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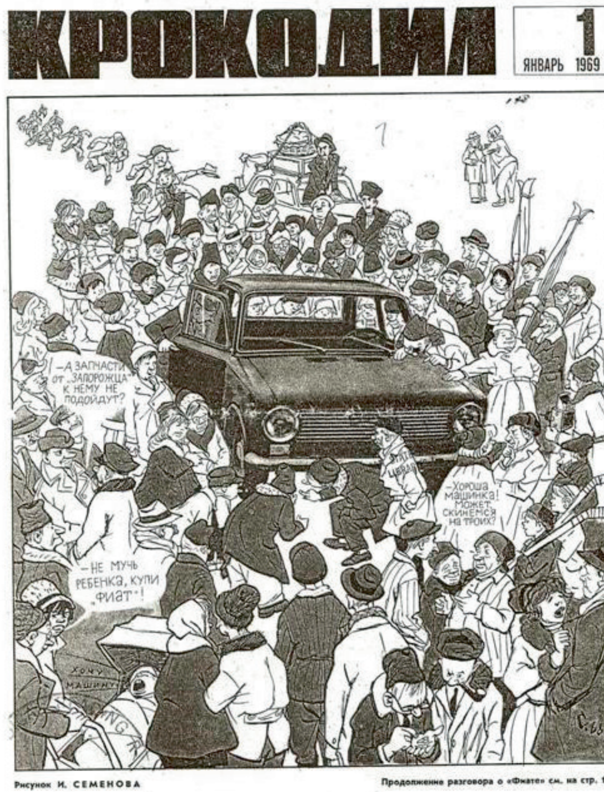

THE FAUSTIAN BARGAIN OF THE SOVIET AUTOMOBILE

January 2008

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The Faustian Bargain of the Soviet Automobile

by

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The Faustian Bargain of the Soviet Automobile

"Curiously," wrote Amsterdam-born Hans Koningsberger after a trip to Russia in 1967, "the Soviet Union is now a highly industrialized country, but in its private sector is only on the threshold of the gasoline age." Consequently, he continued, "the Westerner in his own car . . . moves in an odd way back through time."[1] Curious this was because moving back through time was not what one was supposed to be doing in the Soviet Union. Not for nothing was an emblematic production novel of the 1930s called *Time Forward*. Stalin himself had once said that the Soviet Union had to make up a hundred years in ten or it would go under.[2] Nevertheless, Koningsberger's sense of moving back in time was among his strongest and, ironically, most positive impressions of the country. "Aesthetically," he remarked, "the rareness of gas stations is a boon . . . Roads without billboards and without gas stations show how our world once looked, how it was supposed to look, one would be tempted to say . . . It is marvelous to visit a carless landscape in your own car."[3]

A year earlier (in 1966) a reporter from Izvestiia returned from a car trip to

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[1] Hans Koningsberger, Along the Roads of the New Russia (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux,1968), p. 176. Koningsberger did a lot of traveling through time and space, authoring books on his native Amsterdam, Vermeer's world, Christopher Columbus, China, nineteen sixty-eight, and several novels. After 1972 he published under the name of Hans Koning.

[2] Joseph Stalin, "Speech to Industrial Managers, February 1931," Foundations of Leninism (Moscow: Foreign Languages Press, 1953), pp. 454-58. Time Forward! by Valentin Kataev was published in 1932.

[3] Koningsberger, Along the Roads, pp. 16, 31, 181, 186.

Volgograd. The trip along the same empty roads Koningsberger would travel inspired not satisfaction in "the world how it was supposed to look" but dreams of a time when [as he wrote] "modern, comfortable service stations, gasoline dispensers, cafes, and hotels of concrete and glass would sparkle on both sides of the road . . . Round the clock technical service would be available. Billboards would stand along the roadside lighting up the night with their neon glow."[4]

Koningsberger whom the New York Times described in its April 2007 obituary as a "Prolific Left-Leaning Writer," was at pains to point out that the Soviet Union's carlessness should not be attributed to backwardness."[5] There are very much more backward countries nonetheless crowded with the Western web of roads, gas stations, and cars," he wrote. Carlessness was the result of a policy decision – an enlightened one he thought – the result of which was that Soviet cities "are not only still free from smog, they are also, still, less hurried, less eager, less atomized."[6] At the same time, one wonders whether our left-leaning motorized-flâneur was aware of the irony of being able to visit a carless landscape "in one's own car." As for A. Druzhenko, the Izvestiia reporter, where would he have heard of gleaming gas stations, cafes and hotels, where

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[4] A. Druzenko, "Odinokii kilometr," Izvestiia, Aug. 23, 1966, p. 4.

[5] "Hans Koning, 85, Prolific Left-Leaning Writer, Is Dead" The New York Times, April 18, 2007 at www.nytimes.com/2007/04/18/books/18koning.html. Accessed Oct. 15, 2007.

[6] Koningsberger, Along the Roads, pp. 79, 176.

would he have seen billboards lighting up the night sky? And why in 1966 would such dreams as his have been published in the Soviet government's newspaper? If carlessness was the result of an enlightened policy, why publicize dreams that encouraged its opposite?

Enlightened or not, the days of carlessness in the Soviet Union were numbered. As late as the mid-1960s Soviet car production hovered around 200,000 units of which the public had a chance to buy a mere 65,000. These consisted overwhelmingly of the Moskvich, the Soviet version of a pre-war Opel Kadett produced at Moscow's Automobile Factory of the Leninist Komsomol (AZLK), and the Zaporozhets, a subcompact with a 26 hp engine manufactured by a former tractor factory in Ukraine. But even as Koningsberger reveled in the solitude of Russia's open roads, a giant car factory – the world's largest – was rising on the Volga's left bank at a town called Togliatti. This was the Volga Automobile Factory (VAZ), a state-of-the-art plant for which the Soviet government paid Fiat some $US 900,000,000 to produce the Zhiguli (exported as the Lada), the Soviet equivalent of the Fiat 124. By 1970 the plant commenced operation; by 1974 it reached its full capacity of 660,000 cars a year.[7] The threshold of the mass production of cars and their private ownership had been crossed.

