

I HOMEWARD BOUND

The Ambivalence of Home and Self

Of all the modern notions, the worst is this: that domesticity is dull. [. . .] The home is not the one tame place in a world of adventure; it is the one wild place in a world of rules and set tasks.

—G. K. Chesterton

“Let us agree once and for all: living quarters are the foundation stone of human life” [zhilishche est’ osnovnoi kamen’ zhizni chelovecheskoi].¹ Thus begins Mikhail Bulgakov’s “A Treatise on Housing” (“Traktat o zhilishche,” 1926), a story about the paucity of housing and consequent lack of rootedness of Moscow in the 1920s. Although Bulgakov’s statement becomes mildly ironic within the context of his narrative, it restates the premise from which much philosophical, geographical, and psychological theory begins. “Dwelling,” in the words of Martin Heidegger, is “the essential property of human existence.”²

The house did not grow solely out of man’s need for shelter, but also out of his ability to symbolize and his need for identity.³ The divergent origins of the house distinguish “house” from “home.” “House” refers to an object, possession, or measurable space, while “home,” Kim Dovey says, describes an “emotionally based and meaningful relationship between dwellers and their dwelling places.”⁴ “The basic passions of man are not rooted in his instinctive needs,” says Erich Fromm, “but in the specific conditions of human existence.”⁵ People need to give meaningful structure and symbolic significance to

the relationship between themselves and their environment (the human "condition"). Through repeated encounters and complex associations, people invest the space they inhabit with meaning. The act of becoming and being "at home"—what Heidegger calls the "dwelling function"—transforms space into symbolic, meaningful "place." "What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place," Yi-Fu Tuan says, "as we get to know it better and endow it with value."⁶

The home is the most richly significant and intensely symbolic of human places. Representing an order that is comprehensible and familiar, the house, Gaston Bachelard says, is "our corner of the world [. . .] our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word."⁷ The house gives concrete shape and form to the individual and cultural values that are projected onto space; it is at once a reflection of how people view the world and how they see their relative position within it.⁸ As the image of man's place within a perceived cosmic order, the home becomes the quintessential symbol of the self.⁹ "Home is the foundation of our identity as individuals and members of a community," Relph says, "the dwelling place of being. Home is not just the house you happen to live in [. . .] but an irreplaceable centre of significance."¹⁰

The novel as "noplacé"

The need to be "at home" is universal, although ways of being and becoming at home vary and reflect the different preferences and values of unique individuals or cultures. The desire to be "at home," however, is a more complex matter. Attitudes toward home places often prove ambiguous or even paradoxical, especially when the home is imagined as a past or future ideal. Indeed, the frequent definition of home as utopian space quickly becomes problematic. First, the pursuit of such domestic perfection is futile because the ideal does not exist in reality; the aim then becomes perpetual homecoming rather than home itself. Looking back to the correlation between home and identity, it is easy to see that an endless search for home leads to a constantly redefined self. Any understanding of identity under these circumstances remains superficial and unstable. On the other hand, if the ideal were to be achieved on a symbolic, aesthetic, or spiritual level, the material home and the contours of a unique self would be unnecessary. Human

thought, as expressed in philosophies and religions, imagines “home” as a state of perfectly realized self-transcendence.

Ironically, the prospect of arriving at a home-paradise can inhibit the process of becoming “at home” in the world. Heidegger says that human identity means “to dwell.” But if finally becoming at home implies the willing surrender of the ego self, then the loss of individual consciousness must be measured against the burden of alienation that results from individuality itself. This double-bind situation demonstrates a struggle between the self and a collective and may explain the alternate pursuit and avoidance of home. Those figures, be they religious leaders, politicians, or poets, who are selected by a collective to voice group identity experience intensely the paradoxes of “home.” While these people are expected to construct the “home” of the spiritual, national, or cultural self, they must never take up residence in it themselves. They must remain at enough of a distance in order to maintain the kind of individual consciousness and creativity that allows them to express the complexities of home and self. It is fitting that the architects of “home” are given no place within it, for the home is indeed a “utopia” (literally, “noplacé”) in the truest sense of the word.

