INTRODUCTION: THE MAN FROM GRINLANDIA

BARRY P. SCHERR

It is easy to understand why some of Alexander Grin's contemporaries within Russia assumed that he was a foreign writer. The surname is not only very unusual for a Russian but also pronounced like (and in the Cyrillic alphabet serves as the transliteration for) the English Green or Greene. Similarly, many of his characters have names that are not typically Russian. In a few instances these, too, sound English (Hart, Steel, Grey), some resemble names found among other nationalities (the German Braun, the French Dupleix, the Italian Garducci), and still others (Bam-Gran, Scorrey, Egl) simply seem invented. The influences on Grin, whether cited by himself or others—including Rudyard Kipling, Robert Louis Stevenson, James Fenimore Cooper, Jules Verne, Mayne Reid, and Edgar Allan Poe—were almost exclusively foreign and often authors who wrote in English. Some even suspected him of plagiarism: one of the many legends that swirled around the reclusive Grin held that, as a sailor, he had murdered an English sea captain, stolen a suitcase full of manuscripts, and was gradually translating them into Russian, passing them off as his own.

Grin's style no doubt played into the rumor that his works had been rendered into Russian from another language. He frequently resorts to convoluted syntax that requires careful parsing, devises odd phrasings and similes that impress with their originality but can resist ready interpretation, and employs italics with a frequency rarely found among Russian writers. Readers of this volume will find that Bryan Karetnyk's fine translations have met the challenge of dealing with Grin's sometimes difficult manner. While remaining admirably close to the Russian and conveying the sense of Grin's style, he has managed to find ideal equivalents for even the more obscure Russian phrasings and to put the whole into highly readable English. The settings of Grin's stories also set him apart. Some take place in Russia, whereas in others the action occurs abroad, often in exotic regions. And many of his major writings refer, either entirely or in part, to places that are not found on the globe at all: Zurbagan, Liss, and Gel-Giu are among the place names that recur from work to work, so that more than one attempt has been made to create a map of this nonexistent territory. Shortly after Grin's death, a Soviet critic labeled it "Grinlandia," a term reminiscent of the Russian name for an actual exotic locale, Greenland ("Grenlandia"). Grinlandia has since become synonymous with the world that found expression in Grin's work, yet again emphasizing the so-called foreignness that distinguishes so much of his writing.

And yet Grin was very much a Russian. Born in 1880 as Alexander Stepanovich Grinevsky, he died in 1932, with his literary career, which began in 1906, bisected by the Bolshevik Revolution, an event that was to prove fateful for him personally and for his reputation as a writer. His early years were spent far from the political and literary centers of Russia. When he was two, his family moved twenty miles from his birthplace in the town of Slobodskoy to what was then the small city of Vyatka. Today, renamed Kirov to honor an assassinated Bolshevik leader, that city has some 500,000 inhabitants and

is a major manufacturing center. But in Grin's youth, Vyatka was a relatively quiet place, with a population of perhaps 25,000 that a few decades earlier had served as a place of political exile, thanks in no small part to its relatively remote location nearly 600 miles north-east of Moscow. Among those sent there was the famous political activist and writer Alexander Herzen. Grin's own father, Stepan Grinevsky, had ended up in the area because of his exile to Russia after involvement in the Polish rebellion of 1863.

Most of what we know about Grin's early life comes from his unfinished *Autobiographical Tale*, which he wrote near the end of his life and breaks off abruptly in 1910. Like many autobiographies, it should be approached with caution: comparison of the published text with early drafts indicates that he occasionally rearranged or embellished events for literary effect. That said, some corroborating evidence exists for its latter portions and suggests that he remained broadly faithful to his experiences. Grin describes reading voraciously as a child, drawn to adventure stories that described distant lands and the romance of sailing ships, all of which contrasted with the drab milieu of Vyatka.