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[7] On VAZ see R. G. Pikhoia, ed., AVTOVAZ mezhdu proshlym i budushchim. Istoriia Volzhskogo avtomobil'nogo zavoda 1966-2005 gg., (Moscow: RAGS, 2006), and Lewis H. Siegelbaum, Cars for Comrades: The Life of the Soviet Automobile (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, forthcoming in 2008).

Thanks primarily to VAZ, Soviet roads accommodated about 8 million cars by 1980.[8]

Automobiles and Faust

Why did Soviet authorities decide to do this, why had they entered into what Averell Harriman, the American billionaire and former ambassador to the Soviet Union, called "the deal of the century?" And what were the long-term consequences of this decision?[9] This paper seeks to shed new light on these questions by employing another deal – between the alchemist/necromancer Johann Georg Faust and the devil/Mephistopheles – that has come to be known as the Faustian bargain. I use the Faustian bargain not as a tool of explanation but as a conceit or an extended metaphor. A metaphor of what? Whereas these days not too many people identify with Soviet Communism, the theme of Faust - the single-minded pursuit of knowledge and power – is something to which many can relate. It can, therefore, serve as a useful device for adopting the standpoint of Soviet officials who by the 1960s were no less desperate to keep up with the capitalist world's prodigious production of consumer goods than Faust

[8] Toli Welihozkiy, "Automobiles and the Soviet Consumer," in Soviet Economy in a Time of Change, a Compendium of Papers submitted to the joint Economic Committee, Congress of the United States (Washington, D. C.: US Government Printing Office, 1979), p. 818 cites a figure of 7.3 million vehicles by 1979, of which 80 percent (5.8 million) were owned by individuals. See also TsSU SSSR, Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1985 (Moscow: Gos. stat. izd-vo, 1986), p. 446.

[9] Harriman quoted in Valerio Castronovo, Fiat 1899-1999, un secolo di storia italiana (Milan: Rizzoli, 1999), pp. 1120.

was to know and conquer all. Faust's conquests were many. They included – depending on the version – the simple, wholesome mittelständisch Mädchen Margarete (Gretchen), the consort of Emperor Charles V, and the spirit of Helen of Troy. These objects of Faust's lust can represent Soviet officials' yearning to demonstrate the extraordinary achievements of Communism and the Soviet way of life to a population weary of sacrificing on behalf of an abstract ideal or even future generations. Just as Faust considered the devil his servant, so Soviet political authorities believed the passenger car could assist them in their quest for a more modern and abundant version of Communism. And just as their tolerance of heterodox and even illegal behavior in connection with the ownership and maintenance of cars would result in a heavy price to pay, so (in most versions of the legend at least) Faust gets his comeuppance.

This adaptation of the Faustian bargain serves as the framework for the main part of this essay, which explores the ideological and material/economic dimensions of the automobile's presence in late Soviet society. The assigned roles in this version are thus as follows:

Faust – the Soviet government (and Soviet Communism) during the Brezhnev era (c. 1965-1985) when a new discourse promoting individuality, self-reliance, and privatism emerged in contrast to the previously dominant version stressing workerist, collectivist values[10];

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[10] I borrow this distinction between the Brezhnev era and previous Soviet administrations from Anna Paretskaya, "Middle Class without Capitalism? Socialist

Mephistopheles – the automobile, more specifically, the private car, and the second/gray/shadow/on-the-side economy on which automobile owners came to depend[11];

Margarete/Gretchen – not only potential car owners but all those Soviet citizens too pure or too poor to own a car, in short, the majority; alternatively, "pedestrians" or those who depend on public transportation.[12]

In defense of employing this extended metaphor, the Faustian legend that originated in popular German literature and theatre of the sixteenth century has had many adaptations over the centuries and its meanings have accordingly shifted. Best known of all is Goethe's two-part epic drama, Faust (1808/32), the first version in which the eponymous hero is not damned for trucking with Satan. As the Germanist scholar Osman Durrani has noted, Goethe's version continues to appeal to readers because it seems to speak to the modern condition, beginning with Faust's "initial desire to know more than he ought" and proceeding through "his subsequent race through life, involving flight, short-term

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Ideology and Post-Collectivist Discourse in Late Soviet Union," paper presented for the 2007 Young Researchers Conference, Havinghurt Center for Russian and Post-Soviet Studies, Miami University OH, October 25-27, 2007), pp. 3-4.

[11] For a typological definition of the "second economy" and its interdependence with the first, official economy, see F. J. M. Feldbrugge, "Government and Shadow Economy in the Soviet Union," Soviet Studies, vol. 36, no. 4 (1984): 528-43.

[12] As Ilf and Petrov observed in the opening lines of their comedic novel The Little Golden Calf, "pedestrians comprise the majority of humanity …the better part. Pedestrians created the world."

solutions to perennial, intractable problems, paper money and fleeting entertainment."[13] It is through "the magic of Mephistopheles" that Faust experiences this acceleration of time and motion, a condition Faust articulates near the end of Part Two of Goethe's drama as follows:

> I merely raced across the earth,
> Seized by the hair each passing joy,
> Discarded all that did not satisfy;
> What slipped my grasp, I let it go again.
> I have merely desired, achieved, and then
> Desired some other thing. Thus I have stormed
> Through life; at first with pride and violence,
> But now less rashly, with more sober sense.[14]

This curiously unsatisfying "race through life" is a paradigmatic condition of modernity. It also resonates with the most characteristic materialization of twentieth-century modernity - the automobile. Like Goethe's Faust, automobile drivers experience highs

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[13] Osman Durrani, "The Character and Qualities of Mephistopheles," in Paul Bishop, ed. A Companion to Goethe's Faust, Parts I and II (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2001), pp. 91-92.

[14] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Faust, Part Two, trans. David Luke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 219.

and lows unknown to the non-driving public. The automobile enables but also can disable. It is because of this double-sidedness that I have decided to include another adaptation of the Faust legend, one in which the leading actors assume quite different roles. This version stresses gender, a dimension very much emphasized in Goethe's Faust. So, let the play begin!

