant), miners need as much help as they can get. And who is a miner's best friend if not another miner?

The fact that Donbas miners are portrayed by Savochkin as initiators of all miners' utopian unification can be explained by their post-revolutionary twentieth-century history. (Even though *Mark Sheider* is not set in the Soviet period, the novel cannot be fully understood without the knowledge of the Soviet past.) The USSR's urgent need for enormous energy resources to implement its ambitious policy of rapid industrialisation has turned miners into a much-admired avant-garde of the Soviet working class enjoying significant privileges and influence, precisely because it was miners who could ensure the prompt and secure availability of those energy resources. The Donbas miners in particular occupied centre stage in the process of Soviet industrialisation, as Donbas was the largest area in the USSR in terms of the regional coal production. When the dissolution of the Soviet Union translated into a kind of economic meltdown for most, if not all, of its former constituent parts, the Donbas miners used their considerable social gravitas to try to negotiate the best possible economic conditions for themselves at a time when almost everyone else was struggling financially. In that, the miners have achieved only partial success – which has resulted in their severe disappointment with the political authorities (and, where appropriate, the new mine managers and owners), as well as the desire to take matters into their own hands (by, for example, seizing the mines' ownership and declaring independence). Apparently not without assistance from the Russian Federation, the runaway republics of Donbas have been established.

In his prophetic book, Savochkin has captured the miners' mood of the moment exceedingly well. Yet, to get back from the novel to reality, the question is, whither now? By isolating themselves from the central authorities in Ukraine and demanding the country's federalisation, the DPR and LPR may actually diminish their chances of bargaining for their special status effectively.[74] Yet the economic independence of the two separatist republics is not feasible. Neither, it seems, is their incorporation in the Russian

Federation, which would entail, at least at present, a hardly bearable financial burden for the country that already subsidises Donbas (and the Crimean peninsula) heavily enough.[75] In the bigger scheme of things, it is tempting to interpret Donbas's proclamation of independence, to some degree, as the desperate effort of an extractive industry to survive, by kicking and screaming, a little longer in a hostile world that will eventually need it no more. This industry's agony may still last for decades to come. No one can tell with complete confidence which political repercussions, including (further) fragmentations of sovereign states, the agony may bring about. Fiction such as Savochkin's remains one of the few occasionally rewarding endeavours to discern what the future holds.

Notes

1. Imre Szeman, 'On the Politics of Extraction', *Cultural Studies*, 31 (2017), p. 444.
2. Ibid., p. 445.
3. Barbara Freese, *Coal: A Human History* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), p. 149.
4. Ibid., p. 8.
5. Joan Vicente Rufi, Yann Richard, Jaume Feliu, and Matteo Berzi, 'Editorial: Peripheral Borders, Soft and Hard Rebordering in Europe', *Belgeo: Belgian Journal of Geography*, no. 2 (2020), section 6. https://doi.org/10.4000/belgeo.37391.
6. Szeman, p. 445.
7. One more form of rebordering expresses itself through a temporary gender reassignment, when Sinclair's mail protagonist Hal Warner dresses up in a widow's garb to come to a coal camp undetected (see *King Coal*, Book IV, sections 24–25).
8. Wolfgang Iser, 'Representation: A Performative Act', in Murray Krieger (ed.), *The Aims of Representation: Subject/Text/History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 225.
9. Iser's summary of Hans Vaihinger's *Die Philosophie des Als Ob* (Leipzig: Meiner, 1918), pp. 219–30.
10. *Germinal* was first translated into Russian almost simultaneously with the novel's serialisation in the French periodical *Gil Blas* in 1884–1885; and *King Coal*, in 1923. All the above-named Russo-Ukrainian authors use the Zola/Sinclair master narrative in their own works, with some variations (e.g. Reisner merely inspects mines instead of working in them; and in Gorbatov and Gorenshtein, strikes are either unnecessary or useless, so they are either altogether absent or not even contemplated).
11. Graeme MacDonald, 'The Resources of Fiction', *Reviews in Cultural Theory*, 4.2 (2013), p. 19.
12. See, for example, Shaeda Isani, 'FASP and the Genres within the Genre', in Michel Petit and Isani Shaeda (eds), *Aspects de la fiction à substrat professionnel* (Bordeaux: Université Victor Segalen Bordeaux 2, 2004), pp. 25–38.
13. William B. Thesing, 'Introduction', in William B. Thesing (ed.), *Caverns of Night: Coal Mines in Art, Literature, and Film* (Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press, 2000), p. xii.