The growing allure of the sea—abetted by the oppressiveness of life in his hometown and a lack of desire to continue his schooling—caused Grin to set off for the port city of Odessa, 1,400 miles away, shortly before his sixteenth birthday in 1896. There his dreams quickly clashed with reality. His lack of experience and frail build made it difficult to find work as a sailor, and his money soon ran out. He managed to find a few temporary jobs on ships that sailed the coast of the Black Sea, and in 1897, he served on a cargo ship to Alexandria—the only time he ever ventured abroad. But he was fired during the return voyage and that July returned to Vyatka. The following year Grin again headed for a southern port, this time Baku on the Caspian Sea, but found only occasional employment, his one enduring remembrance of that

time the malaria that would plague him off and on for the rest of his life. His subsequent efforts to establish himself included odd jobs back in Vyatka, brief work mining for gold, lumberjacking, and sailing on a river barge.

In 1902, still unsettled, Grin volunteered for the army, but he chafed against its discipline. His first attempt to desert, only a few months after he enlisted, ended with his swift capture. Later that year, assisted by a cell of Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) with whom he made contact, he succeeded. The SRs, along with the Bolsheviks and other groups, were agitating for the overthrow of the tsarist regime and conducting a campaign of terrorism, assassinating numerous individuals associated with the government. Grin proved a poor terrorist but was an effective propagandist until his November 1903 arrest in the Crimean seaport of Sevastopol. He spent nearly two years in jail, thus missing the violent events of 1905, which began in January with the shooting of demonstrators in St. Petersburg on what came to be known as “Bloody Sunday” and continued with strikes and riots throughout Russia for much of that year. Freed by a general amnesty for political prisoners, Grin went to St. Petersburg under an assumed name but was again arrested early in 1906 and sentenced to four years’ exile in Siberia. He soon escaped from the city to which he had been sent and by July was back in St. Petersburg, where he spent the next four years under a different false identity, living with Vera Abramova, who would become his first wife. The authorities only discovered his identity in 1910, when he received a less severe sentence: a two-year exile to the northern province of Arkhangelsk. This time Grin served out his term. After six years of wandering about Russia and failing to find a calling, he spent ten years living either illegally, in jail, or in exile. These early experiences are reflective of his character: unwilling to submit to discipline or to social norms, motivated by a youthful idealism, and drawn to adventure and to following his own path.

Grin's literary career began in 1906, first with stories that served as propaganda pamphlets for the SRs—toward whom he soon cooled—and then with a series of tales largely based on his experiences with that movement, sometimes depicting individual adherents favorably but for the most part reflecting antipathy toward the SR program. He signed his first published story with the initials of the false name under which he was living but soon settled on “A. S. Grin,” the name by which he was thenceforth to be known and which for several years proved sufficient to conceal his true identity from the authorities.

Grin's signature technique developed rapidly: the first manifestations of Grinlandia appeared in his prose as early as 1909. During these years, he also enthusiastically embraced the bohemian life of the capital, spending hours in various drinking establishments where he especially associated with other writers. Among these, his closest friend was Alexander Kuprin, at the time among the most popular Russian prose writers. Grin, though, never became associated with any literary school, and his mode of writing—with its frequently non-Russian characters, imaginary settings, adventure-filled plots, and excursions into the improbable or unreal—remained very much his own.

On returning from exile, Grin quickly resumed the unruly life he had led prior to his arrest. Although he was to look back on this time fondly, his years of wandering had left him with an unsociable manner, so that even those to whom he felt close found him to be reserved and melancholy. Arkady Averchenko, a prominent satirist and editor of *Novyi satirikon*, to which Grin began to contribute in 1914, called him “Mr. Inveterate Pessimist.” Another writer recalled that Grin impressed him as a person who did not know how to smile. Meanwhile, Grin's heavy drinking, dating from the pre-exile period, helped bring about the end of his marriage to Vera Abramova and was to remain a near-constant habit.