The expectation in Russian society that the novel should express a cohesive cultural identity (a “Russian Russia,” as Nikolai Gogol put it) places its literary artists in the realm of “noplacé.” The author’s role as the formative voice of collective Russian identity is threatened by the temptation to partake of the comforts of the cultural home. To do so would signal the end of the creative self. However, the Russian writer cannot simply avoid the home, as an understanding of its symbolism is central to literary expression. Neither is homelessness a viable alternative; eternal wandering threatens to prevent the writer from achieving both spiritual depth and heightened aesthetic awareness. To maintain a position from which the ideal home can be discerned and described, the Russian writer must constantly negotiate the distance between home and homelessness.

The novel, like the home, encompasses by nature the ambiguities inherent in the search for identity while acting as a medium of self-expression. In the four works included in this study—Gogol’s *Dead Souls* (1842), Ivan Goncharov’s *Oblomov* (1859), Evgenii Zamiatin’s *We* (1920), and Mikhail Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita* (1928–40)—an uncertain attitude toward the aesthetic representation and

realization of a Russian cultural self is manifest in the heroes' tortured search for ideal forms of domesticity and self-expression. The ironic relationship between creative consciousness and the home in each work illuminates the ambivalence of the narrator and the hero toward their goals. In each work, the "poet" or "writer" searches for a viable mode of domesticity in pursuit of self-knowledge. Distinguished by superior insight and aesthetic inspiration, the writer alone envisions a Russian "home" that can instill both unity and spiritual significance into a culture traditionally alienated from itself. Ironically, however, "homelessness" and not "home" is the source of the writer's creativity and imagination. Although he may consider his endless wandering a burden, the writer must ultimately choose between the comforts of home and artistic inspiration.

Written somewhere between 1840 and 1940, these four novels span a century of Russian cultural history and literary development. With each successive author aware of his literary predecessors, the presentation of the heroes' search for home and self makes up a body of shared imagery that, although changing in significance from work to work, unites the works with a common theme and purpose. Taken as a whole, these novels demonstrate the problems and issues that are central to Russia's "condition" of becoming at home. In an attempt to define the nature of a modern self, the novels consider the relationship between an "old" and "new" Russia. Weighing the need for change against a nostalgic desire for a lost or imagined past, each novel portrays the ambivalent nature of this relationship. The open-ended "conclusion" of each work, wherein no hero finds a truly satisfactory mode of dwelling, suggests that the Russian search for ideal domesticity and mode of self-expression is an ongoing process. And, while the works' representation of the uncertainties and conflicts that characterize the quest for home and identity can be self-revealing, it is not necessarily self-defining.

The wanderer and the stay-at-home

Returning home to Russia after serving in the campaign against the French, the poet Konstantin Batiushkov—a founding member of the literary group Arzamas and a poetic "tutor" of Alexander Pushkin—

emphasized the country's need for national redefinition in the wake of the war. The upheaval in Russian society after the War of 1812 and the loss of Moscow—its political and cultural center—to fire forced the country to question the nature of its culture and its “place” in history. Defending their homeland against the onslaught of Napoléon's army, Russians began to reexamine the cultural values and national characteristics they so ardently protected. Russia's own military victory thrust it into modern Europe; the country now faced the problem of reconciling its traditionally “Eastern” heritage with its future role in Europe. Constructing the image of a more contemporary Russia became a national undertaking. For Batiushkov, the search for the voice of a new Russia was a poetic endeavor.

In his poem “The Wanderer and the Stay-at-Home” (“Stranstvo-vatel' i domosed,” 1814–15), Batiushkov portrays Russia's search for home and self. The poem is a thematically appropriate starting point from which to approach the four novels included in this study. A cross between the parable of the prodigal son and Homer's *Odyssey*, Batiushkov's poem uses the opposing images of “home” and “homelessness” to represent a Russia divided by the desire to embrace its traditional culture and the need to find a new, more appropriate means of self-definition. Set in ancient Greece, the poem—just under four hundred lines long—is a miniature national epic of homecoming and departure. “The Wanderer and the Stay-at-Home” inverts the homecoming legends to which it refers, however. This inversion illuminates the duality, rather than the epic wholeness, inherent in Russia's attempt to find a new mode of home and self while coming to terms with its traditional past.

