

## (Literary) Capital of the Russian Arctic: Murmansk in Russian Literature

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*Поэтому вся моя жизнь – настоящий Мурманский роман.*

Viktor Timofeev, 2008

In this article, I examine depictions of the city of Murmansk in Soviet and contemporary Russian literature: how different works describe Murmansk’s geographical location and role as a frontier city in the Russian Arctic. I approach this question by analysing three themes that are central to the texts in terms of Murmansk: 1) future visions of the city, 2) the role of the sea/ocean and the port in the city’s life, and 3) depictions of the geographical location and natural surroundings of the city. I ask how the image of the city has changed during the last century and how different actors and places in the city space influence the urban experiences of the protagonists. The Arctic became “a key component of the modern mythology” in the Soviet Union in the 1930s (McCannon 1998, 81). This “Arctic myth,” examined extensively by John McCannon (1998, 2003), is an important context for my study. I am interested in the role of urbanization, in particular that of the city of Murmansk, in the Arctic myth and in conquering the North in the 1930s. I also cover questions concerning the relationship between gender and urban space.

My theoretical frameworks come from literary urban studies, geocriticism, and semiotics. I analyse Soviet texts in parallel with contemporary material. The geocritic Bertrand Westphal proposes a geocentered approach to texts: “the geocritical study of literature is not organized around *texts* or *authors* but around *geographic sites*.” (Prieto 2011, 20, italics mine) According to Westphal, analysing a single text or a single author makes the study of a place lopsided, and a geocritical study should emphasize *the space* more than *the observer* (Westphal 2011, 126, 131, italics mine). Applying Westphal’s geocentered approach to texts, I analyse depictions of Murmansk in multiple texts by different authors and from different decades. I prefer this kind of approach because, by exploring different eras’ texts about Murmansk, I wish to present a comparative perspective to its history as a literary city.



### *Background and research material*

Murmansk is the biggest city in the world north of the Arctic Circle. It was founded in 1916, and since then has been one of the most important ports of Russia.<sup>1</sup> Although its strategic and logistic significance has always been great, the fishing industry, which was important in the Soviet era, has been diminishing. The port of Murmansk is home to Atomflot, the Russian fleet of nuclear-powered icebreakers. Originally, Murmansk's name was Romanov-na-Murmane,<sup>2</sup> in honour of Tsar Nikolai II. It acquired its current name in 1917. Murmansk was bombed heavily during World War II, and many wooden houses in particular were demolished in 1942. At the beginning of the 1990s, the city had almost half a million inhabitants, but since then the population has shrunk, and it currently has about 300 000 inhabitants. Murmansk has been called the capital of the Soviet or Russian Arctic, a name which is also used to refer to it in prose (see, for example, Blinov 1974, 9). My analysis of the literature about the city enables me to propose that it is also the literary capital of the Soviet/Russian Arctic, because of its long literary history and the significant amount of poetry and both fiction and non-fiction written about it.

Veniamin Sheinker, a Soviet researcher of the cultural history of the Kola region, states that most texts written about the Kola Peninsula region are essays or sketches (*очерк* in Russian) (Sheinker 1962, 5–6). These essays are not fiction but mainly newspaper articles or travelogues. Sheinker collected texts about the Kola Peninsula into his book *Kolskii kraii v literature* (1962), in which he also briefly presents every writer. Only some of these texts focus on the city of Murmansk.

Maksim Gor'kii visited Murmansk briefly in June 1929, during his second longer trip around the USSR (23–25.6.1929). Gor'kii writes about his experiences in the text *Na kraiu zemli* ("At the Edge of the Earth"). The writer Vsevolod Lebedev visited the city in the same year, 1929, and in the following year, published the book *Poliarnoe solntse*, "The Polar Sun," based on his experiences. Marietta Shaginian made a business trip to the Kola region in April 1950 for the newspaper *Izvestiia*, and her two articles about Murmansk were published in *Izvestiia* in May 1950. She was especially interested in the economic development and fishing industry in Murmansk.

Vsevolod Lebedev, Konstantin Paustovskii and Marietta Shaginian each wrote different essays simply entitled "Murmansk." There are many texts about Murmansk during World War II, mainly newspaper articles and poetry. Among the most important wartime writers are Konstantin Simonov and Vladimir Beliaev, who both worked as correspondents on the Kola Peninsula during the years 1942–44. Beliaev published a book called "Under the Murmansk Sky" (*Pod nebom Murmanska*, 1958), and Simonov a book called "Direction of Murmansk" (*Murmanskoe napravlenie*, 1972).

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<sup>1</sup> The port was founded in 1915. The building of the Murmansk railroad also began in 1915 and was completed in 1917. The railway connection and port were built primarily because Russia needed proper connections with the Allied Forces (and with the rest of Europe) during World War I.

<sup>2</sup> The city name *Murmansk* and the name of its inhabitants, *murmanchanin*, or old *murmanets*, derive from the word *murman*. In the Middle Ages, Rus(s)ians called Norwegians (i.e. *Normany*) *Murmany*, and the Northern coast of the Kola Peninsula was called *Murmanskii bereg* (see Ushakov 1974, 26).

The contemporary material in my research consist of Dmitrii Korzhov's<sup>3</sup> trilogy set in Murmansk, Nikolai Blinov's and Boris Blinov's novels and memoirs, and Dmitrii Danilov's essay about Murmansk in his collection *Dvadsat' gorodov* (2016, "Twenty Cities"). The first part of Korzhov's trilogy, *Murmantsy* (2008, "People of Murmansk," in the references M1), describes Murmansk during the civil war of 1918–1920, and the second part, *Murmantsy 1942* (2011, "People of Murmansk in 1942," M2) describes Murmansk during World War II. The third part of the trilogy, the novel *Gorod mezhdum morem i nebom* (2015, "The City Between the Sea and Sky," M3) describes the city after World War II and at the beginning of the 1960s. So, altogether, the trilogy describes over 50 years of the Soviet history of Murmansk. Special emphasis in this article is given to the last part of the trilogy, in which Murmansk plays an even bigger role than in the first two novels.<sup>4</sup>

### *City as a text*

The most significant city text in Russian literature is the Saint Petersburg Text, famously explored by Iurii Lotman and V.N. Toporov. Lotman interprets the city as a semiotic mechanism, "a generator of culture," formed from heterogenic texts and codes that belong to different languages (Lotman 2002, 212). To him, the architecture and blueprint of the city, the street names and many other things functioned as "coded programs," which time after time create the texts of the city's historic past (ibid. 123). Toporov describes a city as "heterogenic text" which has its own language: every city speaks with its "streets, squares, waters, islands, gardens, buildings, sculptors, people, history [...]." (Toporov 2003, 22).<sup>5</sup> Applying Lotman's and Toporov's approach, V.V. Abashev, examining the Perm Text, also interprets nature elements, such as rivers, hills, ravines and forests, as "symbolic elements/forms of culture," which act in the human imagination and a person's perception of their surroundings (Abashev 2000, 36). Abashev summarizes that semiotics is interested in "the associative and narrative" possibilities of events and facts, that is, how they function in the text (Abashev 2000, 30). Lotman (2002, 220) proposes that semiotic polyglotism is typical for cities such as Saint Petersburg, and Toporov (2003, 66) proposes that the Saint Petersburg Text forms a "polyphonic resonant space" — thus the idea of the city text as multilingual, polyphonic and heterogenic forms the base for the semiotic view of the city text. I propose to explore the texts about Murmansk combining these semiotic viewpoints with a geocritical attempt, in order to examine the interaction between the literature and the "real" places.

Lotman's and Toporov's research of the semiotics of Saint Petersburg have had a great impact on later Russian studies on the local texts (локальные тексты) of smaller cities. In his study of the

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<sup>3</sup> Dmitri Korzhov (1971), born in Perm, works as a journalist and writer in Murmansk. Korzhov has published poems, novels and literary criticism. He graduated from Maksim Gor'kii Literature Institute in Moscow in 2002 and joined the Russian Writers' Association the same year.