The writing, though, continued apace. Grin's first volume of stories had appeared as early as 1908; by 1913, he had written enough that a three-volume collection of his works appeared that year. When World War I started, he was found unfit to serve in the army, but he began to write frequently about the war. Grin found a ready market for stories on that topic in the popular magazines that served as the chief outlet for his work. Their publishers wanted brief tales, preferably exhibiting a patriotic view of the conflict, and were not much concerned with literary quality. The pay was poor, so that to earn enough to survive, Grin wrote scores of short pieces: in 1915 alone, he published more than 100 stories and poems. Many were eminently forgettable and not republished for many decades; only in 2017 did an edition of his stories gather nearly all the previously uncollected writing. However, alongside this work Grin managed to produce several excellent tales, including this volume's "The Poisoned Island."

In the summer of 1916, Grin was banished from Petrograd (as St. Petersburg was called at this time) to a Finnish village some 40 miles away after being overheard making disdainful remarks about the tsar. However, he was able to return after the February Revolution of 1917, the event that led to the establishment of the Provisional Government. In general Grin wrote little about politics, but a nonfiction piece titled "To the Revolution on Foot," describing his journey back to the capital, indicates that he was excited about the fall of the regime that had jailed and exiled him. He appears, though, to have been less enthusiastic about the Bolshevik takeover: through the first six months of 1918, until strict censorship was established, he published regularly in several satirical journals that were hostile to the new government.

From mid-1918 Grin's life in postrevolutionary Petrograd became increasingly difficult. With many of his usual publishing outlets closed, he found his options becoming limited and frequently

went hungry. Although in 1919 he managed to publish several stories in *Plamia*, a journal edited by Anatoly Lunacharsky, a prominent Bolshevik and first head of the People's Commissariat for Education, Grin's financial situation remained precarious. That same year he was drafted into the Red Army, where, thanks to his age and physical condition, he was assigned a noncombat role. Nonetheless, he soon fell ill, was eventually given leave, and then returned to Petrograd. With the assistance of the influential Maxim Gorky, he was able to get into one of the city's overcrowded hospitals, where he was diagnosed with typhus. Lacking any means of support after his discharge, he again turned to Gorky, who saw to it that Grin was allocated a food ration and a room in the House of Arts, one of several institutions that Gorky helped to establish in order to assist Petrograd's cultural elite during this harsh period.

The House of Arts, which occupied a large building in the heart of Petrograd, became a center for intellectual and cultural life during the several years of its existence, serving as both a refuge and a focus of intellectual ferment for its inhabitants. Leading literary figures either lived there or came to give readings; the swirl of activities included seminars, concerts, and painting exhibitions. Friendships and literary alliances were forged, and the House became a hotbed for nurturing younger writers. However, Grin's personality had not changed. Although he became friendly with a few of his fellow residents, for the most part he was remembered as a taciturn and morose individual who kept largely to himself. The poet Vladislav Khodasevich, who also lived in the House, described him as "an author of adventure tales, a gloomy and tubercular man. . . acquainted with almost no one and, it was said, engaged in the training of cockroaches."

Despite Grin's relative uninvolvedness in the life of the House, the months that he spent there proved crucial for both his professional and personal life. He completed *Scarlet Sails*, the novella that

was to establish his subsequent reputation and remains, to this day, his most beloved work; he began writing what would become his first novel, *The Shining World*; he composed several fine stories; and he found inspiration for both “The Rat-Catcher” and “Fandango.” During this time, too, he renewed an acquaintance with and then married Nina Nikolaevna Mironova, who was to remain his companion for the rest of his life.

The three years after Grin left the House of Arts in the spring of 1921 and lived elsewhere in Petrograd brought a revival of the publishing industry. He began to earn a reasonable income and saw his modest reputation grow. Granted, his works were sparsely reviewed, and even at the beginning of the 1920s, some had little patience for literature that did not deal with the realities of the postrevolutionary era. However, through the middle of that decade, some critics would express at least a degree of admiration for the romantic and imaginative elements that characterized many of his works, as well as for his psychological acuity.