In his prewar “My Penates” (“Moi penaty,” 1811), Batiushkov creates for himself the persona of a disciple to the “house gods” and the simple pleasures of the home: genteel idleness, poetry, and friendship. Batiushkov's celebration of these domestic ideals, however, turns ironic in “The Wanderer and the Stay-at-Home.” In the poem, the “epic” storyteller, now a “peaceful homebody” comfortably seated before his warm fireplace, introduces the friendly tale he is about to tell. Like Batiushkov's persona in “My Penates,” the storyteller here seems to appreciate the peace and comfort of home. Yet the content of his story—the difficulty of staying at home after spending one's youth wandering “from country to country”—suggests that the “singer”

of this small, epic tale may not be content with his cozy, domestic scene after all. However, neither is he certain that years of homeless roving offer anything but “empty dreams.”

Having traveled the world over,
 A peaceful stay-at-home, before my fireplace
 I sit and think about [. . .]
 How difficult it is to live out life at
 home [na rodine]
 For one who in his youth rushed from one
 part of the world to the next,
 Who saw everything, learned everything—
 And what of it? From overseas
 No better, no wiser
 He returned home to his paternal roof:
 A devotee of empty dreams,
 He is condemned to search . . . for what—
 He himself does not know!
 A tale about such a wanderer
 I will tell you now.¹¹

The narrative that follows shows the ambivalence toward home on the part of the storyteller, whose own experiences of travel and homecoming are interspersed throughout like an interpolated tale. Based on opposing views of home, the story tells how two Athenian brothers decide to spend their inheritance and their lives. The first brother, Klit, quickly decides to settle down. “And I just want to buy a house / And live out my life in it ever so quietly with my wife / Under the protection of our paternal penates.”¹² The second son, Filalet, sets out in search of fame and glory. His need to wander is linked with his desire to become a man of letters. Filalet boasts that with his “oratory and verse” [krasnorechie i stikhi] he will enlighten the heathen priests, uncover the mysteries of the ancient world, and contemplate questions of man’s creation and existence. Equipped with his inheritance and his eloquence, he sets out on what the narrator ironically refers to as his “odyssey.”

Too impatient for philosophy and too weak to endure physical hardship, Filalet grows tired of “being a guest everywhere” year after year and finally returns home. The “stay-at-home” Klit welcomes his

exhausted and by now destitute brother warmly. Filalet, however, soon becomes restless at home. He does not enjoy the comfort and warmth of his brother's hearth; the life of a homebody seems to threaten his inclinations toward oration. As Filalet sets off once again, his brother Klit calls after him from the threshold of the house, trying to prevent him from leaving. Klit cannot comprehend why his brother would forsake his homeland for "new misfortune" in a foreign country. But Klit's efforts are for naught and, waving his hand, Filalet disappears into the distance.

In vain did Klit and his wife call after him
 From the threshold of their home:
 "Brother dear, turn back, we beg of you,
 For God's sake!
 What is there for you to find in foreign
 parts?
 New misfortune?
 Tell us, what is it at home that is not dear
 To you?
 Or did friendship, a cruel friend, embitter
 You?
 Stop, dear brother, stop
 Filalet!"
 Idle words—the eccentric did not turn,
 He waved his hand . . . and disappeared.¹³

In "The Wanderer and the Stay-at-Home," Filalet's quest for his lyric voice is a function of his wandering and supersedes his need for home. Like Pushkin's later "The Wanderer" ("Strannik," 1835), Batiushkov's small-scale epic suggests that the errant Filalet will ultimately utter the words that will give shape to the national "home" and cultural self. The homelessness of the artist, Batiushkov suggests, is necessary to carry out this national mission.