14. Szeman, p. 445.
15. Freese, p. 14.
16. Dmitrii Savochkin, Mark *Sheider* (Moscow & St Petersburg: Ast/Astrel', 2009), chapter 16. As a paper copy of the book has not been obtainable, so quotes are made from its online version (http://www.e-reading.club/bookreader.php/144302/Savochkin_-_Mark_Sheiider.html [Date accessed: 28 December 2020]), by reference to chapters, rather than page numbers. All translations are mine, unless stated otherwise.
17. Savochkin, chapter 29.
18. As literature about mining is invariably fact- and experience-based (perhaps to a larger extent than many other varieties of FASP), non-fiction should also be included in what might be termed a Mining Text Corpus (i.e. an aggregate comprising all the available mining-related *topoi*). Combined, the non-fiction and fiction about mining create a stereoscopic picture of their subject, with the former often serving as a reality-checking basis for the latter.
19. The other, known as Kuzbas, is located in southwestern Siberia.
20. Namely, only 41 million tonnes in 2016. On the particularly sordid state of affairs in the Ukrainian coal mining industry as of 2017–2020, see Dmitrii Kirillov, 'Donbass zakryvaet shakhty' ('Donbas Closes Down Its Mines'), *Radio Liberty*, 14 July 2017. https://www.svoboda.org/a/28614469.html ; idem., '"Adskaia voda" dlia Rossii: Kak budet pogibat' Donbass' (Water from Hell for Russia: How Donbas Will Die), ibid., 19 November 2018. https://www.svoboda.org/a/29608193.html; and idem, '"Zhrut sebia, zhrut liudei": Posledstviia zakrytiia shakht v DNR i LNR' (Devouring People and Themselves: The Consequences of Mine Closures in Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics), ibid., 26 July 2020. https://www.svoboda.org/a/30748012.html [Date accessed: 28 December 2020].
21. See, for example, Savochkin, chapter 10.
22. See Max Hureau's documentary *À l'Est de Walbrzych* (France, 2004).
23. For example, in June 1993; Spring-Summer 1996; July 1999, Summer-Autumn 2002; etc.
24. Thus, the late 1993 Donbas miners' strike led to the 1994 snap parliamentary and presidential elections. Several payments towards the wage arrears have been made since. Still, as of early 2020, the Ukrainian government's debt to miners reportedly amounts to some 48 million US dollars. See 'Pravitel'stvo Ukrainy predusmotrelo v biudzhete den'gi na zarplaty shakhteram' (The Ukrainian Government Has Budgeted for Miners' Salaries), *RIA Novosti*, 13 October 2019. https://ria.ru/20191013/1559721809.html [Date accessed: 28 December 2020].
25. The German term 'Markscheider', or mine surveyor (literally, a 'border marker') – adopted in the Ukrainian and Russian mining tradition and invoked in the title of Savochkin's novel as the first name (Mark) and the last name (Sheider, transliterated here from Cyrillic according to the Library of Congress rules, hence the difference in spelling) of its mythical central character – encapsulates many of the above-listed occupational traits quite well. For a brief history of mine surveying in Imperial, Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, see A. A. Grigor'ev (ed.), *Marksheidery Dal'nego Vostoka Rossii: Dostizheniia i kadry* (*Mine Surveying in the Russian Far East: Names and Achievements*), (Vladivostok: DVFU, 2019), pp. 7–27.
26. Andrei Balkanskii, *Eduard Limonov* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2017), pp. 295–6.