In the spring of 1924, Grin and his wife moved to the Crimea, where the warm weather and proximity to the sea had long been attractions. They settled in the port of Feodosia, and for a few years Grin’s career was at its height, necessitating occasional trips to Moscow and Leningrad regarding publishing matters. Although he remained essentially a literary outsider and was rarely able to place his writings in the most highly respected journals of his day, Grin did not lack readers or opportunities to see his work in print. He published many stories in *Krasnaia niva*, a biweekly for which Lunacharsky again was an editor, and in the highly popular *Ogonyok*. Collections of his tales came out regularly, and, by 1930, he had published six novels as well. Thus the mid-1920s in particular were relatively happy years for Grin, though his wife later remarked that he was still his reserved and solitary self, with the couple having a narrow social circle in Feodosia.

As the decade wore on, negative assessments of Grin's works became dominant, with sharp attacks for their Western influences, fantastic elements, and seeming indifference toward contemporary Soviet life. A publication that made recommendations to libraries summarily described his books as "not needed." By the late 1920s he was thus finding it increasingly difficult to place his work. The years 1929 and 1930 witnessed the publication of his last two completed novels, but Grin had been left with relatively little time to write new stories, and reprints of his previous work had virtually stopped. The honoraria for his writing were such that his finances had never been secure; now he and his wife began to endure genuine hardship. Furthermore, his health, thanks in part to his continued drinking, was beginning to decline.

In 1930 Grin and his wife left Feodosia for Stary Krym, about 15 miles inland, in part to live more economically and in part because the higher elevation at their new home was reputed to have health benefits for those experiencing respiratory problems. With his fiction not in demand, he reluctantly began his *Autobiographical Tale*, which was serialized in a major journal, *Zvezda*, the following year, but that was to be his only publication of 1931. In August that year he fell seriously ill, apparently suffering from a recurrence of tuberculosis, and two months later was diagnosed with pneumonia. He continued to weaken as the months passed, then in June 1932 was found to have stomach cancer. Grin died on July 8, already, it seemed, largely forgotten by the wider literary community.

Oddly enough, Grin's reputation underwent a mild revival shortly after his death. During the final years of his life, the powerful Russian Association of Proletarian Writers, popularly known by its Russian acronym, RAPP, had strongly advocated for a proletarian literature and railed against those it deemed insufficiently wedded to the revolutionary cause. RAPP was dissolved a few months before Grin's death, to be replaced in 1934 by the Writers' Union.

Although socialist realism then became the officially sanctioned mode for writers, the harsh attacks on Grin ceased. Several collections of his stories were published during the years leading up to World War II, and, if the few critical articles on him still expressed reservations, they could at least praise his originality and see his works as having a place in Soviet literature.

Grin's standing thus survived the purges of the 1930s, only to run afoul of another Stalinist campaign shortly after World War II. A pair of vicious articles attacked Grin as a "rootless cosmopolitan," a label more typically applied to Jews whose loyalty to the Soviet Union was being questioned, and for some years his works were no longer published. However, the thaw that followed Stalin's death brought a rapid change.

In 1956, a collection of his work appeared, containing a preface by the popular writer Konstantin Paustovsky, who did much over the years to promote Grin's reputation. From then on, Grin's renown grew rapidly, and his best-known works have been republished many times. In 1965, a six-volume collection of his writings came out in an edition of nearly half a million copies, making a wide selection of his works readily available. Other multivolume editions have followed since. Although only a handful of scholars outside Russia have devoted extensive attention to Grin, within Russia, the body of research on his work has become substantial. Although information about his life remained scattered and, in some cases, unpublished into the twenty-first century, a publishing house in Feodosia issued a series of volumes that were extensively annotated by associates of the Grin museum in that city and that contained memoirs, biographical materials, and Grin's modest epistolary heritage.

Many of Grin's writings are widely known today, but none other matches the prominence of his signature work, *Scarlet Sails*, which has been adapted for film and stage (including an opera and a ballet).