In the novels on which this study focuses—*Dead Souls*, *Oblomov*, *We*, and *The Master and Margarita*—the literary consciousness is the medium through which the heroes conduct their search for home and self. The writer's spiritual insight and inspiration, the authors imply, will provide Russia with a mode of domesticity that symbolizes and accurately reflects a cohesive and meaningful cultural identity. Because

the “writer” is willingly or unwillingly rendered “homeless,” each work ironically suggests that those who are “outside looking in” may enjoy the clearest perspective on this Russian “home” although they are not allocated a place within it.

The writer at home

In the lives of Gogol, Goncharov, Zamiatin, and Bulgakov, the experience of “home” and literary production are closely allied. Despite differences in their backgrounds, writing styles, and the historical contexts in which they lived, the home lives of these authors are characterized by fundamental dualities. The authors seem to draw on their uneasy relationship with home for inspiration and creativity. For each, literary work and aesthetic insight become a function of “homelessness.”

The tension between what seems and what is pervaded the home and family life of Nikolai Gogol (1809–52). The noble lineage of Gogol’s Ukrainian roots was itself an illusion, a fact, Simon Karlinsky suggests, that may be reflected in the ubiquitous theme of questionable identity in Gogol’s work.¹⁴ In the 1760s, Catherine the Great passed a set of edicts that outlawed land ownership by non-noble Ukrainians. Gogol’s ancestors owned land but, as provincial clergy, were not members of the gentry. Threatened with the loss of his property, however, Gogol’s grandfather is thought to have falsified documents to represent the family as nobility.¹⁵

Whether its noble roots were based in fact or fiction, the serf-dependent patriarchal estate was fundamental to Gogol’s understanding of home (inspiring the liberal critic Vissarion Belinskii to call him an “apostle of the knout”). Yet, as Leon Stilman says, the “patriarchal idyl [*sic*] was for Gogol an idealized reminiscence.”¹⁶ The security and plenty of the patriarchal way of life was more a dream for Gogol than a reality. And, because of his father’s early death, “home” was more a source of worry and demands than the “peaceful shelter” he imagined.¹⁷

Travel offered Gogol respite from familial and financial obligations and a way to preserve his vision of domesticity. To his friends and family, Gogol was the eternal traveler, a “homeless wanderer.” The road provided Gogol a source of poetic inspiration and spiritual

refreshment. "I am traveling for the sake of traveling," Gogol wrote to Sergei Aksakov in 1843. "Traveling, as you know, is my usual remedy. [. . .] I am depending on the road and on God, and I implore Him to be on the road as He is at home [. . .] in order that I may have the strength and opportunity to produce something."¹⁸ The journey, Donald Fanger says, was often more important to Gogol than his destination.¹⁹ And when his journey's end actually became the reason for travel, Gogol conjured up an idealized and unreal image of his goal. Gogol's heightened expectations may explain why his pilgrimage to Jerusalem ended in such grave disappointment. His ambivalence toward home may also have resulted from the discrepancy he perceived between reality and his ideal vision of domesticity.

The childhood home of Ivan Goncharov (1812–91) was defined by a different sort of duality—the coincidence of two distinct worlds. The author's widowed mother strictly preserved the values of a "narrowly practical society of the old merchant class."²⁰ Nikolai Tregubov, Goncharov's gentle spirited and somewhat eccentric godfather, introduced him to "the milieu of the enlightened cultivated segment of the gentry."²¹ Despite his inability to overcome the contradictions of his upbringing, Milton Ehre says, Goncharov, too, managed to "idealize" the conditions of his childhood.²² He loved his sleepy hometown of Simbirsk and, in one letter to his brother, wrote: "I am envious that you are home now, while I am among cold strangers."²³ Another contemporary recalls Goncharov's joy of returning home to Simbirsk where, at first, he "gave himself over" to the overindulgence of his family and their servants.²⁴ Nonetheless Goncharov's nature—"richly gifted [. . .] energetic and lively"—could not acclimate to the "easy way of life" in his native Simbirsk and, hearing the distant call, he left for St. Petersburg.²⁵