<sup>4</sup> Andrei Rastorguev also pays attention to this increased role of the city in the third novel in his critique of *Gorod mezhdum morem i nebom* in *Ural*, 9/2015. The most explicit expression of this role is the way in which Korzhov writes the word "City" with a capital letter, like a proper noun, when referring to Murmansk.

<sup>5</sup> Он говорит нам своими улицами, площадями, водами, островами, садами, зданиями, памятниками, людьми, историей [...]. All quotes from Russian originals are translated by the author (A.L).

city of Perm in Russian literature, Abashev lists cities that have recently been studied in this framework of local texts studies: Arkhangelsk, Petrozavodsk, Cheliabinsk, Staraia Russa (Abashev 2000, 14). E.Sh. Galimova's research on "Northern text" (северный текст), also links to this Russian research tradition (see Galimova 2012). Studies of the "provincial myth," the provinces and provincial cities in the Russian cultural imagination and literature, formed a field of their own during the 2000s and 2010s (see Parts 2018, Sazhin 2000, Zaionts 2004, Abashev 2000). The Russian "provincial myth" could be defined as being constructed by two contrasting views on provinciality: on the one hand, provinces are interpreted and represented in culture as backward places, and on the other hand, they are represented as (an idealized) repository of traditional values and "Russianness" (Parts 2018, 4-6). Deconstructing and analysing this two-sidedness of the "provincial myth" is one of the keys to conceptualizing the noncapital fictional space in Russian literature.

English language urban literary studies have recently oriented more towards "second" and "peripheral" cities, beyond the historical metropolises (see Ameel et al. 2015; Finch et al., 2017). My interest in Murmansk is related to, and a continuation of, both these tendencies to conceptualize and analyse noncapital and peripheral urban space.

There are certain similarities between Murmansk and Saint Petersburg, in both the literature and "reality": both are artificial cities that rose suddenly in the middle of a wilderness; both are cities on the sea, that is, cities at the edge of the country; both are located near the Western border of Russia; both are symbolically cities without a history, cities of the future (see Lotman 2002, 212-213); and finally, both are symbolic "Northern capitals." Both Lotman and Toporov suggest that in the Saint Petersburg Text, the artificial city (culture) opposes nature (Lotman 2002, 209; Toporov 2003, 36). In the Saint Petersburg Text this opposition manifests itself in the juxtaposition of the (eternal) water and (man-made) rocks (Lotman 2002, 211). Toporov notices that the Petersburg Text manifests the idea of the diarchy (двоевластие) of nature and culture, neither being superior to the other, but nevertheless in opposition (Toporov 2002, 66). Recently introduced hybrid geographies have criticized the nature-culture division (Whatmore 2008, 11-16, see also Bolotova 2014: 38), and in many depictions of Murmansk this juxtaposition is at least very ambiguous. On the one hand, the conquering of the North has a whole historical context, in which the city is opposed to Northern nature. But on the other, this opposition hardly exists in the everyday urban experience of the protagonists, as I will show in my analysis.

#### *City with no history*

Iurii Lotman writes that "an ideal artificial city [...] should lack history." (Lotman, 2002, 212). Young Soviet cities are cities with no history in a very concrete sense, and this idea of a "lack of history" and "artificiality" is repeated in the texts about Murmansk, although, founded in 1916, the city is not actually a Soviet city. John McCannon, researcher of the Soviet Arctic in culture, argues that the Arctic territories were especially suitable for depictions of the great future visions of the USSR, "a discursive tabula rasa" (McCannon 2003, 251, McCannon 1998, 89). I see Murmansk and its great future visions as an exceptionally good example of this.

Gor'kii writes in his essay about Murmansk, *Na kraiu zemli*, that [н]а пустынном берегу Ледовитого океана, на гранитных камнях, местами уже размолотых движением ледника и временем в песок, стоит город. Именно – так: люди строят сразу целый город. (Gor'kii 1952, 236).<sup>6</sup> He depicts Murmansk as a city with no history, which rose quickly in the middle of a wilderness. Vsevolod Lebedev wrote in his essay that “there are cities with no history,” and that Murmansk was one of these (Lebedev 1930, 99). One of the most important writers from Murmansk, Boris Blinov, claimed almost the same, eighty years later: У Мурманска не было истории, не было традиций. Он был порождением новых социальных и нравственных отношений. (Blinov 2010, 11).<sup>7</sup> Boris Blinov's father, Nikolai Blinov, also a writer (and a teacher in the nautical school of Murmansk), begins his novella *Sud'by* (“Destinies,” 1974) by describing how, despite Semenov's Bay and Lake Semenovskoe on the hill, earlier, where Murmansk now is, there was nothing (Blinov 1974, 8).

In Korzhov's trilogy, one of the protagonists, Sasha Gorevoi, talks with his history professor about what was on the Kola Peninsula before Murmansk (МЗ, 94). Professor Kushakov briefly summarizes the history of the foundation of Murmansk for Sasha:

Он мог появиться и раньше – в девяностых годах прошлого века Витте, в то время министр финансов, а позже премьер-министр, убеждал государя, что порт, военную базу, нужно строить здесь. Не убедил. Город создали, когда возникла острейшая необходимость в незамерзающем порте – в войну, первую мировую. Тогда и дорогу положили [...], и город основали и начали строить – Романов-на-Мурмане. (МЗ, 94)<sup>8</sup>

This discussion seems to be a history lecture for readers. The professor explains the historical processes behind the foundation of the city and shows how Murmansk does in fact have its own history, tightly related to the historical events in Europe.

Both Gor'kii in 1929 and Marietta Shaginian in 1950 conclude their texts about Murmansk with thoughts about how little Soviet people still know about the Arctic territories around Murmansk. Gor'kii writes: Жаль только, что мы знаем о ней неизмеримо и постыдно меньше того, что нам следует знать (Gor'kii 1952, 247),<sup>9</sup> and Shaginian repeats almost the same: Жаль, что мало еще известно об этой замечательной советской области на нашем крайнем северо-западе [...]. (Shaginian 1950a, 2).<sup>10</sup> These remarks manifest the idea of “a tabula rasa,” introduced by

<sup>6</sup> “in the wilderness of the coast of the Arctic Ocean, on the granite stones, which are here and there crushed into the sand by the movement of glaciers and time, they are building a city. Just like that: people are building a whole city at once.”

<sup>7</sup> “Murmansk had no history and no traditions. It is a child of new social and moral relations.”

<sup>8</sup> “It could have appeared already earlier – in the 1890s, Witte, the Minister of Economy at that time, and a later Prime Minister, tried to persuade the tsar that a port, a military base, was needed here. The tsar was not persuaded. The city arose when the state needed an ice-free port in the First World War. Then they built the railroad, too [...], and they founded the city and began to build Romanov-na-Murmane.”

<sup>9</sup> “It is a pity that we know immeasurably and shamefully less about it than we should.”

<sup>10</sup> “It is a pity that still so little is known about this great Soviet region in the North-West of our country [...].”

McCannon: Arctic territories and Murmansk (especially the Murmansk region) are white spots on the map on which researchers, as well as writers, can create great, urban future visions.

### *Conquering the North*

The intense development of the northern territories began in the Soviet Union in the 1920s with the forced industrialization led by Bolshevik authorities (Bolotova 2014, 41)<sup>11</sup> and with the exploration of the northern territories. The management of these distant territories was transformed “[i]n order to establish political, military and administrative control over the vast Northern peripheries.” (Bolotova 2014, 41). The aesthetics of “conquest” or “mastery,” *osvoenie*, became “predominant during the ‘high’ Stalinism from the mid-1930s” (Widdis 2003, 221, see also John McCannon 1998, 2003), and the “mastering/conquest of the North,” *osvoenie severa*,<sup>12</sup> plays a central role in this Soviet conquest of new territories from the 1930s onwards.