The Ideological

Late one evening in Moscow the driver of a Zaporozhets stopped to pick up a reporter from Izvestiia. It was January 1965. "I'm an engineer," he told the reporter, "and it took me ten years to come up with the money for this car. And here's what I don't understand. . . . It baffles me why when a person buys a television, a piano, a carpet or other junk it's called the growth of well-being (blagosostoianie). But deny yourself all these charms, go into debt and obtain the most modest automobile or even win a Moskvich in the lottery, and you immediately become a suspicious private person (chastnik)."[15]

"Never talk to strangers" is the title Mikhail Bulgakov gave to the first chapter of The Master and Margarita, his adaptation of the Faust legend. In his version, the stranger, Woland, disguises himself as a stage manager who has just arrived in Moscow "from abroad." The conversation between the two strangers - the reporter from Izvestiia and the lamentable motorist – may have been no more real than the encounter between Woland

[15] Izvestiia, January 28, 1965, p. 3.

and the two Muscovites at Patriarch's Ponds, but that is beside the point. The point that Izvestiia's editors wanted to get across was that it was time to change attitudes toward motorists. They should be recognized as fully-fledged citizens, no different from the owners of other durable goods.[16] "Older citizens," it was observed in another article from March 1966, "remember a time not too long ago when wrist watches and bicycles were luxury items, to say nothing of radio receivers, televisions, and vacuum cleaners. But now these things have entered into daily life." So too would automobiles, was the message.[17] "Especially in connection with the rapid development of technology and the growth of production, the car undoubtedly will become more accessible and cease to be regarded as a luxury item," another article from August 1966 promised.[18]

It was no accident, as they used to say, that such articles began appearing in the mid-1960s. Just as an army of workers was preparing the ground for the factory in Togliatti, so the press was laying the ideological foundation for expanded car ownership as part and parcel of a new discourse of consumption. This discourse corresponded with the Brezhnev administration's orientation toward raising living standards and improving the quality of life for the Soviet masses and especially industrial workers. It contrasted sharply with Khrushchev's attempts to reinvigorate the collectivist ethos of Communism

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[16] Izvestiia, January 28, 1965, p. 3. The title of the article is "Between a Hat and a Personal Satellite."

[17] Izvestiia, March 4, 1966, p. 3; March 5, 1966, p. 3.

[18] Izvestiia, August 18, 1966, p. 5.

via social activism.[19] It would stress satisfaction of personal needs and the desire for material comfort, marking not only a significant shift away from the paramountcy of production over consumption and leisure in Soviet definitions of the good life, but within the realms of consumption and leisure, the earlier emphasis on public and collective forms.[20]

Until 1947 no individual could purchase a car in the Soviet Union. Soviet factories produced motor vehicles primarily to move things, not people. That is why far more trucks than cars rolled off Soviet assembly lines – nearly nine times as many in the 1930s, eight times as many in the late 1940s, and still four times as many in the early 1950s.[21] Aside from economic rationality, ideology justified the low priority assigned to cars. Cars, after all, facilitated individual mobility and (who knows?) individualism. Only the most deserving of cadres could be trusted with them. A fortunate few received them

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[19] For the contrast, see George W. Breslauer, "Khrushchev Reconsidered," in Stephen F. Cohen, Alexander Rabinowitch, and Robert Sharlet, ed., The Soviet Union since Stalin (Bloomington,: Indiana University Press,1980), pp. 50-70; and James Millar, "The Little Deal: Brezhnev's Contribution to Acquisitive Socialism," Slavic Review, vol. 44, no. 4 (1985): 694-706.

[20] For more on this shift, see Paretskaya, "Middle Class Without Capitalism?" pp. 20-28; Lewis H. Siegelbaum, "Introduction: Mapping Private Spheres in the Soviet Context," in Lewis H. Siegelbaum, ed., Borders of Socialism: Private Spheres of Soviet Russia (New York: Palgrave, 2006), pp. 1-21.

[21] W. H. Parker, "The Soviet Motor Industry," Soviet Studies, 32, no. 4 (1980): 520; Alain Dupouy, L'Automobile en URSS- Chronologie de 1917 à 1990 (Grenoble, 1991), 56-87; L. M. Shugurov, Avtomobili Rossii i SSSR (2 vols., Moscow, 1993), 1: 160, 174.

as gifts from the state – Aleksei Stakhanov, the legendary coal miner, got a "Molotovets" (M-1, popularly known as "emka") for example – while others won cars in lotteries. But the overwhelming majority of passenger cars one saw in the streets were distributed to ministries and other institutions by an informal commission nominally under Viacheslav Molotov, chairman of the Council of People's Commissars.[22] The ministries in turn made them available to their high-raking officials for "personal use." Chauffeurs, the ministry's garage, and supplies of fuel were typically thrown into the bargain.

The replacement of GAZ-A and imported Ford sedans by newly minted M-1s in Moscow during 1937 well illustrates the call that the state had over passenger cars. After receiving tune-ups, the older vehicles were to be sent to provincial cities and collective farms. This exercise, which also included the retirement of old British Leyland buses by 500 ZIS-8 models, was part of a broader initiative to enhance the prestige of the capital city of the Land of Socialism. Evidently, though, not everyone cooperated. According to a directive straight from NKVD chief N. I. Ezhov, motorists who refused to turn in their cars faced arrest and from three-to-five days incarceration, passengers would be hit with a fine of 100 rubles, and those in charge of the garages where the cars were kept also

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[22] Valery Lazarev and Paul Gregory, "The Wheels of a Command Economy: Allocating Soviet Vehicles," Economic History Review, vol. 55, no. 2 (2002): 324-48; Idem, "Commissars and Cars: A Case Study in the Political Economy of Dictatorship," Journal of Comparative Economics, vol. 31 (2003): 1-19. For actual distribution requests and decisions, see GARF, f. 5446, op. 14a, d. 628 (Plan for the distribution of automobiles for the first and second quarters of 1933); d. 635 (Plan for distribution of automobiles for the fourth quarter of 1933).

faced criminal prosecution.[23]

Between 1947 and Stalin's death six years later, especially meritorious workers, officials, writers, and artists had the opportunity to purchase a couple thousand Pobedas and Moskviches each year. This was part of what has been called the post-war "Big Deal" between the Stalinist political elite and an emerging "Soviet middle class."[24] It is commonplace to regard Stalin as ideologically crazed and his eventual successor, Nikita Khrushchev, as a pragmatic reformer. That is not necessarily wrong but on the matter of cars and a few other things, Nikita Sergeevich could actually be more concerned with ideological rectitude than his predecessor.[25] Even while the output of automobiles and numbers of car owners crept upward, Khrushchev developed a different approach - a rental system intended to eliminate the need for both the traditional assignment of cars and drivers and the purchase of cars by individuals.[26] But like a few other promises from

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[23] Za rulëm, no. 3 (1937): 30; no. 4 (1937): 9; no. 16 (1937): 9.