Goncharov served the rest of his life as a civil servant in St. Petersburg and, during vacations, worked on his novels in the various spa towns of Western Europe. He never married and, other than his dark, rather cramped apartment in St. Petersburg where he lived with his housekeeper and her children, he never established a household. The lack of a true domestic realm proved beneficial to Goncharov's literary work, however. In a way, writing provided Goncharov with the "comfort" [uteshenie] of home. Without his work, Goncharov wrote to M. M. Stasiulevich in 1868, he would end up homeless. "[I]f I were to finish [my work] [. . .] then I would go hide myself in a corner

somewhere and die there. Unfortunately, fate has given me no corner of my own; there is no such nest, neither of *gentlefolk*, nor of birds, and I myself do not know where I would go."²⁶ In a particularly revealing passage, Goncharov admitted that, if he were to leave Russia for an extended time, he would grow homesick for a home that did not exist. "I cannot live permanently outside of Russia [. . .] perhaps I would live there a year and then in the second year I would be pulled home [potianulo by domoi], although I have no so-called 'home' [net tak nazyvaemogo *homa*] [*sic*]." ²⁷

Evgenii Zamiatin (1884–1937) spent his childhood in the provincial town of Lebedian isolated and "almost without friends."²⁸ The well-read son of a schoolteacher and a pianist, Zamiatin did not feel part of his provincial surroundings.²⁹ Like that of Goncharov, Zamiatin's boyhood home was characterized by what the author saw as an ironic juxtaposition of two different social worlds. "You will see a very lonely child," he writes of himself in his autobiographical notes ("Avtobiografii," 1922), "under the piano, on which his mother is playing Chopin. Two steps away from Chopin, and you are in the midst of provincial life [. . .] a piglet tied to a stake in the middle of the street and hens bathing in the dust."³⁰ In this environment, Zamiatin turned to books as "friends." Of all the authors whose work he read, Gogol was the most congenial. Dostoevsky and Turgenev, Zamiatin writes, "were my elders and perhaps a bit terrifying. Gogol was a friend."³¹

In 1906, Zamiatin was exiled from St. Petersburg to his native Lebedian for revolutionary activities. But, like Goncharov before him, Zamiatin could not endure the peace and quiet of his "homecoming" and returned illegally to the capital. Yet, despite his aversion to his childhood home, Zamiatin was unquestionably drawn to his homeland. When revolution broke out in Russia, Zamiatin was living and working in England. Reading about the events unfolding in Russia, Zamiatin could "no longer bear to remain in England" and, in September of 1917, he undertook the perilous ocean voyage home.³²

Zamiatin's second "homecoming" proved fruitful. "I think that had I not come back to Russia in 1917," Zamiatin writes in 1929, "had I not lived all these years with Russia, I would not have been able to write."³³ It is ironic that, by 1931, Zamiatin wrote to Stalin personally requesting permission to leave the Soviet Union. The conditions in the Soviet homeland required that an artist leave the country in order to write freely. Claiming that he had been transformed

into the “devil of Soviet literature,” Zamiatin describes in the letter how, one by one, every avenue for his work was closed to him. “[N]o creativity is possible,” he writes, “in an atmosphere of systematic persecution.”³⁴ Ultimately, Zamiatin was unable to write at home or abroad. After leaving Russia—apparently his primary source of inspiration—Zamiatin produced nothing that equaled his earlier work.

Mikhail Bulgakov (1891–1940) grew up in the loving and cozy household of an intelligentsia family in Kiev, the capital of modern Ukraine and ancient Rus’. The grandson of a Gogol scholar, Bulgakov, like Zamiatin, professed an early love for the nineteenth-century author. The Russian Revolution and the ensuing civil war scattered Bulgakov’s family and destroyed the social basis on which the ethos of the home was founded. Bulgakov devoted the rest of his life and his creative work to restoring the values of his lost home and the bygone Russian literary culture. His nostalgia for what the Soviet regime regarded as a bourgeois and indulgent past was labeled in the press as “bulgakovism” [bulgakovshchina], an epithet that echoed Goncharov’s term for his hero’s attempt to recreate the conditions of his childhood home (*oblomovshchina*). For Bulgakov, as for Batiushkov’s lyrical persona in “My Penates,” “home” was defined by a genteel social structure, close family ties, and literary endeavor. The housing crisis and the bureaucracy that managed the new Soviet “home” and state threatened to destroy altogether Bulgakov’s notion of home, the cultural values of the past, and Russian literary tradition. “Housing, families, scholarship [. . .] standards of living and practical ideas—these are all suffering from gangrene,” Bulgakov wrote in 1924. “Everything has been devoured by Soviet officialdom. [. . .] Every step or movement made by a Soviet citizen becomes a torment which consumes hours, days, and sometimes months. [. . .] The state of literature is dreadful.”³⁵