27. As far as Russian miners' role in Russian politics is concerned, in the late 1980s-early 1990s, they had taken Boris Yeltsin's side in his confrontation with Mikhail Gorbachev, which ultimately led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union – but in May 1998, they demanded Yeltsin's resignation, and, in order to be heard, blocked several railways (including the North Caucasian and the Trans-Siberian), thus effectively isolating a number of Russian regions from each other. For more, see Dmitrii Lyskov, 'Shakhtery sposobstvovali razvalu SSSR i edva ne razvalili Rossiiu' ('Miners Contributed to the Break-up of the USSR and Nearly Split Russia apart'), *Vzgliad: Delovaia gazeta*, 15 May 2018. https://vz.ru/society/2018/5/15/922659.html [Date accessed: 28 December 2020].

28. For a wider selection, see *Strana ognia: Proizvedeniia russkikh pisatelei o Donbasse* (*The Land of Fire: Russian Writers on Donbas*), ed. Spasenko K. F. (Donetsk: Donbas, 1979), 2 vols.

29. Gorbatov is the only one in my selection of authors who claims that 'there are neither wizards, no spirits, no gnomes and no elves in the mine, but there is Uncle Stepan the shotfirer, and Uncle Trofim the driller' (Boris Gorbatov, *Donbass*. https://www.litmir.me/br/?b=271467&p=1, part II, chapter 7 [Date accessed: 28 December 2020]).

30. Aleksandr Kuprin, 'V nedrakh zemli'. http://az.lib.ru/k/kuprin_a_i/text_1502.shtml [Date accessed: 28 December 2020]. In Vasilii Grossman's *Gliukauf* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1935, p. 125), a mine hoist operator is reminiscent of a 'fairy-tale elder from underground'.

31. According to *Germinal*, the French mining folklore of the 1860s, when female labour in the collieries was common, mentions the so-called Black Man, an 'old miner who haunts the pit and strangles girls who've been bad' (Émile Zola, *Germinal*, trans. Roger Pearson [London: Penguin, 2004], p. 49).

32. This variation has clearly taken place under the partial influence of Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1996), which Savochkin translated; the protagonist in *Fight Club* has one body and two minds.

33. Vasilii Grossman, *Stepan Kolchugin*, book 1 (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1947), p. 65.

34. Larisa Reisner, *Izbrannoe* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1965), p. 291.

35. Reisner, about a Gorlovka mine, p. 365.

36. Savochkin, chapter 13.

37. Reisner, p. 346. Descending into a mine is likened to the process of dying in Grossman, *Gliukauf*, pp. 38 and 240.

38. Gorbatov, part II, chapter 19.

39. Fridrikh Gorenshtein, 'Zima 53-go goda'. http://bookscafe.net/read/gorenshteyn_fridrih-zima_53_go_goda-29768.html#p4 [Date accessed: 28 December 2020]. For more on the Soviet trope of humans' transfiguration into machines, see Rolf Hellebust, *Flesh to Metal: Soviet Literature and the Alchemy of Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

40. George Orwell called the task performed by 'fillers' (loading coal onto a conveyor belt inside the mine) 'an almost superhuman job by the standards of an ordinary person' (*The Road to Wigan Pier* [London: Penguin Books, 1985], p. 20.) To the best of my knowledge, this book has not yet been translated into Russian.

41. *Germinal* reproduces a suitable range of emotions: when talking about the unknown owners of certain coal pits in northern France, one miner's voice

'assumed a tone of almost religious awe, as though he were talking about some forbidden temple that concealed the squat and sated deity to whom [all the local miners] offered up their flesh but whom no one had ever seen' (Zola, p. 14). Another miner says of the collier managers and their bosses: 'If only we could have a nice cholera epidemic that would wipe out all those Company people who are busy exploiting us' (Zola, p. 230).