In Gor’kii’s depiction quoted above, where earlier were vast white glaciers, a new socialist city now lies, he concludes that there will be a time when man can say that “I made the land with my reason and my hands.” (Gor’kii 1952, 247). In this confrontation between the city and wilderness we can hear echoes of Gor’kii’s slight “open enmity towards nature,” discussed by some environmental historians and other researchers (Bruno 2016, 75; Rosenholm and Autio-Sarasmo 2005, 9–18; Frank 2010, 108). Overall, the idea of nature as an opponent to fight with, to conquer, was widespread in Soviet literature and Arctic myth from the 1930s onward (McCannon 1998, 83, Bolotova 2005, 103). Like Gor’kii, Marietta Shaginian formulated the same idea of Soviet man conquering nature when she wrote that “the most precious thing” in Murmansk is Man (1950a, 2). As Bolotova states, this kind of “romanticisation of the battle against nature is more characteristic to countries that are more industrialized, such as the USSR and USA.” (Bolotova 2005, 103–105). In my view, when reading texts about Murmansk and other northern cities, we can see that the romanticization of the industrialization in the North was at the same time the romanticization of its urbanization.

Мурманский край одним концом стоит на море, другим – на тундре, а наполовину – в будущем, в перспективах, writes Lebedev (1930, 118).<sup>13</sup> In his geographical metaphor, the natural environments (sea, tundra) are opposed to the man-made city between them, and the future is in the city. In Gor’kii’s, Lebedev’s and Shaginian’s essays, Murmansk is clearly connected to the Soviet

<sup>11</sup> For a thorough, compact view of the history of “mastering the North” see Alla Bolotova’s dissertation *Conquering Nature and Engaging with the Environment in the Russian Industrialised North* (2014).

<sup>12</sup> Environmental historian Andy Bruno presents the differences between the translations of the terms *osvoenie*, which can be translated as “mastery,” “assimilation” or “conquest” (Bruno 2016, 30–31) and Emma Widdis translates it interchangeably as “mastery” or “conquest” (Widdis 2003, 223). Alla Bolotova seems to distinguish between the English terms “conquering nature” and “mastering the North” (see Bolotova 2014). According to Bruno’s interpretation, “[t]o conquer nature was to destroy any obstacles in the way of making it serve human-dictated purposes” (Bruno 2016, 31), and differentiating between mastery and conquest helps us better understand the “variation in interactions with the natural world” (ibid.) I use both terms, but mainly “conquest,” because the impact of the *osvoenie severa* on nature is central in my analysis.

<sup>13</sup> “The Murmansk region stays in the sea at one end, and on the tundra at the other, while its middle lies in the future, in the perspectives.”

settler experience, the conquest of the North. In her dissertation, Alla Bolotova comprehensively shows how the unknown northern space turned into a territory when explorers worked there, and how “migrants who settled in newly established socialist towns turned that territory into a place – constructed, inhabited, dwelled in.” (Bolotova 2014, 74). This history of the settlers of the North passes through the whole literary history of Murmansk and is its main plot line.

The conquest of the North, and the resulting urbanization processes, had a huge impact on the lives of the indigenous people, the Sámi, living on the Kola Peninsula. At the same time, the Soviet minority policy had its own impact, and according to Mikkel Berg-Nordlie (2015, 47) “economic development and indigenous empowerment were presented as simultaneously possible, and the discourses were mixed.” The first novel of Korzhov’s trilogy in my contemporary material has a fictional Sámi character, Artemii. Through this character, the author touches upon the topic of the impact that colonializing the North had on the indigenous people. Two overlapping discourses, those of the conquest of the North and the Soviet indigenous minority policy, are reflected in a discussion between Aleksei and Artemii while driving to Pechenga.<sup>14</sup>

Aleksei asks how Artemii speaks Russian so well, who answers: “We, Sámi, are Russians like you: same God, same Tsar and the same language.” (M1, 75)<sup>15</sup> Aleksei thinks that there is no longer a Tsar after the revolution, and that the Bolsheviks will also abolish God, after which the language question will be the only remaining difficulty. One of the problems of this excerpt is that the narrator uses the word *lopar’* instead of ‘Sámi’, and Artemii also refers to himself with this word. *Lopar’* is an old, inappropriate word for Sámi, and carries a pejorative and disparaging meaning; it is no longer politically correct.<sup>16</sup> It was used in the Soviet ethnographic literature from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards. We can interpret that the whole discussion and the usage of the word *lopar’* illustrates the language of the 1910s and reflects Aleksei’s focalization and prejudices. But the usage of this term and Aleksei’s patronizing attitude towards Artemii also reflects the state-level policies and superior attitudes towards the indigenous population of the Kola Peninsula in the Soviet Russia.<sup>17</sup> What makes the word even more problematic is that we do not know the writer’s intention, and why he did not problematize the word or just substitute it with a more correct term. Finally, I consider this question about contemporary Russian fiction depicting the indigenous people as one which needs a proper postcolonial analysis of its own. Here I want to propose that the question about the impact of the conquest of the North on the Sámi of the Kola Peninsula is present in the fiction to some extent, but that the conflicting process of urbanization and the rights of the indigenous people are not properly problematized.

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<sup>14</sup> Their discussion takes place in the wilderness, not in the city, which I read as one problematic element in this episode, because it seems to reinforce stereotypical ideas of indigenous people being more connected with nature, unlike urbanized Russians such as Aleksei.

<sup>15</sup> Мы, лопари – те же русские: один Бог, один царь, один язык.

<sup>16</sup> See Berg-Nordlie 2015, 44, footnote.

<sup>17</sup> Berg-Nordlie (2015, 59) writes about the “attitude of state paternalism” in both the imperial Russian and Soviet minority policies. In the case of Korzhov’s novel, the temporal aspect makes the interpretation more complex: the events take place during the civil war, thus we cannot speak yet about the Soviet policy. However, this episode reflects its coming.

The Arctic territories are often conceptualized as “an ultimate frontier” (McCannon 1998, 91, see also Frank 2010, 116), and Murmansk is described as such in texts by authors who depict its location as being on the ultimate edge of Soviet Russia and “on the edge of the Earth.” It is claimed that Soviet texts “do not regard the Arctic as a border or limit” (Frank 2010, 120), but according to my reading, many of the depictions of the location of Murmansk reflect the idea of an Arctic border.

Lebedev, like Marietta Shaginian twenty years after him, compares the city with a ship that is sailing towards the future (Lebedev 1930, 101, Shaginian 1950, 2). In contrast, in Dmitri Korzhov’s trilogy, one of the protagonists, Sasha Gorevoi, compares *the ships* with *the city*. For him, the port looks like a “separate city itself” (M3, 78), ships in rows like streets on a map. These metaphors highlight the importance of seafaring and the port for the city. In my reading, these examples also seem to thematize the conquering of Arctic nature: the ship is moving forward, towards new places to be explored and conquered.

### *Street names and conquest of the North*

Naturally, Soviet writers depicted much of the construction of socialism in the city, and Vsevolod Lebedev and Konstantin Paustovskii considered the Arctic city especially inspiring for working people: *Здесь строят социализм даже те люди, которые в другом месте ничего бы не строят стали* (Lebedev 1930, 102);<sup>18</sup> *Мурманск – самый пролетарский город в СССР. (Paustovskii 1962, 110).*<sup>19</sup> Gor’kii writes [...] *в Мурманске особенно хорошо чувствуешь широту размаха государственного строительства. (Gor’kii 1952, 245).*<sup>20</sup> John McCannon argues that the depictions of the Arctic landscapes were often hyperbolic (McCannon 2003, 243), and I also consider Murmansk being seen as “the most proletarian city in the USSR,” with its inhabitants exceptionally motivated to build socialism one (urbanized) version of this hyperbolism.

Vsevolod Lebedev wrote in 1929: *Вед улиц в Мурманске почти нет, а если поглядишь на город думаешь, что Мурманск вовсе и не желает улиц, а согласен жить в хаосе земли...* (Lebedev 1930, 101)<sup>21</sup> In 1950, Marietta Shaginian wrote that the lines of the city were only then taking shape (Shaginian 1950, 2). Depicting the city’s life during World War II, Korzhov wrote about the area of the Planernoie pole near the city centre, describing how there were no streets at that time, only numbers of barracks (M2, 134). These examples, depicting the city at the end of the 1920s and in the 1940s and 1950s, illustrate its early years as a time when the lack of streets was a characteristic element of the city: Murmansk was a city with no urban features.