Like his friend Zamiatin, Bulgakov regarded the Soviet regime’s management of home and homeland as a threat to the survival of Russian literature. But, as Curtis says, “[w]here Zamiatin was concerned that the increasing dogmatism in Soviet culture threatened to stifle innovation and experimentation in the future [. . .] Bulgakov was always more worried about the damage Soviet cultural policy was doing to the heritage and traditions of the past.”³⁶ Despite the difference in their perspectives, Bulgakov and Zamiatin were both targeted by the malevolence of the Soviet press. In 1930, Bulgakov noted that,

out of the 301 references to him in print, 298 were “hostile and abusive.”³⁷ Echoing Zamiatin’s claim that he had become the “devil” of Soviet literature, Bulgakov writes in his own letter to Stalin that he was being hunted like a wolf. “For several years I have been pursued according to all the rules of wolf-baiting in a fenced-in yard.”³⁸

With fewer outlets for his creative work and with his efforts to obtain an exit visa repeatedly frustrated, Bulgakov began to feel imprisoned in the Soviet Union. The sense of entrapment pervaded his home life, too. According to diaries of Bulgakov and his wife, the author suffered from bouts of claustrophobia and agoraphobia and often claimed that he was a “prisoner” in his own home.³⁹ Reminiscent of Zamiatin’s earlier efforts, Bulgakov personally appealed to Stalin in 1931 for permission to leave the USSR. In his letter, Bulgakov claimed that persecution at home had silenced him as a writer and that the only way he could “sing of [his] country” would be to see it from afar.⁴⁰ The meaning of home becomes apparent and artistically expressible, Bulgakov suggested, only when the writer is allowed to venture away from home. It was Gogol who refined and practiced the theory of knowing Russia better from a distance; he took in the sweeping, panoramic view of Russia depicted in *Dead Souls* from the vantage point of Rome. Aware of his predecessor, Bulgakov quotes extensively from Gogol in the letter to Stalin. “I knew only that I was traveling not at all in order to delight in foreign lands,” he writes, citing Gogol directly, “but rather in order to endure, exactly as if I had foreseen that I would recognize the value of Russia only outside Russia, and that I would attain love for her only when I was far away.”⁴¹ Although biographers and students of Bulgakov’s writing note Gogol’s influence throughout Bulgakov’s work (to the extent that Bulgakov’s wife had Gogol’s first gravestone placed over Bulgakov’s grave in Moscow), Bulgakov was never able to share with Gogol the one thing he desired most: a view of Russia from a “wondrous, distant afar [iz chudesnogo, prekrasnogo daleka].”⁴²

The literary home

It would be a gross oversimplification to transfer the experiences of the authors’ homes directly onto their work. Yet, their biographies reveal the centrality of home in their lives, the relationship of home

and creativity, and their understanding of the complexities inherent in being and becoming “at home.” In their novels, as in their lives, the authors associate the idea of home closely with the ironic plight of the narrator’s or hero’s creative processes. In Gogol’s *Dead Souls* and Goncharov’s *Oblomov*, the “homeless” writer or poet uses his literary imagination to search for the ideal home. In Zamiatin’s *We* and Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita*, the heroes’ homelessness is actually the outcome of literary inspiration and production. In each novel, literature or poetic imagination mediates the dialectics of “home” and “homelessness.” The writer’s ambivalent attitude toward his goal of home, however, makes the nature of his homelessness problematic. An ironic and equally ambivalent relationship between the narrator and hero of each work expresses the duality inherent in the hero’s perception of both home and self. Ultimately, the difficulty or reluctance with which the writer approaches his domestic ideal opens to question the nature and value of the home and reveals a nagging uncertainty of self.