42. Kuprin.
43. Reisner, p. 371.
44. Grossman, *Kolchugin*, book 2, p. 152.
45. Kuprin.
46. Gorbatov, part II, chapter 25.
47. Kuprin.
48. Ibid.
49. Grossman, *Kolchugin*, Book 1, pp. 247–9.
50. Savochkin, chapter 3.
51. Reisner, pp. 291–2.
52. Grossman, *Gliukauf*, p. 231.
53. Ibid., p. 37.
54. Gorenshtein. Worried about fulfilling a planned target, this manager sends underage student trainees to an abandoned part of the mine to engage in an unsafe extraction of rock with a high ore content. When they all die in an accident, the mine director claims that they were on a study tour that went astray. Scenes such as these demonstrate that child labour and the neglect of health and safety regulations, common for pre-revolutionary mining (see Kuprin and especially Grossman, whose Stepan Kolchugin begins his working career as a 10-year old trapper, while the death rate at his mine is compared to that at the battlefront), remained an issue long after the industry's nationalization. As for the post-Soviet health and safety in mining, according to Savochkin (chapter 12), on average, every 600,000 tonnes of coal mined in Ukraine come at a cost of one miner's life. This is apparently three times lower than in China, but 10 times higher than in South Africa and more than 30 times higher than in the US. On child labour in Donbas mines in the late 2000s, see Marianna Kaat's 2010 documentary *Auk nr 8* (Mine no. 8).
55. Gorbatov, part II, chapter 7.
56. For instance, see George Orwell's description of a northern England mine in the mid-1930s: 'the place is like hell, or at any rate like my own mental picture of hell. Most of the things one imagines in hell are there – heat, noise, confusion, darkness, foul air, and, above all, unbearably cramped space' (Orwell, p. 19).
57. Grossman, *Kolchugin*, book 2, p. 162.
58. Gorenshtein.
59. Savochkin, chapter 9.
60. Grossman, *Kolchugin*, book 2, p. 21.
61. Ibid., p. 59.
62. Savochkin, chapter 13.
63. Gorbatov, part I, chapter 4.
64. Gorbatov, part I, chapter 17.
65. Gorbatov, part I, chapter 20.
66. Gorbatov, part II, chapter 19.

67. Reisner, p. 293. She is discussing the Bilimbai colliery in the Urals, but the sentence can be legitimately applied to mining activities elsewhere.
68. Reisner, pp. 348, 350.
69. Gorbatov, part I, chapter 5.
70. Gorbatov, part I, chapter 7. This is not an isolated example. In Grossman's *Gliukauf*, a miner imagines the coalface of the future as a place which has 'plenty of light, with sunrays coming through the green tree leaves and a mixture of joyful sounds filling the ears' (p. 203).
71. The parallel drawn between miners and peasants can be explained by the fact that many Russian and Ukrainian miners initially originated from the peasant stock. Furthermore, a certain similarity in the nature of their labour is noted in Grossman's *Kolchugin*: 'A miner is not really an industrial worker, is he? He had tilled the ground in a village and moved [to the mining town] to do the same, only on the underside. Once a peasant, always a peasant' (Book 1, p. 33). From a much wider, non-Slavic perspective, 'in the metabolism of the Western world, the coal-miner is second in importance only to the man who ploughs the soil' (Orwell, p. 19), so a recurrent comparison between the two professional occupations is almost inevitable.
72. A classic text that pays a great deal of attention to the multinational nature of an overexploited miners' collective is Sinclair's *King Coal*. However, it is not quite the International Workingmen's Association as Marx would probably like to imagine it. 'The Americans and English and Scotch looked down upon the Welsh and Irish; the Welsh and Irish looked down upon the Dagos and Frenchies; the Dagos and Frenchies looked down upon Polacks and Hunkies; these in turn upon Greeks, Bulgarians and "Montynegroes", and so on through a score of races of Eastern Europe […] – ending up with Greasers, niggers, and last and lowest, Japs' (Upton Sinclair, *King Coal*. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/7522/7522-h/7522-h.htm, Book I, section 18 [Date accessed: 28 December 2020]). Still, these people had 'the deep unconscious bond of solidarity which made these toilers of twenty nations one' (ibid., Book III, section 17).
73. See, for instance, Robin McKie, 'Is This the End for 'King Coal' in Britain?', *The Guardian*, 9 August 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/aug/09/is-this-the-end-for-king-coal-in-britain [Date accessed: 28 December 2020].
74. In Savochkin's book, the underground tunnel meant to overthrow the Ukrainian government fails to achieve its objective.
75. Moscow's current annual subvention to Donbas is believed to be in the region of 2 billion US dollars. See Brian Milakovsky, 'A Cost-Benefit Analysis for Russia of the Donbas Economic Blockade', *Focus Ukraine*, 19 July 2019. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/cost-benefit-analysis-for-russia-the-donbas-economic-blockade [Date accessed: 28 December 2020].

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