The sociologist Maksim Palamarchuk shows how the symbols of the sea, seafaring and fishing are typical of the Murmansk city space (Palamarchuk 2008, 471), as they are naturally typical for most port cities. Palamarchuk also lists the streets of Murmansk, named after famous captains who worked in Murmansk either in the navy or in the trawling fleet, of which there are many: *улицы*

<sup>18</sup> “Here socialism is built even by those who anywhere else would not begin to build anything.”

<sup>19</sup> “Murmansk is the most proletarian city in the USSR.”

<sup>20</sup> “[...] in Murmansk you can feel the breadth of the state construction exceptionally well.”

<sup>21</sup> “There are almost no streets at all in Murmansk, and if you look at the city you think that Murmansk does not even want to have streets, but agrees to live in the chaos of Earth...”

Морская, капитана Буркова, капитана Орликовой, капитана Егорова, капитана Копытова, капитана Маклакова, капитана Тарана, капитана Пономарева, переулок Якорный, проезд Портовый. (Palamarchuk 2008, 471).<sup>22</sup> In Korzhov's trilogy, some of the people after whom the city's streets are now named appear as fictional characters. When I interviewed him, Korzhov stated that he started to write a trilogy about Murmansk partly because he noticed how little people (including himself) know of the history of the city in which they live (from an interview by the author 5.8.2017). In fictionalizing historical people, the writer shows who the people behind the street names are. I find this makes the relationship between the text, the urban space and the history interesting: not only does the urban space affect the text, but Korzhov's text also aims to affect the way in which the reader perceives the urban space. Interestingly enough, the writer Viktor Timofeev claimed that there was no "Captain Street" or "Sailor's or Lieutenant's Boulevard" in Murmansk, and gave other similar examples (Timofeev 2008, 13). He wanted to see streets named in honour of these sea-related professions and indirectly suggested that the map of Murmansk was not yet complete, and could contain even more sea-related symbols.

In his essay about Murmansk, Dmitrii Danilov writes about wandering on the streets: Я прошел по улице Челюскинцев [...] Долго шел по длинной улице Папанина, дошел аж до Полярных Зорь (это тоже такая улица) [...]. (DG, 145).<sup>23</sup> Korzhov's novels also often mention Cheliuskintsev Street. It is named after the ice-breaking type of ship Cheliuskin and its crew of "Cheliuskinites," who spent two months in the Arctic wilderness after the ship was crushed by ice-packs in the Chukchi Sea in February 1934. Papanin Street is named after the famous Soviet Polar explorer and scientist, Ivan Papanin, who participated in the North Pole-1 expedition in 1937–1938. Poliarnie zori Street, meaning "Polar dawns," is an Arctic-related name in its very denotation.<sup>24</sup> These street names are related to the history of Soviet Arctic exploration, to the Soviet conquest of the North, and to the symbolism of the sea, typical for the Murmansk city space.

Danilov writes interestingly about the old wooden two-floor houses on Papanin Street, describing them as "really specific northern houses," which could be horrible places in which to live, but они хранят в себе [...] дух освоения севера. (DG, 145).<sup>25</sup> Danilov's idea of wooden houses preserving "the spirit of the conquest of the North" is interesting because it openly refers to the Soviet idea of conquering the North. In one sentence, Danilov implicitly refers to the previous tradition of depicting the North and Murmansk, in which *osvoenie severa* plays a significant role.

Another feature related to this meaning-making of place names, is Murmansk's brand or symbolic status as "the capital of the Russian Arctic" (столица русской Арктики/Заполярья) or "the Arctic Capital" (заполярная столица),<sup>26</sup> in addition to its being the administrative capital of

<sup>22</sup> "Streets of Captain Burkov, Captain Orlikov, Captain Egorov, Captain Копытов, Captain Maklakov, Captain Taran and Captain Ponomarev, Anchor Lane and Port Street."

<sup>23</sup> "I walked along Cheliuskintsev Street [...] I walked along Papanin Street, walked until Polyarnye Zori (it is a street, too) [...]."

<sup>24</sup> The street acquired its name in 1964. On the Kola Peninsula, there is also a city named Poliarnie Zori, founded in 1968, for the workers of the Kola nuclear power plant. It is possible that the street is named after the city.

<sup>25</sup> "they preserve in themselves [...] the spirit of the conquest of the North."

<sup>26</sup> Salekhard and Arkhangelsk occasionally use this name for themselves too, but most often it is used for Murmansk.

the Murmansk region (*oblast'*). These names are used in both Soviet and contemporary texts, as well as widely in everyday language. However, the “Northern capital” (северная столица) is also one of the names for Saint Petersburg. This case of self-identification and city branding highlights the difference between the symbolic concept of the North and the actual, geographic concept of the Arctic.

Lyudmil Parts writes about how Russian provincial cities try (and often fail)<sup>27</sup> to brand themselves: according to her, to brand a city is “to give shape to existing, positive association, that distinguish[es] it from other cities,” that is, “to formulate its unique story.” (Parts 2018, 61, 60)<sup>28</sup> Russian provincial cities have been seen as lacking individuality in the cultural imagination, as they are all the same. Murmansk differs strongly from this stereotypical view of the Russian provincial city, I believe mainly because its unique geographical location lends it a strong unique identity.

### *The sea and the city*

Fidel Castro, who visited Murmansk in April 1963, appears as a fictional character in the third novel of Korzhov's trilogy. The episode begins as he walks along the seashore (M3, 181). Castro begins to get to know the city from the shore of the bay, like many other protagonists of the trilogy. Its location on the sea has a great impact on the urban experience of the inhabitants of Murmansk. Anthropologist Tim Ingold writes about “sea-ing the land,” seeing the land from the sea, and proposes that this perspective throws the solidity of the ground itself into doubt (Ingold 2011, 131): that is, the land is restless and in motion like the sea. About the Murmansk region, Lebedev writes that [т]вердой территории, постоянного места, где бы можно администрировать, нет... (Lebedev 1930, 118),<sup>29</sup> a depiction of the land exactly as Ingold describes “sea-ing the land.” Still, I read this reference to the “not firm territory” as reflecting the modernization narrative in the way that Arja Rosenholm proposes: the “chthonic” swamps are related to the “undivided chaos of earth and water” before creation, and their capacity to put things together in some “improved way” in the modernization narratives of St Petersburg myth and Konstantin Paustovskii's *Kolkhida* (Rosenholm 2017, 84). In his essay, Danilov depicts his visit to Abram-mys, a neighbourhood located on the western side of Kola Bay: the main part of the city of Murmansk is located on the eastern

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<sup>27</sup> Parts states that branding sometimes fails partly because “until recently, the cultural myth of the provinces held mostly negative connotations and assigned no individuality to provincial places.” (Parts 2018, 61).

<sup>28</sup> Parts states, that the “city brand is always removed from geographical and cultural reality,” but that “its longevity requires a cultural and geographical basis.” (Parts 2018, 67). Abashev also discusses the idea of using the city text, the symbolic and semiotic potential of the city, in city branding, and sees that the research of city texts have a practical dimension: city texts could function as “a base for effective cultural politics of the city and region.” (Abashev, 2000, 122; 399). Thus, Abashev is interested not only in the construction and analysis of the Perm text, but also in how it could impact/impacts the self-identification of the inhabitants and how it could be used in the image-making of the city. In other words, he is interested in the cyclical process of how the texts could impact the “real,” referential world, which they represent. This point is also important to keep in mind when analysing Murmansk texts and their potential ability to influence city branding.

<sup>29</sup> “there is no firm territory, no permanent place to administer...”

side.<sup>30</sup> In the children's novel *Tretii klass kupil kolbas...* by Nikolai Blinov, the young protagonists also visit Abram-mys with their teacher. Both Danilov and Blinov's protagonists look at the city between the waters and the hills from the other side of the bay or from a ship. In this sense, Kola Bay/the sea is a border of a city space, but technically it could be interpreted as a border *inside* the city space, if we look at the administrative map of the city. Kola Bay (and the port, as we will see later) has an ambiguous status in the city space: it can be seen as either part of the city space or as separated from it, depending on the situation.

