Sasha Sokolov has been described as an author "plainly not interested in depicting an empirically credible reality, a historical truth."\(^1\) Indeed, his first novel, Shkola dia durakov (A School for Fools), features few descriptions of characters or surroundings, focusing instead on a narration whose perspective might be described as that of the two halves of a schizoid self that in turn perceive the world in terms of fractured identities. Mezdu sobakoi i volkom (Between Dog and Wolf) presents a similarly solipsistic view of a world that exists "almost outside of time," a twilight zone in which "it is impossible to distinguish one character from another, the real from the fanciful, the dog from the wolf."\(^2\) The postmodern play and satirical modes that characterize Palisandria (Astrophobia) led at least one critic to conclude that Palisandria likewise "is not a novel based on lived experience or containing a moral lesson: it is a self-reflexive text whose focus is language and literature."\(^3\)

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3. Olga Matich, "Sasha Sokolov’s Palisandria: History and Myth," The Russian Review, 45 (1986), 426. See also Peter Vail and Alexander Genis in their Sovremennaia russkaia proza (Ann Arbor, MI: Hermitage, 1982), p. 163, on Shkola dia durakov: “Действительность в его книге – дегенерация всех и всяческих понятий, роковая рефлексия русского интеллигента . . . Действительность почтительно безропотно отступила перед литературой, способствуя созданию уникальной книги, где литературная игра, писательская манера – есть все” (In his book reality is the degeneration of each and every idea, the deadly reflex of the Russian intellectual. . . . Reality deferentially and submissively recoils before literature, promoting the creation of a characteristic book in which literary play and authorial manner is everything); and Kolb, “The high degree of self-reflexivity can only be achieved at the expense of losing immediacy and forfeiting the reader’s identification with the text. . . . Withdrawn from the world, the self-referential space of the text which enables the word games to exist in the first place can very easily become a prison – or a straightjacket” (“The Dissolution of Reality in Sasha Sokolov’s Mezhdusobakoi i volkom,” p. 218). (Note: All translations from Russian are my own unless otherwise indicated.)
Responding to the suggestion that Sokolov’s novels emerge ex nihilo, critics have investigated correspondences between his narratives and the social contexts in which they were produced, as well as their relationships with other fictional worlds as evidenced by Sokolov’s penchant for intertextual play.\(^4\) In his literary biography of Sokolov, D. Barton Johnson notes that in *Shkola dlja durakov* Sokolov “wanted to depict the flavor of Soviet urban life among the professional classes of the early sixties.”\(^5\) Ludmilla L. Litus notes that frequent allusions to the police system, repression, arrests, and interrogations may be found in the novel, though they exist in the absence of any explicit ideological message.\(^6\) Lipovetsky writes that the novel “presented a negative vision of contemporary Russia and therefore had no chance of being published in the Soviet Union,”\(^7\) while Matich observes that it bears the imprint of the Youth Prose of the 1960s. *Mezhdu sobakoi i volkom* has been characterized as a negative reaction to the idealized and moralistic depiction of peasant life in Village Prose,\(^8\) and its setting and metaphorical language assimilated by the author during the two years he worked as a game warden on a hunting preserve and lived among the local “rough hunting and fishing folk, and the misfits.”\(^9\)

Whether the worlds of Sokolov’s novels are characterized by figures of rupture or connection, they are discussed in terms that suggest their construction lies in their solipsistic reconfiguration of the observable world, a trait shared by both its narrator-protagonists and the author. The narrators’ distorted perceptions of Soviet realia and Sokolov’s transformation of earlier literary texts through intertextual allusion contribute tangible evidence to what Renate Lachmann calls “anarchic intertextuality,” that is, “the recomposition and redistribution of texts and their elements” that results in a polychronic and polymorphous heterogeneous text with the traces of an original textual process still visible.\(^10\) By challenging the authority of the individual text and

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4. Ludmilla L. Litus, “Saša Sokolov’s Škola dlja durakov: Aesopian Language and Intertextual Play,” *Slavic and Eastern European Journal*, 41, no. 1 (1997), 114. Note also Andrei Zorin: “Интересно, что в ‘Школе для дураков’, где ни место, ни время действия не обозначены, легко угадывается Подмосковье второй половины 50-х годов” (It is interesting to note that in *Shkola dlja durakov*, where neither space nor time is defined, it is easy to recognize the Moscow suburbs of the second half of the 1950s); (“Насылаиушчii vetер,” *Novyi mir*, no. 12 [1989], p. 252).