[24] Vera Dunham, In Stalin's Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990)

[25] This seems to be the consensus emerging from recent scholarship. See for example William Taubman, Khrushchev: The Man and His Era (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), pp. 242-80; Polly Jones, "Introduction: The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization," in Polly Jones, ed., The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 1-18.

[26] Annual production of cars rose from some 94,000 in 1954 to 185,000 in 1964, the year of Khrushchev's ouster. The ratio of truck to car production dropped from 3.2:1 to 2.1:1. See annual figures in Alain Dupouy, L"automobile en URSS: Chronologie de 1917 a 1990 (Grenoble, 1991).

this period, his boast that "we will use cars more rationally than the Americans" came up empty.[27] Badly financed and stocked with old decrepit vehicles, Moscow's few rental offices became sites for exposés, and the entire system never really got off the ground.[28] The only thing it succeeded in doing was, ironically, to make ownership of cars seem like a more legitimate option.

We thus come to the demiurge of our story – Premier Aleksei Kosygin, who within months of Khrushchev's ouster in October 1964 publicly criticized his predecessor's policy of depriving "even the leaders of big enterprises and economic organizations of the right to use passenger cars."[29] Kosygin it was who set in motion the "Deal of the Century" with Fiat, oversaw the selection of Togliatti as the site for the car factory, and pumped for the expansion of consumer goods production in general. The breakthrough received the enthusiastic support of the industrial bureaucracy. "At present," wrote the Minister of Automobile Production, Aleksei Mikhailovich Tarasov, to

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[27] A. Taranov, "Avtomobil'-massam," Za rulëm, no. 4 (1960): 10-11; no. 12 (1959): 8-9, inside cover. Khrushchev's boast was made at a public meeting in Vladivostok in 1959.

[28] "Problemy prokata," Za rulëm, no. 8 (1960): 17-19; I. Starshinov, "Nereshennye problemy prokata," Za rulëm, no. 3 (1962): 12-13.

[29] Cited in Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, USSR: About to Enter the Automotive Age? (Washington, D.C., 1966), p. 9. Vladimir Nikolaevich Novikov, former assistant chairman of the Council of Ministers, claimed to recall in a 1991 interview that Khrushchev had told him "now is not the time for passenger cars; we must organize public transportation, throw our resources into the production of buses and trolleybuses that are needed by the people. Cars can wait." V. N. Novikov, "Vzgliad na VAZ s vysot Sovmina i ne tol'ko," in VAZ: Stranitsy istorii, 1: 26.

the assistant chairman of the State Planning Commission in December 1965, "our domestic automobile industry is not meeting the requirements of the economy in terms of production." Translation: we need to produce more cars. The country, he reported, contained some 2.74 million vehicles, the majority being trucks, and approximately 30 percent having eight or more years in service. In terms of passenger cars, the Soviet Union found itself near last place compared to "other countries." At a time when the United States had one car for every 2.7 people, the USSR had one for every 238. The Soviet government had been rather grudging in its release of funds for investment in the automobile industry, he pointed out. Compared with the equivalent of 12.7 billion rubles invested in the United States between 1945 and 1963, which had resulted in an increase in output of cars from three million to 9.1 million, the USSR had invested only one billion rubles over the slightly longer period of 1945 to 1965. Output of cars and trucks in 1965 – approximately 617,000 vehicles – will not even reach the modest figures (750-856,000) projected in the Seven-Year Plan approved in 1958.[30]

The Economic

One can hear faint echoes of Gretchen's questioning of Faust after he has deflowered her. "How thy religion fares, I fain would hear/Thou art a good kind-hearted

[30] Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Ekonomiki (RGAE), f. 398 (Ministry of Automobile Production), op. 1, d. 5, ll. 149-50 ("Information on the question of developing automobile construction in the USSR," 11 Dec. 1965).

man/Only that way not well-disposed, I fear." The Soviet press repeatedly informed its readers that cars were like other consumer goods, but it turned out that a car was not just like a wrist watch or a bicycle "to say nothing of radio receivers, televisions, and vacuum cleaners." First of all, far more so than other goods, cars could be used to generate illegal "unearned income" (netrudovoi dokhod). For example, if that poor Zaporozhets-driving engineer charged the Izvestiia reporter for the lift he gave him (which was very common) he was breaking the law. So too were the "large numbers of Soviet motorists" who drove out to the countryside, purchased or stole cabbages from collective farms [and] resold them in the city.[31] And second, while wrist watches and bicycles occasionally broke down and needed to be repaired, cars required more attention, to say nothing of fuel, and a place to be stored over night and in many parts of the Soviet Union throughout the winter months.

Soviet authorities were willing to invest in the mass production of cars so that not only "the leaders of big enterprises and economic organizations" but even ordinary Soviet citizens could buy them – if they met certain conditions. They had to have a lot of cash on hand, be willing to wait up to seven years or more, and not mind having no prior knowledge of the color or even model of the car they would receive. Such conditions – a form of rationing a scarce commodity – were circumvented by a variety of informal (and illegal) arrangements, some more elaborate than others. The penalties for queue-jumping,

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[31] Donald D. Barry and Carol Barner Barry, "Happiness is Driving Your Own Moskvich," New York Times Magazine, April 10, 1966, p. 48.

bribery, and other schemes could be severe, but large numbers of people took the risks, probably because the authorities only caught and punished a few.