The title has become ubiquitous, appearing as the name of not only restaurants and hotels but also enterprises ranging from a trucking company in St. Petersburg to a sauna in Nizhny Novgorod and an apartment complex in Moscow. Perhaps most famously, it serves as the name of an all-night festival in St. Petersburg that marks the end of the school year; a highlight of the celebration is the appearance on the Neva River of a ship rigged with scarlet sails. The fame of this single work has assured Grin's lasting renown, though in a way it also has sometimes served—at least among the broader public—to limit a full appreciation of his achievement.

While Grin was being reintroduced to Soviet readers in the post-Stalin era, an attempt was made to see the elements of Romanticism in his work as implying an underlying optimism and belief in the ability of people to achieve a bright future—thereby aligning him with one of socialist realism's goals, even if realism was not always present in his mature work and socialism, hardly at all.

Scarlet Sails certainly can be seen as in keeping with the official agenda. Its impoverished heroine, Assol, has endured the mockery of the local village inhabitants for having believed since childhood in a prophecy by a collector of tales named Egl, who had foretold that a handsome man on a ship with scarlet sails would one day carry her away to find happiness. Meanwhile, the tale's hero, Grey, has grown up wealthy and privileged but stifled by his environment. Drawn to the sea, he has become captain of his own ship. Reaching the shore where Assol lives and learning of the prophecy, he has scarlet sails stitched for his vessel and, as predicted, carries her away to happiness. The action takes place in the indeterminate realm of Grinlandia, as is true of almost all Grin's novels. The narrative shares certain similarities with fairy tales: the emphatically happy ending, a clear-cut conflict between good and evil, and seemingly miraculous happenings. However, *Scarlet Sails* in fact contains no outright fantasy but only some unlikely coincidences and the presence of

a character who has both the means and the will to fulfill his own dream and that of another.

Among the works in this volume, “The Heart of the Wilderness” is thematically closest to *Scarlet Sails*. Again, a single individual endures the taunting of others: as a cruel prank, several men try to convince the protagonist to search for a wondrous settlement supposedly hidden in the jungle. Their made-up tale fulfills the role of Egl’s prophecy by serving as a vision that one person manages to transform into reality through the strength of his own efforts: the seemingly duped hero goes on to create the village that was described to him. The notion that a single individual would possess the means and ability to create the ideal jungle colony described in the tale may strain the bounds of credibility, but, as in *Scarlet Sails*, nothing beyond the realm of the possible actually occurs. It is, finally, a work filled with optimism, in which the power of the human spirit prevails, enabling good to overcome evil. The 1956 collection that reintroduced Grin to Soviet readers included both these works, along with several others featuring a clearly positive outcome. This volume established a trend of seeing Grin as essentially an upbeat writer of adventure stories, some with fantastic elements, that appeal largely to a young adult audience.

Grin’s work as a whole, however, tends to be darker and more probing of the human psyche than such stories suggest. Granted, the salient features of *Scarlet Sails* and “The Heart of the Wilderness” also appear in many of his other works: the foreign and often imaginary settings; events that are implausible, if not unreal; a sense of adventure; clear-cut distinctions between good and evil characters; and central figures possessed of enormous capabilities. But often his protagonists’ struggles with the surrounding world are less readily resolved and the conclusions not necessarily so auspicious. The inner lives of characters frequently come to the fore, with readers plunged into the world of dream, delusion, or delirium. Grin

essentially wrote fables in which the components of the work are harnessed to illustrate some central point and the verisimilitude of events or settings is of secondary importance. Indeed, his imaginary or at least unusual locales serve to isolate his figures from the usual trappings of civilization and bring into sharp relief their unusual traits that serve to convey Grin's central ideas.