British maritime fiction has mainly had two kinds of sailor heroes: officers and ordinary seamen (Peck 2001, 28), and this also seems to be the case in Russian fiction about Murmansk. The essays and fiction about Murmansk contain navy officers, such as Aleksei Koltsov in Korzhov's novel trilogy, and seamen from the fishing industry. In Korzhov's trilogy, the fishing industry and seafaring are mainly described from the point of view of the female captain of a fishing trawler, Mariia Filatova.<sup>31</sup> This is interesting, because her character reflects the opposition between the city and the sea, city space and the port area, as well as the gendered aspects of the city space. They are also partly turned upside-down.

In Korzhov's trilogy, women seem to be more closely connected to the city, while men are associated with the sea(faring). Men travel, and women stay in the city and wait, which is a typical setting in maritime fiction. This topic also appears in the earlier, Soviet literature about Murmansk (see Shaginian 1950b, 2). In the third novel, the narrator describes how women in Murmansk are used to waiting:

Здесь женщины порой не видели своих мужчин по полгода. Главной их соперницей-разлучницей было море. [...] И они – красивые, лучшие – привыкли ждать. Такая уж выпала им доля. Но сколько же радости выплескивалось на улицы Города, когда корабли возвращались к родным причальным стенкам! [...] И, кажется, самые прекрасные женщины Города спешили в порт – встречать своих любимых. (МЗ, 33)<sup>32</sup>

The sea is metaphorically described as both male and female: on the one hand, it is closely connected to the male field of shipping and seafaring and is thus opposite to the female, waiting

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<sup>30</sup> Murmansk is divided into three administrative areas, Leninskii, Oktiabrskii and Pervomaiskii okrug, the last of which is located on both sides of Kola Bay. Abram-mys was attached to the Pervomaiskii area in the 1950s, and since then Murmansk has technically been divided on both sides of the Kola bay; however, Abram-mys is only a small neighbourhood of the city.

<sup>31</sup> In my interview (5.8.2017) Korzhov claims that basically there are two real prototypes for Filatova's fictional character: the first female captain of the USSR, Valentina Orlikova (1915–1986), who started work in Murmansk in 1955 as the captain of a freezer trawler, and Aleksandra Khrustal'eva (1912–2004), see later in this article.

<sup>32</sup> "Women here have not seen their husbands for half a year. Their main rival-separator was the sea... And they, best and beautiful, used to wait. It was their role. But how much joy rushed on the streets of the City when the vessels came back to the familiar piers! It seemed that all the most beautiful women of the City hurried to the harbour to meet their loved ones."

city. But, on the other hand, the sea is described as an “other woman,” a rival (соперница) between wife and husband.

Today, Murmansk has a new sculpture called *Waiting Woman*, *Ждущая*, dedicated to “those who know how to wait.” In a way, this personifies the whole city as a woman. The sculpture is an interesting example of the impact of literature, and in this case poetry, on the city space. In the 1970s, poet Viktor Timofeev<sup>33</sup> dedicated his poem “Sentimentalnaia vahta” (“A Sentimental Watch”) to the women waiting for their loved ones to return from the sea. The poem was published in 1984, when Timofeev contacted the city administration, proposing the idea of erecting a sculpture for the waiting women of the city.<sup>34</sup> The idea met with an enthusiastic response, but various (mainly economic) difficulties slowed down the process, and the sculpture was not installed until 2012. The poet participated in the opening ceremony, unveiling the sculpture. Lines from his poem are engraved on the base of the sculpture.

Identifying a city with a (young) woman has a long tradition in the history of literature. This phenomenon is closely related to the metaphor of the city as a body (see Ameel 2013, 43–44), and cities are frequently personified as women (Best 1996, 181). The image of a “seductive female city” (Ameel 2013, 45) is not activated in the literary Murmansk, where the sea can be seductive and unpredictable, while the city opposes it as a feminine, familiar and safe place (see Best 1995, 183). Mariia Filatova’s character is an interesting one in this context: she seems to be a new Soviet woman, free to make her own career (in a male field of work). But, on the other hand, Aleksei depicts Filatova as acting differently at home (in the city) from the way she does on a ship: at home she is “only a woman,” while on a ship she acts firmly like a captain (M2, 185–186). This is Aleksei’s male interpretation of Mariia’s different roles, but Mariia herself also feels the difference between the city life and working life on the sea: when she is working, one part of her is on the sea, while the other part of her is on the shore (M3, 98). I see this separation as reproducing a stereotypical view of women’s need to act “like a man” in working life so that they can succeed. On the other hand, it may also refer to the dilemma of superficial Soviet gender equality: women were expected to both make a career and take care of the household, while men focused only on working life. But still, career-oriented Mariia, being a central figure in the whole trilogy, gives a strong voice to women as active figure, overturning the idea of a woman waiting on the shore.

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<sup>33</sup> Viktor Leontevitch Timofeev (1940–2015), the most famous poet from Murmansk, studied in the nautical school of Murmansk, worked as a sailing master in Murmansk, then as a journalist at the “Atlantika” radio station and at the *Komsomolets Zapolar’ia* newspaper. He published several collections of poems and in 1977, was the second writer from Murmansk to be accepted into the Soviet Writer’s Union (the first was Boris Romanov, accepted in 1971). His most recent book, *Murmanskii roman* (2008), is a collection of poems and fragments of his memoirs. In the memoir part, *Zhivye stranitsy*, he takes a thorough but brief look at the history of Murmansk literary life, describing the birth of the Murmansk Writers’ association and publishing activities. In her autobiographical text about her husband N.N. Blinov, Aleksandra Khrustaleva also described the literary life in Murmansk, roughly at the same time as Timofeev did (see Khrustaleva 2000, 71–78).

<sup>34</sup> In his *Murmanskii roman*, published before the “Zhdushchaia” sculpture was erected, Timofeev refers to the long history of erecting the sculpture (Timofeev 2008, 13–14).

*Murmansk as the “City of Sailors”: poetry as a subtext*

In the poems in which Murmansk appears, the city is almost always related to sailing, sailors and the sea. After Prokofev’s visit to the Murmansk region in 1951, he dedicated many of his poems to it. In his poem “Zdravstvui, Murmansk!” from the poem series “U vorot okeana” of 1957 (“At the Gate of the Ocean”), Prokofev associates the city with the sea and seafaring. He depicts Murmansk as a “masculine city of fishermen” and “the city of the ship’s boys and captains,” and in his poem, sailors see the city “from all the oceans.” (Prokofev 1962, 228) Poet Aleksandr Reshetov, who participated in the building of the city of Hibinogorsk (nowadays known as Kirovsk) in the 1930s and who was on the Kola Peninsula during World War II, associates Murmansk with the sea in his poem “Murmansk,” published in 1940. The poet hopes that Murmansk will give shelter to “peaceful sailors” and depicts it as “the city of glorious masters” and “the city of strong and happy Bolshevik-sailors.” (Reshetov 1956, 30) In all these poems, Murmansk is most often identified with the figure of a sailor (моряк).

In the poetry written in and about the Kola region, the relationship between nature and man plays a central role (Liavdanskii 1993, 286). Eduard Liavdanskii shows that the appearance of the Kola Peninsula in Soviet poetry in the 1930s is related to the “industrial mastering,” промышленное освоение, of the region at that time, and in his analysis of the poems of Aleksandr Reshetov, Lev Oshanin and Aleksandr Prokofev, he sees the mastering of nature as a key theme (Liavdanskii 1993, 290, 293). In contemporary poetry about the Kola Peninsula, Liavdanskii finds even ecological motives, and pays attention to the peaceful co-existence of people and nature in Viktor Timofeev’s poetry (Liavdanskii 1993, 311). About the city itself, Liavdanskii says very little.