Obtaining a car, however, was only the first step toward becoming a private motorist. Soviet authorities were willing to invest in the mass production of cars but calculating investment to support the corresponding infrastructure was beyond their capabilities. Or was the underinvestment intentional? No hard evidence has emerged of a deliberate refusal to provide for what was necessary or needed by motorists. On the contrary, the relevant Union ministries - of automobile transport, construction, industrial construction, automobile production – assiduously presented plans to supply parts and service. VAZ itself had ambitions of developing a network of centers and stations to service the Zhiguli. Modeled on Fiat's practice and advertised with the slogan "We build, we sell, we service," VAZ's system looked too good to be true – and it was.

Somehow securing the land on which such centers would be built, the materials needed to build them, the parts to be produced in the requisite sizes and quantities, the staffing of the centers with adequately trained mechanics – none of these could keep pace with the rapidly increasing numbers of cars on the road or waiting to be fixed.[32] "If today our stations have only 800 technical service bays, then by 1976 their number will increase to 4,850," the director of the RSFSR's network of service stations promised in 1971. "The supply of parts is increasing every year," car owners were assured by the

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[32] Pravda, Oct. 14, 1971, p. 2; Izvestiia, August 5, 1973, p. 3; February 4, 1974, p. 3; August 24, 1974, p. 2.

republic's Minister of Automobile Transport in May 1973. We will double the number of auto service centers and increase by one-and-a-half times the number of technical service stations during the tenth Five-Year Plan (1976-1980), promised VAZ's technical service director in 1976. "By 1983 or 1984 the capacity of auto technical service centers will more or less correspond to demand," a Gosplan official predicted in 1978.[33] Nevertheless, as of 1982 it came closer to "a little more than 30 percent, and for parts, 35-40 percent."[34] Little wonder that drivers routinely removed their windshield wipers and often their sideview mirrors when leaving their car overnight or that an English-language guide for foreign motorists recommended doing so "because otherwise there is a chance that someone may fancy them as souvenirs."[35]

Moshe Lewin has traced the inability of different ministries to deliver on their promises or plan their production profiles (which often amounted to the same thing) to "the bureaucratic maze." The maze consisted of different agencies, each with its own army of "pushers" (tolkachi), competing against one another for the attention of the "engine of the

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[33] Pravda, July 24, 1971, p. 3; Literaturnaia gazeta, no. 19 (1973): 10-11; Ibid., no. 38 (1978): 12.

[34] Andrienko, "Legkovoi avtomobil'," p. 109. This same source claims that spare parts production declined by nine percent between 1980 and 1982.

[35] V. E. Louis and J. M. Louis, Louis Motorist's Guide to the Soviet Union, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Pergamon, 1987), 12. Interestingly, the first edition, published in 1967, did not contain such advice. Meanwhile, customers in both the United Kingdom and Canada "reported satisfaction with the services provided by Lada dealers, including a ready supply of spare parts." Welihozkiy, "Automobiles," p. 826.

economic system," the State Committee for Material and Technical Supplies (Gossnab). Under Stalin, the Communist Party (along with the secret police) had served as enforcer of priorities set at the center, but under Stalin's successors, the party functioned as "one agency among others," itself prone to pressures from one direction or another. Such a system – or lack of a system – made it virtually impossible to carry through a significant shift of priorities or resources because other units could nullify action that had the potential to adversely affect them.[36] To increase supplies of brake drums meant sacrificing rocker joints. If more attention were given to rocker joints, battery supply suffered. It was like the cat chasing its tail, like Faust's yearning for contentment and repose remaining unfulfilled.[37] To Mikhail Gorbachev it represented stagnation.

The state did not sweep the problem of automotive supplies under the carpet, but neither did it face the cause directly. Institutes devoted to the study of automobiles and related transportation issues developed theoretical models of optimal passenger car density, determining (not without reason) that the United States had reached "hypertrophic" levels. Articles appeared in sociological journals proposing more rational systems of car usage and maintenance. Newspapers carried exposés of managers of individual garages

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[36] Moshe Lewin, The Soviet Century (London: Verso, 2005), pp. 342-60. See also among earlier works Joseph Berliner, Soviet Industry from Stalin to Gorbachev : Essays on Management and Innovation (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), and Robert W. Campbell, The Failure of Soviet Economic Planning : System, Performance, Reform (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 20-32, 73-88.

[37] See Cyrus Hamlin, "Goethe's *Faust* and the Philosophers," in A Companion, pp. 236-37.

or parts suppliers who had let down customers by poorly stocking their shelves. Even customers themselves were considered blameworthy: they tended to buy up the entire supply of parts whether they needed them or not.[38]

Was it a matter of competing priorities? How did automotive supplies stack up against nuclear parity with the United States; expanding the naval fleet; building more family apartments and providing them with better quality furniture, tea sets, television sets, tape/cassette recorders, and the myriad of other goods that Soviet consumers had come to expect as indices of their "well-being"? The question was partly political and partly ideological – what, after all, was essential and why was it deemed so? – but it also was one of practicality – could motorists get by at finding what they needed otherwise than by relying on the official agencies and dispensaries? In the case of petrol, we know from a study published in the West during the 1980s that the answer to the latter question is a resounding "yes".[39] The study – inevitably based on unofficial data – estimated that owners of private automobiles obtained three quarters of all petrol consumed by their

[38] D. P. Velikanov, "Vazhneishie voprosy razvitiia avtomobil'nogo transporta v SSSR," in D. P. Velikanov, ed. Voprosy razvitiia avtomobil'nogo transporta (Moscow: Transport, 1971), pp. 20-21; D. P. Velikanov, "Avtomobil' i my," Literaturnaia gazeta, March 19, 1971, p. 12; V. T. Efimov, and G. I. Mikerin, "Avtomobilizatsiia v razvitom sotsialicheskom obshchestve," Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia, no. 1 (1976): 134; A. Arrak, "Ispol'zovanie avtomobilei lichnogo pol'zovaniia," Voprosy ekonomiki, no. 7 (1978): 134.