The search for an appropriate dwelling mode and a genuine sense of self lies at the heart of each of the four novels. Readers wonder about the identity of Gogol’s faceless Chichikov and Bulgakov’s nameless Master, while Goncharov’s Oblomov and Zamiatin’s D-503 themselves ask: “Who am I?” In an attempt to redefine the relationship between themselves and their surroundings, these heroes look for a place and mode of “dwelling” that allow them to feel “at home.” The motif of “place,” Anne Buttimer notes, frequently appears in literature “during times of abrupt change within the social or physical environment.”⁴³ Each of these four works is set during a period of social instability, when the “old” cultural self is forced to reconcile itself with the “new” conditions of its surroundings. *Dead Souls* and *Oblomov* unfold within the context of radical economic changes, increasing mobility, and the decline of traditional Russian patriarchal norms; *We* and *The Master and Margarita* confront the cultural effects of the Russian Revolution and the establishment of the Soviet state. Within the unstable social climate of these works, the image of the home arises as an illusory symbol of stability. An ideal dwelling mode, their authors suggest, will not only reward the heroes’ quests but will also capture the essence of the elusive Russian cultural self and create a unique, literary way of self-representation.

In Gogol’s picaresque novel *Dead Souls* the image of poor house-keeping reflects the moral inadequacies and the protean nature of the

Russian national character. The novel was evidently intended as the first volume of a trilogy. Gogol hoped the second and third volumes would chronicle the hero's redemptive transformation from wandering vagabond to ideal homemaker—a literary symbol of the cohesive Russian cultural self. In the only complete part of *Dead Souls*, however, the errant hero Chichikov is free from any definitive identity or place. The narrator, a self-proclaimed “author,” celebrates his hero's homelessness. Life on the road, the narrator insists, provides him with superior insight, aesthetic inspiration, and a heightened sense of spirituality. Within the narrative configuration of the novel, however, the narrator and his hero are able to converse in a type of dialogue. This ironic proximity allows the hero to question the narrator's overly enthusiastic celebration of homelessness. The literary structure of this relationship becomes a vehicle by which both the hero and the narrator express their ambivalence toward “home.” Although the road seems to offer Chichikov freedom from assuming stable identity, his facelessness, like his homelessness, threatens to devolve into a superficial and spiritually vapid existence. And, although in Gogol's vision of ideal domesticity, homelessness is a necessary means to an end, it can become a barrier to a spiritual “homecoming” as well.

The title character of Goncharov's *Oblomov* perceives travel and excessive activity as a wholly negative mode of existence. If Gogol's wandering picaresque hero is the archetype of homelessness, Goncharov's Oblomov is the quintessential homebody. The novel chronicles Oblomov's attempts to bridge the distance between his present sphere of ramshackle domesticity and the way of life he knew on his ancestral estate as a boy. His yearning for home evokes lyric descriptions from him of the conditions of his childhood and the narcissistic yet humanistic philosophy that this gentle existence cultivated. Although Oblomov's inner life is rich and imaginative, his outward life is governed by the overwhelming force of indolence. Incapable of the action necessary to propel him homeward, Oblomov realizes his homecoming only on a symbolic level through the parodic invocation of Homer's *Odyssey*. As Oblomov gradually reestablishes the conditions of his childhood home, the lyric passages diminish until they fade altogether. Ultimately, Oblomov's “homecoming” signals the death of poetry in his life.

Goncharov's use of Homer's epic reveals the narrator's ambivalent attitude toward the “success” of his hero. Oblomov's vision of

home represents a negative ideal to the narrative consciousness, while the opposing image of the journey is repugnant to the hero. Yet the narrator shows compassion for Oblomov, using the mock-heroic subtext to illuminate Oblomov's ironic capabilities as well as his comic limitations. Although Goncharov did not intend to apologize for his hero's idleness, his invocation of the Homeric homecoming does mitigate the popular condemnation of Oblomov, while questioning modern notions of home and self.