Grinlandia thus emerges as a favored setting for Grin's fables. Granted, its exotic features—the tropical locale, the curious mix of figures who inhabit it, a sense of adventure and peril—can be seen as the author's creating in his imagination the world that he was never able to reach during his youthful wanderings. Indeed, many of the protagonists inhabiting that world, lone figures who reject or are rejected by society but who are motivated by a vision of an ideal, bear resemblances to Grin himself. More important, however, Grinlandia facilitated his unique manner. Grin claimed that he had a concrete picture of his nonexistent land and described in detail to at least one acquaintance a journey from one imaginary city to another. The made-up names of places and people put it outside any real-world geography, and yet it is a world much like ours, containing all kinds of people: rich and poor (money or its lack often plays a major role in his works), good and bad, cowardly and brave. Actual historical events, though, only occasionally penetrated Grinlandia, with, for instance, the Bolshevik Revolution being essentially absent from his novels. Some of the works set there contain phenomena not seen in the real world—thus in *The Shining World*, the hero is a man with the ability to fly—but at other times the narratives are entirely realistic. The key point is that Grinlandia is a world of expanded possibilities, where the improbable or even the impossible is on an equal footing with the everyday, thus allowing Grin to create fables in which the focus can be on the psychology of his heroes and what their struggles represented rather than on the specifics of a place or time.

The stories in this volume together represent the greater portion of Grin's literary career and convey a sense of how his concerns and technique evolved over the years. The first two, "Quarantine" and "She," are from the pre-Grinlandia period. The former is based on an episode in Grin's own life. When he joined the Socialist Revolutionaries, he was considered a suitable candidate for terrorist activities. Those recruited for such deeds were sometimes placed in a sort of quarantine, spending a length of time in another town in order to learn whether they were under police surveillance. If they were not, they would be dispatched to the location where a terrorist act was to be carried out. While Grin was with the SR branch in Nizhny Novgorod, he was sent to Tver, more than 350 miles away, to sit out his quarantine. During that time he came to the conclusion that he did not wish to kill anybody, and upon his return to Nizhny Novgorod, he refused to undertake the attack to which he had agreed. The story, one of Grin's earliest psychological studies, explores in depth the thought processes by which its protagonist comes to the realization that he lacks the soul of a terrorist.

"She," unlike many of Grin's early stories, does not deal with either army life or revolutionaries but anticipates some of the qualities that recur in his later work. The anguished state of the tale's protagonist recalls Poe's writings, a likely influence that was to become even more evident in years to come and that was noted by critics even in the prerevolutionary era. Although the geography in the story is not imaginary, it is also strikingly unspecific: the events occur in a European country that uses the franc as currency, but even that much is not evident until toward the end. The not entirely benign role of the then-new cinema prefigures Grin's general suspicion of modern technology: movies, automobiles, airplanes, and

the implements of modern warfare are treated with misgivings, if not outright hostility, in subsequent works.

Although “Reno Island,” of 1909, is generally considered to be the first work set in Grinlandia, the considerably longer “Lanphier Colony,” published just a few months later, at the beginning of 1910, offers the sharper presentation of iconic elements for such works: the self-reliant hero, who is in conflict with his surrounding society and often bears a name similar to that of Grin himself (Horn [Gorn in Russian], Grey, etc.); a stark distinction between good and evil figures; adventurous action in a warm clime on a sea or by the coast; odd names for both places and people; and the threat of or actual violence. Particularly important is the characterization of Horn, who, like Steel in “The Heart of the Wilderness,” attempts to create his ideal community, but with far less felicitous results.

“The Devil of the Orange Waters” notably suggests that Grinlandia is located somewhere on the sea route between Australia and China. (San Riol, the port city for which Bangkok and Baranov are heading, is one of the imaginary cities that recur in Grin’s writings.) The story is of most interest, though, for Baranov, who is specifically Russian—and hence something of an alien presence in Grinlandia—as well as a political exile. Is he meant to be a former SR, with his despair and unfitness for life once again reflecting Grin’s disillusionment with the movement and its members? In any case, Grin seems to hold this character at a distance, having him observed mostly through the eyes of Bangkok, and not probing the inner person to the extent that Grin does with Horn and Steel, who are Baranov’s antithesis.