[39] M. Alexeev, "Underground Market for Gasoline in the USSR," Berkeley-Duke Occasional Papers on the Second Economy in the USSR, no. 9 (Washington, D.C., 1987), 1-25.

cars in 1982, or 7.5 billion liters worth 2.4 billion rubles, "on the side," primarily by buying coupons from truck drivers and using them at petrol stations or directly siphoning petrol from the trucks. If at petrol stations, the transaction usually also involved station attendants (zapravshchitsy), who, being women for the most part, were poorly paid and only too willing to accept the coupons for a small additional payment.[40]

We may address other dimensions of this issue of how motorists coped, not by the method of literary analogy but rather by one championed and practiced so well by Vera Dunham – literary sociology. Dunham used middlebrow fiction to demonstrate the ascendancy in the late Stalin era of acquisitiveness, good taste, and other "middle-class values" that the regime endorsed as part of its "Big Deal" with the new Soviet middle class.[41] The literature remained silent, however, about how middle-class beneficiaries acquired the goods that symbolized the deal. Thirty years later, such literature had become more explicit. Let us start with an excerpt from a 1972 semi-autobiographical novel called Ia i moi avtomobil' (Me and My Car). In the following scene the author shows up at an impromptu (and illegal) bazaar to buy spare parts from a shady character who engages in "spontaneous redistribution":

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[40] For earlier encounters by Western reporters with service station attendants, see Irving R. Levine, Main Street, USSR (New York: Doubleday, 1959), p. 240, and Aline Mosby, The View from No., 13 People's Street (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 95.

[41] Dunham, In Stalin's Time.

"You need a battery, chief?"

"Is it new?" I replied.

"It still has the seal on it."

I was suspicious: "How can one tell?"

"Here, you can tell yourself. In the store it goes for 12 rubles. I'll give it to you for 10."

"Eight."[42]

Our hero has done business with "an unofficial member of the priestly sect of Automobile Longevity" because his car is in need of repair and, like many Soviet motorists, he needs his car up and running before one of the official service stations (STO – stantsiia tekhnicheskogo obsluzhinvaniia) would get around to fixing it. He then turns to Gennadii Stepanych, or rather, "Genka," his "guardian angel from the municipal garage." Genka, whose favorite saying is "Don't get flustered," organizes "Genka's legionnaires," a team of rather formidable auto repair guys who work as moonlighters (shabashniki). The most formidable of the lot is Kuz'mich, a man of few words, whom the author "approached like an experienced supplicant full of timidity and obedience." The author spends the next four days intently watching and listening to the mechanics as

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[42] Leonid Likhodeev, Ia i moi avtomobil' (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1972), pp. 208-12. For a description of another bazaar, this an "iron market" located in a gully at the juncture of Donetsk, Voroshilovgrad, and Rostov oblasts, see Za rulëm, no. 1 (1986): 18-19.

they dismantle, work on, and reassemble his car. He picks up a thing or two about car repair, but no less importantly, learns how to converse with the crew. And when the job is all done and the car is turned over to him shining like new, the author, "with tears of gratitude," joins the guys for a celebration accompanied by vodka, salted fish, and a good deal of "unrealized melancholy."[43]

Likhodeev's story parallels another as reported several years later in the intellectual weekly Literaturnaia gazeta. It is about the reporter's friend, a Moscow physics professor who owns a Volga, and a pensioner known as "Uncle Vasia." The physics professor seeks out Uncle Vasia after spending hours waiting unsuccessfully for his car to be repaired at an STO. Working out of a tiny shed ("saraichik") and using tools and parts scavenged from junkyards, depots, and other places where cars went to die, Uncle Vasia fixes the car in an hour. He becomes a godsend to the professor and is represented by the reporter as a model citizen. Along with other "Uncle Vasias," he saves the state gas and money, and contributes to overall productivity by saving its citizens time to say nothing of emotional distress.[44]

In addition to (or perhaps even more than) middlebrow literature, cinema addressed issues associated with the burgeoning of the semi- or illegal, second economy – the incarnation of Mephistopheles. In El'dar Riazanov's Look Out for Your Car!

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[43] Likhodeev, Ia i moi avtomobil', pp. 9, 150, 219-25, 243-56.

[44] P. Volin, "Kogda techet 'Volga'," Literaturnaia gazeta, no. 38 (1978): 12.

(Beregis' avtomobilia, 1966), the great Soviet actor Innokenty Smoktunovskii plays Iurii Detochkin, an avenging angel who steals cars from their nefarious owners, sells them to honest people, and donates the money to orphanages. In this film, which one post-Soviet Russian critic judged as "the most important intellectual comedy of the sixties," justice – if not Soviet law – could be seen to have been served until Detochkin goes too far by stealing a Volga from (yet another!) physicist, meaning someone above reproach.[45] As in Faust, it was getting increasingly difficult to distinguish good from evil.

Riazanov would return to cars again as corrupters of morals but this time also as sources of antagonism among workmates and friends in his 1979 film Garazh (The Garage). The title refers to a garage cooperative for museum employees who discover that four among them will not be able to park their cars because of a shortage of spaces.[46] But on what basis will the four be eliminated? Seniority? Salary level? Drawing straws? The wrangling continues into the wee hours with all sorts of personal antipathies coming to the surface. It might be going too far to say that the film's sub-text was the Faustian

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[45] A. Plakhkov, Kommersant, November 18, 1997: 13 cited in David MacFadyen, The Sad Comedy of El'dar Riazanov: An Introduction to Russia's Most Popular Filmmaker (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), p. 113. For the script of the film, see Emil' Braginskii and El'dar Riazanov, Tikhie omuty (Moscow: Vagrius, 2000). Detochkin, we discover at the end, did do time for his crime.