In Korzhov’s trilogy, especially in the third part, poetry is an important subtext of the novel. One protagonist, Sasha Gorevoi, gets to know Viktor Timofeev, a real Murmansk-based poet, and listens to his poetry about Murmansk. He also listens to the song about the city composed by Iurii Vizbor,<sup>35</sup> who visited Murmansk. In Timofeev’s poem and in Vizbor’s song, quoted in the novel, the sea and the port are central topics. Poems by Murmansk-based poets Aleksandr Podstanitskii<sup>36</sup> and Nikolai Kolychev<sup>37</sup> are also quoted in the second part of the trilogy (M2, 40–41). In my interpretation, these subtexts affect the way in which the protagonists see and feel about their city. The character Sasha, a poet himself, appreciates Timofeev’s and others’ poems because they describe “his native city, the best city in the world. About Murmansk” (M3, 32), and he likes the name of Timofeev’s collection *Ritm moria* (“Rhythm of the Sea”), because it is named “по-мурмански,” “in a Murmansk way” (M3, 166). In the newest poems about Murmansk, written by Murmansk-based authors Aleksei Polubota and Elena Fedotenko, Murmansk is no longer associated only with the ocean: Fedotenko writes about how “Kola Bay and the line of life are one whole”

<sup>35</sup> Iurii Vizbor (1934–1984), Soviet bard, poet and actor. He lived most of his life in Moscow, travelled much around Russia, visited Murmansk and recorded the song “Murmansk,” with lyrics by Pavel Shubin, composed by S. Nikitin. The sea plays a central role in this song.

<sup>36</sup> Aleksandr Podstanitskii (1921–1942), a Murmansk-based poet, whose poems were dedicated to the war theme and the Russian North. He died in WWII.

<sup>37</sup> Nikolai Kolychev (1959–2017), Murmansk-based poet and prose writer, a member of the Russian Writers’ Association.

(Fedotenko 2015, 283). Kola Bay seems to continue to play a central role in the city imagery; however, sailors are no longer mentioned. In Maksim Saltykov's poem "Murmansku," the city is associated with winter, ice and snow, and in the end called "a strange city," "странный город" (Saltykov 1996, 34). I read this "strangeness" of the city as stressing the idea of it being different from other Russian (peripheral or port) cities.

In the third novel of Korzhov's trilogy, *Gorod mezhdu morem i nebom*, one of the characters, Oleg, watches the movie *Put's k prichalu*<sup>38</sup> ("Way to the Piers"), partly filmed in Murmansk, and thinks: Сама история — как Мурманск, чистая, светлая и грустная. И не без улыбки, конечно. И не без надежды (МЗ, 132).<sup>39</sup> Oleg concludes that, in the film, Murmansk is "glorious and real" (МЗ, 132–133). Furthermore, when he looks at Murmansk from the hill, the cityscape brings to Sasha's mind the rhymes of an author unknown to him: Между небом и водою горизонта нить. Видишь, море, видишь, небо... Где ты хочешь жить? (МЗ, 78).<sup>40</sup> Sasha's answer to the poem's question is, of course, that he wants to live in Murmansk. Thus, both Sasha and Oleg think about how the poems and the film represent the city, and these representations (and the characters' interpretation of them) impact the way in which they experience the city, and most of the time, strengthen their own view of the city. Furthermore, Sasha's praise and love of Murmansk could be read as "promoting the regional identity,"<sup>41</sup> and we can read the whole Korzhov's trilogy as quite openly promoting this. In my reading, Sasha's function in the text is to convince the reader of how great a place Murmansk is in which to live.

### *Port in/and the city*

In the third part of Korzhov's trilogy, some of the characters walk from the port towards the city centre and think about how "Murmansk once began from here" (МЗ, 81). They experience the port as a part of the city, the place on which the city was originally founded. In the beginning of Nikolai Blinov's novella *Sud'by*, the author depicts the memorial in the trade port, erected on the place where, on 19 June 1915, the construction of the port of Murmansk began (Blinov 1974, 8). Thus, Blinov emphasizes the role of the port as the heart of the city. In his novels, Korzhov calls both the central square *Piat uglov* ("Five corners") in the city centre and the port "the heart of the city" (МЗ, 6,11). These examples effectively illustrate the idea of the port as the beating heart of the city, held by most of the texts in my material. The writer Aleksandra Khrustaleva<sup>42</sup> writes much about

<sup>38</sup> The film was directed by Georgii Daneliia and filmed in 1962. It is based on the novella by Viktor Konetskii and tells the story of a teenage boy named Vas'ka, who ends up on the tugboat *Kola*, aiming to sail to Murmansk.

<sup>39</sup> "The story itself is just like Murmansk – pure, light, and sad. And not without a smile, naturally. And not without hope."

<sup>40</sup> "A thread of horizon between the sky and water. Look, the sea, look, the sky... Where do you want to live?"

<sup>41</sup> I borrow this term from Parts, who describes how literary critics have defined Aleksei Ivanov as a Perm writer, because "he actively participates in creating and promoting Perm's regional identity." (Parts 2018, 88)

<sup>42</sup> Aleksandra Khrustaleva (1912–2004) was a ship mechanic, a teacher in the nautical school, and a writer, who worked in Murmansk. She published her memoirs, *Zdes' moi prichal* ("Here is My Pier," 1988), and three collections of short stories, *Babushkiny brillianty* ("Grandmother's Diamonds," 1997), *Na polubake* ("On the Forecastle," 2000), *Podnye dushi: nevydumannye rasskazy* ("Kindred Spirits: Nonfictional Stories," 2009), and some other works. Most of her texts are autofictional or autobiographical, set in the port, on the sea and on ships. She was married to the writer Nikolai Blinov.

the port, the nautical school and work on the ships in her memoirs and autobiographical short stories: Murmansk in her texts seems to play a secondary role in comparison to the port and seafaring, but this topic needs more detailed analysis in a separate study. Khrustaleva remembers the history of the Murmansk port, times when the city also had a military port, and the changes that have taken place in the port over the decades (Khrustaleva 2000, 85). Palamarchuk writes about how the “semantic entrance (смысловый вход) to the city is the port” (Palamarchuk 2008, 472), and in many ways, the port is also the literary entrance to the city of Murmansk. In addition to the fact that many of the texts or episodes begin there, it is also one of the central milieus, and most of all, an important place for the thematics of the works.

As sociologist Alla Bolotova has shown, people in northern Russian industrial cities<sup>43</sup> perceive natural surroundings as “non-city”; as opposed to everything connected to urban life and space (Bolotova 2014, 137). Bolotova uses Tim Ingold’s concept of *taskscape* in her work. Ingold defines a taskscape as “an array of related activities”; by analogy, “the landscape is an array of related features.” (Ingold 2000, 195) Bolotova interprets Ingold’s taskscape as “a space of people’s activity which has spatial borders and boundaries” (Bolotova 2014, 124), and she writes about three different taskscapes in northern industrial cities: the city, the industrial space and ‘nature’ (ibid., 124). All three taskscapes are related to different daily activities: the city is a space of everyday activities, the industrial space is where most inhabitants work, and ‘nature’ is a space for leisure activities (Bolotova 2014, 124). In my opinion, in Murmansk, the industrial taskscape could be replaced by the taskscape of ‘harbour/ waterfront’, or there could be two different taskscapes — the port and the industrial space, because both also cover significant areas on the city map. In Korzhov’s and Danilov’s texts about Murmansk, the movement of protagonists is often from the city centre (urban space) to the port (the space of work), but there are also examples of movement in the opposite direction.