Evidence of Grin’s ability to write fine work even at the height of World War I, when he was busily turning out the short pieces that consumed much of his time, is provided by “The Poisoned Island,” a finely wrought exploration of the fear that can be caused by the horrors of war, even when they are perceived only indirectly.

Narratively, this is one of Grin's more elaborately structured works. He allows information about what took place on the island to be revealed only gradually, with the initial findings by the crew of the *Viola*, the fragmentary account by one of the surviving children, and the contrasting newspaper speculations that only lead readers astray from the facts.

Grin sets "The Poisoned Island" several years in the future, as though predicting that the war would continue for some time. He is concerned, however, less with prognosis than with diagnosis, examining the causes of the mass hysteria that strikes the island's inhabitants. Their way of life—the kind envisioned in both "The Heart of the Wilderness" and "Lanphier Colony"—as well as their distance from the rest of civilization not only fail to protect them but make them even more vulnerable to the ravages of the modern world.

The final two stories in this collection, "The Rat-Catcher" and "Fandango," are among Grin's most enigmatic—and among his highest achievements. Atypically, he has his narrators living in a real city, Petrograd, at very specific times, just a few years after the Bolshevik Revolution (which goes essentially unmentioned). Both stories make use of Grin's own experiences, and both freely mix fantasy and reality, with the reader's perspective confined to that of their first-person narrator. If "Fandango," the later of the two, seems the stuff of dreams, then "The Rat-Catcher" is more the stuff of nightmare. The latter begins on March 22, 1920, just two days after the ailing Grin returned to Petrograd from his service in the Red Army. Like the narrator, Grin suffered from typhus and, like the character, found refuge in the huge structure that had once included the "Central Bank"—which had become the House of Arts in 1919. Some of the House's occupants lived in a number of the sixty-three rooms on the building's upper floors, which had comprised the living quarters of the wealthy Eliseev family,

who owned the building before fleeing Russia in 1917. Grin's room, though, was in a different section, on a dank corridor lower down and once used for servants' quarters. The abandoned bank, with its labyrinth of empty rooms, created an eerie attraction for the House's inhabitants, who scavenged the piles of papers described in "The Rat-Catcher" for fuel as well as writing material. (Thus Grin used letterhead stationery from the "Central Bank of the Mutual Credit Society" when writing *The Shining World*.) This very real locale inspires haunting phantasmagoria, amid which the narrator, whether as the result of delirium or because he actually comes face to face with the uncanny, confronts his inner demons and sense of loss. Grin's qualms about modern technology appear once again, this time through the somewhat ambiguous role of the telephone.

"Fandango" centers on a visit to the House of Scholars, another real-life enterprise set up to aid the country's intellectual elite during the harsh aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution. Grin went there regularly to receive the food ration to which he was entitled. This is a narrative in which time and space have been cut loose from their moorings, with the disjunction between the date of the main action and that at the end of the tale never fully resolved, and with the narrator magically transported to Zurbagan, the Grinlandian city that appears most often in Grin's works. (Bam-Gran, the agent involved in his going there, appears in at least one other story as well.) Although this work, too, has its dark moments, it is ultimately about the power of art and beauty. Unlike the music the narrator hears in a restaurant, the melody of the "Fandango" is transportive—as, literally, is the great work of art, in opposition to the more ordinary paintings that are described. Meanwhile, Ershov, a statistician, has no use for beauty. His material needs are quite real, but by insisting on their primacy, he causes the fine items brought by Bam-Gran to disappear. The narrator's sojourn

in Grinlandia signifies the need to transcend the everyday, to believe in an ideal despite the realities of cold, hunger, and want. It is the assertion of such an ideal that makes “Fandango” one of Grin’s most memorable stories, as well as a fitting conclusion to this collection.