In *We*, the forced homecoming of Zamiatin's D-503 is not so much a function of passivity as indecision. A citizen of the twentieth-century utopian One State, D-503 must determine his mode of self-definition by choosing between two apparently opposing forms of "housekeeping," one collective and the other individualistic. Although he intends to celebrate totalitarian uniformity, when D-503 begins keeping a personal journal he awakens the forces of his creative imagination and sense of individualism. A museum of a "wild" ancient culture, the stone-walled "Ancient House," becomes for D-503 a place where he can explore in privacy the irrational impulses of inspiration and passion. The "private" housekeeping of the Ancient House at first seems to challenge the collective housing mode of the One State. But D-503's attitude toward his newly emerging self is unclear. His oscillating path between the Ancient House and the state's communal housing expresses his tortured uncertainty.

In *We* the Ancient House offers a passage way to the wilderness beyond the borders of the One State. But the symbolism of the house's opposition to the state is illusory. For Zamiatin, any form of house "keeping" implies stasis and cultural entropy. There is no true freedom for the creative individual, he says, except in perpetual "homelessness." Homelessness provides the artist a means to protest aesthetic conformity and to stave off attempts to rationalize or "domesticate" the creative process. D-503 is willing to approach the threshold of true creative freedom (the Ancient House), but he cannot forsake the "cozy" state household for the wilderness beyond its wall. Apparent in D-503's ironic aversion to homelessness is Zamiatin's understanding of the ambivalence of freedom and the burden (the "divine curse") of individuality.

In *The Master and Margarita*, the hero's homecoming ironically celebrates the stasis and cultural entropy that Zamiatin condemns in *We*. In Bulgakov's work, as in Zamiatin's, the writer's freedom

depends on his ability to transcend an apparent opposition between modes of domesticity. A dynamic conflict between the home and what Iurii Lotman calls the “antihome” gives *The Master and Margarita* its thematic structure. The true home, Bulgakov suggests, is necessarily linked to the free production of genuine literature. The basement apartment of the Master becomes a home as he and Margarita work on his novel. In *The Master and Margarita*, the destruction or perversion of literature also signals the capitulation of the home to its rational counterpart, the antihome. When the Master burns his manuscript and, later, refuses to continue work on his novel, his little apartment loses and then fails to regain its former significance. The Master and Margarita fall victim to the ongoing battle between the home and the antihome. When the forces of rational materialism destroy the Master’s home and his novel, they sever the link between him and Russia’s literary heritage as surely as they separate him from Margarita.

The Master and Margarita overcome their separation and homelessness in Soviet society when they transcend its rationalism by magically returning to the home of the Russian cultural past. There, Bulgakov suggests, the Master will be free to create in peace. Yet, as with Zamiatin’s Ancient House, a museum-like quality permeates the Master’s “eternal home.” The atmosphere of absolute stasis suggests the unproductive peace of the nineteenth century’s “superfluous man.” And like Oblomov’s oneiric vision of his childhood home, the imagery of the Master’s domestic refuge evokes both a paradise and a prison. The ambiguous portrayal of the Master’s ideal home expresses Bulgakov’s concerns that, while the writer may enjoy limited peace by retreating into the past, the production of real literature is impossible in the Soviet present.

In *The Master and Margarita*, as in *Dead Souls*, *Oblomov*, and *We*, an uncertain attitude in literature toward home and homecoming reveals the dynamics of Russia’s search for cultural identity. Each author suggests that certain dwelling modes must be rejected and the ideal of the home must itself be challenged under certain historical and political conditions. Each hero—Chichikov, Oblomov, D-503, and the Master—embarks on a homeward journey. But a pervasive ambivalence toward the outcome of each hero’s search for home questions seriously the value or possibility of finding the ideal “home” of the Russian self. The search for identity threatens to become the Russian identity itself. If it were to arrive at its cultural “home,” Russia would

once again have to confront the loss of its old, “homeless” self. It is part of the human “condition” to live with the paradox that, arriving finally at home after a long, arduous journey, the traveler may only find solace in the road.