However, in my research material, port and harbour have different connotations, related not to work but to leisure time. In his autobiographical story, *Murmanskaia saga* (“Saga of Murmansk”), Boris Blinov depicts the life of his family in Murmansk from the 1930s until the 1950s. He writes about the port in the 1940s: “The sea was open. The sea was in the city, it influenced our lives and attached us to its life.” (Blinov 2010, 70) Since the 1940s the harbour has become a closed area, and the inhabitants of Murmansk have no access to the seashore, except to a small area near the passenger terminal and the museum icebreaker Lenin. Both Boris Blinov’s autobiographical *Murmanskaia saga* text and Nikolai Blinov’s children’s novel *Tretyi klass kupi kolbas...* depict the seashore as a place for little boys’ leisure-time activities. The boys observe the life of small fish and seaweed. These episodes are so similar that the question of intertextuality even arises.<sup>44</sup> In both

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<sup>43</sup> Founded in 1916, the port city of Murmansk differs in many ways from the socialist Soviet cities built on the Kola Peninsula from the 1920s onwards. In her work, Bolotova analyses three cities, Apatity, Kirovsk and Kovdor, all three mining towns built during the Soviet era. Despite certain reservations, I consider some of Bolotova’s ideas useful for my reading of the urban space of Murmansk.

<sup>44</sup> Boris Blinov writes: При отливе волна тихо скатывалась в море, обнажая дно, открывая заветные пространство, только что бывшие глубиной. В пологих лужах еще существовала морская жизнь. Водоросли не успевали

episodes, the bottom of the sea, appearing at low tide in Kola Bay, is a secret (заветная), enigmatic (загадочная) place for the boys to explore. Sea flora and fauna is described in detail. These are key examples in my material of how the seashore is experienced as a place to spend one's spare time.

In Boris Blinov's memoirs, the boys go to the bay through Komsomol Park. Komsomol Park, the first park of Murmansk, was built in 1920. Boris Blinov writes in his memoirs that the first trees in the city were planted in Komsomol Park (Blinov 2010, 29). The park is one of the most important Soviet-era places depicted in the literature about Murmansk, but no longer exists.<sup>45</sup> In the books by both Blinovs, Nikolai and Boris, Komsomol Park plays the role of a border between the actual city space and the port area. Boris Blinov writes that the way to the open bay was through Komsomol Park (Blinov 2010, 70), and Nikolai Blinov describes a fight between the "boys from the port" (портовские) and the "city-boys" (городские), and that Komsomol Park was the border between them (Blinov 2010, 37). The boys were fighting over the domination of the park. These depictions of the park as a border construct the idea discussed in this article, that the port plays a crucial role in the urban identity of the city dwellers, but at the same time is seen as a place that is separate from the city space, "a city of its own," as in Korzhov's novel. Bolotova refers to several studies that emphasize how significant a role the green zones within the city play in the formation of the residents' attachments to place (Bolotova 2014, 136). The significance of Komsomol Park in the texts about Murmansk seems to confirm this idea in the literature. But, in the literary works about Murmansk, the seashore, bay and hills around the city also play an important role in the city dwellers' urban experience and attachment to place. I believe it is possible to claim that in Murmansk, where parks are rare, these nature areas play the same kind of role in the people's experience as built green zones in many other cities.

### *City seen from the hills*

In his novella *Sud'by*, Nikolai Blinov depicts Murmansk from above, from Lake Semenovskoe:

Отсюда, сверху, весь город виден. Город как город. [...] Мало ли портовых городов мне довелось повидать: Архангельск, Баку, Одесса, Берген, Амстердам... Но этот не похож на другие. Почему? Вглядитесь внимательно. Видите? Город напоминает искусственный макет, на котором забыли натывать деревья. (Blinov 1974, 8)<sup>46</sup>

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погибнуть и тянули свои перепончатые стебли по песку. Лужи с рыбами можно было определить издали: бойкие пертуи и колюшки проносились под водой [...]. (Blinov 2010, 70). Nikolai Blinov's depiction is almost the same: Там беззвучно текла загадочная чужая жизнь. Под ногами громко щелкали, скользили густые хвосты бурых и красных водорослей. [...] В лужах что останавливались при отливе, можно было ловить маленьких рыбок «колюшек» [...]. (Blinov 2016, 165)

<sup>45</sup> The park was destroyed in the 1960s, when Shmidt Street was made wider. Boris Blinov writes that people protested against the demolition of the park, but to no avail (Blinov 2010, 30).

<sup>46</sup> "From here, from above, one can see the whole city. A city like any city. [...] I have seen many port cities: Arkhangelsk, Baku, Odessa, Bergen, Amsterdam... But this city is not like the others. Why? Look at it carefully. The city is like an artificial miniature, in which they forgot to stick in trees."

Later, Blinov describes the Arctic location of the city, the polar nights and snow in June. Thus, he sees Murmansk differently to others, mainly because of its Arctic nature and weather. This depiction is also interesting because of the metaphor of the “artificial miniature” (искусственный макет). He shows how from above, one can see the city, its streets and the port, in miniature form, on a blueprint or on a map, and he underlines the idea of it being “artificial,” as discussed earlier. The trope of viewing the skyline of the city from the outside has a long tradition in culture (Finch 2016, 27, 194), and the “‘view from above’ [...] has been associated with planner’s perspective” (Highmore 2005, 3). I see this view from above just like this, as protagonists’ attempt to see the city as planners saw it, and this emphasize the future-oriented time-space of the city, too: to see the city as it was planned to be. In his children’s novel, Blinov also describes the city from the hill, through the protagonist’s eyes:

Наша первая мужская школа, гроза всех городских школ, гордо высится на вершине сопки как крепость. От ее парадного подъезда виден весь город, улицы, переулки, рыбный и торговый порты, залив, а на той стороне его синие сопки Абрам-мыса и «Трех ручьев». Когда выскакиваешь из школы и глазу открывается эта величественная панорама города [...] (Blinov 2016, 85)<sup>47</sup>

The third part of Korzhov’s trilogy contains one rather long depiction of Murmansk from the hill:

Мурманск открылся разом, как на волшебной тарелочке сказочной Бабы-Яги. Почти что от края – до края. [...] А вот Центр – весь: и «Арктика», и Дом печати, и Риткин барак на Челюскинцев, на подъеме к Семеновскому, и домики Северного Нагорного на юге, и опять же, три террасы Центра [...]. А дальше, выше – только море, черная тяжелая гладь Кольского залива. (МЗ, 78)<sup>48</sup>

Dmitrii Danilov also looks at the panoramic view of the city centre from a hill twice during his trip to Murmansk. He looks at the city centre down on the shore from the neighbourhood called “Gora Durakov” (“The Hill of Fools”)<sup>49</sup>, built up on the hill near the end of the Soviet era (DG, 139). He also looks at the city from another big hill, where his hotel is located (DG, 145–46). Danilov writes about

<sup>47</sup> “Our male gymnasium №1, a threat to all the other schools, stays on the top of a hill like a fortress. From its front door you can see the whole city, streets, lanes, fishing and commercial ports, the bay, and on its other side the blue hills of Abram-mys and Treh ruchi. When you come out from school and this great panoramic view opens to the eye...”

<sup>48</sup> “Murmansk opened at one glance, like on the magic plate of the witch Baba-Iaga. Almost from one end to the other. [...] And there is the centre: all of it, the “Arktika” hotel, the Printing house, Ritkin’s barrack on Chelustkintsev street, on the hill towards Lake Semenovskoe, and the little houses of Severnoe nagornoe in the south, and again, the three terraces of the centre [...] And further and higher, there is only the sea, the black smooth surface of Kola Bay.”

<sup>49</sup> The neighbourhood received its name when it was built at the end of Soviet era, and the streets were so strangely planned and the numeration of the houses so strangely organized, that the people easily got lost when looking for some address, or even their own home. This is a very well-known legend in Murmansk, and Danilov discusses it in his essay (DG, 139-40). The official name of the neighbourhood is Skal’nyi, “Rocky.” The author of this article has lived there herself and can agree that orientation in this area is a little complicated.

“the breathtaking sights of the city” (головокружительные виды) (DG, 139) and calls Murmansk a “magnificent city” (прекрасный город) (DG, 146). Thus we can say that also in his depiction, the panoramic view is related to admiration and has positive connotations.