[46] Such cooperatives were made legal by a September 1960 decree of the RSFSR Council of Ministers. Their main function was to negotiate with municipal officials for land and permission to build on behalf of members. Land devoted to garages increased from 200 to 500 hectares in Moscow between 1971 and 1978, but there never were enough spaces. See Za rulëm, no. 1 (1978): 17.

bargain, but the expression of concern that people were becoming obsessed with cars and that cars were undermining proper Soviet behavior (sovetskii poriadok) was not limited to this film. Take, for example, the following monologue from a mid-1980s short story:

> Automobiles began to weigh on the brain. Take the newspaper – they write only about cars. Turn on the television – they show only auto factories. …We gather for March 8 [International Women's Day], but do you think we talk about women? The men smack their lips, and even before swallowing their food, continue a conversation about changes in traffic regulations…. At work it's worse. I go out for a smoke and … start a conversation about chess or football. No sir! They talk, gesticulate, and argue about brakes, coasting [and] the technical inspection… I start to tell Ivan Burov in confidence that Maria Petrovna from the technical department has put on weight regardless of the lack of a husband, and he says: "Maybe she should get wheels so that she can find a husband."[47]

To sum up then, from the mid-1960s onward, Soviet political authorities vastly expanded opportunities for the ownership of cars – a notoriously individualistic mode of transportation – but left the provision of infrastructure and services to the "second economy." This arrangement was Faustian because it encouraged millions of citizens to

[47] Kazbek Ismagilov [Stanislav Malozemov], Roskoshnyi avtomobil': povest'-fel'ton i iumoristicheskie rasskazy (Tashkent: Zazushy, 1984), pp. 105-06.

become entangled in webs of essentially private relations – private in the double sense of invisibility to the state and as particularistic rather than collective activity.[48] It promoted behavior alien to Communist ideology and often in violation of Soviet laws. The routine arbitrariness and susceptibility to bribes of the traffic police (GAI – Gosudarstvennyi Avtomobil'nyi Inspektorat), technical inspectors, driving instructors, and other law enforcement officials completed the circle of corruption.[49] Not long after Hans Koningsberger had experienced and reveled in the carlessness of Soviet roads, Soviet motorists aggressively took to the wheel. The neon signs and gleaming gas stations of Druzhenko's dreams, however, would have to wait until after the (no longer identifiably Communist) Soviet Union had disappeared.

Am I seriously arguing, though, that the Soviet government sold its Communist soul to accommodate Soviet citizens' desire to become car owners? Cars were hardly unique in requiring goods and services the Soviet state did not provide (Gretchen, the mother of an infant and the caregiver for her aged mother, had need of other things). Residents of apartments and dachas requiring materials and repairs, parents seeking to get their children into Moscow University, patients needing medicine (to mention but a

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[48] For this sense of the "private," see Jeff Weintraub, "The Theory and Politics of the Public/Private Distinction," in Public and Private in Thought and Practice: perspectives on a Grand Dichotomy, ed. Jeff Wientraub and Krishan Kumar (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 4-5.

[49] Konstantin Simis, USSR, The Corrupt Society: The Secret World of Soviet Capitalism (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982), p. 186.

few instances) all resorted to the second economy.[50] Indeed, the more the media promoted consumer goods as emblematic of the achievements of the Soviet way of life, the more the definition of needs expanded – suddenly, Soviet teenagers "needed" blue jeans and western rock albums - and the more dependent people became on the second economy. Rather than bringing Soviet citizens closer to the socialist Promised Land, the party-sanctioned consumer discourse "gave birth to a tenacious consumer."[51] But whether or not such officially canonized principles of Communism as equality, community, selflessness, and altruism still had meaning in the Brezhnev era, nothing made them seem as anachronistic and irrelevant as the care and feeding of one's own car.[52] Perhaps it is because automobiles loomed so large in the underground economy and impinged on the lives of so many other people in so many ways that this particular deal seems so significant and, from the standpoint of "how our world once looked [and] how it was supposed to look," satanic.

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[50] For extensive lists of second economy activities organized according to severity of punishment see Feldbrugge, "Government and Shadow Economy," pp. 533-40.

[51] Paretskaya, "Middle Class Without Capitalism?" p. 28.

[52] These (and other) values are cited by Alexei Yurchak as having been "of genuine importance" "for great numbers of Soviet citizens … despite the fact that many of their everyday practices routinely transgressed … certain norms and rules represented in the official ideology of the socialist state." See his Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More, The Last Soviet Generation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 8.

Gender

But has my loose adaptation of the Faust legend miscast the leading characters? Instead of the Soviet state or Communism, maybe the role of Faust should have been assigned to aspiring Soviet motorists who sought not omniscience but more independence and pleasure ("more pleasure …in a single hour/Than in a year's dull humdrum," as Mephisto promises Faust). Like Faust, they would have been frustrated at the refrain "You must do without/Must do without! That is the eternal song/That keeps ringing, our whole life long."[53] Mephisto would then be the Soviet government that conned them into selling their souls for the elusive pleasure of owning a car. Just as Satan's mission was "to speed up Faust's journey through life, to accelerate his experiences, thereby rendering them fragmentary and shallow," so Soviet officials could be said to have lured motorists into a never-ending search for fuel, garage space, spare parts, and automotive reliability and pleasure.[54] As for Gretchen, perhaps she is the Soviet car itself, alluring in her simplicity but also quite vulnerable. This is a perfectly plausible alternative, one that would conform to the conventional view in the West of a poor, downtrodden Soviet citizenry deceived and oppressed by the state. As two British writers noted in the mid-1980s, "In Russia they say that owning a car brings joy twice in

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[53] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Faust, Part One, trans. David Luke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 37, 73-74.

[54] Durrani, "Character and Qualities," p. 91.

an owner's life - when it is bought and when it is sold. In between there is only torture."[55] But if that was so, why did millions of Soviet citizens continue to sign up to torture themselves?

Something is missing from this scenario and the version of the Faust legend it illustrates. That "something" is gender. Gender is what distinguishes automobiles from the other consumer goods the Soviet state was using to mark the advance of well-being among households. In the Soviet gender order, household objects such as refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, and other appliances were coded feminine as was the entire domestic sphere.[56] The masculine noun avtoliubitel' registered linguistically the gender of car owners, enthusiasts, aficionados, mechanics, etc. The domain of the avtoliubitel' – the impromptu bazaars in fields and along railroad sidings where spare parts could be purchased and swapped, the courtyards where cars were put up on blocks, and the unsightly metal garages located wherever a bit of land was available – expanded all over Soviet cities and beyond, becoming the masculine equivalent of the domestic sphere. It would be too reductionist to argue that men owned cars in the Soviet Union to assert or

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[55] Julian Pettifer and Nigel Turner, Automania, Man and the Motor Car (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984), p. 167.