In these quotes, the protagonists see the city as on the map, from above. The similarity between all these quotes is that the protagonists depict the city between the hills and the bay, on the seashore. I see this as parallel to the perspective of the city from the bay discussed above: seen from the bay and from the hill, the city is located between the sea and the hills, between the sea and the sky. Korzhov’s third novel, “The City Between the Sea and Sky,” was named after this perspective, that from which protagonist Sasha looks at the city. In my interpretation, both perspectives, from the bay and from the hills, emphasize the unity of the city and the surrounding nature in the protagonists’ experience. Furthermore, they underline the idea of Murmansk being unique because of its geographical location. In my reading, this also manifests the semiotic dominance of geographical location in the fictionalized and real space of Murmansk. The Arctic nature, sea and hills have a great impact on how the protagonists experience and attach to their city: they often feel attached not only to the man-made urban space, but to the Arctic location of the city, and the special cartography of the city, hills and the bay.

#### *Nature and the City: Snow and Sun*

Anthropologist Tim Ingold asks whether the sky is a part of the landscape (Ingold 2011, 127) and how we can read sky and weather conditions when analysing the perception of the environment. Not so surprisingly, in the texts from different decades, the polar sunlight through the night has mostly positive connotations: it is magic and beautiful.<sup>50</sup> Maksim Gor’kii, among others, describes the polar sunlight in the middle of the summer night as a truly strange sight (Gor’kii 1952, 235). Gor’kii imagines what the sun may be thinking when it shines during the night. Contemporary writer Dmitrii Danilov visits Murmansk in the wintertime, and depicts the darkness and the twilight of the polar night (DG, 138). For him, too, the polar night is strange:

Свет ниоткуда. [...] Цвет неба тоже необычный, поразительный, голубой [...] С ума можно сойти от такого неба и света. (DG, 141)<sup>51</sup> In Korzhov’s third novel, Fidel Castro also thinks about the winter sky over the city: И небо, меняющее окрас и тон – одних только оттенков голубого он насчитал только сегодня до десятка, включая и те, которым и названия не-то не ведал. (МЗ, 182)<sup>52</sup>

<sup>50</sup> In Korzhov’s novel trilogy the polar sun also has negative connotations: during WWII sunlight was unwelcome, because it made the city an easier target for the bombers of the enemy, but this is the only negative description of the polar sun that I found in my material.

<sup>51</sup> “Light from nowhere. [...] The color of the sky is also extraordinary, startling [...] One could go mad because of the sky and colours like these.”

<sup>52</sup> “And the sky, which changes colour and shade, he counted ten shades of light blue only today, including those for which he did not know the word.”

To (the fictional) Castro, the colours of the Murmansk sky are different from those anywhere else. Danilov writes about the northern lights (DG 2016, 146), and so does Gor'kii (Gor'kii 1952, 241); however, neither writer actually sees them. The sky over the city is an elementary part of the urban experience of these authors and fictional characters.

Heidi Hansson and Cathrin Norberg maintain that, among the concepts of “snow,” “ice” and “cold” used in the depictions of the Arctic and northern areas, “snow” has the most positive connotations (Hansson & Norberg 2009, 11). In Murmansk texts, the attitude towards snow is ambiguous. Snow symbolizes love and harmony between Aleksei and Dasha in Korzhov's novel *Murmantsy*: around them “it falls differently, unhurriedly and softly” (M1, 124), and by falling on the houses and people, the snow makes the city and its inhabitants one unified whole in the second novel (M2, 163). But in the first novel, the author depicts the winter of 1919, which was exceptionally snowy, and people were forced to clean the snow from the streets (M1, 117–24); here, snow illustrates the idea of nature as people's enemy. This echoes the idea, familiar from Soviet-era texts, that people (building socialism) in the North should be especially strong because they are forced to survive in such harsh conditions.

Korzhov depicts Fidel Castro's visit to Murmansk in April 1963, which was a big celebration. Besides visiting the port, the fish factory, and other important places, Castro tried cross-country skiing for the first time in his life. Korzhov does not mention the skiing in his version, but according to the novel, Castro sees snow for the first time in his life in Murmansk (M3, 182) and observes how easily it turns into water in his warm hands. He compares the beautiful women of the city to white snow (M3, 182), but snow has also a negative connotation, because Castro describes how he was cold “in these snowdrifts” (ibid., 182) (after which his hospitable hosts healed him with vodka). In addition to all this, snow plays a role in the specific historical time-space of the city in the third novel: Sasha Gorevoi walks in the snowfall and observes “strange snow figures” moving on the streets, one of them smiling at him and reminding him of a “teenager with a shovel” (M3, 12). He thinks that the figures are perhaps people who “walked here twenty or forty years ago” (ibid.) The snow figures in the wind are like ghosts from the past. This is an interesting excerpt, because it is one of the few scenes in the trilogy in which the city has a slightly phantasmagoric nature. Polar sunlight, the northern lights and snow appear in the material as factors that strongly characterize the city and the people's urban experience: they make the city especially beautiful, strange or exceptional.

### *Conclusions*

In this article, I have explored the literary representations of the city of Murmansk during different eras, from the Soviet texts of the 1920s until the present day. The texts about Murmansk from different decades indeed differ somewhat, but also, and maybe more significantly, they have key similarities. What makes comparisons between the texts from different era slightly difficult is firstly the fact that the older texts in my material are mainly newspaper essays, and the later material include both fiction (Korzhov's trilogy) and essays (Danilov's text). Secondly, the

contemporary fiction depicts the Soviet era, and the only text I have that portrays the present day life of the city is that of Danilov. But despite these limitations, some thematics continue throughout the decades.

The specific Arctic location of the city and the Arctic nature surrounding it play a great role in the texts. The Soviet mastering of the North, *osvoenie severa*, was explicitly a part of the city image throughout the Soviet era and continues to be a central topic in contemporary fiction. The Arctic natural phenomena such as polar sunlight, the northern lights and snow play an important role in the texts about Murmansk in the different periods. The city was depicted as an opposition to nature in the Soviet works, but at the same time, and especially in many of the later works, the nature surroundings and the specificity of Murmansk's geography were depicted as an inseparable part of the protagonists' or writers' urban experiences.

Secondly, I found exceptionally few references to the provinciality or "provincial myth" in the texts about Murmansk. It is seen as neither a typical backward provincial city nor as similar to other noncapital cities: on the contrary, most of the texts emphasize its uniqueness. Furthermore, many texts had idealizing tones, and Murmansk seemed an exceptionally good place in which to live. I believe that the reasons for this are as follows: the Soviet texts had a propagandist agenda when reporting the construction of the Arctic settlements, and Korzhov's trilogy describes that very same Soviet era and reflects the Soviet spirit. Furthermore, Korzhov's trilogy has a kind of didactic agenda of its own: to create a fiction about the city's history, and it is not surprising that the author does this in a positive, sometimes even idealizing way. Danilov does not idealize the city in his text, but he gives a very positive portrait of it, so that we can say that throughout the decades, Murmansk has remained quite a bright, happy city in the literature.

Thirdly, in the gendered metaphors of the city, I read a certain ambiguity: on the one hand, Murmansk is depicted as a masculine city of sailors, but at the same time, it is compared to a woman waiting for her loved one (a sailor) to return from the sea. In Korzhov's trilogy, the strong female captain reverses these binaries and also sees Murmansk as a city in which the (fictional) first female trawling fleet captain of the Soviet Union can build her career.

Finally, I propose that we could find an "Arctic city text" in Russian literature, closely related to the Arctic myth formed in the Soviet Union from the 1930s onwards, because there are many texts set in the new urban settlements in the Arctic territories. This topic definitely needs more exploration, as the Russian Arctic seems to be increasingly attracting interest in cultural and literary studies. Here I have shown that the image of Murmansk, which first emerged in Russian literature in the early Soviet era, continues to develop and change in contemporary literary works. At this point of its literary history, both real-and-imagined Murmansk seems to continue to be an exceptional, unique and bright city on the (symbolic) map of Russia.<sup>53</sup>

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Interview with Dmitrii Korzhov in 5 August 2017.



Murmansk: View of the city from Skalnaia. Photo: Anni Lappela



Murmansk seen from monument Aliosha. Photo: Mika Perkiömäki.



Murmansk: City and the port. Photo: Mika Perkiömäki.