[56] Sarah Ashwin, "Introduction: Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia," in Sarah Ashwin, ed., Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 1. Gender order has been defined as "historically constructed patterns of power relations between men and women and definitions of masculinity and femininity." See R. Connell, Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), pp. 98-99.

express their masculinity, but it would not be inappropriate to think of those garages and the interiors of cars themselves as alternative living rooms, as at least semi-private places where men went to take care of their cars, engage in car talk, and socialize with other men. The narrator in Likhodeev's novel, the physicist who called on "Uncle Vasia", and the respondents in Rebecca Kay's ethnographic study of post-Soviet men who told her about learning mechanical skills from their fathers all partook of these places and their car-related activities.[57] All indulged in what the Swedish ethnographer Ulf Mellström has called "technical masculine sociability."[58]

Soviet men were hardly unique in this respect. Car talk and the culture in which it is embedded have been described as "the most pervasive of all forms of the historically entrenched domination by men of technology."[59] But two aspects of Soviet urban society made the impact of these places and their associated activities particularly important. One

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[57] Rebecca Kay, Men in Contemporary Russia: The Fallen Heroes of Post-Soviet Change? (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 34-35, 79, 91-92, 133. Aside from repairing cars, watching them race was an activity that fathers and sons could share. See, for example, the comment by "Aleksandr 2" in Sergei Kukhterin, "Fathers and Patriarchs in Communist and Post-Communist Russia," in Ashwin, ed., Gender, State and Society, p. 81.

[58] See the interview with Vladimir Arkusha, associate editor, about his early acquaintance with cars in the 1960s and '70s in Za rulём, no. 3 (2002): 132-34. Ulf Mellström, Masculinity, Power and Technology: A Malaysian Ethnography (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 115.

[59] Linley Walker, "Under the bonnet: car culture, technological dominance and young men of the working class," Journal of Interdisciplinary Gender Studies, vol. 3, no. 2 (1998): 23.

was the relative scarcity of private space outside of the (notoriously crowded) family apartment. The other was the advanced state of naturalizing gender distinctions – perhaps a function of the job segregation and corresponding pay differentials introduced in the 1920s if not older cultural taboos against women's involvement with mechanical objects.[60] Although women comprised a majority of tram and urban bus drivers, truck driving was deemed – at least by one professional physiologist writing in 1979 – inappropriate (protivopokazano) for them.[61] As for cars, the familiar stereotype of the inattentive, accident-prone female militated against women getting behind the wheel.

Driving and looking after cars thus became analogous to hunting, fishing, attending sports events, and other all-male activities (if not "cultures") that served as occasions for alcoholic consumption and male bonding. These activities also had the not incidental consequence of physically removing men from sharing the double burden that Soviet women experienced of waged work and unpaid labor in the home. In the final

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[60] On job segregation, see Wendy Goldman, Women at the Gates: Gender and Industry in Stalin's Russia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). For a graphic account of the survival of taboos against women and machines, see Pasha Angelina, "The Most Important Thing," in Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine, eds., In the Shadow of Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 312-14.

[61] E. B. Gruzdeva and E. S. Chertikhina, Trud i byt sovetskikh zhenshchin (Moscow: Politizdat, 1983), p. 21; Za rulëm, no. 3 (1979): 28. Women comprised as many as 30 percent of truck drivers during the Great Patriotic War and still15 percent in 1945, but a year later only 2.4 percent according to a report in GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 169, l. 243 (report from Ministry of Internal Affairs on technical condition of auto fleet, 24 April 1947).

analysis, avtoliubiteli were willing to torture themselves, it could be said, because there were compensations. Like cars the world over, the Soviet automobile gave its owners a sense of autonomy and control. Even if not an object of their love (liubitel' derives from the verb "to love"), it was a source of prestige. But it also was a source of power – gender power. That is something Faust would have understood.

Conclusion

In the light of subsequent history, which version of the Faustian bargain is more appropriate or "works" better – the one in which Faust is the Soviet government or the Soviet motorist? To some extent, it is a matter of taste. Almost twenty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ideological work that the Communist Party had to perform in connection with the expansion of car ownership and the issues – legal and economic – surrounding the use of cars seem like relics from a distant past. Mephistopheles in the form of the automobile turned out to be not a servant at all, but an agent of death and damnation. If one prefers Faust to be damned for his transgressions, it would seem that the first version is preferable.

If on the other hand damnation smacks of too religious or medieval a mentality (as it did to Goethe), then the second version may make more sense. Compared to an old Zhiguli 2101 or a Moskvich 407, driving any one of the million or so cars imported into post-Soviet Russia in 2006 might lead a former Soviet motorist to think he had died and gone to Heaven. Servicing one's car, while not exactly fun, no longer necessarily

involves skirting or violating the law. Then again, the proliferation of motorists – six times as many in Moscow in 2006 as in 1991 – has made urban driving quite stressful.[62] Moreover – to reintroduce gender – men no longer have the road to themselves. Although women still make up only twenty percent of all drivers in the Moscow region, 45 percent of all students enrolled in auto schools are said to be women.[63] There also are on-line magazines catering to women drivers and Ladies Behind the Wheel, a recently published book that promises to assist in "choosing your first car, giving no quarter to male drivers, defending your rights before officers from GIBDD (traffic police), and finding your bearings in repairing your 'miracle on wheels.'"[64] Gretchen on the move?

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[62] Robert Argenbright, "Cars, Class, and Space in Post-Soviet Moscow: The First Decade," paper presented at American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies conference, Washington, D.C., November 18, 2006.

[63] "Russian Women Take to the Wheel," Zhenskii Avtomobil'nyi Klub at www.ladies-cars.ru/ (accessed May 14, 2007). For the comment that the most visible change in behavioral patterns "is the number of women driving cars," see Elena Chinyaeva, "The Politics of Gender in Russia," Russia and Eurasia Review, vol. 2, no. 5 (2003) at www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=16&i (accessed Dec. 4, 2006).

[64] See "Macho N 5," Zhurnal A&W, no. 5 at www.autobuy.ru/nites.php?aid=414&aform=2 (accessed Dec. 4, 2006); advertisement at www.geleos.ru/?key=books-womanclub&only=540 (accessed June 4, 2007).

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